

Transforming Global Health and Soft Money Politics in the Time of Trump

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DECOLONISING THE GLOBAL HEALTH SECTOR



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The Contradiction of the Moment

Key Questions

How can we productively think about social change and transforming Global Health given this predicament?

What is the goal of this moment? Is it to “protect what is left”? To bring back what existed before January 2025? Or something different?

“Soft Money”

In order to understand this moment, we have to understand the *business* of Global Health

The dominant financial system of Global Health research and practice is called “soft money”

Cannot understand responsibility, solidarity, and more without articulating the contingencies of change

A Qualitative Study in American Global Health

30 Interviews with Global Health faculty at an elite American school of public health

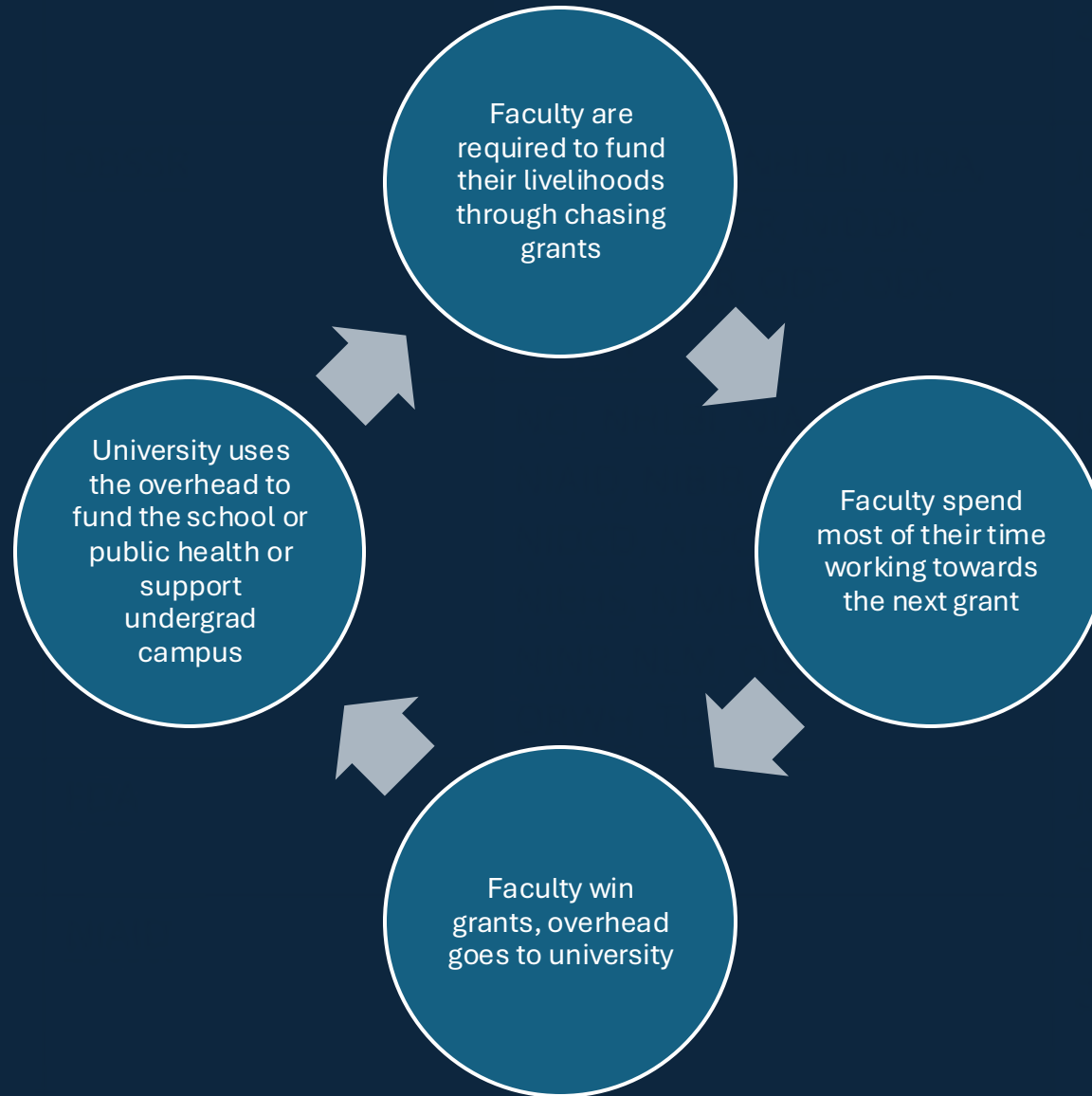
Interviewed about their conceptualization of "decolonization" and social change in the field

In each, the soft money funding structure of their university and the field was cited as the biggest problem

