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PHILANTHROPY IN AFRICA: FUNCTIONS, STATUS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction

Philanthropy in Africa, at least from the perspective of those societies I am familiar with – of which I am a part – is perhaps best captured in the framework of *birth, life, death* and *rebirth*. I explain briefly below how these concepts, strange as they may seem, interface with philanthropy both in terms of its meaning and practice in an African’s life, (although of course this might not be peculiar to Africans alone and may well apply to many other societies). I use this framework very cautiously, however, because some African societies may not fit within it and its use here is therefore illustrative rather than representative.

I am also aware that this framework might not capture all dimensions of societies in Africa – but neither does the term philanthropy. Many in Africa would rather not use the term; instead they prefer to use simple expressions such as “helping” or “giving”. Limited as these might appear to be, they capture the essence of what in other parts of the world would clearly qualify as philanthropy.

Although this article does not seek to give a comprehensive definition of what philanthropy in Africa is, it may be useful at the outset to point out some of the features of what can be classified as philanthropy in the continent. As stated in an entry in the *International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society*, “*The term philanthropy is not generally understood nor is it*

preferred in Africa—simply because it is not inclusive both in its scope and reach.”¹

Given this, the term is used rather carefully here, intended to capture both the nature and character of philanthropy in the African continent, which revolves around two dimensions – the horizontal and vertical. Some writers have preferred to call the horizontal forms of philanthropy (or giving) “African philanthropy” or “philanthropy with African characteristics”. Is there a difference between these two definitions, though? “African philanthropy” would perhaps imply philanthropic action that is specific and unique to Africa, and researchers in the continent have made some attempts to define the very essence of this type of philanthropy: it is mainly indigenous and usually informal, although there have been movements towards institutionalising some of its forms. Some research and clarification, however, is still needed to define the concept of “philanthropy with African characteristics” and this might in fact overlap with the concept of “African philanthropy”.

More dominant and prominent are the vertical forms of philanthropy in Africa, which have normally been in the shape of formal and institutionalised mechanisms such as foundations, trusts, community chests and other societal mechanisms through which communities help each other.

Given these variations in definition and description when one speaks of philanthropy in Africa, not everyone agrees on its features. Often, priority is given to modern and formal institutions of philanthropy at the expense of the informal ones. And where there is an encounter between the two types, formal and institutionalised philanthropy often overrides everything else. Let me illustrate this point through a story.

In 2008, I attended a workshop that brought together a number of *philanthrocrats*² in Africa, mainly from the community foundations movement. The workshop facilitator began by asking each participant to share his or her experiences of working in philanthropy. As each participant spoke, I realised that many drew a clear line between their profession in philanthropy and their day-to-day lives. In other words, philanthropy as practice was not necessarily embedded in their personhood. For many, their experiences ranged from two, four, ten and even twenty years in the field of philanthropy or development in general. One gentleman, who was probably in his early sixties, even went as far as saying that he had been in other fields before, but had just joined the philanthropic world less than

1 Moyo, B (2009) ‘Philanthropy in Africa’ *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society* (eds. Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler) [online], available from the World Wide Web: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/j62k806410114239/fulltext.html>

2 This is a term coined to refer to those who work in the bureaucracy of disbursing philanthropic resources.

two years earlier. He was probably the least experienced in the area he professed. I sat there wondering what this exercise meant to me and whether or not I was reflected in the discussions that had gone before me. It was at that point that I decided I would frame my response to the question of experience by using the concepts of birth, life and death. I have since revised my framework to include rebirth – for it is when there is death that new life begins again. So instead of being a linear framework, it is now cyclical.

In order to define what philanthropy meant for me and others I know, I juxtaposed my date of birth and my experience of philanthropy. I was thirty-five years old at the time. And I had thirty-five years of experience in philanthropy. This perplexed many in the room who by mere calculation of my age would have found it very difficult to understand how I had worked for thirty-five years in the philanthropic sector, when in fact I looked thirty-five or so years old. My point was that for me there is no clear line between my life as I live it everyday and my professional occupation when it comes to philanthropy. Even if I did not have a professional job or career, I would still have given the same answer. And this is why.

Birth: When I was born (and before then) many people gave my parents all kinds of assistance which was by definition and nature philanthropic. At the time of my birth, which I am told included a naming ceremony, all manner of gifts – both financial and in-kind – were extended to me and my parents in ways that today would be defined not just as charity but as “development”. Thus I immediately became a recipient of some benevolence from both my community and those from afar, as did my family and parents. At that point, I could not become a philanthropist but I certainly benefited from philanthropic acts. There is no doubt that my parents were philanthropic already.

