ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES ON PHILANTHROPY, AGENCY AND POWER IN AFRICA

Reflecting on a series of consultations

FORD FOUNDATION OFFICE FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

THE MOTT FOUNDATION (SOUTH AFRICA)

PHILANTHROPY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PEACE

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'We live in a world of unprecedented opulence…and yet we live in a world with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression…overcoming these problems is a central part of the exercise of development. We have to recognize, it is argued here, the role of freedoms of different kinds in countering these afflictions. Indeed, individual agency is, ultimately, central to addressing these deprivations. On the other hand, the freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that we have available to us. There is a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is important to give simultaneous recognition to the centrality of individual freedom and to the force of social influences on the extent and reach of that freedom…expression of freedom is viewed, in this approach, both as the primary end and as the means of development'

'Development can be seen, it is argued here, as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. … if freedom is what development advances, then there is a major argument for concentrating on that overarching objective, rather than on some particular means or some specially chosen list of instruments. Viewing development in terms of expanding substantive freedoms directs attention to the ends that make development important, rather than merely to some of the means that, inter alia, play a prominent part in the process.'

Amartya Sen[1]

WHY THESE CONVERSATIONS?

Twenty years after these words were penned by Amartya Sen, we are increasingly seeing 'development' once again being reduced to narrow targets, instrumental processes and siloed tactics. While significant advances have been made in development discourse, moving from very hard and fast economic indicators to social and political elements, from individualized approaches to structural ones, from purely western-based analyses to recognizing the need for contextualized analyses and solutions – the resultant gains have not been anywhere near enough or met the potential of the resources poured into the development sphere. In the push to progress, the why of development, and its ends – **freedom, of which agency and power are its core -** has taken a back seat, and the trajectories of progress have, instead, been aligned with much more instrumentalized components of development. This is glaringly evident on the African continent, where, despite billions of dollars in resources, injustice, inequality, poverty and limited freedoms are still a norm for a majority of the continent's people.

Institutionalized private philanthropy in/on Africa, though a relatively small component of development aid flows, has long been said to punch above its weight; often hailed as being relatively more progressive than bi-lateral or multi-lateral aid, and its 'progressive' foundations put on a pedestal as a savior of last resort, supporting

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[1] Sen, A. 1999. Development as Freedom. Oxford. Oxford University Press

independent civil society to push forward social justice concerns and remedies. While this philanthropic largesse has had some significant impact on particular issues in different places, there is overwhelming sentiment that the impact of philanthropic potential to advance broad scale and transformative social change is extremely limited. Increasingly, anxiety, dissatisfaction and anger have been building up on the nature of such philanthropic practice and the limitations imposed by existing institutional structures and norms. While these sentiments have been heard in many civil society conversations for a long time, there is now also growing recognition by some within the philanthropic community on the African continent that current modes of philanthropy need to be critically re-examined. At the heart of these sentiments, from both ends, is dissatisfaction with both the process of philanthropic interventions (the how of philanthropic decision making) and the target of these interventions (what issues philanthropy decides needs addressing) – with a common thread being that local power and agency is denied in both.

Recognizing these sentiments together with acknowledging that alternative narratives of philanthropy – that of freedom through power and agency - while still marginal, do exist, in 2018 The Ford Foundation in South Africa, Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP) and the Mott Foundation in South Africa co-hosted a series of conversations focusing on better understanding existing issues and limitations regarding philanthropic practice and exploring alternative narratives relating to philanthropy, agency and power. These conversations involved two sets of dialogues in South Africa and a consultation session at the 2018 African Philanthropy Network Assembly. The discussions were primarily grounded in the South African context but reflected contributions from a range of participants across the African continent and many of the issues raised have applicability in other parts of the continent. Participants at the sessions came from a mix of private philanthropic institutions and a wide range of civil society – from activist to academics; from institutions focusing on public interest litigation to those working with community organizing to others supporting social movements – a mix which made for conversations that were varied, layered and textured in a space where contested debates were encouraged. The conversations were held under Chatham House rules.

