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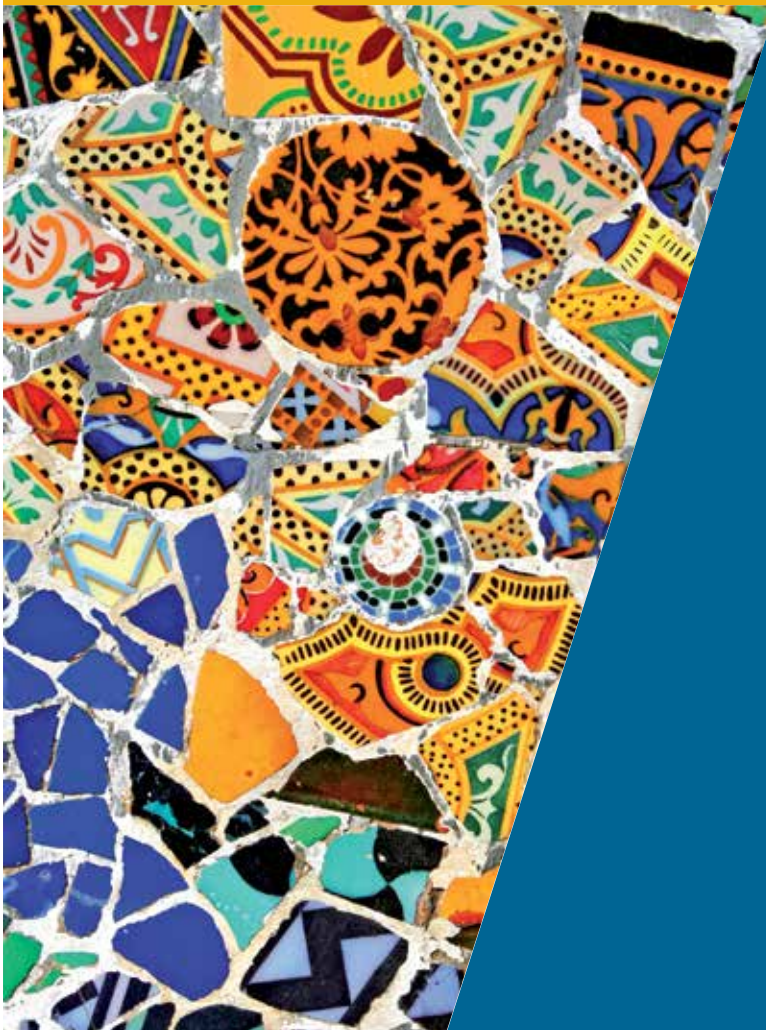
DEVELOPING A COLLECTIVE FRAMEWORK & AGENDA TO ADVANCE SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY IN AFRICA AND THE ARAB REGION

Based on discussions at a convening in Johannesburg, South Africa

October 28-29, 2012

INTRODUCTION

"Lots of people are acting for and speaking for African interests. We must insist on clarity about our relationships as people of the sector vis-a-vis the poor people we say are our constituents, and the extent to which they are being empowered to change their conditions. This links to the shifts in relationships that must be strengthened and equalized. Donor relationships are often becoming more and not less unequal."

This report is based on discussions from a convening which brought together a small group of individuals reflecting diverse perspectives and contexts, to begin a collective discussion on how to advance debate, build a body of knowledge, inform good practice and strengthen the impact of social justice philanthropy in Africa and the Arab region. Three draft papers — By Alice Brown; Yao Graham and Sherine el Traboulsi — were prepared in advance to provoke thought and discussions during the convening and these are being shared as part of a working paper series currently under way.

The convening aimed to provide a space to deliberate on the key contextual issues in Africa and the Arab region — to examine how SJP plays out in different contexts, to share diverse experiences and commence joint conversations — that enable us to locate the role of social justice philanthropy in contributing more effectively to a social change agenda, as framed by the emerging contextual issues.