Life: As I was growing up, I continued to be the recipient of many forms of philanthropic acts at home, from the community, and increasingly from the international world. I still am today. I have been a recipient of religious gifts, financial support and other forms of philanthropy. However I have not just been a recipient. I have also been a philanthropist in my own way to others, in terms of my time, money, and in-kind contributions to others. Thus I have partaken in both the horizontal and vertical forms of philanthropy. There is no clear line between my life and being philanthropic or being a recipient of philanthropic acts. At any moment in my life, I am one or both of these.

Death/rebirth: This is the most controversial to some people and yet it is the clearest phase in one’s lifetime where philanthropy is best illustrated. Either, one is a recipient of philanthropy, aimed at covering the costs of burial and other funeral arrangements (including consoling the bereaved), or one is also a philanthropist at death through wills and bequests. A

number of philanthropic institutions normally benefit at the death of some rich people who give a certain part of their estate to philanthropic causes. It is through such a process that new life begins – either a foundation or trust is established, or other forms of institutionalised philanthropy are born.

So my definition of philanthropy is very simple. My experience of philanthropy coincides with my age. Thus birth, life and death/rebirth are defining philanthropic moments for me as an African. I am yet to meet an African, or any human being for that matter, who would not identify with this. Therefore, whatever form philanthropy takes, it has some manifestations at a personal level at each of these life moments.

The main challenge, however, has been the lack of information regarding both the scope and size of philanthropy in Africa. The paucity of information has led to many myths and untruths about philanthropy, leading some to view Africa as lagging behind both in terms of its understanding and practice. There are very few institutions that have dedicated resources and personnel towards the research and study of philanthropy on the continent. No continental studies have been conducted in this field – it is a field that is under-resourced and seriously understudied.

There are however some studies that have been conducted at a national level. These include those in South Africa,³ Southern Africa,⁴ North Africa,⁵ East Africa. I have also since contributed a chapter on Philanthropy in Africa to the 2009 *International Encyclopaedia of Civil Society*.⁶

To close this gap, TrustAfrica developed a philanthropy-specific project which among other things seeks to:

- Ascertain gaps and opportunities as well as produce a resource base and a mechanism for building an “infrastructure of and study of philanthropy” in Africa;

3 Everatt, D., & Solanki, G. (2005) *A nation of givers? Social giving among South Africans*, Durban: Centre for Civil Society. Friedman, S., Hudson, J. & Mackay, S. (2005) *Like cheese, like chalk? 'Professionalism' and 'Whim' in corporate giving at AngloGold Ashanti and Pick' N' Pay*, Durban: Centre for Civil Society. Habib, A. & Maharaj, B. (2008) *Giving and solidarity: Resource flows for poverty alleviation and development in South Africa*, Cape Town: HSRC Press. Mahomed, H. (2009) Conceptual frameworks influencing social justice philanthropy: A study of independent funders in South Africa in *The state of philanthropy*, in Africa. Dakar: TrustAfrica.

4 Wilkinson-Maposa, S., Fowler, A., Oliver-Evans, C. & Mulenga, C.F. N. (2006) *The poor philanthropist: How and why the poor help and give each other*, Cape Town: Compress. Moyo, B. (2004) *Dimensions of philanthropy in Southern Africa*, Paper prepared for the Ford Foundation Retreat, Jinja: Ford Foundation

5 Daly, M (2007) *Philanthropy in Egypt: A comprehensive study on local philanthropy in Egypt and potentials of directing giving and volunteering towards development*, Cairo: Center for Development Services

6 Moyo, B (2009) 'Philanthropy in Africa' International Encyclopedia of Civil Society (eds. Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler) [online], available from the World Wide Web: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/j62k806410114239/fulltext.html>

- Understand local forms of philanthropy within the broader discourse of philanthropy.

This project has specific focus on an annual publication called *The State of Philanthropy in Africa*, whose main aim is to measure the state of philanthropy in the continent by gathering all necessary data, in order to locate the philanthropic discourse in proper context.

The current philanthropic landscape

This section addresses briefly what exists in Africa. It draws heavily from a recent publication by the same author.⁷ As stated above, the philanthropic landscape in Africa is generally characterised by both horizontal and vertical dimensions of philanthropy. Because the term “philanthropy” is not popular with the people in the continent, and neither is it useful in capturing what exists, the emerging body of literature on philanthropy in Africa prefers to define philanthropy as “help” or “giving”.⁸ In the informal realm, philanthropy manifests itself in what Wilkinson-Maposa *et al.* have called the “philanthropy of community”. In this realm, philanthropy refers to giving by the poor to other poor individuals of the community. More often this manifests itself in cultural and linguistic underpinnings – hence it normally takes on indigenous expressions such as cooperatives, rotation and savings clubs (normally called stokvels), communal collective efforts and burial societies.

