



PHILANTHROPY  
for  
SOCIAL JUSTICE  
and  
PEACE

## INTERVIEW WITH BERNIE DOLLEY, IKHALA TRUST, SOUTH AFRICA

### How do you understand the role of philanthropy?

Currently, there is a very exciting conversation happening in South Africa where we are rethinking the role of philanthropy and the development discourse at large. Big donors in the country are investing a lot of money in civil society organisations that are seemingly well structured and able to comply, but these organisations so seldom leave their offices and interface with communities they say they serve. I don't think many of these organisations are effective but these are the ones that get all the money. My big question is – is compliance equal to effectiveness and efficiency?

Some of us are concerned about the 'us and them' language in philanthropy and the development sector. The question we should be asking ourselves is 'Whose interests should we be serving and in this context whose interests should come first?'



Some of my friends and colleagues in philanthropy have been stressing that the role of philanthropy is to honestly and frankly ask the naïve questions about ourselves and to take risks in supporting small grassroots organisations that may be off the radar but are pioneering community based solutions.

I would say the role of philanthropy is to always keep our eyes and ears open to what's happening around us in the environment and be responsive and ensure that those who are vulnerable and marginalised are not further compromised in whatever it is we do.



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### What are the principles that drive Ikhala Trust?

The motivation to found Ikhala Trust came over ten years ago when five women in Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, who were all working for the nonprofit sector, converged around the frustrations we were feeling in our work. We were working with communities - providing

capacity building training, work-shopping them ad-nauseum, getting their hopes up to initiate change and then walking away from them. It was as if we did not trust them enough to give them money to support the solutions they themselves pioneered.



From this came the principles that till today underpin the work of Ikhala Trust. We value and respect all human beings especially those at the margins of society, we recognize that everybody has something to offer and our job as an organisation is to unlock their potential and shine the light on their efforts.

Ikhala Trust recognizes that the actual work is not in the offices but in the communities. We are constantly asking of ourselves and others, 'why we as a field are not placing communities at the centre of our work?' How dare we be arrogant enough to think we have the solutions? We need to be constantly asking the question of ourselves, 'Why do we exist – what is our purpose as an organization?' For Ikhala - taking the lead and guidance from the communities we serve is key to our work. We are one of the very few foundations that goes to all the grassroots communities we support on a regular basis and get our hands really dirty so that we understand what we are dealing with.

#### **What is unique about this approach? What would you say is your key strength and why?**

I think there is something quite unique in the smallness of the philanthropy of foundations like the Ikhala Trust where advocating for social justice and peace becomes very personalized. There is a lot of personal investment and it's not something that someone else out there must do.

The value of small grants also brings us back to frustrations in the sector wherein donors are giving money to big NGOs because they meet all the compliance requirements but the real work is not in those offices, it's in the communities who are already driving their own development and

all they need are small seed grants. We have always been clear that we'll give small grants as little seeds of hope and with that will come a continuum of support and relationship that will go beyond the money.

Our grant size can be anything from ZAR 1500.00 to ZAR 30000.00 and upwards. Small grants help to forge relationships and over time the small grants could become grants of quite a substantial size based on the quality of the relationship we have with the grantee.

Our grants reinforce and build on the existing assets (physical, social, financial, natural, human) of communities.

When we work with marginalised communities, we have to ask, is it about 'power to, power over or power with' the communities? Ikhala Trust is definitely about a 'power with' approach. We cannot deny that we are powerful

because we have a resource called money. However, where a community driven social justice agenda comes in is when we recognize the resources the community has and are able to say that we have power together to change a situation. What money does for us is that it leverages a relationship and solutions that are community owned.

This approach diverges from mainstream development paradigms that are deficit oriented and needs based and often undermine what communities have already done for themselves.

#### **What is the push back to such an approach?**

It has been our experience that sometimes it's convenient for others to keep communities below the radar and to continue to speak down to them and on their behalf because it gives you justification for your being as an organisation.



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### What are some of the challenges you face?

At the core and essence of our struggle is the fact that changes we are trying to demonstrate are not measurable in numbers. How do I measure the value in the life of a woman who has now realized her rights, has gained confidence because of the work we supported and is no longer going to be in an abusive relationship? How do I measure this in a way that values and respects the human family? People think that our work is too fluffy and it can't be measured. In South Africa, according to the dominant paradigm in philanthropy unless it can be counted and touched and felt, it's not good enough. Everything that matters should be counted. This is our biggest struggle. We have lost one or two donors and one of the reasons for them leaving was this issue of measurable results.

Another challenge has been working in urban areas. Our major success is definitely within the rural context. The rural organisations we support are off the radar and in most instances Ikhala Trust is the only donor they have supporting them. The fact that we trust them to support what they are already doing is very valuable for them. On the other hand organisations that are closer to cities, where there are more resources, see our grants as small-change and therefore we have a struggle connecting with urban based community organisations.

Urban organisations are more visible and they have greater access to information. Added to this problem is the fact that the government gives large sums of money to such organisations and though the failure rate of such grants is very high, they continue because it's easier to give a large grant while it is a lot of work to give a small grant.

### How are you able to address these challenges?

Firstly, we are saying that success can be measured in many ways and it is not always the size of the grant that determines the significance of the change we see. For our tenth year anniversary in 2012 we went back to all of the 142 organisations we had first funded ten years ago. At the time we were their only donor. Of them, we found that 95% were still together and working. There is something that is not measurable that keeps them together – its not Ikhala, but the trust and respect they have for each other, the unity, the place and identity which provides the sustainability to their solutions and efforts. So if success cannot be measured in numbers it can be measured through the stories of ordinary community members making substantial intangible contributions toward supporting their communities.

There are many great stories we can tell from our grantees that have been with Ikhala Trust for a number of years and the changes that they have seen in themselves and their work as a result of this relationship with us.

We are also developing and promoting alternate tools for measuring the value of the assets and strengths in our communities. We participated in the "Building Community Philanthropy Project", an initiative of the Centre for Leadership and Public Values at the UCT Graduate School of Business in 2008, in the phase of the project that developed and tested tools to count and measure the value of self-help and mutual assistance resources mobilised within poor communities through local Community Based Organisations (CBOs). The Ikhala Trust was chosen as a partner for this phase of the project because of the potential for this type of work to impact on donor practice.



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Through these tools we aimed to understand and highlight the community as a giver, so that the community members, the CBOs themselves and external resource and support organisations would have a better understanding of what people already do for themselves and others.

As an extension of this, in 2012 we decided to adapt the Measuring and Valuing Tools developed in 2008 and test their practical application, in partnership with two Ikhala Trust grantee organisations over a period of five months. In both instances we were able to demonstrate the intangible critical assets that communities bring to the development table. The participating organizations were extremely proud of their achievements and have used these to demonstrate to other potential supporters what their contribution has been in terms of driving their own development.

Our next step will be to make these tools available to colleagues in the community foundation sector as well as to others who may be interested in learning more about how these tools can be used and/or adapted.

Regarding funds, a lot of people tell us that we should scale up, that we are too small. But we say 'no', because there are too many foundations that are not like us. We probably could get more money if we wanted to but we are very selective. For example we will not take money from the government because it is very disempowering when you have to play a role to fulfill their mandate and become their service provider. We will not be dictated to and we cannot wait six months to receive a grant because the urgency is now! So the kind of money we accept has to give us the space to be flexible, to take risks, to learn, to be responsive and to rise to any occasion.

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