Feelings about Soft Money

- *This research is not useful for them. We're like calling them up or texting them on WhatsApp and we don't even have anybody in the country. It feels so uncomfortable like just trying to cold email people in some cases. You know, we're [redacted university], like, hopefully they open the email. And that's a bad feeling that we're writing on that premise to these people who are very senior. We have to take an hour of their limited time to talk to us about a health issue that's not a priority for them.*
- *I'm increasingly seeing some of the unfortunate aspects, the biggest one of which is that people are pursuing research agendas based on what money is out there and not based on what they think are relevant and interesting issues to investigate. It makes me sad that they [graduate students] don't get to study what they want because they have to chase money.*
- *It's a fiscal pressure. For faculty members to be productive, you have to bring in money. I would prefer that faculty members are fulfilled, they're doing good work, and that the metric of their productivity is their fulfillment as a benefit to the world. But that's not what's measured. What's measured is how much departments and how much faculty members bring in revenue and to me that's been the most disheartening thing.*

The Reproductive Cycle of Soft Money



The Contingencies of Change

- **Elite American (and to a large degree European) schools of public health are fundamentally structured to support the university's financial integrity**
- Change that challenges the bottom line or this financial stability (whether from progressive or regressive pretenses) is not encouraged or welcome. The school will not allow or encourage
- Faculty know this (and don't have the time or space to challenge this system effectively because of its demands) thus see themselves as "stuck" within the system that they must participate in to survive and do Global Health work but cannot change

Structured Imaginations of Social Change

I don't think the researchers have the power to change much, because the reality is an institution like [this university] is soft money. We respond in many ways to our donors' areas of priority. They set the priority, whether it's for us or the global South. But in general, those lines of priorities are from donors from the global North. And I don't think at [this university] we really have the power to change that.

Soft Money in Summary

- The financial system of Global Health research is fundamentally averse to change beyond superficiality
- Produces system behaviors of elite faculty that limit imagination of change and stance against non-reformist change
- Overall, this was an unsustainable system before Trump
 - With calls for change across the world, something would have had to change
 - Extremely risky system at its core
- ***Nothing dramatic called for in the field would have happened because this financial system was unchallenged***
 - **Authorship, partnerships, any other reformist change will, in the end, be configured to supporting Northern institutions and actors because these powerful institutions REQUIRE *the money to flow to them***



Executive Order on the National Security Council's Review of the Intelligence Community's Access to the United States' Internal Security Information

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

WHEREAS the Intelligence Community has provided the United States with critical information and analysis that are essential to the national security;

AND WHEREAS the Intelligence Community has provided the United States with critical information and analysis that are essential to the national security;

IT IS THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA to ensure that the Intelligence Community has the necessary access to the United States' internal security information to provide the United States with critical information and analysis that are essential to the national security.

- James Clapper
- Michael S. Hayden
- Robert O. Anderson
- William E. Wittman
- James R. Clapper
- Michael S. Hayden
- Robert O. Anderson
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- William E. Wittman

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and the Great Seal of the United States at Washington, DC, this 14th day of February, 2017.

Executive Order on the National Security Council's Review of the Intelligence Community's Access to the United States' Internal Security Information

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Donald Trump

By the President of the United States

Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

James M. Conaway

Deputy Secretary of State

Thomas H. Shannon

Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs

Matthew J. Spitzer

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs

John R. Schmitt

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs

Michael J. Kelly

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs

“In the interest of our own security, we need to know what’s happening, and then we need to be able to mount an effective response if something occurs,” says Walson. “And that, of course, requires careful surveillance, monitoring, and having the ability to know what’s happening in very remote parts of the world and in countries with whom we don’t have great diplomatic relations.”



The Art of the Pivot

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What will most likely happen

In a constrained granting ecosystem, GN institutions and actors will leverage networks, resources, and prestige to disproportionately win needed grants to keep them and their institutions afloat

This will happen at the expense of GS institutions and researchers who are less well positioned to succeed in this ecosystem

GS institutions and actors will revert back into being dominantly subcontracted and not co-facilitators, reversing trends of recent years and taking away their agency to work on their terms

Moralized narratives of preserving what's left for GN actors and institutions will facilitate widespread acceptance of this

What is Happening

- Soft Money institutions mass layoffs go unchallenged
- Still employed GN actors applying to any and all grants (the “pivot”)
- Unemployed GN actors dominantly move to private sector
- Continued belief that the global South needs mass amounts of Americans working in their nations
- Advocacy for reviving USAID and US soft power

