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## From seed to sprout - creating new spaces to strengthen philanthropy in emerging market countries

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**The ‘idea seed’ to organize a forum to convene philanthropists and practitioners from emerging market countries was planted back in January 2012, at a meeting in London on ‘Building Bridges: Developing Philanthropy in Emerging Markets’.**

**The weather outside was dark and dreary, while the energy inside was full of light, sparked by the late Olga Alexeeva’s vision of ‘building bridges’ for philanthropy in emerging market countries. Her early and untimely passing left the newly formed Philanthropy Bridge Foundation without a leader, and the rest of us who worked with her, or had planned to, with an important question to address: how to continue to spread this light and take the work forward?**

### **Back in January 2012**

Forty-one participants from 14 countries got down to work in small groups, developed some quite powerful ideas, and discussed their proposed activities. Having worked extensively with foundations and NGOs in Turkey, and realizing increasingly over the years the benefit of my conversations and other interactions with practitioners from countries such as Brazil, Russia and India, I was among those who proposed organizing an annual Emerging Philanthropies Forum. To my delight, the small working group we established eventually took the form of a slightly bigger steering committee, with the Russian Donors Forum as the secretariat and main organizer.

### **Fast forward to June 2013**

Fast forward to June 2013: the Emerging Societies-Emerging Philanthropies International Forum was hosted in Peterhof, a small, quiet town outside St Petersburg – which is in fact a city of many bridges, 60 to be exact. This time, it was much sunnier outside, as due to the celebrated ‘White Nights’ the sun never really did quite set. All of this solar energy must have penetrated the participants, creating a constant buzz of 60 people from 14 emerging market and developing countries networking and discussing issues of common concern, from Mexico to China, Turkey to India. A comment repeated several times over the course of two days by various participants was ‘we have much more in common than I had expected ...’ Yes! This statement left us feeling that the mission was accomplished.

So what was our mission? To create a space for new connections and an exchange of experiences among those working in the field of philanthropy in emerging market countries. Granted, these countries – including what are commonly known as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) plus others such as Turkey, Mexico and Indonesia – have as many differences as similarities. This topic was explored in more detail in the March 2013 issue of Alliance. And over the past month, many of these countries can now add ‘widespread citizen protests’ (at the root of which lies discontent with lack of equity in growth, depletion of environmental resources and public spaces, etc) to their list of similarities, along with expanding middle classes, steady economic growth, rapid urbanization and young populations. All the more reason for us to convene ...

## **The Peterhof Diaries**

Over the course of two days, participants explored themes around regional philanthropy, government relations and legal frameworks, communications, new mechanisms for philanthropy and infrastructure support. There were many interesting debates revealing both differences and similarities, with a bit more emphasis on the latter. According to my own analysis of the various discussions (materials soon to be available on the Forum’s website [www.emergingforum.org](http://www.emergingforum.org)) here are the top four which cut across all thematic discussions.

### **Compiling and sharing cases/examples of ‘good’ philanthropy**

Communication is everything. Case studies, documentaries and other products that can showcase the good work being done through philanthropic initiatives were seen as critical for raising awareness about the value of this work, securing a positive reputation among the public and the government, and increasing participation. Interestingly, this was similar to one of the suggestions that came out of the London 2012 meeting (highlighting stories of good and inspiring philanthropy). The First Olga Alexeeva Memorial Prize, also an idea that came out of the London 2012 meeting, was awarded at this [forum](#), providing a good opportunity to communicate an impressive example of local community philanthropy.

### **Mechanisms**

Is the foundation endowment dead? Of course not. Should giving be ‘one off’ or spend-down, as opposed to constant and in perpetuity? Not necessarily. Yet there was much discussion on the need to diversify the ‘mechanisms’ and strategies to allow existing and potential donors the opportunity to shape their giving in a way that suits them. This is especially important given young populations, expanding middle classes and increased use of technology in many emerging market countries. On a collective level (community, regional, national and across borders), platforms to mobilize ideas, solutions and funding from all segments of the population were also discussed – as was the potential for using technology more to increase accessibility and participation.

### **Lack of data**

Many, if not most, of the countries represented at the meeting expressed the serious lack of data about the

sector – due to a number of factors including difficulty of gathering data and the lack of systems/programmes to analyse and convey outcomes. This was considered as an obstacle to many of the activities that could help engage more participation in philanthropy and increase its effectiveness. Getting a better handle on the numbers in our own countries could also help plot out the various trends across countries. This was another issue that also came up at the London 2012 meeting.

### **Government relations/legal frameworks: incentive or barrier?**

At times, both. Governments in many countries appear to be cooperating with foundations and private donors, including corporations. Yet on what terms cooperation is based, how partners are chosen, and other procedural issues were under question. Looking at legal frameworks, flexibility and ease, on the one hand, and adherence to regulations for accountability and transparency, on the other, were discussed. Yet again the importance of conveying the work of this sector – linking to the issue of communication – was emphasized, for gaining the government's support (in the form of partnership and incentives) and the public's invaluable commodity of trust in the sector. A call for comparative research across emerging market countries was raised as part of the discussions, especially with regard to 'incentives' (taxation deductions and the like) for philanthropy.

### **Looking ahead**

What next? Will there be a new network? A second forum? Perhaps. There may be other existing events through which this forum's goals could initially be pursued (for example, WINGS Forum 2014 in Istanbul has already agreed to make room for this thematic area). It would be valuable to find some continuity in these gatherings and initiatives, as the London and Russia meetings and the increasing amount of literature on these subjects indicate that the philanthropic community in emerging market countries has much to learn from and share with one another.

This is especially important as recent episodes of protests and unrest show that many countries are experiencing serious challenges in balancing economic growth with equity and securing a participatory democracy. These developments are opportunities to mobilize philanthropy in addressing social and economic injustices, and present an opportunity for this group of countries to come together and discuss new approaches and strategies for doing so.

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### **For more information**

[www.emergingforum.org](http://www.emergingforum.org)

See the Latest from Alliance blog at <http://philanthropynews.alliancemagazine.org> for a series of blog posts on the Emerging Societies-Emerging Philanthropies International Forum, from Paula Fabiani, Maria Chertok, Kingsley Kariuki Mucheke and Luis Gallo, among others.

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