In the formal realm, philanthropy takes forms such as private foundations, trusts, corporate foundations, family trusts, community chests and community foundations. More often this is understood – or misunderstood for that matter – to mean the rich giving to or helping the poor. I say misunderstood because this is, however, a form of disempowerment for the poor. The rich are made patrons for the poor, and yet the poor are philanthropic too, as my story earlier on demonstrated. The added danger with this interpretation is that it also takes away the poor’s agency in giving and developing themselves and others, around and far beyond.

As I write this chapter, Haiti has been struck by one of the most disastrous earthquakes in recent history. African civil society organizations led by Mrs Graca Machel, TrustAfrica, CIVICUS and the African Monitor have put together a campaign called Africa for Haiti⁹ which appeals to all Africans, poor and rich, to make contributions that would be channelled

7 Ibid.

8 Wilkinson-Maposa, S, Fowler, A, Oliver-Evans, C, & Mulenga, CF N (2006) *The poor philanthropist: How and why the poor help and give each other*, Cape Town: Compress

9 www.africaforhaiti.com

towards rebuilding Haitian communities. Such an approach is informed by existing research which increasingly shows that giving is not the exclusive domain of the wealthy.¹⁰ This is also informed by the fact that Africans more often give to local causes, and very few give to international causes. This might be due to the fact that many developmental challenges are right in front of them, for example the HIV/AIDS pandemic; wars and conflicts; unemployment, particularly for the youth; and the general levels of poverty. But with a disaster like the one in Haiti, Africans are being called upon to give to international causes. In other words, this campaign has the potential of turning what is normally considered local and informal, as well as indigenous, into an international mechanism.

There are many factors that motivate people to give. Many are motivated by what in Southern Africa is called “*ubuntu*” – literally referring to humanity or humaneness. There are also significant numbers of people who help and give both financially and in kind because of their religion. In return, these people expect spiritual blessings. But there is a group of people that give and help because they think that their philanthropic activities are geared towards tackling poverty and development-related matters. An interesting defining characteristic feature of philanthropy in Africa is that there is a thin line between short-term and long-term philanthropic actions. Charity is not just charity, it is very much linked to development.

This thin line is also to be found in diaspora remittances, which are fast becoming critical levers of development on the continent. Existing research on remittances seems to conflate contributions made to families with philanthropy. There is no doubt that the diaspora phenomenon is an emerging and interesting development in philanthropy, particularly in Africa. It is estimated that there are more than thirty-five million citizens of African descent in the United States alone, whose collective purchasing power amounts to about 450 billion United States dollars (USD) per annum.¹¹ According to the World Bank’s 2007 report, remittances to Africa amounted to 4 billion USD for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Individual giving and foundations play a major role in Africa in terms of defining the philanthropic landscape. Below I give a snapshot of individual giving and foundations.

10 Everatt, D, & Solanki, G (2005) *A nation of givers? Social giving among South Africans*, Durban: Centre for Civil Society. Wilkinson-Maposoa, S, Fowler, A, Oliver-Evans, C, & Mulenga, CF N (2006) *The poor philanthropist: How and why the poor help and give each other*, Cape Town: Compress

11 Bridgewater, P. (2003). *The African diaspora and its influence on African development*, Remarks at Kentucky State University March 28, Frankfort, KY

Individual giving

There has not been much research conducted in Africa on individual giving. However, there are considerable resources that come from individuals, either to other individuals or to formal institutions. The only study so far on giving which was conducted at a national level is by the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu Natal. This study is instructive of what is generally believed to be the case across Africa.¹² It concluded that South Africa was a nation of givers. Over half of the people who were surveyed gave money to charities or other causes, a third gave food or other goods to charities or other causes, while almost a fifth volunteered time for charity or other causes. The study adds that slightly less than half of the respondents gave money or goods directly to the poor, while the majority preferred to give to formal structures rather than to individuals.¹³ Elsewhere throughout the continent, similar trends can be observed. More studies need to be conducted however, to avoid the tyranny of anecdotes.