It sought to provide a collective space to explore the real issues facing our practice and, emphasis was on the need to "get down to the context and texture" of social justice philanthropy (SJP), avoiding the "tyranny of concepts where we become bogged down by theory and are unable to act," and to "ask ourselves some of the hard questions about what we are doing, what it means for the impact we want to have, to interrogate, drill deeper and reflect on our practice."

In both framing and structure, the convening specifically sought to find ways that would enable us to collectively begin to bridge the gaps between SJP in Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa/ Arab region and thus explicitly sought to both understand differences but also recognize connections and intersections in our work and our agendas going forward.

It must be highlighted that the convening was seen as a first step toward developing a collective agenda across regions and sectors, but certainly not the last, and it is hoped that multiple and diverse conversations and spaces will begin to emerge and develop to take forward our individual and collective efforts in seeking to advance a social justice philanthropy agenda.

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UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY

Links with everyday life
"What was it called before we called it SJP?

In understanding social justice philanthropy in an African and Arab context, participants searched for deeper links between everyday life, ordinary citizens and their practice. "Who are the stakeholders of SJP?", "Is it the exclusive territory of civil society and donors?", "What is the role of ordinary citizens and how do they become involved?"and "Does social justice philanthropy resonate with ordinary citizens?" were some of the questions that framed the discussions. One participant drew attention to the dilemma in SJP, i.e. the tendency for polarization between the everyday practice of "charity" by ordinary citizens and the practice of SJP. On the SJP spectrum, at one end there is the idealist transformed structure which delinks everyday experience, including what we call charity. At the other end of the spectrum there is (what we view as) charity, which is not necessarily SJP. An

emphasis on seeking links with daily life seemed to be an aspiration to humanize the practice. "What was there before and what is still holding society together?" Some discussion focused on what was described as the "biggest drivers of the human condition" — "reciprocity" and "altruism"— and there was a call to seek deeper links between these drivers and SJP. On the other hand, questions were raised around whether philanthropy has become "an industry like any other" and if so, what are the implications of that for how we understand and advance our practice.

Inclusive, holistic and expanding
"There is huge exclusion through language and access."

The discussions that ensued brought about multiple perspectives on how we understand the terminology of social justice philanthropy in context and, without looking to set an agreed definition, raised several issues that need to be considered. There was a strong caution against seeing 'charity' as a negative term and against creating dichotomies between charity and SJP. Several participants advocated for a contextual understanding of the term charity, (which in some places has positive connotations) and a reframing of how we understand linkages between charity and long-term change. While ultimately addressing the root causes was seen as the central driver, questions about how, at what level, by whom and in whose interests were all factors that constantly pushed the definitional boundaries of social justice philanthropy outwards, seeking a deeper understanding of the practice.

In addition, there was considerable contested discussion around whether emphasis should be on intention or impact. Some participants advocated for the need to locate philanthropy, charity and giving on the African continent within a broader discussion of the drivers underlying action, be it reciprocity, solidarity, altruism or obligation, to name a few. Others insisted that motivation and intention are secondary matters and instead called for more focus on the outcome and its links to change of power relations.

At the same time, weathered by past experiences,

participants pursued a deeper understanding of history and context, and its implications for advancing this work going forward. For instance, it was noted that in the Arab region historically, political constraints made institutional philanthropy highly dysfunctional and unprogressive, and much of that philanthropy was seen as "patronage and influenced by the potential visibility of the donor instead of addressing roots of social injustice." Moreover, philanthropy in the region was seen as culturally embedded - largely charity and handouts, and not sustainable. On the other hand, there was a recognition of change in some parts of the Arab world, "a nexus between charity-oriented development and development-oriented philanthropy," which is likely to influence how SJP is understood in the Arab region; and a redefinition of philanthropy, which offers significant opportunities for shaping social justice philanthropy in the region.

