

The Bellagio Initiative

Briefing Summary

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Transformative Innovations in African Philanthropy

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Philanthropy, wellbeing and development in Africa are intricately interdependent. The very meaning and occupation of philanthropy is the love of humanity. This implies that it exists to address developmental questions. The glue of solidarity, reciprocity and mutuality among other defining features of African communities and societies binds philanthropy and wellbeing together. One's existence is dependent on that of others. This cannot be explained better than by the following story. In one elite part of an African city lived a very rich man who never attended funerals and burials of neighbours, relatives or colleagues. Every time somebody close to him died, he would sign a cheque and send it to the bereaved family. This continued until one day he lost his own daughter. The community and all the people who knew him reciprocated and signed cheques and sent them through to him. However, like him they did not attend the funeral or burial of his daughter. He was left alone. Nothing can be more un-African than being left to bury your loved one(s) alone. It did not matter how much money he had, he needed the solidarity and care of his community, friends, relatives and colleagues.

Philanthropy in Africa is therefore very much anchored in these communal values. It is intrinsically embedded in the life cycle of birth, life and death of many, if not all Africans. Everyone is both a philanthropist and a recipient of philanthropy. Philanthropy is thus not a preserve of only a few rich individuals making huge donations. It cuts across all classes. Hence it finds its expression in horizontal and vertical forms that include mutual aid, rotating savings clubs, *stokvels*, cooperatives, 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 that utilises

a diverse set of strategies that range from grant-making, to 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, among many others. The philanthropic ecosystem and the various innovations, strategies and partnerships respond differently to different aspects of development and wellbeing in Africa. However, underlying all these are values and principles of solidarity, reciprocity, cooperation, mutuality and giving necessary for relationship-building. Africa's challenges and threats to human wellbeing are such that no one individual, organisation or state can resolve them. Only transformative and lasting partnerships stand to address the dynamic and complex challenges of the twenty-first century.

The resolution of the unsettled development questions requires an investment in African-led processes and the anchorage of these processes in African cultures, knowledge systems, institutions and relationships. Clearly philanthropy plays an important role in addressing wellbeing and developmental challenges. Given the diversity of philanthropic institutions and experiences in Africa and the complex nature of wellbeing, there is no one role or dimension of philanthropy. Different actors address wellbeing differently based on their contexts, structures, orientations and beliefs. This understanding of the philanthropic ecosystem and how it is related to wellbeing and development raises policy questions and areas for potential advocacy in promoting wellbeing for the twenty-first century.

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- Locally established and funded foundations are emerging. However, in most African countries, there are no legal and institutional frameworks for philanthropic practice. Perhaps the African Grantmakers Network's real relevance would be to cultivate the culture of philanthropy for social justice and other forms of development inclusiveness among policymakers by establishing necessary policy frameworks as well as motivating African citizens – individually or collectively – to give towards the wellbeing of societies and their peoples.
- Africans' wellbeing cannot be separated from their unique cultural and philosophical foundations, which are expressed in different forms of philanthropic practice. Utilising Sen's capability approach, it means Africans have to take the lead in promoting their own wellbeing. This implies that all philanthropists or development actors who are not aligned to these foundations will overlook the nuances of African wellbeing. This calls for serious investment in strengthening local institutions, systems and normative frameworks by the new high net worth individuals (HNWIs) and influential individuals who can champion policy agendas for wellbeing in Africa.
- To address wellbeing, development needs to be driven by the people concerned. Policymakers and development actors need to invest adequately in participatory frameworks just as giving attention to material aspects of human wellbeing. Questions of capacity building, infrastructure development, leadership development, governance reforms and education become more critical than project-based investments. Social venture philanthropy prioritises building the infrastructure for social change, which is likely to grow and attain resonance among many African institutions. For policymakers, this requires creating an enabling environment for social investments. And for conventional philanthropy, this means learning from some of the principles that have made venture philanthropists successful. For venture philanthropists, it requires humility to accept that not everything needs a business model.
- The notion of wellbeing cannot be narrowly simplified to mean tangible questions of access to water, education, health, etc. and not address the wholeness of a human being. Human wellbeing comprises both material and non-material aspects and focus should be given equally to all its dimensions. Because wealth is increasingly concentrated among a few HNWIs, there is a tendency to be reductionist and seek solutions for social challenges in the business models that have made them successful. There is a role for this approach, but it must not replace other forms of philanthropy that address challenging and complex questions such as social justice, democracy, the media and socioeconomic rights.
- No one organisation or individual can address human wellbeing holistically. They need to forge partnerships in order to strongly respond to the needs and demands of societal and individual wellbeing. It is for this reason that the establishment of the AGN and the other regional and national philanthropic platforms are crucial in moving Africa forward.

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The Future of Philanthropy and Development in the Pursuit of Human Wellbeing

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