Research Article

Institutional Philanthropy and Popular Organising in Africa: Some Initial Reflections from Social Movement Activists

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ABSTRACT

As popular forms of organising increasingly serve as sites for change in Africa, institutionalised private philanthropy, which has generally stayed away from such activist spaces is slowly engaging. While anecdotal knowledge exists, evidence-based analysis on these relationships is scarce. This study explored how African movements experience and see the role and nature of philanthropy in relation to their own functioning and objectives. It highlighted that it is not merely a question of whether it is appropriate for institutional philanthropy to engage, but the 'how' of engagement that matters most. As a result, different challenges and limitations emerged. The research reflected critical concerns raised by movements about philanthropic orientation, ideology, and practice, and called for radical mindset shifts from institutional philanthropy – particularly on aspects such as power, control, accountability, and impact – and provided practical observations for consideration.

Key words: philanthropy; Africa; social movements; popular organising, power

INTRODUCTION

> *The more genuine critique of the ways power is exercised in Africa is not to be found where Western political theory is searching – in the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and CSOs that are ostensibly constituted to balance the power of the State – but in the more grassroots and unstructured acts of obedience and avoidance. (Obedare and Willems, 2014, p xiv)*

The last few years have seen a rise in alternative spaces of organising in Africa, spaces that bring a different kind of politics and demand, which formalised civil society has not brought. These spaces are increasing in contexts where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are charged with not being sufficiently connected to struggles on the ground; making decisions on behalf of those they serve without being led by their priorities; and working in ways that limit and stifle local agency and power. These large, urban-based NGOs as well as international NGOS (INGOs) are recipients of the majority of institutionalised philanthropy'[a,b] *also referred to here as funders*. Seen in a resurgence of civic activism, formations and community organising, social movements are the most visible reflection of such popular organising – often reflecting ordinary people's agency in a context of extreme disillusionment at the absence of social, economic, and political justice.[c]

Social movements, and other forms of popular organising, operate very differently to traditional NGOs, and funders have not systematically engaged directly with these as a part of a broader civil society eco-system. African funders have been conspicuous by their absence, particularly when movements are demanding political reform or challenging the political/economic status quo. As new movements emerge or an existing movement gains prominence in Africa, most progressive African funders appear to experience a quandary; silently cheering on the cause for social justice but unsure

[a]Institutional philanthropy /or funders, here, refers to that philanthropy which is mediated by formal and legal structures and systems of operation.

[b]The term philanthropy is not a popular in Africa, many prefer the term "giving" or charity". These include giving of resources (time, money, skills, intellectual and social capital, assets etc.) and a range of different sources of giving, from high net-worth individuals to corporations to everyday individual and communal giving.

[c]Social movements are not always progressive. As a microcosm of society these can advance progressive or conservative agendas. This paper focuses on progressive movements for justice.

if, where, and how to engage. There have been small pockets of direct institutional support and interest, but these are few, and, with notable exceptions, often linked to particular funders' self-interest, or are instrumental in achieving a narrow thematic purpose. Rarely is support for movements offered under the rubric of enabling the space for agency.

International funding for African movements, while miniscule, has recently seen some increased interest. There is wariness, however, that the theory and practice of movements developed elsewhere – and the nature of philanthropic support accompanying it – is being imposed onto the African context. Not enough is understood about the nature of movements in Africa (which are not homogenous) and the extreme fluidity of contexts in which many operate; much less about how philanthropy should appropriately engage, or what it needs to think about differently if it does. There is a strong call for philanthropic engagement to be informed by a contextualised analysis of individual African movements.

This research sought to understand the relationship between institutional philanthropy and alternative spaces of organising, using the lens of social movements to illustrate emerging issues and lessons. This research did not look at the relative strengths/weaknesses of movements relative to NGOs, or advocate support of movements over all other forms of civil society, or that that support should necessarily equate financing. However; it recognised that movements are a core part of the civic space, have been marginalised in relation to NGOs, and must be factored into broader engagement strategies.

> *I think we need to show that this is how we're going to get to impact. If you have a diverse ecosystem that's not just working on the legal side, but is working on the social side, on the mobilising side, on the movement side; then you're strengthening a sector. And movement building is something funders often say, "Ooh but we don't do movement building", but you can't say "we do women's rights, but we don't do movement building" or "we do economic justice but we don't do movement building". We actually need to say that movement building should be part of every approach… You need the think tanks, you need the lawyers, you need the social movements, the community organising, you need the funders. That's how change happens. (Interviewee #1)*

METHODOLOGY

This research was based on a qualitative methodology that used in-depth interviews for its core data. Analysis was supplemented by a brief scanning of literature on (i) theories of social movements; (ii) African social movements; and (iii) philanthropy and social movements. Reflections based on the author's prior work on philanthropy, local agency, and power also informed this paper.[d]

This research is a long-term effort, divided into two stages. The first stage included interviews, primarily with activists who are/have been linked to, thirteen different movements in eight African countries – Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Kenya, South Sudan and Senegal. Some of these activists have experience with more than one movement. Additionally, a small number of interviews with representatives of philanthropic institutions and movements that supported organisations are included. It is important to note (i) the multiple identities people bring into their roles; (ii) some funders or movement support representatives play dual roles – with current or prior movement involvement – thus bringing in multiple perspectives.