Comprehensive individual reports/reflections on the first two discussions can be found on the PSJP website.[2] This piece seeks to reflect what we have heard and what we are learning from the three collective discussions with some attention to the emerging recommendations. It should be noted that the discussions were the first part of an interrogative process and were designed to flesh out initial thoughts exploring what philanthropy could and should be doing differently as well as reflect recommendations for what the next steps in this exploratory process could include.

Which philanthropy are we talking about?

It is important right at the start that we recognize the dangers of generalization. There are multiple expressions of private philanthropic practice across a range of different indices and levels, of which legally institutionalized mechanisms are but one form. Even within this category, there is much differentiation. While we have a vague picture of the

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[2] http://www.psjp.org/resources/alternative-models-southafrica/

kinds of philanthropic institutions reflected on in these discussions - seemingly progressive private international or African social justice institutions that either provide money obtained from an elite set of sources or which have developed very hierarchical top down structures for expending their funds – even within these sub-groups there are exceptions to the norm.

It is also important to mention that not all philanthropy is inherently directed at equality and justice. There are many examples of philanthropic support that seek to further self-interest through the maintenance of the structures of injustice, for instance philanthropic support to conservative neo-liberal policy institutions or ultra-right-wing nationalist groups. There is also a large field of philanthropy that is directed at addressing the symptoms or effects of injustice/disasters. Neither of these is the subject of this discussion – we are talking here about philanthropy that at face value states its aims as that of advancing structural change to support a more just society.

WHY ARE ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES FOR PHILANTHROPY NEEDED? WHAT'S WRONG WITH EXISTING NARRATIVE AND PRACTICE

Several issues lie at the crux of this. As a brief summary of the discussions, prominent amongst these is that much of this institutionalized philanthropy under discussion falls in line with a narrative that prioritizes siloed and instrumentalized development targets as the end goal, in ways that fail to recognize the necessity of local agency and power as central goals of development. Such a narrative is operationalized in philanthropic practices that:

(i)   See power and control over resource allocations, and resultantly, over development priorities and strategies, residing at the top, with those who are involved in the giving structures – rather than at the base, with those who are most affected by injustice.

(ii)   Use its power to determine not just what issues are of importance and what strategies are required, but whose voices are legitimate enough to influence the trajectories of efforts to address those issues.

(iii) Legitimize development actors based on their levels of institutionalization and their aversion to risk.

(iv)   Prioritize form and structure as a key determinant for support to civil society rather than content, context and diversity of voice.

(v)   Operate on an issue/thematic basis, focusing on specific targets and leverage points, rather than recognizing the multiplicity of and intersections between issues and the need for a more holistic approach to addressing the connected roots of injustice.

(vi)   Seek to place measurement of development impact on specific types of gains achieved for those it is meant to serve rather than placing the development end goals around much more complex and less measurable concepts of power, agency, voice and dignity.

(vii) Reduce due-diligence and accountability to a linear and transactional process.

(viii) Reflect minimal efforts to be accountable on what they spend their funds, but make overwhelming accountability demands from those they support.

(ix)   See a reduced risk appetite such that philanthropic impact is inherently limited to incremental change.

(x)   Has de-politicized itself or hidden its politics in the need to appear as neutral above partisan politics.

But its not just philanthropy that needs a new narrative…

The discussion reflects that there is an unhealthy co-dependence between this philanthropy and the structures of civil society it deems worthy of support. Perhaps the most significant issue underlying this is what is seen as the broader NGO-isation of civil space in Africa. The term civil society has come to be reduced to mean formalized non-governmental institutions (NGO's), some of which are African in make-up and others are subsidiaries/offices of international NGOs. Together, these are seen take up a significant share of private philanthropic aid. Again, it must be noted that just as there is variation in philanthropy, there are as well hierarchies of NGOs - and the practices, experiences

and critiques of select elite, urban-based NGOS cannot easily be transferred to smaller and more grounded rural-based NGOs.

