

TRUSTAFRICA

Influencing policy at a pan-African level

Bhekinkosi Moyo

Before TrustAfrica was set up, there was no African foundation that worked at a continental level explicitly on issues with regional and continental dimensions.¹ The very scale of Africa's problems was potentially paralysing. How could TrustAfrica, with minuscule resources compared to the challenges it faced, come up with a strategy that would allow it to achieve meaningful change in at least some areas? Part of the answer was to work through the existing system of treaties rather than starting advocacy from scratch. Another part of it was to work through civil society and civic engagement with the aim of improving political and economic governance in Africa.



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But we didn't get to this point immediately. Initial consultations across Africa resulted in three programmatic areas for TrustAfrica: peace and security, regional integration, and citizenship and identity. We also decided that grantmaking in these areas would be just one strategy at our disposal. Others included convening, technical assistance, advocacy and dialogues.

These three thematic areas made sense for a number of reasons. First, they had clear regional and continental dimensions. Second, there were several treaties and declarations at both the continental and the regional level that most African countries were committed to but had not implemented. If complied with, these treaties would go some way to addressing challenges in the thematic areas. Third, civil society was critical for holding governments accountable for these and other commitments.

TrustAfrica decided to focus on civic engagement in the three areas. We made grants for knowledge generation, capacity strengthening and advocacy training. We believed that by attempting to influence policy through civic engagement at a pan-African level, we could also influence national policy shifts, with civil society formations demanding that member states ratify and comply with the regional treaties they had signed. An example is our funding of a coalition of organizations that has undertaken a study of all treaties

and is now advocating for their domestic ratification through campaigns and other related activities.

A focus on governance

However, two years of pursuing this strategy led us to shift our focus to three broad areas – civil society and democracy, equitable development and African philanthropy – to secure the conditions for a peaceful, safer and prosperous Africa. We were convinced that to secure lasting solutions to Africa's governance challenges, citizens and their institutions needed to come together to set a common agenda and to develop strategies for holding their governments accountable. Consultations also showed us that the three areas were means and not necessarily ends in themselves. The question still remained: what were we concerned with? What were our ends?

Clearly, we were about governance, both political and economic. Equally clearly, the questions of peace, identity and integration that we had focused on were closely connected with how Africa is governed. Ours was in many ways a strategy that was born out of a few years of learning.

Key elements of the strategy

The treaty system

A number of our partners focus on international principles, declarations, treaties and commitments that member states have signed and ratified. This is a critical level for TrustAfrica because these treaties provide a framework to hold governments accountable at both international and domestic levels. Most of the treaties have implications for transforming power relations, addressing the structural and systemic causes of underdevelopment and helping to dismantle some of the underlying causes of social injustice.

In 2007, for example, African member states adopted the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. If implemented, this would address the underlying causes of conflicts, violence and violation of human rights in Africa. It lays out the developmental imperatives for member states. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1987) also guarantees every person the right to the freedoms of assembly, association, protection, development, etc. These treaties address both first-generation rights and second-generation rights around socioeconomic development.

However, the treaties remain ineffective because most of them have still not been implemented by individual states. To remedy this, TrustAfrica supports non-state actors at national, regional and international levels

¹ The African Women Development Fund (AWDF) was already in place. However, it worked specifically on women and feminist issues, while TrustAfrica encompassed a broader focus and mandate. Increasingly regional grantmaking bodies have emerged.

to collaborate with member states in the implementation of these treaties and to monitor their compliance. Our work on agricultural advocacy, for example, is geared towards equipping smallholder farmers to engage meaningfully with the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme, an African Union framework agreed by the majority of member states. The same applies to our gender work on Millennium Development Goal 3. The aim is to get member states to comply with the commitments they have made to ending gender-based violence and enhancing the dignity of women. In the investment work where we are partnering with the International Development Research Centre, the aim is to improve policies to do with doing business with a pro-poor focus in Africa.

Civic engagement

The first years of TrustAfrica's grantmaking strengthened our view that we had to focus on civic engagement in questions of governance. Our experience was that most governments respond to people's needs only if there is a critical mass of demand from bodies such as unions, associations and social movements. Furthermore, support for these organizations helps create an environment in which all members of society can meaningfully take part in their development and governance.

Collaboration and partnership

TrustAfrica's strength lies in that of its partners. For this reason, we invest in institutions that address the fundamental challenges of governance, development and rule of law, including human rights, as well as implementing initiatives ourselves that we see as critical for TrustAfrica's identity. These include research and knowledge generation, advocacy, and taking positions on issues that demand our voice as an African-led and governed institution. An example is our forthcoming book *(Dis)Enabling the Public Sphere: Civil society regulation in Africa*.

We support groups that generate knowledge on a variety of issues and encourage them to collaborate with others such as media, advocacy and similar groups that can help disseminate that knowledge. We also support groups that work at the advocacy level on areas such as economic governance and equitable development

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(extractive industries, trade, aid, mining, climate change, business environment, investment, agriculture, higher education, etc) and political governance (transitional justice, human rights, elections, governance, etc). These normally target national, regional and intergovernmental institutions such as parliaments, courts, Regional Economic Communities, and the African Union and its various organs. They also target international bodies such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization and World Bank and initiatives like the World Economic Forum and its adversarial counterpart, the World Social Forum.

In addition and from the very beginning, we chose to set our agenda through consultation with our partners. For example, we have brought together potential grantees in our economic governance work as well those in the broader political governance area to develop projects that respond to their situations and the needs of their constituencies. Often we find that these dialogues facilitate a collective response to Africa's challenges. In many ways this also addresses questions of duplication and cost-effectiveness. In addition, groups usually identify a holistic response to problems, with some groups addressing the underlying causes and others focusing more on other dimensions.

African philanthropy

As a foundation based in Africa, TrustAfrica is often in collision with political elites and others with vested interests. This is why we have adopted African agency or what we term African philanthropy. Africans should be at the centre of the response to their challenges and African philanthropy means resources – human, financial, social, intellectual – that can be tapped to address Africa's problems.

A comprehensive and holistic approach

This comprehensive and holistic approach is designed to address all dimensions of social injustice – from the policy level to attitudes to practice and knowledge. Grantmaking is only one of the elements in this strategy. Opening up a dialogue or lobbying are equally important. Sometimes, we simply provide travel grants for activists or representatives from grassroots organizations to enable them to attend key meetings where decisions are made that will affect their well-being. This can be crucial in allowing them to begin a dialogue that will help build a shared value base and a future Africa where equity, equality and justice can thrive. @

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