Summary Report: Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace in South and South-East Asia

Based on conversations at a convening of community foundations held in Shillong, India, September 2013

PHILANTHROPY *for* SOCIAL JUSTICE *and* PEACE

Global Fund for Community Foundations

About the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace

The Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP) exists to increase the impact of grant making for social justice and peace work. It does this by developing tools and practices to advance this field of work; shifting the narrative in philanthropy to place social justice and peace at the centre; and supporting a network for practitioners across the globe.

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- Hania Aswad, Naseej (Amman, Jordan)
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- Chandrika Sahai, Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace Network Coordinator (Jaipur, India)

For more information visit www.p-sj.org

About the Global Fund for Community Foundations

The Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) is a grassroots grantmaker working to promote and support institutions of community philanthropy around the world.

It works with individual community foundations and other local grantmakers and their networks around the world, with a particular focus on the global south and the emerging economies of Central and Eastern Europe. Through small grants, technical support and networking, it helps these local institutions to strengthen and grow so that they can fulfil their potential as vehicles for local development and as part of the infrastructure for sustainable development, poverty alleviation and citizen participation.

For more information visit www.globalfundcommunityfoundations.org

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2013, the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace and the Global Fund for Community Foundations convened a small group of grassroots indigenous foundations in Shillong in the North East of India. The convening* was hosted by the Foundation for Social Transformation – Enabling North East India and included foundations from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia.

The convening aimed to provide a platform to these foundations to learn from one another to strengthen their organisational capacities, and to work as a group to develop community philanthropy for progressive social change in Asia.

The following report summarizes the key characteristics of these foundations as emerging from group work during the convening. Its purpose is to set out the emerging themes form the conversation in Shillong and explore ways in which the practice of philanthropy for social justice and peace in the region can be deepened and broadened.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

There was great diversity in the participating foundations in terms of the location, roots and size. There were 17 participants from India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia, an area that is as culturally, economically, socially and politically diverse as it is vast. Most of the Foundations in this cohort were quite young (around 15 years old) with the oldest organization being 30 years old; very few had endowments and almost all of them were involved in fundraising activities; many of them had been set up with international funding. They described themselves as 'women's funds', 'community foundations', 'peace funders' and 'social justice funders', but there were strong similarities in their ethos, values and strategies and these are discussed in the next section.

COMMON FAMILY VALUES

Working in Areas of Conflict, Focus on the Most Marginalized

The group had an overwhelming focus on the most marginalized sections of the society that experience unjust treatment, exclusion and demonization, with many of them working in areas of persistent and entrenched communal conflict. This is also illustrated through the following point, which emerged from a group work session during the convening, "We have in common that we work with women and youth particularly coming out of conflict. We seek to transform the image of youth from being contributors to conflict to civil activists through programmes such as arts and culture, debate on political themes, channel their energies in a positive way. We also work with women coming out of conflict who have taken on roles as heads of households and build their capacities to deal with their new roles."

* The convening was facilitated by Barry Knight, CENTRIS, UK. Barry is also an advisor to the Global Fund for Community Foundations and a member of the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace.

A recent report published by the Asia Foundation, entitled '*The Contested Corners of Asia*' describes subnational conflicts as "the most wide- spread, deadly and enduring, form of conflict in Asia." The report further states that, "over the past 20 years, there have been 26 subnational conflicts in South and Southeast Asia, affecting half of the countries in this region. These conflicts are among the world's longest running armed struggles, often lasting for multiple generations, and more than 40 years on average."

In light of this study, the role of many foundations in this cohort becomes of paramount importance. Some of the foundations in this cohort worked in areas of ongoing armed conflict such as the North East of India, Nepal and Southern Thailand or areas such as Sri Lanka where ceasefire had been achieved but the ramifications of armed conflict were ongoing. The Asia Foundation study further highlights the limitation of foreign aid programmes of which nearly 88%" focus on traditional development sectors such as infrastructure, economic development, and service delivery." The study shows that "most programmes use developmental approaches and there is very little evidence of positive impact on conflict dynamics."