The important point, however, is that the struggle for rights and justice in Africa has become one that is increasingly only seen as legitimate and worthy of substantial philanthropic support if that struggle is institutionalized. The power conferred by such narrow resourcing, has however, often further distanced these NGOs from broader civil society and from those they seek to serve. These profiled urban-based NGOs are often seen as not rooted enough with the struggles of those on the ground, perceived as operating with analyses that are not cognizant enough of the broader range of changes required, not always contextualized enough to resist 'imported' issues and with strategies that can only encourage partial change. They are charged with not making enough space for the voices of those affected to influence their work; with not being accountable to those they are meant to serve and using the power of their resourcing to maintain a status as the legitimate voice of civic action **– directly and indirectly minimizing space for alternative voices and views**. Fragmentation and competition, the absence of a common vision that can enable collective agendas, the existence of what are deemed as donor favorites or 'blue-chip' NGOs that draw significant portions of funding have all been raised as critical issues that need addressing and will require much more interrogation, discussion and action.

This funding focus on 'large scale NGOS' is seen as a silencing of other legitimate spaces of civic action and was referred to by one participant as the 'power of depoliticizing movements for change'. That these issues are not unique to just the Southern African context is echoed in a recent piece by Hala-al Khalib, talking about the women's movement in Africa:

> 'Subsequently, the women's movement lost its collective power. Women lost their solidarity, their connection to each other and most significantly and sadly, their capacity to engage in politics collectively because they had been uprooted, displaced and polarized. The civil space in the Horn of Africa is now fully occupied by NGOs. For the past 40 years, we have been living in times of what I regard as 'the NGO-ization of civil space', where the language and rhetoric of gender equality is mostly generated by international NGOs. The challenge of NGO-ization is that it is predominantly subject to the imagination, assumptions, and interest of Northern funding institutions and their surrogates.' [3]

These conversations, however, were cautious to note that critique should not delegitimize NGOs in general – in fact, several participants in the conversations represented alternative solidarity-based NGOs who are finding ways to bridge this institutional divide and work in ways that truly support local power and agency as determinants of development agendas, irrespective of where resourcing emerges. There is much to learn from how these institutions are navigating power and how their work is rooted in in a values-based practice.

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[3] https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/dangers-ngo-isation-women-rights-africa-181212102656547.html

Form, function and language

Perhaps the most important reminder on the need for alternative narratives was directed at the way in which we – philanthropy and civil society – in having these and other critical discussions, have adopted an analytical lexicon that by itself further weakens our efforts rather than strengthening them.

> 'We talk about NGO's and civil society. We are talking about institutions, not practices. We need to locate ourselves within a struggle for justice and dignity and emancipation as a basis – and then institutional form comes after'

These words by a participant in one of the sessions succinctly brought home how even our own terminologies, analyses and framing in these conversations are part of the problem. We were reminded that our biggest challenges are not with the constituent parts, but with how we are understanding what we are ultimately working towards, and then figuring out what institutional or non-institutional forms are required to achieve that end. In as much as our critiques and reflections are centering around the institutional; it behooves us to recognize that for a true exploration of alternatives, we must move beyond form and structure, and instead, begin with a focus on the substance of the practice and politics on the ground.

A DEEPER DIVE INTO SOME CRITICAL RECURRING THEMES

Does philanthropy have a role in advancing power and agency?

The issue most debated was that of power and this took on multiple dimensions, with contested opinions on whether (i) power can be given by philanthropy, (ii) power resides with people inherently and needs to be claimed or (iii) power can be seen as something other than a zero-sum game, where philanthropic power can be used to build power. The question also arose that there needed to be more clarity on whether what was being called for from philanthropy was power redistribution, reconfiguration or ceding of power – and better understanding of the demands and implications of these, what does that mean for new forms of engagement that can create local agency but also a realistic assessment of what is feasible.

It was also noted that both philanthropy and NGOs tend to talk about power as something 'out there' and that there needs to be re-orientation of mindset about acknowledging the power in the room, placing it on the table and being honest and clear about what such power implies.

