



**AFRICA  
IS ~~VERY~~  
VERY RICH  
UNDERGROUND  
~~~~~  
& VERY POOR  
ABOVE THE  
GROUND-**

## FUNDING A MORE EQUAL FUTURE:

Philanthropy and social justice in Africa

### Introduction

There is no doubt that philanthropy plays an important role in society whether it involves humanitarian assistance, advocacy or grant making. However, I want to focus on an element that is often ignored in discussions about philanthropy in Africa - the intersection between philanthropy, economics and politics and how these impact on social justice.

Increasingly, philanthropy is being thrust into debates about developmental governance and the resolution of social injustices. But few people seem to recognise that there has always been a clear relationship between social justice and the objectives of philanthropy or that philanthropy and social justice have always been intertwined.

Our common understanding today is that a socially just society is one that prioritises human rights and pays attention to questions of the ownership of the means of production, property and decision-making among others. Such a society has to be based on principles of equity, fairness, solidarity, peace and dignity. Philanthropy, on the other hand, is generally and simply defined as the love for humanity. There can be no philanthropy without love and for love to be truly manifested there can be no injustices, inequalities or conflicts. Philanthropy fights to rid society of barriers to love and dignity, fairness and equality. Therefore, it is oxymoronic to talk of philanthropy and social justice as if they are two separate ideas. And yet, they seem to have become divorced from each other over the years.



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## Philanthropy's split personality

In my view, philanthropy has not been equal to its natural task. It has failed to live up to its primary goal – to provide love to all humanity. Philanthropy ought to be social justice oriented all the time yet over the years there has been a determined and systematic differentiation between so-called 'charity philanthropy' and 'social justice philanthropy'. Philanthropists today choose between the two – opting to concentrate on charity or social justice. But this obsessive bifurcation has polarised philanthropy – distorting the field and undermining its capacity to provide love and dignity to humanity.

All philanthropies should be transformational whether their efforts are directed at material or non-material conditions. Rather than creating a binary world, my view is that we should be looking at a spectrum covering all the material and non-material dimensions of philanthropy. In this way, some philanthropies will address one end of the spectrum, while others will address the opposite end and others the greyer areas in between. This clarification is important because it shows that we should not be forced either ideologically or conceptually to work solely with the category of philanthropy that has been deemed 'social justice philanthropy' but rather that we can still discuss social justice within the broader framework of all philanthropies.

## Philanthropy, governance and political economy

There can be no better time to talk about the relationship between philanthropy and social justice than today. With more and more uprisings against inequality and inadequate basic services, it is not enough to talk about philanthropy solely as it relates to humanitarian assistance or mere grant making to citizens and their organisations.

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What has become more and more apparent is that at the root of societal challenges are questions of governance, unfair distribution of resources and social injustices. Since philanthropy, particularly in Africa, is not just about financial transactions but also about synergies, solidarity and reciprocity, it has become increasingly important for philanthropy to address the fundamental questions of injustice and inequality. There is no better illustration of this need than the shocking events at Marikana – a mining community in South Africa where 34 miners were killed by police after they went on strike to demand better standards of living and reasonable wages. These injustices in the extractive industry sector underline the inequalities that exist across the board in many countries – and the need for philanthropy to play a more transformational role. The same is also true of popular protests and uprisings across Africa in recent years – most poignantly in North Africa during 2011 and 2012 – that have called for better governance and a fairer distribution of resources.

Clearly there can be no solidarity in a world full of inequalities – and no dignity for all. Philanthropy can change this. It can help to foster a more socially just equilibrium in Africa because philanthropy is at the very centre of the continent's political economy. The very definition of philanthropy in Africa is not complete if it does not include the political economy of the continent's development.

It is about resources – human, financial, social, political and otherwise. It is about

solidarity, mutuality and reciprocity – all key tenets of accountability and a socially just society. For philanthropy to be truly transformational and tackle social justice issues, it has to prioritise accountability across societal levels. Most importantly in my view, philanthropy has to support and enhance accountability efforts around Africa's resources. How our resources are utilised, managed, governed and mobilised speaks to the fundamental questions of social justice.

Defining philanthropy within the context of resources and juxtaposing it with the resolution of social injustices in Africa is – by every means – a clarion call for a fundamental shift from simply viewing philanthropy as a field concerned with grantmaking, giving, aiding and foundation-building to repositioning it to be at the very centre of Africa's

political and economic processes.