On the other hand, indigenous independent philanthropic institutions such as those included in this cohort that are rooted in the communities such as the Foundation for Social Transformation from the North East of India, Tewa in Nepal, The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in Sri Lanka or the Local Development Institute in Southern Thailand can play a very effective role in such situations.

In a breakaway session which focused on the value of community philanthropy in contested societies, organized in March 2014 at the WINGS Forum in Istanbul by the Working Group on Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace, Ambika Satkunanthan of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, Sri Lanka highlighted the value add of community philanthropy in rebuilding contested and divided societies. In light of the presence and work of many foundations in the Shillong cohort in conflict areas, it is worth mentioning the points from Ambika's presentation here:

We, Community Foundations:

- Are present even when others leave; communities should not feel abandoned which will further weaken already frayed social networks.
- Are guided by communities in the provision of support, i.e. our constant engagement with communities has influenced and shaped our strategic plan. Suggestions of organisations we support have even helped us formulate user-friendly and less cumbersome proposal submission and project review processes.
- Do not wait for organisations to approach us for support but actively seek small organisations that are struggling to meet the needs of communities either due to lack of funds or capacity.
- Are flexible since the context changes rapidly and the community orgs we support have to change their strategies and interventions accordingly, sometimes even overnight.
- Create confidence amongst partners and grantees by supporting their institutions in ways that extend beyond solely funding projects.
- Focus on institutional strengthening.
- Act as facilitator to link local groups with larger orgs and donors.
- Are open to innovative strategies. We realise that often local organisation may have to initiate trust-building/community awareness raising/mobilization activities that may not appear directly related to the programme but nevertheless are required to create social conditions conducive to implement the programme.
- Are trying to move beyond using narrow indicators to measure the 'success' of initiatives we support.
- Take risks and invest in nascent organisations that implement innovative projects that larger donors may not be willing to support.

Many other foundations in the Shillong cohort focused on addressing persistent and reinforcing social injustices and everyday violence faced by women and other marginalized communities such as the Dalit's in India. They saw their role as standing alongside the most marginalized communities in their society. It was clear that these foundations were sensitive to the power imbalances that lie beneath these injustices and the belief systems and traditional hierarchies that support them. Stress was laid on empowerment of the communities by promoting access to their rights and building bottom up leadership.

Community Driven

As a group, another binding factor was that most of the foundations were deeply grounded in their communities and believed that they achieve best results when the community informs their work, "We all believe that communities come up with the best solutions to the problems they face. We believe we can learn from the communities we serve." Their work evolved based on the needs of the community.

There was an underlying assertion that these foundations saw themselves as different from traditional donors, perceiving themselves as 'not the norm', as 'deviants' in the traditional foundation world. They saw themselves not just as grantmakers but also as someone who, above all other foundation functions, represents the voice and interest of the communities in the philanthropic sector. The following statement from a group-work exercise during the convening helps to further illustrate this point: "We came into being at a time when research and needs assessment from the field indicated the need for hybrid organisations/ intermediary organisations that would serve as a bridle between donors and communities. We serve as a one-stop shop for donors but we also represent voices of different stakeholders in development. We are somebody who speaks on behalf of the communities."

Enabling their Communities

Another overwhelming focus of the cohort was building resilient communities that are engaged in their own social, economic and political development. As discussed above, they saw their role as addressing the underlying structural injustices, giving voice to the voiceless and addressing the power imbalances in society that have existed for hundreds of years.

Foundations in this group clearly did not lead from the top, nor did they view their community members as beneficiaries of their charity or as helpless victims. Rather, they perceived the beneficiaries of their work as agents of change capable of participating in their own development. Their role was an enabling one, one that serves to leverage the agency and voice in the communities. In practical terms, building grassroots leadership through capacity development training was a common thread in the conversations in Shillong. Many of the funds focused on the systemic denial of equality and rights of women. The Bangladesh Women's Fund aspired for women to become advocates, leaders, decision makers and human rights defenders in their own localities and raise their voice for their rights. Nirnaya Trust in Hyderabad, India perceived its role as "enabling a woman to make a decision of her own choice". Tewa- Nepal's Women's Fund on enhancing women's voice and visibility in Nepal while the South Asia Women's Fund's messaging was clear and unmistakable, "our voice, our rights, our claims."