> 'A lot of donors don't just call themselves donors – they say they are partners or capacity builders – and what this does is hides power. What is needed is to put power on the table and be honest that you come with money and this comes from the north'

For philanthropy, these discussions brought out some critical reflections on what does a different power dynamic require of its practice, one that goes beyond just navigating the power it has to opening itself up to alternative configurations of decision making but also practical considerations and uncertainties about who power is given to and how - and what does that mean for new forms of engagement that can create space for local agency as the end goal of philanthropy

> 'The limitations on agency and power are of our own doing'

Like power, whether agency can be given or taken was a contested topic, but it was also noted that such a debate was, for some, undermining of the dignity of the institutions and people we are talking about. As such, the issue then becomes not just about whether power/agency can be given or taken, but whether the space for power or agency is being restricted, suppressed or denied and what collusive structures of power are complicit in this. While most of the discussions focused on what philanthropy and NGOs can or cannot do, the principle of do no harm was raised as an important alternative lens. For philanthropy, as much as it considers how it can operate in ways that open up space for local power and agency it must also ask the counter question: **What does it mean for philanthropic practice to operate in ways that, at its core, does not limit or stifle the power and agency of those it means to serve**? And how does that become an analytical lens for action.

Whose power and agency is being stifled?

> 'We need to [also] have conversations with those who do not have power, but who [do] have value'

> 'Our practice limits diversity and forces homogeneity- we align with ideas we think are useful, enforce those, and that then determines what happens in development'

Who constitutes a legitimate voice is an issue of much contention. Significant discussions centered on philanthropy's support for large, elite NGOs as the preferred mechanism for advancing social change. It was strongly felt that the much broader spectrum of civic action that is beyond the large NGOs has tended to be deemed by philanthropy as not influential, connected, strategic, or organized enough for the type of change necessary – or too unpredictable and risky to support - and has thus tended to be bypassed when considering where philanthropic money should be spent. The critique of philanthropy tending to fund those that appear to be in their own mold and who are aligned with their visions was strong, as was the implications this has for philanthropy (i) choosing whose voices to profile and legitimize, (ii) the implications of this on a reduction of space for contestation and debate, (iii) the favoring of particular priorities and strategies that derive from a specific worldview of change, and (iv) for legitimizing forms of oppression by amplifying/ignoring selective voices.

There was a call for philanthropy to think more critically about what it means to support a broader civil society eco-system; to enable space for multiple perspectives and voices and to shift orientation away from form and structure to values, content and context. Questions reflected a re-orientation of philanthropic purpose, looking at what is the kind of philanthropic and development practice that reflects an acknowledgment of people's dignity? and what is required for philanthropic practice to truly reflect solidarity?

Two cautions emerged in this discussion. The first was about the danger of the rhetoric delegitimizing NGOs that are seen by some as a one legitimate expression of civil society – and this takes us back to the form vs function discussion. The second was that we are talking about 'communities out there' without acknowledging that people in the room are themselves part of multiple and diverse communities that are the subject of discussion – and thus legitimacy and voice are not segmented in clear-cut institutional layers and forms.

Does civil society have negotiating power?

While there was some discussion about NGOs neglecting to use their power and ability to speak hard truths to donors, and the power of saying no to money, the more overwhelming sentiment was that the balance of power is still unduly tipped towards philanthropy. Donors choose what social justice challenges need problematizing and how, and civil society is invited into a space that is already delineated. Agency to challenge or oppose donor priorities does not exist, apart from being able to say no to funding (sometimes seen as a romanticized option), which could be a double-edged sword, and something not very easily said.

Donors are seen to consult within already-set parameters, and much more is needed to enable spaces where civil society is intrinsically involved in shaping the fundamentals of philanthropic approaches, and not just feeding into its different tangents. At this point,

this largely refers to NGOS – it is important to note that there is almost no space for alternative civil society formations and mechanisms to influence philanthropy.

The issue of fragmentation between NGOs and between NGOs and others forms of civil society are a key element here and there was a strong call that only with collective vision and collective agenda can civil society hold negotiating power on philanthropic resourcing decisions.

What power does international philanthropy based in Africa hold?

 For international philanthropic institutions with offices in Africa, the added dimension of internal power – within and between the institutional hierarchy itself, was raised as an important limitation. There is some feeling that in many international philanthropic institutions, the need for cohesive global strategies, large footprints, and scale are increasingly centering decision-making power in head offices based in the U.S. or Europe, rather than at the level of the offices on the continent. While choice of grantees and some level of strategies may still reside at the level of local offices, this centering, at its core, is seen as linked to the steps preceding that - from defining the issues of importance, deciding what framing of issues is appropriate, what kinds of strategies are suitable to explore and importantly, what kind of civil society actors can be supported. Bureaucratic and statutory limitations passed down to local offices further limit flexibility and decision-making power – so while local offices are closer to the ground, more in touch with the context and often run by people from the continent, their own agency and power is also somewhat constrained. Significant concerns on how to manage this power dynamic were raised, with some expressing that the rules and bounds operate so tightly that any radical change, no matter how much desired at the local level, is not possible within such institutional structures.