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There was also a strong call to "avoid the use of exclusionary language" in defining SJP. Some participants highlighted the importance of inclusive language to expand the definition of what constitutes giving, going beyond money, and exploring informal forms of giving that focus "not on the deficits, but assets" of the communities. Others stressed exploring links to traditional forms of giving. Participants from the Arab region pointed to problematic understanding of the words 'social justice' and 'philanthropy' in certain contexts and therefore the "need for great sensitivity when promoting SJP." As one participant from the Arab region pointed out, "It is important to recognize that, for many decades, philanthropy was seen to have Marxist influences and supporters were seen as being in opposition to the military regimes in the region."

On the whole, participants underscored the importance of understanding SJP as a holistic

approach for achieving systemic changes and shifts in power relations, providing support in a way that is meaningful and empowering and does not entrench dependency. "SJP is not a name of terminology per se; it is not prescriptive but serves as an umbrella." The key question to be addressed then became: What kind of internal paradigm and mindset shifts are needed in the field of philanthropy to enable a focus on addressing systemic issues?

THE CURRENT CONTEXT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AN SJP AGENDA

It is noteworthy to mention at the start that, in interrogating where social justice philanthropy is as a sector and exploring how the sector needs to engage with the issues going forward, there were as many questions as there were answers. The convening raised multiple and contested perspectives and the contextual realm can only be described as 'complex'. Examination of an agenda for SJP against this background also called for nuanced approaches and strategies that could be connected while still retaining contextual relevance. Setting the tone for such a discussion was a strong call for linkages to be made between our "philosophies, positions and practices."

"Where does power lie?"
 "If you do not have clarity of your own agency, you become someone else's project."

Attention was drawn to the phenomenon of Africa as a zone of much contestation and as both rising and sinking in different spheres. On the one hand, there is increasing external investment, booming exploration [and exploitation] of natural resources, and growing pressure on, and contestation around, commodities. On the other hand, despite some opening of civic spaces, as seen in North Africa, there has been considerable direct and indirect closing down of civic spaces across the African continent, increasing inequality and decreased accountability by those in power. There was also wariness around the dangers of external funds reproducing "the colonial structure of the economy" and concerns around the political and social

agendas of African countries being set for Africa outside of Africa.

Key issues of concern within this context revolved around how African governments manage resources and govern power ; the notion of development agendas falling victim to hegemonic ideas, and the implications of these in limiting agency for change; and the level of unpreparedness of activists to engage on the challenges that are emerging from the changing contextual configurations. For social justice philanthropy, in particular, some of the discussion revolved around the need to view philanthropy as a political economy question; how to link structural change issues within the Africa rising discourse; the need to focus on where and how to locate power and the imperative of being explicit in what constitutes our notion of social justice.

> **There was a call for philanthropy to critically examine its role in entrenching elite voices and dampening marginalized ones.**

Whose voices are represented?
"Many people, including ourselves, rely on patronage to solve problems. For active citizenship to replace lines of patronage we must bridge the gap that exists between established organizations that have access and power (relatively), and participate in these transactions of patronage, and we must build a bridge to the people."

A critical issue to emerge in the discussions around power was of voice and representation. This was framed by questions that examined the roles of both civil society and philanthropy. Discussions here ranged from questions around how reflective civil society is of the voices it claims to represent and where it derives its mandate from; to the role and relationships of social movements and grassroots organizations with more recognized and formalized civil society organizations that philanthropy tends to favor supporting. Within this context, there was a call for philanthropy to critically examine its role in entrenching elite voices and dampening marginalized ones; to ask itself if indeed we are complicit in advancing external donor agendas through the

type of civil society organizations we support — and thus advancing an intra-elite consensus — or do we provide space for unheard voices that are not part of external agendas?

Questions around how we engage with social movements were also raised, with concern around the nature of our support contributing to the NGOisation of social movements and interference in their agendas. This called for deeper reflections on the practice of philanthropy itself; "who do we work for?" How well do we work to give voice to the marginalized and what exclusionary barriers do we perpetuate, rather than break down? There was also a call for philanthropy to play a bridging role between different types and levels of organizations; to enable spaces for creation of collective African voices and agendas and; to help transform agendas based on relations of patronage into ones built upon active citizenship.

