SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY, WHY SHOULD IT MATTER?

Based on discussions at a session held at the Annual Philanthropy Conference organised by the East Africa Association of Grantmakers in Mombasa in July 2013

PHILANTHROPY *for* SOCIAL JUSTICE *and* PEACE

African Grantmakers Network
VOICE AND ACTION FOR AFRICAN PHILANTHROPY

EAAG
Nurturing Philanthropy in East Africa

EAST AFRICA ASSOCIATION OF GRANTMAKERS

This report summarises the discussions that took place during a two-hour session of the Annual Philanthropy Conference organised by the East Africa Association of Grantmakers. The session on *Social Justice Philanthropy: Why should it matter*, provided a diverse group of philanthropic grantmakers and development practitioners with an opportunity to develop a shared understanding of ways in which philanthropy may address systemic and structural issues of social justice.

Led by three panellists with significant experience in grantmaking within East Africa, the participants spoke about the ideological basis for the SJP agenda and the factors that currently limit understanding and practice of SJP. They highlighted the key issues for a continued discussion towards an African narrative on SJP, in a manner that would resonate with the realities of East Africa. As such, the session fulfilled the recommendations of a gathering in Johannesburg during October 2012, which called for deeper discussions and better communication on SJP.

THE BASIS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY

Meaningful SJP requires understanding of the various dimensions of injustice, which can be attained through regular analysis and sharing of lessons. During previous conversations, the following issues have emerged as fundamental to improved communication and learning about SJP among philanthropists and grantmakers.

1. Analysing the injustices that philanthropic organisations can address through grantmaking. These include:
    - The historical factors and circumstances that shape unjust realities
    - The forces that perpetuate injustice
2. Analysing and understanding the effects of marginalisation among, and within, groups and communities.
3. Understanding the institutional factors that entrench injustice. These include the structures, cultures and relationships that establish and sustain systems which are unfair.
4. Understanding power (how it is acquired, distributed and used) and the relationships between different stakeholders (for example, between private investors and local communities).
5. Identifying and understanding which groups in a society benefit from injustice and, therefore, are most likely to resist social change.

While appreciating the potential pitfalls of developing an isolated practice, it remains important to distinguish between SJP and other forms of giving. Above all, SJP seeks to restore balance and equity. The conceptual link between justice and peace is also relevant. In this regard, the statement “where there is no justice, there is no peace; where there is no peace, there is no development” is an appropriate maxim for SJP.

THE CONTEXT AND CONCERNS FOR SJP WITHIN EAST AFRICA

Although the circumstances vary between states and communities, certain issues and trends are significant for social justice across East Africa, as well as the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions.

Governance

There have been improvements but, in general, the current systems of governance fall short of people's expectations. Notable are the challenges to environmental governance emerging from the growing extractive industries within Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The existing policies and legislation are inadequate to ensure prudent exploitation, prevent or address conflicts. Furthermore, civil society organisations and other interest groups (including businesses) have demonstrated limited capacity to engage with investors in the extractive industry; many of whom are known to be complicit in environmental crimes.

In all areas, governance continues to be undermined by corruption. The Corruption Barometer 2013 survey results published by Transparency International indicate increased corruption in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The culture of impunity persists in both public and private institutions. The levels of transparency and accountability are declining even as the possible negative consequences of poor governance to the citizens are increasing.

The democratic deficit is also apparent in extensive failure to manage diversity and plurality within society. Extreme manifestations of prejudice and intolerance during the past five years include violence between communities in parts of Kenya and Uganda, and clashes between religious groups in Tanzania.

Poverty

Poverty levels remain high. People and communities who are already marginalised by other systemic and structural failures are being impoverished further by inadequate access to critical basic services. Although basic needs such as health care and education may be recognised as human rights, enforcing such rights costs money that governments appear unable to mobilise and use effectively.

The poor include people who are unemployed, underemployed, or victims of societal biases against their gender or culture. Unemployment is a serious concern, particularly among the youth. The estimated rate of employment varies across East Africa but, in many places, it is estimated that over fifty per cent of young people between the ages of 18 and 35 years are unemployed or underemployed.