The tensions here – between what staff at such philanthropic institutions may deem as appropriate alternatives to explore or different ways of working and the limited space they perceive to have in dedicated action to explore these, rose quite clearly. This revealed great discomfort and internal conflict at feeling bound by institutional dictates that do not allow them to act in ways that they think may add value to the issues of agency and power and feeling co-opted when trying to deal with internal systems that are at odds with what their constituencies are demanding.

There is significant dissonance here that philanthropy must confront and engage. There is a need for a much more frank and forthright discussions within philanthropic institutions about the internal power dynamics at play and the ways in which these limit the agency of their staff and in turn the nature, range and process of philanthropic decision making at the level of local offices. This is a tension that has, in fact, been raised for quite some time, and in several philanthropic discussions – but with no resolution; in fact, the sense is that the ties that bind local offices to global planning are in fact pulling tighter, with less flexibility in action being a norm.

Solidarity and the limitations of litigating social justice

There is much critique on philanthropy's constantly shifting priorities having significant implications for both holding the ground on gains made but also translating these gains into practical action. There is a sense that, in South Africa, high-level advocacy and

public interest litigation have become the philanthropic strategies of choice and attract the most of this social justice philanthropic resourcing. Yet, litigation-based approaches are increasingly being recognized by activists as only one component and alone, not enough to advance long term change. Support for implementation and a range of other approaches have consequently been marginalized and as a result, progress on paper is not easily matched by advances on the ground. Philanthropy's ever-changing strategies, however, mean that big wins on litigation are often seen as a cue to move on, and important ground is often lost in this process. There is a strong call for philanthropy to locate its support for litigation within a much broader range of strategies.

A call to reframe and reimagine philanthropic support as directed by the concept of solidarity emerged very strongly. Discussions revolved around the need to better understand what philanthropic solidarity could look and feel like in practice? What would solidarity involve beyond money? And the need to explore new ways of showing solidarity that recognize local agency and power as key factors in decision making. The need to center solidarity work around deep contextual analyses of those who are most affected by the situation was noted as critical.

It was also noted, however, that such an approach goes against majority of philanthropy and development practice – and would require a radical disruption of existing power hierarchies and modes of operation; a much more in depth understanding of how communities of commonality organize and mobilize, how institutionalized structures can accompany and support community struggles rather than direct it and a much more flexible and 'agenda-less' funding arrangements that let go of pre-conceived, one-dimensional and linear notions of what needs to happen.

> 'We need a proper discussion on how change happens, and link this to understanding what our analysis of what the problem is'

> 'The notion of certainty – the call for us to be certain has grown – niche, focus, causality of work – has led to a point that we have narrowed our ability to be in it and be comfortable in space of chaos. It is difficult to shift practice if we use the systems of certainty that we have developed – the idea that we can predict change five years down is farcical'.

Politics, values and risk

> 'We have very little knowledge about the politics of the philanthropic sector – we can't hold you accountable unless we understand your value proposition'

Politics was an interweaving issue. There is a sense by some that this philanthropy has lost its edge because it has become somewhat de-politicized. Discussions called for philanthropy to be much more explicit and upfront about its politics, as of its values – what these are and how they operationalize these.

The issue of politics and values were intricately linked to that of risk. In the words of one participant

> 'The donor community has become particularly risk averse to the point that it almost disabled itself – part of the narrative that informed that was a de-

> politicization to be seen as neutral and not having any politics – we need to re-introduce politics into the donor space as a way of increasing risk appetite'

Discussions around risk also centered on how upward rather than downward accountability reduced philanthropy's appetite for risk; how the uncertainty of flexible and dynamic alternative approaches go against the modus operandi of philanthropy and how risk is often used as an excuse for maintaining power and control. In the words of one funder:

> 'We feel uncomfortable in dealing with uncertainty – we cannot acknowledge that we do not know – that is deeply connected to our power

There is some sense that this philanthropy is stuck in its ways and limited in recognizing and reimagining what potentials different kinds of risks could yield and that much consideration needs to be given to different ways of increasing its risk appetite.