Many individuals are motivated by religion when they give either money or in kind. Most religions require the poor be taken care of. However, another motivating factor for individual donors is the need to tackle poverty. As such, individual giving is not the exclusive domain of the rich, the poor also give. Because of this realisation, emerging institutions such as community foundations are finding that they can also raise resources from local communities. Individuals also give time. According to a study of the nonprofit sector in South Africa,¹⁴ the sector has the highest number of volunteers. In 1999, more than 1.5 million volunteers contributed their time to the sector. Their contribution was equivalent to the work done in 316,991 full time jobs and accounted for almost 49 percent of the nonprofit sector's work force. Volunteers were active in culture and recreation, religious institutions and politics or advocacy. There were 70,740 volunteers in the culture and recreation sector, 64,457 in the politics and advocacy sector, 52,743 in the religious sector and 50,450 in social services.¹⁵

Individual giving can be enhanced if the tax regime is enabling. In most countries, the tax environment does not provide incentives for voluntary

12 Everatt, D., & Solanki, G (2005) *A nation of givers? Social giving among South Africans*, Durban: Centre for Civil Society. Wilkinson-Maposa, S, Fowler, A, Oliver-Evans, C, & Mulenga, C.F.N

13 Ibid.

14 Swilling, M., & Russell, B (2002) *The size and scope of the non profit sector in South Africa*, Durban: Centre for Civil Society

15 Ibid.

giving in the public interest.¹⁶ This is a challenge that confronts many countries, but an opportunity exists to reform tax laws: this would serve as a significant step forward in encouraging private individuals to donate parts of their estates to philanthropic activities. Already Africa is witnessing an increase in new foundations being created by individuals, and more are likely to emerge if the environment for individual giving is improved.

Foundations

The speed at which African foundations are sprouting right across the continent points to the fact that the philanthropic landscape is developing and maturing faster than was anticipated. In the last few years, foundations working in Africa were mainly international in nature and orientation. Today, however, there is an emergence of African-founded and led foundations, most of which also focus on areas which, previously, only international foundations addressed. These include, but are not limited to, grant-making to civil society and the private sector in fields such as development, governance, human rights, community development, HIV/AIDS, and peace and security.

These new foundations include TrustAfrica, the African Women's Development Fund, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the Joaquim Chissano Foundation, the J.A. Kufuor Foundation, the Solomon Tandeng Muna Foundation and the Youssou N'Dour Foundation, among many others. Some of these have been created and supported by international foundations such as the Ford Foundation. Others have been formed by former heads of states. Others, like the Mo Ibrahim and Dakota Foundations, were created by rich Africans who made their money mostly from the private sector and are now giving back to the communities. Sports personalities and others have also created their own foundations right across the continent, and these focus on issues that are dear to them. The Mutola Foundation in Mozambique is a classic example of a foundation set up by a sports personality. Because there are many sports personalities – mostly working in Europe – there is potential for more foundations to be set up according to the specific interests of the founders.

Foundations are the biggest constituents of institutional philanthropy in Africa. The highest concentration of foundations is still in Anglophone countries, mainly in Southern Africa (South Africa mainly), East Africa (Kenya) and parts of West Africa (Nigeria and Ghana). North Africa, particularly Egypt, has also developed a number of foundations. In these

16 SAGA (2004) *South Africa philanthropy and the Fiscus*, A SAGA position paper: Johannesburg: SAGA.

countries, there is a growing development of family trusts, about which very little is still known.

In South Africa alone in 2002, there were 3,891 non-profit organisations that were registered as trusts or foundations, representing 4 percent of the non-profit sector overall. For a subsector about which relatively little information exists, the number of trusts and foundations would appear to be quite high. And research conducted into a sample of family foundations in South Africa showed that they are all very diverse in terms of the projects that they support and their overall modes of operation.¹⁷

Although foundations appear to work in many different areas, the majority work in the fields of education, welfare and health. Equally, very few family foundations are in areas that could be described as transformative, such as social justice, democracy, rule of law, gender and civil rights and so on, and much of their work would seem to focus on ameliorating the effects of poverty, for example, rather than addressing its causes. This tendency towards “charity” among family foundations is not only true of family foundations in South Africa, but is a common feature of much institutional philanthropy across the world.¹⁸

Over the last ten years, there has been an increasing interest and growth in the number of community foundations. In 1998, there were only two such foundations across Africa: today there are more than fifteen such institutions on the continent.¹⁹ The highest concentration is in South Africa. Others are found in Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, Malawi, Uganda, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe. There are other community-like institutions in Africa, and these have not been studied. The growth in community foundations is an illustration of the importance of such community-based institutions for development purposes; through community foundations, communities feel that they own their own development. The Kenya Community Development Foundation is a classic case, illustrating how communities can rally around a particular development imperative and pull their resources together.²⁰

Despite the interest in community foundations (even the World Bank has been developing community foundations across the world – the four