In situations where communities have, unwillingly, been alienated from their land and other natural resources, poverty negatively affects all members, irrespective of their age or gender. Land is one of the biggest assets in wealth creation and many of the poor have been unjustly dislocated from this shared capital by other interest groups, often without compensation or subsequent benefits.

Humanitarian crises

All countries in the region have had to deal with some type of humanitarian crisis in recent times. Thousands of people have migrated or been displaced as a result of armed conflicts, drought, floods and other calamitous events. The origin and dynamics of such humanitarian crises are complex and difficult to navigate. As such, philanthropic actions have, at best, only temporarily relieved the effects of longstanding and recurring problems.

PHILANTHROPY AND GRANTMAKING

There are many forms of philanthropic giving, but cash donations and grants are currently the most reported and measured. The conversation, therefore, drifted towards participants' concerns about the origin and use of the money granted to address social and developmental challenges in East Africa.

Where does the money come from?

During the 2012 Assembly of the Africa Grantmakers Network, participants were challenged to question why, 50 years after independence, a large proportion of the funding for development in Africa comes from external sources. There are concerns that their dependence on external funding undermines the sustainability of philanthropic organisations, which may also undermine their credibility among their grantees, particularly at community level.

> ***"Who is funding development work in Africa?"***

Philanthropic organisations should not be content to remain conduits of 'aid'. Recognising the limitations of aid, they should also come out more strongly to press for other means of restoring equity in developing societies, including more appropriate trade and investment. For example, grantmakers should begin questioning the extent to which wealthy Africans and companies operating within Africa invest in social enterprises and other development-oriented ventures within the continent.

Vigilance is required to ensure that philanthropic organisations and individuals in Africa do not replicate the inequitable and unsustainable structures and practices evident elsewhere. At best, such replication will only devolve the same problems to local levels and, at worst, entrench poverty and injustice within the targeted groups and communities.

Where does the money go?

There are several foundations making high-profile investments within East Africa to ensure that more people have access to education, housing and healthcare. These include the Equity Bank Foundation, Akili Dada, Zawadi Africa Education Fund, Matibabu Foundation and Akiba Mashinani Trust. A significant proportion of local philanthropy is directed toward similar impact investments, and also towards alleviating the effects of humanitarian crises.

Meanwhile, the foundations that are more sensitive to the systemic issues underlying poverty, marginalisation and community vulnerability to conflicts and other crises, are channelling funds towards initiatives that can improve governance. These include grants awarded to civil society organisations (CSOs) which facilitate broader inclusion during formulation of government policies; to strengthen communities' capacity to hold government to account; and foster links among different stakeholders in governance. Some philanthropic organisations are also channelling funds towards enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of CSOs.

In all cases, there are a lot of lessons to be learned about effective grantmaking and the pitfalls to avoid. Participants cited examples of grantmaking that had been unsuccessful (and possibly harmful) because it did not take

full account of the context and capabilities of the grantees. However, learning among grantmakers will require some convergence in their ideology and theories of change. At the moment, many grantmakers appear to be working at cross-purposes. Of particular interest is the apparent divergence between the culture and practice of corporate philanthropic initiatives and other foundations.

THE EMERGING NARRATIVE FOR SJP IN EAST AFRICA

Two dimensions of giving that distinguish SJP from other forms of philanthropy were highlighted during this session: motive and results.

SJP is more sensitive to the politics of unjust circumstances than other philanthropic responses. When working from the SJP perspective, grantmaking is motivated to identify and address the primary causes of injustice, and avoid actions that may obscure or sanitize injustice. SJP goes beyond the "management of poverty" by, for example, doing more than just helping those who have been treated unfairly adjust to their altered circumstances.

> ***"We need a panacea, not a Panadol"***

SJP is directed towards results that can overturn an unjust *status quo*. Therefore, SJP will often work against the interests of those stakeholders who benefit from unjust circumstances, including state agencies and private businesses. The resulting tension between business interests and SJP is likely to manifest in disagreements between philanthropic organisations founded by corporations, and other foundations. For example, there is already some disquiet over corporate philanthropy in the agriculture sector deemed to have negative and long-lasting implications for seed and food sovereignty in East Africa.

