

## About the stories



**Caroline Hartnell and Andrew Milner**

Enabling girls in a community in Palestine to finish their high school education through revival of a great cultural concept; opening up the possibility of higher education to poor students in the US state of Louisiana and raising standards across the state in the process; making a grant to a group of LGBT activists to help change public attitudes to LGBT people in Northern Ireland; supporting an unknown UK group called the Carbon Tracker

Initiative that developed the concept of 'stranded assets' that underpins the movement to divest from fossil fuels – these and the other stories in this collection show how much can be achieved through an approach some have called philanthropy for social justice, though in many cases what is described is still very much the beginning of the story.

The stories all describe a philanthropic intervention against some form of injustice, actual or potential. They show that a just approach should inform the means as well as the ends of the work if funders are to effect positive social change. One of the common threads running through many of the stories is that the intervention was effective because the funder based the work on consultations with those at the centre of the problem: mothers protesting indiscriminate police violence in Brazil; farmers' movements affirming rights to land in Indonesia; village communities looking for means to create livelihoods in rural Tunisia; and, perhaps the most striking example of all, children in north-east England documenting and speaking out against child poverty.

Some funders may see all this as too difficult: the process is so time-consuming, the results so long in coming. But these stories show that this participative approach and long-term commitment are key to success. While there are challenges and risks in this approach to philanthropy, they are not insurmountable, and the rewards are great.

The Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace has worked since 2007 to support philanthropy that addresses the root causes of persistent poverty, growing inequality and injustice in the

world. This collection of stories came about because they recognized the need to produce concrete and compelling accounts of the work of such philanthropy. Their purpose in telling these stories is to broaden the circle of philanthropy practitioners whose aim is to help produce lasting change in the lives of people and communities.

The Working Group's message to these potential funders might be summarized as follows: if you want to achieve lasting change and to have a positive impact on the lives of communities and individuals, this is the most effective way to do it. These stories show what can be done and how to do it and how the challenges were overcome along the way. They range from community-level interventions to initiatives that aimed to change public attitudes and thinking, sometimes at global level.

### **Supporting marginalized groups and communities to achieve change in their own lives**

This is at the heart of Naseej Foundation's approach. 'Naseej doesn't set priorities in terms of sector,' writes Hania Aswad. '... It's not that we don't see the urgency of particular issues; rather, we see the need for people and communities to be the decision makers.' This thinking is also clearly central to the work of Fikra in north-west Tunisia and the Webb Memorial Trust in the UK.

- The Naseej Foundation supported a group of young activists to work with a village in Palestine to extend the local school – and in so doing breathed new life into Al Ouneh, a practice of collective effort that had fallen into disuse.
- Fikra is a fund established by four European foundations in response to the Arab Spring. Its aim is to support local communities in developing their own resources and fulfilling their own aspirations.
- With child poverty remaining a widespread problem in the UK, the Webb Memorial Trust supported efforts over four years to make the voices of children themselves heard on the issue and to encourage them to participate in discussing how their society should run.

### **Fighting for justice and opportunity**

One common element in these stories is that they all involve attempts to change policy, which often means changes in the law.

- Indonesia for Humanity is supporting Sidomukti, a community located inside a palm oil plantation which is trying to secure government recognition of its rights to the land from which it was forcibly evicted 45 years earlier.
- Brazil Human Rights Fund supported Mothers of May, whose aim was to fight for truth and justice for the victims of institutional violence – an aim that evolved to embrace the bigger struggle against police violence and the violence of militias.
- The Ford Foundation supported 27 local education reform programmes throughout the Philippines, and the subsequent establishment of Synergeia, in an effort to improve the country's failing education system.
- The efforts of businessman and philanthropist Patrick Taylor led to the passing of a law in 1989 in the US state of Louisiana that every child who achieves certain standards should be allowed to go to college regardless of their parents' ability to pay. Taylor's work also led to a fundamental shift in public attitudes to children's rights to a good education.

### Challenging accepted attitudes and ways of thinking

Changing attitudes is perhaps the most challenging area of all. These stories show how significant changes have been achieved. In Northern Ireland this was through a small grant, but it was linked to a much wider programme.