> **The sentiment was that we needed to begin engaging in more depth with philanthropy sourced from within the continent, and the potentials and challenges that this brought along.**

There was a need for "equalizing relationships" between donors, grantees and the communities we seek to serve; asserting a role for social justice philanthropy "to provide guidance that will empower people at the grassroots." The call for the practice of philanthropy to reflect the voice of the communities was loud and clear and the existing discourse of philanthropy, which in many instances locates itself outside of the communities it serves, was seen as problematic. Said one participant: "There is an 'Us and Them' concern in philanthropy. We are uncomfortable to talk about the poor out there. We see them as separate from ourselves." Some participants cautioned that "donor relations are becoming more, and not less, unequal" and stressed the need for philanthropy to "avoid speaking down to people and constituents." Others questioned whether the response of philanthropy has suppressed the agency that lies within communities to help themselves. The defining ideology that was stressed was that "people themselves must transform a society, with the challenge for philanthropy then being to democratize the donor

space." Some of the critical elements raised as a way of leveling this playing field were the need to acknowledge that our communities have resources, to draw on and learn from traditional models of giving; to recognize the existence of multiple types of community assets and to explore examples of grantmaking practice that are creating horizontal relationships with grantees.

It must be noted that while there was a clear need expressed to counter hegemonic ideas and to root donor agendas in the communities, participants cautioned against demonizing foreign funding altogether. While it was acknowledged that "foreign money has strings attached," it was also stressed that blanket generalizations were not always useful; that in some places, like Egypt for instance, the only source of funds for human rights work before the Arab Spring came from outside the country; and that we cannot assume that African money will inherently not have any strings or an agenda attached. "We must not make assumptions, but rather see where agency is located, as this is the critical determinant."

Engaging African money

"We are sitting here talking about other people's money and how we influence it yet we ourselves don't put a penny on the table, and this is problematic."

The discussions stressed on the need to look inward and stop only talking about other people's money. The sentiment was that we needed to begin engaging in more depth with philanthropy sourced from within the continent, and the potentials and challenges that this brought along. This threw up several implications for an SJP agenda, with some pushing for a risk appetite in building alliances with new money and others cautioning critical examination of the principles upon which we engage. The challenge, for one participant, was to engage strategically and balance being in the room and speaking the truth to funders, while simultaneously funding organizations that work against the inequitable issues that they may be complicit in perpetuating.

Given the context of emergence of assets in Africa driven by extractive industries and times of extreme change in the Arab region, the discussions also focused on how to engage with this money from a social justice agenda. Once again, at the heart of concerns around money was the question of "power relations". "When we get money from wealthy people what does that do to perpetuate the power relations that entrench inequality, and how does that impact on our commitment to address systemic issues that underpin poverty?" The concern around African money also related to the risks involved in engaging with tainted money. Addressing this elicited a broad range of responses from the need for self regulation; to the creation of platforms that enabled transparency in financial accumulation; to leaving this as institutional level decision. We must "examine the sources of money and decide for ourselves what we will accept or not. This is an institutional decision, there must be some kind of [internal] protocol that informs it" urged one participant. "Each one of us must define those frameworks and guidelines" said another. "We must each draw our personal parameters around change and funding." Others also called for a degree of self reflection, "internal clarity is a safe guard against using tainted money."

One emerging issue related to incentivization of giving. "Do we know enough about the unexpected consequences when we promote an enabling environment around tax?" and "are we sometimes working at cross-purposes from the tax justice issues that our colleagues are working on?" asked one participant. Another cautioned how tax incentivization distracts from the State fiscus. "We must not fragment the tax base and fiscus." "We must not be pushed into supporting the erosion of state capacity and an obligation to deliver the essentials." A case in point relates to the extractive industries and some of the contradictions that arise between money lost to the fiscus through subversive financial practices and money gained by communities through the establishment of local trusts by these same industries. Discussions revolved around how do we then balance the critical need to support tax justice work with support for the value of creating local philanthropic assets that are community owned and controlled? What are the

issues and implications that emerge from this and how do we use this to build a constituency around African philanthropy and the governance of assets?