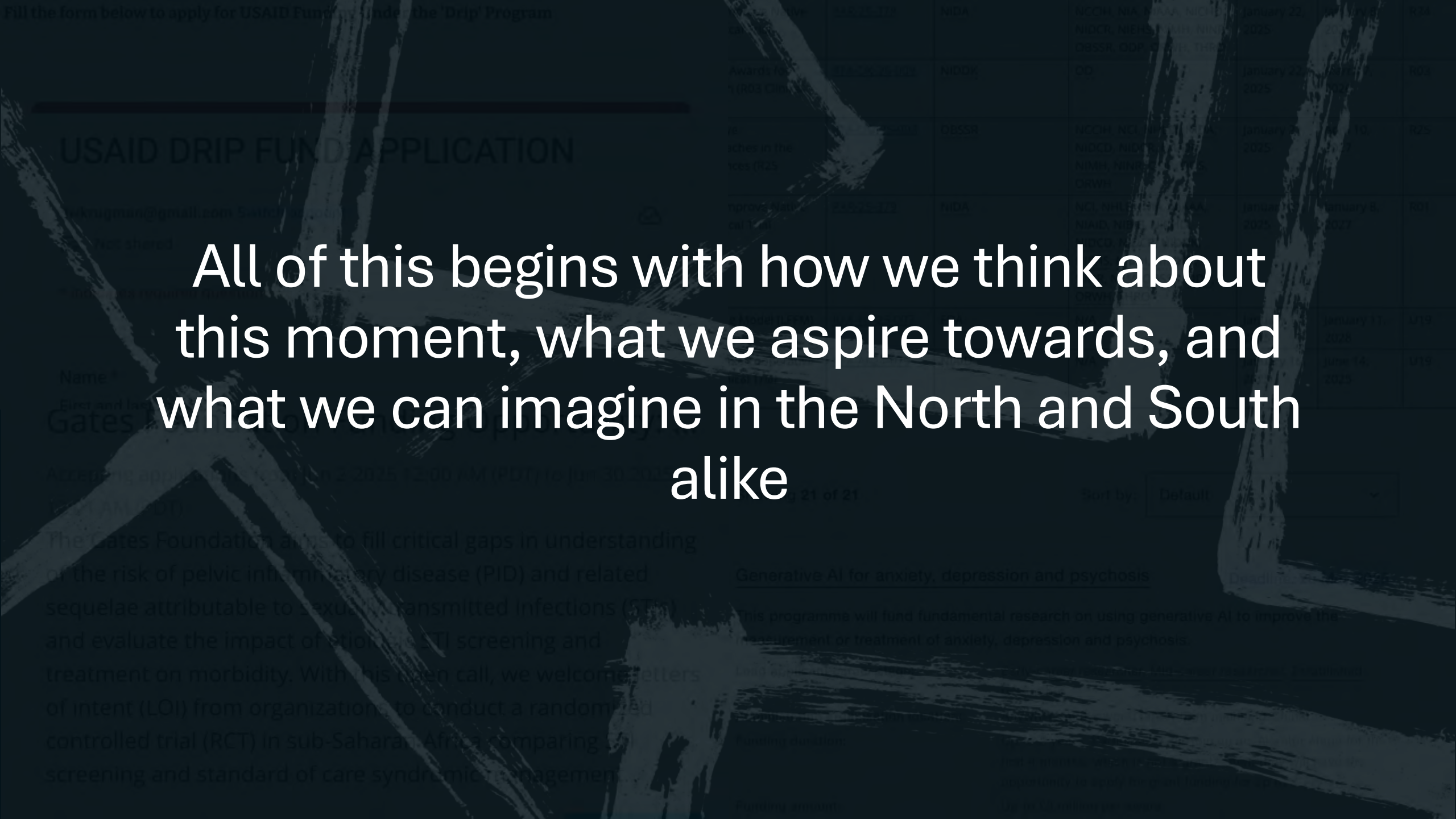
What could Happen (at a minimum)

- Advocacy for movement to hard money/ unionize
- Question whether grant dominance is really what should happen in this moment
- Think about how employment is NOT political action.
 - (and that private sector employment was the very point of this whole thing!!!!)
- Commit to the fact that Global Health and all that affiliate with it is NOT inherently good
- Let this moment radicalize you
 - Returning to USAID, and Global Health itself, will not save the world
 - Doing development and development work for a fascist regime is never doing what it purports to do (there is no “good enough”)

The Both/And Mindset

We need to *both* fight fascism *and* remember fascist victory is not an excuse to funnel more money into northern institutions

We need to *both* recognize the loss and violence of the moment *and* continue to move towards the end of Global Health as we know it



USAID DRIP FUND APPLICATION

All of this begins with how we think about this moment, what we aspire towards, and what we can imagine in the North and South alike

The Gates Foundation aims to fill critical gaps in understanding of the risk of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and related sequelae attributable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and evaluate the impact of non-invasive STI screening and treatment on morbidity. With this open call, we welcome letters of intent (LOI) from organizations to conduct a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in sub-Saharan Africa comparing screening and standard of care syndromic management.

Generative AI for anxiety, depression and psychosis

This programme will fund fundamental research on using generative AI to improve the management or treatment of anxiety, depression and psychosis.