

Can the new African foundations level the playing field?

Bhekinkosi Moyo

This article attempts to answer three related questions. The first is whether new African philanthropic foundations such as TrustAfrica and the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) have the clout needed to raise money from the North and use it on their own terms to set their own development agenda. Put differently, can these institutions engage on equal terms with their northern partners? The second relates to dependency, which has characterized relations between the non-profit sector and its donors, particularly from the North. Can the new institutions break the dependency cycle? The third question is whether these institutions and the new generation of African philanthropists will break with or recreate power imbalances that have existed over the years between northern donors and southern recipients.



Bhekinkosi Moyo is Research Fellow at TrustAfrica. Email moyo@trustafrica.org. He wishes to acknowledge the input of Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, AWDF Executive Director.

Photo on p1: Bishop Malusi Mpumwana of South Africa shares his thoughts with Imam Muhammad Ashafa of Nigeria, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of South Africa, and other participants at a TrustAfrica workshop on religion and pluralism in July 2007.

These questions are tackled by reference to TrustAfrica and AWDF, partly because these foundations were established to change perceptions about Africa and to begin to imagine an Africa capable of deciding her own destiny, but also because the two foundations have over the past five years been involved in work that has sought to address these very issues.

New developments in Africa and the world

Can they do what is expected of them? Let's examine the background. Globally, it is worth noting that philanthropy has undergone a number of recent radical changes. The current buzz word is 'philanthrocapitalism', a shift from the traditional foundation model to using business techniques to address social challenges. In Africa this has not yet been a major issue, but indications are that soon there will be a proliferation of creative capitalists. South African Mark Shuttleworth is one who springs to mind.

But there have also been major philanthropic developments in Africa. Whereas yesterday it was the powerful northern foundations that drove the development agenda, today the tide is turning. New African foundations are at the forefront of development initiatives and are setting priorities. There is also a

steadily increasing number of foundations set up by rich Africans right across the continent and a proliferation of foundations set up by former heads of states, sports men and women, musicians and other celebrities. Developments like these have raised the hope that resources can in the long run be mobilized from within Africa. The platform for a collective African voice on many of these issues has been created and perceptions have begun to shift from negative to positive.

Levelling the playing field

So far, so good, but in the current aid landscape, African foundations will have to continue raising donor aid, at least in the short to medium term, both from the North and from Africa. At this juncture, it is not the source of money that is an issue but rather the terms under which aid is given and its subsequent use. Can the new African foundations mobilize resources from their northern counterparts while engaging with them on an equal basis? Arguably, the very emergence and existence of these institutions is an indication of their capacity to do so.

Recognizing that Africa's challenges should be addressed by Africans

Perceptions about Africa are slowly changing in the donor world and it is now widely accepted that there can be no sustainable development if resources are not moved closer to the hands of local foundations and institutions. Africans, in short, need to address Africa's challenges. Support for local philanthropic institutions is crucial, and there is evidence that this has already started. The very creation of these foundations is testimony that their northern partners think they have the capacity and legitimacy to raise resources and to use them to support locally set priorities. The Ford Foundation, for example, has sought to build local capacity to set local agendas and seek local solutions through many projects such as the International Fellows Program and its Philanthropy Initiative in Africa. TrustAfrica is a product of that process. Comic Relief (UK) has a direct funding partnership with AWDF and with Nelson Mandela Foundation. This demonstrates an appreciation of local capacities. There is still some way to go, of course, hence the need to raise awareness about supporting local philanthropic institutions.

Letting grantees shape the agenda

In a way, therefore, TrustAfrica and AWDF have already begun levelling the playing field between North and South. Both were established to serve as platforms

for Africans to set their own agenda. TrustAfrica, for example, has since its early days as the Special Initiative for Africa sought to seek local solutions to African challenges. One of the principal methods it used was to convene at least three continent-wide meetings between 2001 and 2006 around citizenship and identity, regional integration, and peace and security. Because of these consultations, TrustAfrica was mandated to work on these thematic areas. This was further consolidated by more consultations in the period 2007–08 around these themes and others such as religious pluralism, African regional organizations, and philanthropy in Africa. As a result, TrustAfrica has supported priorities that are set by different stakeholders across the continent. With this mandate and scope of work, TrustAfrica can legitimately engage with northern donors on equal terms.

The same approach is used by AWDF in its quest to strengthen women's movements through a feminist philanthropy agenda. AWDF is a social change organization established for and by women to mobilize resources and address structural issues that confront women. Most of AWDF's work is done through grantee constituencies, women's networks and other coalitions. Hence there is a focus on capacity building and peer learning among AWDF grantees. The result is that AWDF's thematic areas, just like those of TrustAfrica, are shaped by grantees.

Dispelling the untruths and the half-truths

Another way of levelling the playing field is through the production of credible knowledge, and both institutions are concerned about the myths and untruths that are associated with Africa. A number of research studies are being commissioned and conducted to correct misconceptions about Africa and African giving. The 'State of Philanthropy Initiative', for example, is one such project championed by TrustAfrica.

Challenges still abound, however. For example, there is still a tendency to treat African foundations as grantmakers or intermediaries. Although grantmaking is their function, it is not their identity. Beyond intermediary roles, these institutions add value by the nature of their work, most of which is conducted

There is still a tendency to treat African foundations as grantmakers or intermediaries. Although grantmaking is their function, it is not their identity. Beyond intermediary roles, these institutions add value by the nature of their work, most of which is conducted with partners, networks and coalitions right across the continent and beyond.

with partners, networks and coalitions right across the continent and beyond.

The other challenge is that there is a lack of formal infrastructure to support African philanthropy. However, there is a move by TrustAfrica and AWDF to establish by 2009 an African grantmakers' association. Through this network, African institutions will be able to leverage funding as well as engage with other global philanthropic associations.

The dependency question

The question of dependency is one that these institutions have begun addressing. Although they still raise their funding primarily from outside, there is a strong drive towards raising resources from Africa as well. AWDF, for example, launched a \$15 million endowment fund campaign in South Africa in November 2007. A significant amount of money was raised at the event, and today the campaign has two paths: the legacy fund and the 'seizing the moment fund'. Increasingly, AWDF hopes to raise more resources from Africa.

Likewise TrustAfrica is developing a fundraising strategy that will raise resources from African professionals in different parts of the continent as well as exploring the possibilities of airline contributions to bolster its endowment fund.

Towards a different relationship?

The concentration of power and resources in particular organizations and individuals affects the way they view those that they support. In the quest to address issues of social change, traditional philanthropic institutions, like venture philanthropists and other types of philanthropist, have failed to change the status quo. It is too early to tell whether the new African institutions will at last transform social relations and tackle head on the supremacy embedded in all forms of philanthropy. It's worth noting one thing, however. The very emergence of these new institutions in Africa is a step towards developing a different and unique philanthropy in the continent that also shares in the universality of other philanthropies. The new African philanthropists need to be aware that the resources at their disposal might tempt them to set agendas for their recipients and recreate imbalances. If they are not alive to this danger, their added value will be diminished and the hype around them will become 'hot air'. These foundations must thus make a conscious political step to build the sustainability, independence and autonomy of civil society in Africa. @