While there was some call for examining regulatory frameworks around giving, there was also discussion around the need to balance the focus on the issue of 'creating an enabling tax environment' for giving with a recognition that many givers on the African continent are not part of the tax base; and

> **The concern around African money also related to the risks involved in engaging with tainted money. Addressing this elicited a broad range of responses from the need for self regulation.**

hence an enabling environment needs to be more than just about tax and to also recognise that giving is not just about money.

In looking at African money, there was a strong agreement that individual giving needed to be better recognised, and the collective scale and impact of such giving better understood, both in and of itself but also in relation to impact on social justice. This was accompanied by a call for better measurement and valuing of the different types of African giving, and the development of an enabling environment to support, strengthen and incentivise it in its myriad forms.

The interrogation of current contextual issues unearthed deep implications for the discourse on social justice philanthropy in Africa and the Arab region. The key issue that dominated the debate was around governance of power and assets in the region. To be responsive in this context, the discussions pointed strongly to several key implications for the practice of social justice philanthropy:

• To locate agency for change with communities

• To replace lines of patronage with active citizenship

• To build alliances across the sectors and regions and draw from collective thinking and different approaches

LOOKING FORWARD: STRATEGIES AND SPACES

Leading from the questions raised, and the implications for practice uncovered, discussions moved on to the exploration of what it would take to do this and what SJP needed to do differently. Underlying a search for new strategies and spaces was a call for SJP to look inward. Four themes surfaced in the introspective discussions that followed; some that cautioned against pitfalls and others that pushed for exemplary leadership:

• **Demonstrate leadership:** There was a call at the convening for SJP to look inward, engage in self-reflection, assess our mode of engagement and examine our practices. "First apply the prism to yourself. As we ask questions of others around accountability, governance and leadership, are we asking those questions of ourselves." Another important challenge was to develop a clear conceptual framework appealing to practitioners and those who want to help the cause. Participants also pointed to a need to concretely think about how individuals working in the field of SJP can lead by example by themselves investing in their institutions, demonstrating clear strategy along with leadership and, there was a call for a peer review mechanism within the field of SJP.

• **Be inclusive:** There was a strong sentiment for strategies within SJP to be holistic, inclusive and participatory. One participant cautioned, "let us not create a tribe of our own making but rather find creative ways of reaching out to people who want to be part of the change." There was a general call to include voices across the board; through grant making as well as within peer grant maker networks, and stress on the need to support "movements for change against exclusion and integrate voices that were excluded under former regimes in the Arab region." Participants also strongly pointed to the need to include peers who may not be part of the SJP conversation yet. The value of building alliances was also strongly emphasized by participants. It was recognized that there needs to be a concerted effort to begin to bridge some of the gaps that exist within the philanthropy field; between philanthropy and the civil society sector it supports; between philanthropy and academia; and across boundaries created by geography and language.

• **Recognize the power vested in grantmakers:** Conversations urged participants in the room to recognize that they held power, "the question is what we do with it?" While collectively having huge resources at our disposal, a participant noted that "the unique thing about our work is that there is room for imagination, creativity, innovation, new paradigms." Implicit in these remarks was a call for action, a need to move from intellectual discourse to practice. We must not become "interlocutors" warned another. Reasserting one of the central tenets of SJP and earlier calls to "horizontalize" power relations between grant makers and grant seekers, another participant reminded that, "In implementing SJP we must be informed by values. We should be able to transform power into humility and humbleness."

