

Change or charity?

Andrew Milner As part of its feature on social justice philanthropy, *Alliance* asked a number of funders and researchers around the world to give their views on social justice philanthropy in their region – what does it mean in different places and cultures? Who is doing it and who is funding it? And what is preventing its spread? This article is based on their responses.

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¹ It is, for instance, one of the five founding principles of the Indonesian state.

² See Alison Goldberg, 'Social Change and how to do it', *Foundation News and Commentary*, May/June 2002 (www.foundationnews.org/CME/article.cfm?ID=1982).

Guest editor for the feature on social justice philanthropy



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Current, but cloudy

While 'social justice philanthropy' is a recent term, it has attained a fairly wide currency, particularly in the global North, but despite this there is what Rick Cohen (National Council for Responsive Philanthropy, USA) describes as 'little definitional coherence in philanthropic circles'. Torie Osborn (Liberty Hill Foundation, USA) is more definite: 'There is no generally accepted usage of the terms "social change" or "social justice" within philanthropy in the US.' In the South, while 'social justice' might be understood,¹ 'social justice philanthropy' often is not. Interestingly, in Muslim states it is often the word philanthropy that is puzzling. 'Islamic charity is predominantly traditional in nature,' says Amelia Fauzia (State Islamic University, Jakarta). Marwa El Daly (Center for Development Services, Egypt) points out that, although philanthropy is an ancient practice in Egypt, there is no Arabic translation of the word.

Nor is this perplexity confined to Islam. 'Philanthropy in South-East Asia has the notion of being charity-oriented, elitist and pro-status quo,' with few foundations calling their work philanthropy, says Gisela Velasco (Synergos, Philippines). Similarly, Sithie Tiruchelvam (Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust) says Sri Lanka 'has had little or no culture of philanthropy', and Sushma Raman (Ford Foundation, India) says that while there is a strong philanthropic tradition in India and South Asia, it is often not referred to as such. It is more likely to be called charity. However, both Tiruchelvam and Raman speak of a 'vibrant and healthy civil society' and it is in this context, Raman suggests, that social justice philanthropy can be framed, rather than in the context of more traditional forms of giving, which have mostly been curiously disconnected from civil society efforts to advance social justice.

Change, not charity

There is nevertheless broad agreement on definitions. Most respondents distinguish between social

justice philanthropy and charity – the Liberty Hill Foundation and the Reichstein Foundation have taken 'Change, not Charity' as their motto. It is philanthropy to 'support long-term systemic change rather than direct services', says Raman.

Many see the fundamental characteristic of social justice philanthropy as attacking the roots of problems, rather than ameliorating their effects. Kavita Ramdas (Global Fund for Women, USA) cites Alison Goldberg's definition²: 'grantmaking that aims to address the root causes of social and economic inequalities.' Christa Momot (Reichstein Foundation, Australia) says: 'It seeks to address fundamental causes of social ills and bring about systemic change. We do not fund direct service as a strategy to address systemic issues.' Cohen lists 'researching root causes of social problems' as an activity NCRP considers social justice philanthropy.

Augusto Varas (Ford Foundation, Chile) sees social justice philanthropy as different to traditional Latin American philanthropy in that 'it tackles the really difficult challenges facing a society, issues that are often controversial, can make people uncomfortable or angry and are in many cases politically sensitive'. This is a reason why foundations can be chary of social justice philanthropy. Marcos Kisil (Institute for the Development of Social Investment, Brazil) is more unequivocal: 'Social justice is part of human rights . . . Social change is linked with the transformation of society, with the emphasis on access to opportunities for development.'

Both Cohen and Emmett Carson (Minneapolis Foundation, USA) talk of power relationships. Carson talks of foundations' efforts to change current power relationships between citizens and with government, business and the non-governmental sectors, while Cohen talks of grantmaking to make society fairer by increasing political, economic and social opportunities for the disadvantaged or disenfranchised and more equitable distribution of political power.

Cohen complains of a lack of 'definitional rigour'. 'Philanthropy simply addressing the needs of disadvantaged and disenfranchised constituencies is often lumped into the broader social justice framework,' he says. 'But if the accent remains on the redistribution of social, economic and political power, social justice philanthropy will increasingly involve the "target" constituencies in the decision-

making process.' El Daly comments that many civil society organizations (CSOs) focus on building the capacity of disadvantaged and disempowered groups but don't do much to provide them with advocacy tools to influence laws or change structures.

A present need

Semantic or conceptual difficulties notwithstanding, several southern respondents feel there is great scope for social justice philanthropy. Tiruchelvam argues that after 20 years of conflict in Sri Lanka due to social inequity and racial prejudice, awareness of the need to intervene is growing. Likewise, Velasco cites Filipino grantmaking organizations that see a role for social justice philanthropy in a country that is still moving from dictatorship to democracy, saying grantmakers have wider latitude than government and the business sector and can take risks – piloting models that others can follow if successful. Varas says that Latin American societies are 'marked by deep inequities' and that social justice philanthropy seeks to address the structural issues that hinder their removal.