Accountability

> 'The lexicon of donorship has distracted us from real issues of social change'

Philanthropy's approach to accountability is seen to require a drastic overhaul. Critical in this discussion was that accountability on progress was increasingly being directed by issues of scale, without any accountability to issues of power and agency.

Accountability was also seen as a one-way street, with grantees being called to provide - often onerous - accountability reporting, but philanthropy itself not opening up the space to be held accountable by civil society on what it funds, who its funds, and how. Space to call out donors without the risk of being side-lined or targeted was deemed very important to explore; regularizations of mechanisms to enable systematic and meaningful funder accountability was raised, as was that of funders needing to explore how to internalize the cost of extended accountability - particularly in supporting alternative civil society formations that are not structured in ways that philanthropy is used to dealing with.

Democratizing philanthropy

The issue of where power lies to determine what and who is funded were central to the conversations and consequently there was some emphasis on democratization of philanthropy. Conversation on this ranged from approaches such as (i) philanthropy being much more cognizant about conferring and consulting with a much broader broad range of constituencies, - beyond an elite set of formal institutions to other layers of NGOs and different types of civic actors - in informing their understanding of the issues at hand and their development of strategic approaches and funding priorities to (ii) to finding feedback loops and mechanisms that allow this broad civil society to guide and shape philanthropy's strategies and (iii) diversifying its boards and advisory committees to include not just experts and profiled development players but also voices that are in touch with the lived realities of those they seek to support. Lastly, developing collaborative funding pools and dedicated mechanisms that enable participatory grantmaking was discussed as an important avenue to explore - both as a means to and an end of enabling space for local agency and power. Democratizing philanthropy was also posited as an important way for philanthropy to take risk, premised on the

understanding that those involved on the ground understand best what kinds of calculated risks will be best for the issues they are working on.

In all of this, one theme was evident – the real expertise lies with those who suffer the brunt of injustice – and it is from them that philanthropy must take its direction. A caution was raised, however, that inclusion not be reduced to a numbers game, that democratizing philanthropy requires considerable planning and effort to understand its multiple possibilities and should not be reduced to once-off interventions that create small pockets of devolving power while leaving the macro structures untouched.

Alternate spaces of organizing

'The alternative is not going to come from us in this room'

Last, but not least, perhaps the issue reflected on most throughout the multiple discussions was that significant change is happening through different sites of politics – local civic action, movements and community activism – sites which once held prominence and were seen as legitimate spaces of support, but which in recent years have been overshadowed by the demands for professionalization, structure and fixed targets. Philanthropy has continued to stay at arms-length from such sites of activism. There was a strong recognition from the participants, that despite the progressive work they are engaged in, much more answers lay outside the room than inside it. There was also recognition that their own work, in itself, was limited in impact and only one part of a much broader eco-system of players needed. Efforts to support and strengthen spaces of alternative organizing and mobilizing was seen as critical to enabling spaces for local agency and power to dominate development priorities and agendas. In this regard, two particular strategies resurfaced throughout the multiple conversations:

i. Community organizing - Support to strengthen spaces for community organizing and mobilizing. Discussions on the how of this varied, but what clearly emerged is the need for philanthropy and NGOs not to assume they should be doing /leading the organizing, but to (i) strengthen the spaces for such organizing and mobilizing (ii) to work in ways that support communities to lead their own struggles and to (iii) create pathways for agenda setting to emerge and influence decision making higher up. Contestation on who communities are, that divisions and dissonance and injustices are part of any community as a microcosm of society, and that issues of traditional power and patriarchy were all recognized as real challenges that needed to be factored into community organizing approaches.

ii. Social Movements –Support to enable space for movements -whether local or national - to have their voices and priorities heard and to claim space at decision-making tables was raised as important. But it was not just support for individual movements that was raised, but a consideration for reflecting on how to support movement leaders, infrastructure and collective strategizing and planning. Little is understood about how movements operate and what they may or may not require from philanthropy and this is an area that requires considerable exploration and discussion – with movements themselves – to determine appropriate ways to proceed.