Naturally, accountability is a mechanism that is inbuilt in African philanthropy. The very notion of mutuality means that everybody holds each other accountable in any relationship. Yet in today's world, accountability has to be closely monitored and managed by a governance system and its institutions. For this reason, it is essential to strengthen institutions of governance. Philanthropy in Africa has no option but to support these institutions and processes of governance.

There is a natural link between the mobilisation of resources and how they are managed. That is why it is important for philanthropy to pay special attention to institutions of governance in Africa. These institutions are particularly important today given the continent's current economic growth and projections that Africa could become the next global growth pole. With more and more attention focussed on Africa and the possibility of another wild scramble for African resources, there is an urgent need to strengthen the continent's governance systems so that the people are protected from possible exploitation, which could result in even greater inequalities and mass disenfranchisement.

Africa and her institutions must be ready to deal with the new context as it will have serious repercussions in relation to social justice. In the African context, social justice cannot be isolated from the everyday experiences of the people. Social justice is intimately linked to both the material and non-material conditions of



the people. If philanthropies in Africa address the question of developmental governance, then there is a chance that some real progress around social justice can be achieved.

The fact is that societies cannot be just and equitable unless there are sound governance systems in place that can promote and sustain such an equilibrium. In the African context, people's livelihoods depend primarily on the continent's resources. Africa is very rich underground and very poor above the ground – not because there is lack of wealth but because there is lack of sound governance of those critical resources. So far only a few well-connected political and economic elites have benefited from the vast natural wealth of the continent. For everyone to benefit from Africa's resources, it is important that we do not separate the discourse and practice of philanthropy from the primary commodities such as land, water and natural resources that are driving the continent's economies. Philanthropy has a key role to play in ensuring that African people actively participate in the governance of their resources for the betterment and long-term sustainability of their societies.

## Philanthropy's key role

There are many ways in which philanthropy can play this critical role. The first is for philanthropy to recognise that in the African context, there should not be any division between what is normally referred to as charity work and social justice work. The two are very much intertwined. Many times an act that is regarded as charity has helped to transform the status quo. For example, paying school fees for a girl child in a family dominated by patriarchy and suffering from high levels of poverty would – in the classical definition of philanthropy – be classified under charity. But what if the girl performed so well in school that she not only changed the mind-set of her own family but also inspired other girls to follow her example and thereby helped to transform gender relations in the broader community.

The second is for philanthropists, particularly the richest ones, to work with civil society organisations to address key developmental

challenges on the continent. In recent years there has been a proliferation of philanthropic entities. From South Africa to Nigeria to Egypt, philanthropies increasing by the day and taking a variety of forms, including foundations, trusts, corporate social investment vehicles, community foundations and individuals. These could make a major difference but only if they work in concert with civil society organisations. For example, the relatively new African Grant Makers Network could focus on creating an enabling policy environment for philanthropy to tackle social justice issues and work with civil society organisations.

However, it is also time for rich African philanthropists, who sometimes choose to be lone rangers, to forge partnerships with civil society organisations that are at the coalface of social injustice. South Africa's Patrice Motsepe – believed to be worth over US\$2 billion – recently pledged to give a huge chunk of his wealth to his philanthropic foundation, which would channel it towards uplifting the lives of the poor. If more of Africa's super-rich followed suit, philanthropy would be a real economic, political and developmental force to be reckoned with.

But it is not just money that will resolve social injustices. Our understanding of philanthropy should not be confined to just providing funds but to other kinds of giving and transformational efforts. Philanthropy is about providing a variety of resources for the resolution of social injustices – from handing out cash to speaking out on critical issues. And there can be no more important issue right now than the management of Africa's natural resources, which should be the driving force behind sustainable development not simply a vehicle for elite enrichment.

African philanthropy will be irrelevant if it is not at the centre of the mobilisation and governance of these resources, including oil, gas, minerals, timber, water and land – especially as so many of the continent's richest philanthropists have made their money from these very resources. Philanthropy must play a bigger role than merely doling out charity. It needs to be at the heart of the political economy of Africa because only then can it help to transform society and achieve its ultimate goal – to provide love and dignity for humanity. ( )