- Community Foundation for Northern Ireland's £3,000 grant to the Rainbow Project helped spark a change in the public perception of LGBT people both in Derry and in Northern Ireland more widely.
- 'My father hit me. So what's the big deal?' Bernard van Leer Foundation launched a programme to reduce violence in children's lives, the first step being to shift social norms to make violence less acceptable.
- In the early 2000s, the Ford Foundation's International Economic Policy portfolio fostered a number of large networks of analysts and activists to develop an alternative economic narrative that could engage critically with the prevailing liberalization and deregulation policies associated with globalization.
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust's (JRCT's) early support for the Carbon Tracker Initiative helped to bring a radical and visionary idea, and the term 'stranded assets', into the mainstream of global economic thinking in just five years.

### The funder doesn't always know best

Most of the funders profiled in these stories clearly give more weight to their grantees' views and interpretation of events than to their own. With funders like Naseej Foundation and Fikra, supporting local communities in their own efforts is their *raison d'être*. Likewise, the Webb Memorial Trust's initiative is all about enabling the views of children to be heard.

But this attitude can be seen more widely, not least in the extensive use of consultations with those nearest to the problem. 'They know better than we do what needs to be done,' says Ana Valeria Araujo of the Brazil Human Rights Fund. 'JRCT knows that it doesn't have the answers to all the pressing issues of the day,' says Stephen Pittam. 'It maintains its role as a responsive funder because it wants to attract those with a clear vision of what needs to be done. Its role is that of facilitating such people and organizations to get on with the job.'

Out of all the stories in this collection, the only one that features what could be seen as a 'top-down' initiative is that of US businessman and philanthropist Patrick Taylor, whose determination that all children should be able to go to college regardless of their parents' ability to pay stemmed directly from his own experience: as a penniless young man from Texas, he was given the opportunity to study free at the University of Louisiana. Unusually, the foundation that Taylor set up carried out all the advocacy that led to the adoption of the TOPS programme and the passing of the law in 1989.

This story also reminds us that effective initiatives leading to lasting change can come from many different sources – in this case a staunch conservative.

### Working with informal groups

Many of the funders in these stories worked with inexperienced groups that lacked a formal structure. They did so because these groups seemed likely to bring about the kind of lasting change that they were looking for. But decisions to support these groups were taken with great care. The Brazil Human Rights Fund decided to support Mothers of May only after extensive research. They found out what kind of experience they had and evaluated the strategies they were putting forward. The fact that other human rights defenders in the country recognized the group's legitimacy 'helped to convince us that their proposal was worth supporting'.

Likewise, JRCT's decision to support the Carbon Tracker Initiative was by no means a blind 'leap of faith': JRCT carried out extensive due diligence. They were impressed by the track record of CTI's team members, and two members of the team were already known to them.

Many of the funders in these stories offer capacity building or mentoring as well as funding – what Avila Kilmurray calls 'added value' – which can help to ensure that inexperienced groups have the skills they need to carry out the work.

### The importance of analysis

All the funders in these stories attach great importance to having a good analysis of the problem before any action is taken. As we have seen, many carried out extensive consultations with those most affected. Others consulted widely with other players active in the field. Manuel Montes recounts how the Ford Foundation spent a year 'surveying the field, talking to academics and activists, and attending key events where discussions on development policies would take place' before developing the strategy for their International Economic Policy portfolio. Suzanne Siskel took a similar approach in the Philippines, consulting widely with 'education specialists, government and private sector leaders, and experts on many different aspects of the educational system'. 'I was new to the Philippines, I was not an expert in education,' she says. In the case of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, baseline studies and research across seven countries, followed by 'further investigation', 'helped the foundation conclude that of all the factors that determine a child's potential to learn and grow up healthy there was one that was not effectively addressed through the markets, through governments or by foundations – violence'.

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To achieve the kind of change that transforms the outlook of an entire society may take years. Funders seeking lasting change must be committed for the long term. They will also need to be prepared for frequent setbacks. This means being flexible and willing to adjust what they are doing as they go along. Having a good local partner will give funders an 'ear to the ground' and help them do this.

Funders must also be willing to live with uncertainty about outcomes: in the end there is no guarantee of ultimate success – hardly

surprising, given the complexity of the problems they are addressing and the great rewards if they are successful.

But all stories should speak for themselves. It's time for them to do so.

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