WHERE TO FROM HERE…

It cannot be overemphasized that these conversations were just one step. Rich, reflective and powerful as they were - providing insights into tough questions that need to be asked of values and politics, raising critical issues that challenge our assumptions and our behaviors and, calling out damaging practices that have too long been accepted as part of the game of philanthropy – these conversations can only but offer the beginnings of multiple tangents that will need much further understanding in the exploration of alternative narratives, and the practices they engender.

In terms of process, several recommendations have emerged.

Continued knowledge building

- The need to continue engaging on this topic with multiple constituencies. There was a recognition that even the composition of people invited/attending the multiple discussions represent a form of elite power and a manifestation of the exclusion prevalent in civil society and that yet further outreach needs to be done to include the very voices and constituencies that have been highlighted as 'missing' from philanthropy's support. This means engaging with voices and constituencies that form part of the broader civic arena – and not just NGOs - as a starting point to open up spaces for understanding the forms of civic action that are beyond our comfort zones. The form of such engagement may need to be given some additional thought: the structure and nature of the convening used to bring together NGOs into a room with donors may not necessarily be the kind of consultation space useful/appropriate to other types of constituencies/ Further discussion and planning will be needed with institutions/individuals who are more grounded in/linked to such constituencies to help think through this in more detail. There may be an interesting opportunity here to allow the agenda setting for these conversations to be determined outside of the donor circle.
- While these conversations covered multiple topics, there is a need for much more substantive focus on its different constitutive elements, understanding better what different types of approaches will require of philanthropy, what implications for philanthropic practice, what limitations are posed by internal and statutory requirements and what opportunity costs come into play. As different alternative ways of working are being considered, there will be a need for more in-depth explorations of actual practice and learnings.
- The need to broaden the circle of donors engaging in discussions on this topic. There appears to be some appetite by donors who are already thinking critically about the limitations of existing practice to convene to (i) share examples and lessons from where and how agency and power are being brought from the periphery to the center, (ii) have honest conversations about collective responsibility in advancing alternative narratives on philanthropy and (iii) importantly, begin to strategize around turning words into action. Broadening out from the initial conveners of this discussion to include multiple and varied donors taking the lead in subsequent conversations should also be an element of this.
- Evidence-based documentation, analyses, case studies and other writings on this topic need to be encouraged and provided space for – so that what is marginal

begins to be better understood, highlighted and engaged with – at both theoretical and practical levels. There are opportunities and avenues for doing so, ranging from (i) collaborating with institutions such as the Wits Centre for Philanthropy and the UKZN Centre for Civil Society to enable/encourage space for writing and reflection; (ii) connecting to online sites dedicated to raising critical discussions on philanthropy and challenging dominant narratives and; (iii) internal blogs and articles that can be circulated within philanthropic institutions and outreach to development-oriented media. One specific suggestion involved documenting various processes of community engagement in philanthropy across the spectrum of strategies and interrogating what lessons can be learned from these.

But knowledge building alone is not enough…

Perhaps the loudest call emerging was for donors in the room to take action, to do something that represents a commitment to taking forward some principle, element or idea discussed or something that shows a commitment to take risk beyond existing comfort zones and opening up spaces for alternatives to emerge. Much as the conversations were valued by civil society actors in the room, there is some sense that without some actual commitment to action that shows a willingness to do things differently, the donors involved won't be seen as taking this conversation seriously enough. This is more easily said then done, particularly for philanthropic institutions that have multiple upward reporting structures or living donors with very specific ideas – but this call is an important one, and links to the donors in the room holding legitimacy in continuing such conversations and showing commitment to taking these explorations to heart.