The Dalit Foundation in India stressed the imperative to support Dalit leaders to challenge the oppression and violence faced for thousands of years by the Dalit community. The Simag Foundation from Philippines aimed at empowered community leaders and active members engaged in the development of their community, and the Nilan Tiruchelvan Trust in Sri Lanka was committed to "enabling communities to participate in their own development."

Many a time, this commitment to community empowerment and leadership building translated into sustainable support for local projects and civil society organisations. The Foundation for the North East aimed at supporting indigenous projects with local money. The support, as will be discussed in greater detail below, was almost always far more than money and included capacity building and technical assistance to strengthen local civil society institutions and community–based organisations.

Building Philanthropy Locally

As mentioned above, many of the foundations in this cohort were set up with foreign funding and in fact many still rely on foreign donors to support their work. Fundraising is a critical function for them as well as one of their major challenges. While the region has an age-old culture of giving, giving has historically been for religious purposes in the form of donations to temples and other religious institutions, alms to the poor, or for elementary services such as clothing and food to the needy that the state fails to provide. This cohort however saw the role of philanthropy being more strategic and affecting fundamental social transformation. Some of the challenges faced by these foundations as well as successful strategies are discussed below in greater detail. However, for now it is important to note that given the dwindling and problematic foreign aid in the region, the lack of a local culture of strategic giving for social change work, one of the fundamental roles played by these foundations was to develop local philanthropy.

Many of their initiatives toward fulfilling this role were at an early stage of development. Some of them such as the Foundation for Social Transformation in India and the South Asia Women's Fund (SAWF) had undertaken (and even published in case of SAWF) research studies to understand and map the state of giving in their respective regions of work. The newly formed Social Trust Fund in Indonesia was engaged with the State Islamic University (UIN), Jakarta to develop studies of social justice philanthropy and were advocating with faith based philanthropy organisations to promote strategic focus on social justice philanthropy.

The Indian Centre for Philanthropy was specifically focused on promoting community philanthropy and help in the setting up of community foundations in India. They had so far successfully established 13 community foundations across the country and 32 village level local funds in inaccessible rural areas.

There was an underlying assertion in the conversations in Shillong about recognizing and leveraging the inherent agency and resources in the communities these foundations served. This agency was not restricted to monetary resources but as discussed above, encompassed the intangible social capital in the communities such as leadership and voice.

PRACTICE

There were two specific elements of their practice that embodied the values discussed above

- They did not abide by rigid institutional frameworks but were responsive to the needs of the communities. “Our programmes are dynamic that evolve based on the needs of the community.”
- They sought to be participatory and inclusive in their support to communities and their programmes.

There were three key functions of foundations that surfaced in discussions:

1. **Grantmaking:** Grantmaking was, if not a key function of most of the foundations in this cohort, an aspiration they were working toward. It was evident that grantmaking was more than just an activity; it was a strategic way to engage with the community, to share power and leverage the solutions that lie within the community to the problems they face.
2. **Movement building:** The foundations were more than grantmakers. They identified themselves as “a space that provides ideas … a facilitation point for organisations, we put in place systems.” Toward this end, most of the foundations made a lot of investment in building the organizational and leadership capacities of their grantees. Additionally, they also played a bridging role by connecting their grantees and building networks. “Working in networks makes us stronger and healthy and gives us immunity.”
3. **Fundraising:** Fundraising was a key activity that all foundations were involved in and it was also one of their biggest challenges as will be discussed below.