17 Moyo, B (2006) *Family foundations in South Africa*, paper prepared for the State of Social Giving in South Africa Report Series. Durban: Centre for Civil Society

18 Chen, L (2002) *Philanthropy and social change in Latin America*, Strategies and lessons. Workshop presentation, The David Rockefeller Centre for Latin American Studies and The Hauser Centre for Non Profit Organizations, Harvard University

19 Global Status Report (2008) 2008 Community foundations global status report [online], available from the World Wide Web: www.wingsweb.org/Information/publications_Community_2008_Main.cfm

20 Mutuku, M (2006). ‘Process makes perfect’. In Katharine Pearson (Ed.), *Donors ourselves: Rural development philanthropy from East Tennessee to East Africa and beyond*, Whitesburg, KY: The Center for Rural Strategies. (pp. 31–43).

community foundations in Tanzania were developed through a World Bank project), a number of challenges still abound around the community foundation concept. These include the very understanding of the term “community”, which if not properly defined might lead to exclusion rather than inclusion. The other challenge has been that community foundations have tended to bypass their communities and depended mainly on international sources of funding.

Philanthropy in Africa therefore takes many forms including indigenous mechanisms, foundations (private and public), community foundations, corporate philanthropy and individual giving. As highlighted previously, giving is not the preserve of a few rich people, but is a domain that also includes the poor, who are taking an interest in their own affairs. Hence a significant number of individual givers include the poor who are driven by the need to address poverty, charity and their religious beliefs. There are a significant number of foundations, including international ones like the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and other new entrants. There has been an important development in the continent which has seen African foundations sprouting up everywhere. This development is very important, for it has the potential to reverse power relations that exist between the global North and the global South. Also, there is a possibility that these new foundations can break the dependency cycle that currently characterises relations between the non-profit sector and international foundations. Lastly, it is possible that the new foundations can work on an equal footing with their counterparts from the north. But equally important is to caution that the same African foundations could, within Africa, recreate the same imbalances that currently define relations between the north and the south.²¹

TrustAfrica and other philanthropic institutions such as the African Women’s Development Fund, the Southern Africa Trust and the Kenya Community Development Foundation have been in the forefront of developing a philanthropic platform in Africa. For example, after many years of consultations, planning and preparations, the African Grantmakers Network (AGN) was launched in Accra, Ghana in July 2009. This network was formed by major African grant-makers on the continent, as a platform for collective action with the potential to reverse some of the imbalances of the past. At the same time, the AGN has the potential to propel Africa’s development through an effective use of philanthropic resources. Currently guided by a steering committee of seven organisations and located at TrustAfrica, the Network will, among other things, be a platform for peer-learning and good practice. It will serve as a force to amplify African

21 Moyo, B (September 2008) *Can the new African foundations break the dependence syndrome?* Alliance Magazine (pp. 40–41)

voices and advance African perspectives in development and global platforms. It will also cultivate productive relations with other civil society formations in Africa.

However, the AGN faces a number of tasks to not only maintain the momentum but to remain relevant. Among these, the first is information generation about grant-making in Africa, including the general map of what exists and the architecture of philanthropy on the continent. The second task relates to managing collaborations and partnerships. The wide acceptance of the launch has the potential to fast-track the AGN's growth beyond natural laws of expansion. Thirdly, the AGN will have to be innovative, and think outside the box in connecting the various initiatives across the continent in ways that contribute to an effective development approach.

In addition, TrustAfrica has supported efforts aimed at securing the conditions for democracy and equitable development in Africa. This has been possible through grant-making, technical assistance and provision of mobility support for groups and individuals who under normal circumstances would not be able to operate effectively. Thus as an African foundation, TrustAfrica has not only focused on building an infrastructure for philanthropy but has used its philanthropic resources to address challenging developmental questions facing Africa. From transitional justice issues to economic governance and the promotion of human rights, TrustAfrica has attempted to give ordinary Africans the capacity and voice to hold their governments accountable. Working at the regional and continental level, TrustAfrica has used the treaty system to advocate for good governance, free and fair elections, agrarian reform, gender equity and civil society protection.

Conclusion

Philanthropy in Africa is a field that still needs further probing. For example, Africa still needs more research and studies that track philanthropic flows, as well as studies which explore their impact on development and transforming societal structures. More important will be the alignment of philanthropy with national priorities as well as with the activities and processes of traditional philanthropy. New studies in the continent, such as the focus on diaspora philanthropy, the focus on indigenous philanthropy and optimising institutional philanthropy will prove useful in defining the philanthropic terrain in Africa within the next five to ten years. With more philanthropic institutions emerging and more research being conducted continentally, the philanthropic map is slowly being drawn.