> **Participants also pointed to a need to concretely think about how individuals working in the field of SJP can lead by example by themselves investing in their institutions.**

• **Build African Narratives:** In light of the discussion around development and philanthropic agendas in Africa falling victim to hegemonic ideas, and the concerns around the issue of voice and representation, deliberations highlighted the need for harnessing African expertise, supporting African leadership and developing an African discourse on philanthropy. Participants expressed concerns around research on Africa and the Arab region being done by others on behalf of them and the need to thus build our own institutions and create our knowledge to develop and share our own narratives and ideas. The need to ensure that the gaps between intellectual discourse and everyday practice are addressed was also an important element raised and there was particular emphasis on drawing on existing experience in the field. As one participant said, "we must continue to not only raise issues and questions but also look at how we can do things differently to contribute to African narratives on these issues through our own practice and institutions.

Three specific programmatic issue areas drew considerable interest from participants:

- **Arts and Culture:** One defining strategy explicitly articulated by participants at the convening was the use of arts and culture as one tool to deal with some of the challenges of the SJP agenda and the "frustrations about framing, communication, getting masses in". The role of arts and culture in relation to the shifts in the Arab world; the use of arts, culture and sports in Africa as a medium to drive out messaging and the role of arts and culture as a tool in the women's movement were all highlighted. There was a keen interest by some participants in thinking about how to collectively explore arts and culture and its intersections with social justice more concretely.

Knowledge management and creation were seen as key to promoting giving that is informed by the local context.

- **Resource Governance:** Within the context of booming extractive resource based economies, there was considerable interest in exploring how philanthropy engages with issues related to governance of resources. Tax regimes, illicit flows, transparency in how rights and access to resources is managed were recognized as critical issues but ones which have not received enough attention or a collective focus and it was recognized that as an area in which philanthropy needs to engage with in more depth.

- **Enabling Environment:** The need to interrogate in more depth what constitutes an enabling environment for giving in an African context was a much discussed issue. While there was a recognition that we needed to look at how to incentivize giving through an enabling regulatory environment, there was also much emphasis on the need to interrogate what an enabling environment means within the context of African systems of giving which are small and not part of the formal philanthropy environment.

CONCLUSION: SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In reflection of the discussions over a day and a half, the participants identified seven key areas for specific action within a social justice philanthropy agenda in Africa and the Arab region;

• **Communicate better:** It was acknowledged that SJP could sometimes be difficult to capture as a concept. There were calls to either define it precisely or at least have a common understanding of what we mean by the term on the African continent. There was also emphasis on developing simple messages; building an evidence base and drawing on examples that can help us illustrate the role and relevance of social justice philanthropy.

• **Deepen and broaden discussions:** There was much interest in the room in continuing these discussions in more depth but also in expanding the discussions to include broader constituencies, and participants reflected on the need to look for different types of opportunities to do so. Existing platforms such as Africa Grantmakers Network (AGN) and The Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace Network (PSJP) were mentioned as some of the spaces to help take forward this work and platforms such as the Ushahidi model were mentioned as a possibility to help map the field.

• **Generate knowledge,** strengthen analysis, reflect evidence and build a community of practice: Knowledge management and creation were seen as key to promoting giving that is informed by the local context, to enabling spaces for innovative thinking and action, building an evidence base and sharing lessons from practice. It was advocated that a knowledge hub be established to take forward research and analysis, build evidence, develop tools and disseminate information. There was a call for building a community of practice on social justice philanthropy that was both inclusive but also linked with wider interests.

• **Recognize what exists:** Recognizing that much giving on the continent is not acknowledged as

part of "philanthropy' and that the social justice implications of some of that giving has largely been undervalued, there was both a call for developing tools and evidence that would better understand and help reflect the nature and value of non-formal giving and identify intersections between informal giving systems and issues of injustice.

• **Promote arts and culture as a tool:** Share learning and tools on the use of arts and culture to promote social justice, with a call for the development of a position paper on the topic.

• **African funding and resource governance:** Develop a matrix of transparency concerns in relation to funding and explore avenues for self-regulation.

• **Begin with ourselves:** The idea of developing a trans-national fund, originating with a commitment from those in the room, was mooted and endorsed.

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