CHALLENGES

Resource Mobilization

As mentioned above, raising funds was an overwhelming challenge for these foundations. The difficulties specifically related to cultural barriers for strategic giving for systemic change as opposed to giving for religious and charitable purposes, a restrictive bureaucratic environment, difficulty in communicating the value of abstract concepts such as ‘social justice’ and ‘women’s rights’, lack of transparency and a general environment of mistrust of NGOs in the region by citizens. Participants also expressed their frustrations around the divide between the vision of their organization for systemic change and social justice and the donor’s agenda, which often leans toward immediate and visible impact. A clash of ideologies was particularly visible in seeking resources from the corporate sector. Organisational capacities and the limited resources (both human and financial) available to the foundations’ to invest specifically for fundraising activities were also articulated as a barrier to efficient fundraising. Another challenge was the sustainability of the organisation itself as a grantmaker; while funds might still be available for programmatic areas, foundations in Shillong expressed major difficulties in raising operational costs. In the face of such a challenge, the Foundation for Social Transformation in the North East of India had to stop making grants and become an implementing organization. Such a situation raised another dilemma for the foundations in the group i.e. of putting them in competition with their grantees for the same funds.

Despite the challenges, a peer-learning exercise revealed solutions that the foundations have experimented with success to resource themselves. These included strategies for immediate results such as fundraising events and dinners, telemarketing, face-to-face meetings with potential donors and selling of raffle tickets. One of the long- term strategies however was to create a culture shift towards giving. These strategies included raising consciousness among local community, corporates and other stakeholders about how they can solve social problems by giving their time and resources, media campaigns, building community and NGO credibility and motivating the community to be donors by involving them in the early stages of planning and vision of the work.

There were also many ideas within the group about how to strategically address the issue of resource mobilization. They discussed the potential of crowd funding as a strategy - to develop an online platform that allows for donor engagement at multiple levels and uses reliable curators who give credibility to specific causes. Working with youth banks, which would engage youth to fundraise (from their family, friends and community) and also involve them in the grant making process, was discussed as another opportunity the foundations wanted to explore.

Mapping local resources, building a transparent accounting system, communicating the 'difference' they make, and motivating their community through consciousness raising were tools considered for increasing their own institutional capacities and infrastructures for fundraising.

Governance

Governance issues and engagement and support from 'board members' to steward and guide the secretariats' came up in the conversations in Shillong that many foundation executives were facing. Board members, while being leaders in civil society, displayed a lack of trust and inhibitions against risk taking behaviors by the secretariat thereby limiting the experimentation the executive can do. Many executives felt discouraged in such an environment and there was a call for more discussion and support on this issue.

WHAT NEXT?

The report has so far revealed the unique qualities and practices of a small but emerging family of foundations in Asia that represent the agency and voice of marginalized communities and a deviation from mainstream institutional philanthropy on the continent. Despite their challenges of capacity and limited resources, we have seen that these foundations are well placed to support peace building and conflict transformation, build broken societies and leverage sustainable solutions, that are community owned and community driven, to local social problems. There is potential, commitment and even a degree of success in these foundations to break the aid dependency on foreign donors and harness local resources for development and addressing systemic issues in the region.

However, this still remains a space that exists on the margins of the mainstream philanthropic discourse in Asia. The value-add and of such foundations in not adequately communicated and many of them exist in a very fragile environment, not knowing where their next grant will come from. In order to stimulate the field and help it grow, there is a need to further:

1. **Map** who else is out there.

2. **Connect** and strengthen the relations among these and other practitioners to build a collective voice and agenda for greater visibility, collaboration, sharing and collective impact on social justice and peace in Asia.
3. **Communicate** their success and the difference they make – their added value, to global donors as well as new emerging Asian philanthropies - to increase support for the field itself as well as for greater impact, through the field, on the ground.
4. **Grow** the movement that these foundations represent by leveraging their voice to influence and shift the discourse and direction of mainstream philanthropy on the continent.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Tewa (Nepal)
2. South Asia Women's Fund (Sri Lanka)
3. Bangladesh Women's Foundations
4. Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (Pakistan), Charkha (India)
5. Simag Foundation (Philippines)
6. Social Trust Fund (Indonesia)
7. Nirnaya (India), Bangladesh Women's Fund (Bangladesh)
8. Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust (Sri Lanka)
9. i-Partner India (India)
10. Sampradaan Indian Centre for Philanthropy (India)
11. Lin Center for Community Development (Vietnam)
12. Local Development Institute (Thailand)
13. Dalit Foundation (India)
14. Foundation for Social Transformation – enabling north east India (India)

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