But there is a limit to what philanthropy can achieve. Sandor Koles (Carpathian Foundation) undoubtedly speaks for many respondents, including Varas, when he urges grantmakers to 'be aware of the complexity of social justice and their limited power to form a just world'.

Participation, not patronage

Social justice philanthropy should consider the views and abilities of its beneficiaries more. 'Our constituents shape our priorities and are involved in our decision-making structures,' says Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (African Women's Development Fund, Ghana). Momot says this affirms the power of local communities to unite and build movements for change by valuing and respecting their wisdom.

The idea of democracy is implicit in that of social justice philanthropy, which, says Cohen, has some ramifications: funders should not only fund the pursuit of justice in the wider community, they should practise it by making funding decisions more democratically. The need for participation in determining where change should happen and where funds

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should be directed is recognized. The Reichstein Foundation prioritizes projects advocating structural reform to address issues which demonstrate that consumers are involved in their management.

Is it a distinctive approach to grantmaking?

Almost by definition, this is the case in the global South. El Daly points out that Egyptian foundations have a relatively recent history, while Fauzia says that the traditional nature of Islamic giving militates against the new departure that most of our respondents agree social justice philanthropy represents.

'We believe that our approach is quite distinct from other local funders', says Osborn. Cohen and Carson agree, while Sukhvinder Stubbs (Barrow Cadbury Trust, UK) says that social justice is still the remit of only a few UK foundations, usually those with a Quaker background, so they are sometimes described as risk-taking, innovative or even 'weird'.

Some examples

Although social justice philanthropy practice is not widespread, most respondents gave specific examples. Ramdas says that all the Global Fund for Women's grantmaking falls into this category because its funding criteria are geared towards achieving equality and justice. Raman mentions the Dalit Foundation in India and two women's funds, Nirnaya in Hyderabad and Tewa in Nepal. Kisil cites a partnership between the W K Kellogg Foundation, the Ayrton Senna Institute, the Odebretch Foundation and National Bank for Economic and Social Development focussed on youth development in the north-east of Brazil. Liberty Hill 'funds grassroots organizations in Los Angeles County that are actively educating and mobilizing communities to address the institutions, attitudes and policies blocking access to equal opportunity'. Stubbs points to the Barrow Cadbury Trust's Asylum, Immigration and Resettlement programme in the UK, 'which worked to shift public attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers'. Fauzia cites the Indonesian example of Dompot Du'afa,³ an organization providing funding to be used 'in a productive, not just consumptive way'. It has established a free hospital for the poor and provides funds for education, the environment and human rights activities. Varas gives a rare example involving the business community. 'The Foundation Ideas for Peace was created out of the concern of a group of business leaders over the serious situation in Colombia,' he explains. 'The Foundation works

³ Purse of the poor people.

with the private sector to promote and consolidate peace efforts on the part of civil society.'

Velasco makes the point that social justice philanthropy should not be seen in terms of grantmaking alone. Donors can deploy a wider range of tools to support social justice, such as loans, which are better for income-generating activities and encourage communities to be more creative and productive through the discipline of borrowing and repayment. She also mentions foundations' convening role, when they use their 'clout and credibility' to draw attention to issues, which can be 'more crucial than the funds they provide'.

Who's paying for it?

The crucial problem is that there are 'precious few funders', as Cohen trenchantly says. Though Ramdas feels a wide variety of individuals and organizations are 'funding "it" because they're funding us', she admits that corporate foundations rarely support controversial ideas. Generally, it is felt that the actual amounts involved are 'only a speck' of the monies devoted to philanthropic purposes.

In southern countries, where giving is not traditionally directed towards social justice issues, social

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE – FRIED EGGS FROM SCRAMBLED

Many Eastern and Central European countries present a special case due to communism's legacy, feels Sandor Koles (Carpathian Foundation, Hungary): 'People in the former communist bloc are ambivalent towards social justice. They are very sensitive to social equality, especially in these days when they see increasing social disparities on the one hand, but social justice has a bad connotation for them because it was part of the communist ideology on the other.'

Also crucial to social justice philanthropy development, he adds, is the state of civil society. Several countries have 'no significant tradition of civil society', many languages have no translation for terms like civil society and community development, and the 'civic' has connotations with 'bourgeois', a 'swear-word in these countries 10 or 15 years ago'.

He believes a curious situation has arisen. A traditionally over-powerful state means many still look to it as provider of goods and services, and that it has 'the care of nurturing civil society', while the state itself retains an identity separate from its citizens and a jealousy regarding its prerogatives. He quotes one of the region's politicians: 'it is much more difficult to make fried egg from scrambled egg than to do it the other way round.' Under these circumstances, he believes grantmakers have a role to play in making sense of a concept so often invoked but so little believed in, but they need to be aware of the complexity of social justice in the region.

justice NGOs tend to be dependent on foreign funders. As Tiruchelvam says: 'The NGO sector has traditionally looked towards the international donor community for resources to carry out their professed mission for change.'