A narrative for SJP that can energise grantmakers within East Africa must be framed and communicated in a manner that emphasises reform and resonates well with other endeavours to promote equity and balance in society. Successful changemakers are adept at reframing issues. A good example is the manner in which Via Campesina has reframed its discourse opposing the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture by shifting the focus from Food Security to Food Sovereignty.

Reform usually takes place over a long period of time and, therefore, patience is required. Although there are pressing needs to be addressed, it is worthwhile to spend time and effort defining the core issues for SJP before taking action. Understanding and communicating the purpose and anticipated effects of SJP are not simple tasks. It was once stated that members of philanthropic organisations need to be revolutionaries and not 'resolutionaries'. However, changemakers cannot afford to bypass critical interrogation of their motives, and the probable effects of their actions.

> ***"We need to be revolutionaries, not resolution-aries."***

Participants at the session proposed some critical questions to guide further

development of the narrative on SJP within the region.

- What kind of society do we want to have?
- How can SJP contribute to this vision of a reformed society?
- Should more philanthropy be directed towards sustainable businesses that address social justice?
- How do we build effective and sustainable constituencies for SJP?

Most of the philanthropic organisations that are addressing issues of social justice in the region have a dual identity as both grantmakers and grant seekers. This situation is unlikely to change in the near future. As such, it is necessary to continuously question the sources of funding for SJP and the implications for the emerging narrative. Such reflection will ensure that the conversation within East Africa is not captured by organisations pursuing individual or external interests.

> ***"Who is controlling the conversation?"***

At the same time, inadequate control of the narrative and sources of funding are hindering wider application of SJP within philanthropic organisations that have the potential to serve as changemakers. Many are already partners in pre-designed grantmaking initiatives that limit their ability to respond adequately to social justice issues. It is hoped that such contractual obligations might become more responsive to the principles of SJP once the narrative is communicated and appreciated more widely.

STRENGTHENING AND GROWING THE PRACTICE OF SJP IN EAST AFRICA

While attempting to grow and sustain the constituency for SJP in the region, philanthropic organisations should also invest in improving their practice. Four broad areas for improvement were highlighted.

Going back to the basics

As stated at the beginning of the session, meaningful SJP requires understanding of the various dimensions and causes of injustice. Responsible and effective grantmaking should also take into account the capacities that prospective grantees already have, and need to acquire, in order to achieve positive outcomes.

Developing partnerships

There are still problems of duplication and inefficiency within and among grantmakers, highlighting the need to find more effective means of employing the limited resources available for SJP. Efficiency could be improved through partnership and collaboration, especially between philanthropic organisations and the government. Formal partnerships can be used to reinforce funding commitments, which are good for accountability and for encouraging subsequent investments.

For SJP, the principles of partnership and collaboration should be extended to the relationship that grantmakers have with their grantees. In this regard it will be important to strengthen the capacity of citizens and CSOs to participate in both discourse and action for SJP.

Encouraging innovation

While encouraging efforts to document, analyse and share information relevant to SJP, grantmakers should also pay more attention to creativity and innovation. The philanthropic sector is diverse, comprising actors with different ideologies and culture. This situation may pose a challenge for convergence in practice but, if cultivated appropriately, also presents numerous opportunities for innovation.

Tracking and measuring the outcomes

There are important lessons for SJP to be learned from past mistakes as well as successes. More effort should, therefore, be directed towards tracking and measuring the outcomes of philanthropy. The culture of accountability should be cultivated within all philanthropic organisations. Currently, the levels of scrutiny applied to corporate philanthropy appear to be less rigorous than the standards expected from other grantmaking organisations.

Coordinating discourse and learning

Participants suggested the following ways in which EAAG can facilitate further discussions and learning on SJP.

- Facilitating processes to formulate and popularise mechanisms for local giving at different levels, including media campaigns.
- Strengthening local thinking about what makes philanthropy and, in particular, SJP work well.
- Facilitating discourse aimed at identifying areas of convergence among the diverse stakeholders in SJP.
- Undertaking research aimed at generating evidence of positive outcomes and innovation in philanthropy.

The session also concluded with a recommendation for EAAG to foster close connections with other philanthropic forums on the continent, such as the Africa Grantmakers Network and African Philanthropy Forum.

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