

# Giving is key to Africa's wellbeing

In Africa, everyone is both a philanthropist and a recipient of philanthropy. Nothing is more unAfrican than being left to bury a loved one alone.

29 Oct 2011 11:53 Bhekinkosi Moyo

In an elite part of an African city lived a very rich man who never attended the funerals and burials of neighbours, relatives and colleagues. Every time somebody close to him died, he would sign a cheque and send it to the bereaved family.

This continued until the day he lost his own daughter. The community and all the people who knew him reciprocated—they signed cheques and sent them to him. And, like him, they did not attend the funeral of his daughter. He was left alone.

Nothing is more unAfrican than being left to bury a loved one alone. It did not matter how much money he had, he needed the solidarity and care of his community, friends, relatives and colleagues.

This story illustrates how the glue of solidarity and reciprocity, among other defining features of African communities and societies, binds philanthropy and wellbeing together. In Africa, everyone is both a philanthropist and a recipient of philanthropy.

Philanthropy is not the preserve of only a few rich individuals who can make huge donations. It cuts across all classes and finds its expression in forms that include mutual aid, rotating savings clubs, stokvels, co-operatives, burial societies, foundations, trusts, corporate social investments, voluntarism, individual and religious giving, among others.

All these form an ecosystem of the philanthropic landscape in Africa, which involves a diverse set of strategies that include grant-making, public-private partnerships, endowments, advocacy and lobbying, online giving and other new social media-related innovations, social impact investing, peer learning, collaborations, joint programming and capacity-building.

Understanding the philanthropic ecosystem in Africa and how it relates to wellbeing and development raises policy questions and areas for potential advocacy in promoting wellbeing for the 21st century.

## **New philanthropy**

There is a new way of practising philanthropy in Africa, one that builds on solidarity, reciprocity, giving and helping from local sources. The emergence of locally established and funded foundations - and the fact that from Tanzania to Kenya, and South Africa, individuals and corporations give to public and private causes - is a reaffirmation that Africans are natural givers.

This gives hope that Africa can support its own developmental needs and define its own trajectory. Until Africa finances its own development, wellbeing will remain elusive. In many ways this calls for a review of the development trajectory that Africa adopted and that failed to prioritise local institutions, knowledge and perspectives. In most African countries, there is still no legal and institutional framework for philanthropic practice.

What about the new high net-worth individuals in Africa? They are indeed well positioned to fund development differently in Africa. Not only can they provide leadership, they are also influential individuals who can champion policy agendas for wellbeing in Africa.

For this to happen, though, philanthropy in Africa must forge a partnership with different types of high net-worth individuals and policy influencers to address wellbeing questions in Africa.

There is still a danger, especially as a result of these individuals and the private sector still not funding or supporting social justice questions, that the notion of wellbeing is simplified to mean such things as access to water, education and health and does not address the wholeness of a human being. Wellbeing comprises both material and nonmaterial aspects, and focus must be given equally to all its dimensions.

Because increasingly wealth is concentrated among a few high net-worth individuals primarily from the private sector, there is a tendency (perhaps understandable given their background) for them to seek solutions for social challenges in the business models that have made them successful. But the sure and fastest way to address wellbeing is for development to be driven by the people concerned.

For policymakers and development actors alike, this means there is a need to invest as much in the means and methods by which people can determine their own futures as in the material aspects of human wellbeing. Questions of infrastructure and leadership development, governance reforms and education need to be even more important than project-based investments.

## **A call for an appropriate environment**

For policymakers then, this is a call for an appropriate environment for all forms of philanthropy to thrive to meet the ever-changing dynamics of wellbeing. For philanthropic actors, it means there is a need to build mechanisms for collaboration and new ways of tackling inclusive development. No one organisation or individual can address human wellbeing holistically, not even the likes of Bill Gates or Warren Buffet.

Increasingly it is becoming clear that the lines between the business sector and philanthropy will be closed and both will partner with governments to address pressing developmental questions in Africa. There is a dire need to prioritise transformative partnerships, most of which are driven by new technologies, innovations and the passion for a progressive continent.

Nothing seals these partnerships better than the spirit of solidarity and reciprocity underpinning African relationships. Thus impact investing, encompassing venture philanthropy, online giving and strategic philanthropy, among others, will effectively complement other forms of philanthropy in Africa in tackling development and wellbeing.

It is for this reason that the establishment of the African Grantmakers' Network and the other regional and national philanthropic platforms in Africa are crucial to moving Africa forwards.

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