As a starting point, some suggestions for consideration in this regard include:

- Reflecting on what an eco-system approach to grantmaking could look like and taking steps to enable diversified support to multiple types of civic actors, connect different constituencies and enable space for multiple and contested views to emerge. While this needs to include a deliberate strategy to move past elite networks of social capital that exist in the sector, the caution about allowing content and context to determine support, rather than form and structure is an important one to bear in mind here.
- Pursuing the idea of a collaborative effort to explore what donor accountability and transparency could look like on strategic imperatives and funding distribution.
- Exploring the establishment of an 'agenda-less' fund that is geared towards supporting local organizing, strategizing and mobilizing.
- Exploring mechanisms and strategies to provide support beyond those who have a track record or exist within a particular type of institutional form. This could include investigating intermediary mechanisms, establishment of a pass-through instruments and support to incubate new and riskier ideas.
- Establishing a movement fund that looks at how best to engage and support the movement space.
- Exploring use of participatory philanthropy as a strategy, of which participatory grantmaking is one component (advisory committees, grantee-led fora and

debates, inclusive boards etc are other facets of this). Multiple models of participatory grantmaking exist[4] and considerable effort will be need to be made to identify an appropriate and contextualized model.

- Support to nurture the next generation of social change makers. This could include exploring support for either/or young leaders who are engaging in different ways or community leaders/ other activists who are enabling spaces for local power, agency and voice.

An offer was made by a group of participants to come together and help think about options where philanthropy can 'incubate a space where people can take risks to take forward the struggles that we involved in'. It would be useful to explore this in more depth.

In any of these it must be noted that while these could be first steps, they cannot be the only steps – as such initiatives may be a marginal part of a foundations budget and never change anything significant. Concurrently, efforts need to be taken to begin to bring about much more widespread and radical change within foundations. It is not enough for an alternative approach to be a small and marginal part of a bigger system – as this too just advances incremental changes – alternative requires fundamental changes to the nature of the system at hand. In the words of one group of participants:

> 'Transformational change is where the future state is unknown when you begin and is determined through trial and error as new information is gathered. You can't manage transformation with predetermined time bound linear project plans – the change process must emerge as you go. The future state is so radically different that the leaders and workers need new mindsets, behaviors and worldviews to invent it, and then to operate that new future.'

As several grantmakers in the room have noted, however, doing this when part of a large hierarchical philanthropic institution that is set in its processes and systems is no easy task and will require significant internal canvassing, advocacy and evidence building to gain even a foot in the door of alternatives. Power is not easily conceded and there are no illusions that even small gains will be easily achieve – but the path to change must begin with a single step in the right direction.

Enabling spaces for civil society to lead

Finally, recognizing civil society fragmentation as an important element of not having power vis-a-vis donors, there was a call for donors to support the space for a civil society-led cross sectoral, multi-constituency set of dialogue(s) in South Africa. This would be aimed at developing some kind of cohesiveness in civil society engagement with philanthropy, recommendations for philanthropic practice, and allow explorations for civil society constituencies to begin to lead on framing development agendas.

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[4] http://www.grantcraft.org/assets/content/resources/DecidingTogether_Final_20181002.pdf

Ford Foundation

Ford Foundation funds social justice work through a $13 billion endowment that includes committing about $600 million a year in grants to nonprofit organizations. Ford Foundation has 10 offices around the world with its headquarters based in New York.

The Foundation's work in Southern Africa began in 1953, providing fellowships for scholars, funding research that exposed the brutality of apartheid. In the post-apartheid era, the Foundation continued to fund projects that advanced education and public interest law while also expanding into other areas, including gender rights, community development, and public policy research. To support this broadened scope of work, Ford opened an office in Johannesburg in 1993. https://www.fordfoundation.org/

Mott Foundation

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, established in 1926 in Flint, Michigan, by an automotive pioneer, is a private philanthropy committed to supporting projects that promote a just, equitable and sustainable society. It supports nonprofit programs throughout the United States and, on a limited geographic basis, internationally. Grantmaking is focused in four programs: Civil Society, Education, Environment and Flint Area. In addition to Flint, offices are located in metropolitan Detroit, Johannesburg and London. With year-end assets of approximately $3 billion in 2018, the Foundation made 358 grants totaling more than $132 million. https://www.mott.org/

Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP)

PSJP is a network for social change. Its purpose is to support the development and adoption of new ideas. PSJP also works to connect and strengthen institutions, groups and individuals who are doing this work on the ground, and those who are resourcing and supporting the work in many different ways. http://www.psjp.org/

www.mott.org

www.psjp.org

www.fordfoundation.org