The lack of indigenous funders is a general difficulty in South Asia. Raman argues that the main challenge lies precisely in 'getting domestic donors on board'. Carson points out that social justice grantmaking doesn't require huge resources, but 'raising the public profile of social inequities . . . does require the will and the courage to use the foundation's cache to legitimize a topic as being worthy of discussion.'

If it's such a good idea, why aren't more people funding it?

India, for instance, has a large middle class and an affluent diaspora, but Indian CSOs have not managed to tap this potential source of funds systematically. Dr Indira Jena (Nirnaya, India) says that while donors would support female education or the rehabilitation of widows, it is harder to engage them on more general questions such as women's rights, a difficulty she attributes to 'fear of change'. Hema Khadka (Tewa, Nepal) regards the religious and cultural barriers, and the mindsets that result from them, as the major challenge, while Carson accuses foundations of lacking the 'courage to withstand controversy'.

In Egypt, there is an absence of models, a relatively young philanthropic sector and a certain unease about giving to NGOs or intermediaries. 'Local donors, whether private sector or individual givers, prefer to give to disadvantaged people straight and not through institutions,' says El Daly. Fauzia feels there are special concerns in Indonesia: some scripturalist leaders are wedded to the traditional practice that giving should be restricted to certain groups according to religion, while literal interpretation of Islamic law does not permit philanthropy for economic improvement and tends to confine it to religious ends.

Fauzia also points out that social justice philanthropy challenges traditional leaders, government and companies. 'Government is afraid that the large quantity of money will be used for activities that diminish the government authority.' This touches on a sensitive area. As Ramdas remarks, 'social change inherently challenges the status quo'. Or Cohen: 'As the products of wealth, foundations and their governing bodies may find it difficult to support a type of grantmaking

that challenges the basis of how that wealth was generated.' Or Carson: 'Foundations owe allegiance to the social systems that created them.'

This is echoed in Latin America. Varas suggests that 'the Catholic Church is a main actor in the field, increasingly reticent or directly opposed to considering proposals for social action that question issues on which it has a clearly stated position'. He adds that the economic elite that have historically funded social action are unconvinced that philanthropy can contribute to social transformation, or that it is an appropriate goal, considering the changes in balance of power and conflicts of interest likely to arise.

In addition to the desire, conscious or unconscious, to preserve the status quo, other reasons include an unwillingness to sacrifice the power resulting from money and resources (Ramdas) and foundations' discomfort with the notion of power and subsequent reluctance to exercise it to promote social change (Carson). Varas adds another from Latin America: 'The more developed the government social services, the less developed the national philanthropic sector.' Many people from other parts of the world would recognize the truth of this.

There are particular difficulties in the US. Osborn cites 'the dominance of 30 years of successful right-wing organizing and promotion of conservative policies'. Cohen mentions that 'there is no public right of review of their decision-making, no public process to challenge the decisions and choices of

foundations'. He adds: 'Until philanthropic structures are democratized . . . and there are requirements to spend rather than hoard a larger part of philanthropic capital, it is difficult to imagine significant expansion of social justice grantmaking.'

Exceptionally, Kisil feels there is no barrier to widening social justice philanthropy. He sees the challenge as overcoming more traditional, 'paternalistic' philanthropy.

Cause and effect?

After shortage of funds, probably the biggest single problem is how to measure how much good it is doing. 'Is it possible to accurately measure what is so complex to define?' wonders Velasco. Tiruchelvam feels that 'diligent appraisals are imperative', but Khadka suggests 'the measurement of change itself is a kind of barrier'. Momot says that direct service can be easily measured but raising consciousness, changes in attitudes, lobbying and campaigning cannot.

Nor does social change happen overnight. 'Achieving social justice is a long-term goal,' remarks Varas. It requires funders to 'stick around for the long haul', says Adelye-Fayemi, 'at a time when many funders want visible results over a relatively short period'.

Two respondents, however, feel that the measurement problem may be in funders' minds. Carson says that though it is commonly perceived that social justice grantmaking is more difficult to assess than other forms, 'It is relatively easy to measure whether changes in the underlying system result in more equitable outcomes for people in a specific area, for example, jobs, housing . . . than before the change was instituted'. Kisil agrees: 'It is possible to create indicators and use unsophisticated methodological processes.' Stubbs advocates reviewing the overall impact of a programme against stated objectives (rather than a detailed analysis of the outputs of each project funded).

Cohen brings the issue back to politics. 'Few in the US are willing to look at the politics underlying the outcomes movement,' he says. 'The drumbeat for outcomes pushes grantmaking to focus on advocacy "projects" – short term, measurable – as opposed to advocacy campaigns or systems reform.' For now, funders have to live without a satisfactory means of evaluation: while evaluation can wait, the communities on the wrong end of social ills often cannot.

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