A total of 28 interview requests were disseminated based on a snowball sampling method, and 16 interviews were completed. This sample should not be seen as a representative analysis of all African movements; it aimed to surface key issues and concerns for further exploration, in an area of study that is not well documented in Africa. A comprehensive exploration on this topic requires broader and deeper discussions with movements, funders, and support organisations.

All interviews were treated with complete confidentiality. Funders wield inordinate power in relation to those they support; confidentiality enables frank critique and a level of protection against harming existing/potential relationships.

Phase two of this research will involve a further set of movement interviews, focusing on experiences in Francophone and Arabophone countries.

PARAMETERS AND FUNDAMENTALS

- There are varied and contested definitions on what constitutes a movement. This work did not use a pre-determined definition but followed the example of many African scholars and engaged with movements based on self-identification.
- The paper does not present a standard recipe for engagement, but offers issues for funders to consider, from a movement perspective, when engaging. Each movement and context is unique and requires different interventions at different times. This type of study can only reflect and highlight individual movement's experiences – significantly more intensive movement studies are required for a more comprehensive analysis.
- A key weakness in the anecdotal discourse on philanthropy and civil society, pointed out by Obedare and Willems (2014), is that analysis has tended to segregate via institutional form. Consequently, in practice, function has tended to follow form, and organisational structure has generally shaped the parameters of funding. This study used the social movement form to illustrate the issues and experiences of this form of popular organising, but remained cognisant that movements were part of a broader sphere of organising in which dividing lines are not always defined.

[d]See http://www.psjp.org/resources/alternative-models-southafrica/

– This research is mindful that movements are themselves a microcosm of society and different movements may bring different types of internal inequalities, power dynamics, and vested interests.
– In a context where one of the biggest development critiques has been outsiders speaking on behalf of those directly facing injustice, this paper deliberately created space for the direct voices of the respondents to dominate.

A REFLECTION ON CURRENT KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

The literature on social movements globally is vast, and on the African continent, increasing. This paper does not delve intensively into the different theories of social movements or analyses of characteristics of African movements. Instead, for the purposes of the topic, it (i) points out critical debates about scholarship on African movements; and (ii) reflects on scholarship relating to movements and external resourcing.

Pan African scholarship

While recent years have seen an explosion of social movements in Africa, there is a view that scholarship on African movements has taken time to catch up. Aidi (2018, p. 1) noted "scholars of social movements and global protest have long neglected social movements in Africa", a sentiment echoed by Eckert in Berger and Nehring (2017). While earlier scholarship on African movements focused on South Africa, and then North Africa, recent work expands significantly beyond these (Branch and Mampilly, 2015; Aidi, 2018; Obedare and Willems, 2014; Manji and Ekine, 2012; Larmer, 2010; Lafi, in Berger and Nehring, 2017; Seddon, 2015). Critiques reflect that (i) most analyses tend to be national or movement specific, with cross-national/Pan-African studies remaining few and far between (Obedare, 2014); (ii) global scholarship and theorisation on social movements and civic resistance has not been adequately informed by concepts developed from global South experiences (Eckert, 2017). It is thus overwhelmingly shaped by external experiences (Altmann et al, 2017; Eckert, 2017), which are extended to African movements, bringing to bear a-historical and non-contextualised analysis (Branch and Mampilly, 2015; Eckert, 2017). In addition, (iii) much research denies the agency of movements in the South, portraying them as passive recipients of others' actions (Eckert, 2017).

Is there such a concept then as an African movement? Larmer (2020) saw African social movements as hybrid in nature, arguing against a 'distinct' African form of social movement. De Waal and Ibreck (2013) cautioned against understanding sub-Saharan civic space and movements as merely at a different point in a linear (western) projection of civic mobilisation. Lafi, in Berger and Nehring (2017, p. 685) emphasised that social movements in the Arab world, while having some western influence, are a "response of societies with a rich history of civic identity to specific traumatisms".

Looking at traditional movement theories, Altmann et al (2017), without discounting them, noted the limitations of:
– political process and resource mobilisation theories applying primarily to traditional democratic contexts, making it unsuitable outside formal or non-democratic societies;
– political process and new social movements theories applying to contexts within liberal welfare states;
– political process theory in viewing the state as the primary antagonist of movements, thus excluding labour-, identity-, ethics-, and climate-based movements for instance.

Critiques further highlight characterisations of 'new' social movements as reflecting a middle-class base, which is not aligned with the majority of African experience (Ruckt in Berger and Nehring (2017),

Altmann et al (2017, p. 16) reflected on new trends in thinking about movements, and approaches based on cultural politics, distance, exclusion, and distribution, highlighting calls for a multidisciplinary approach.

> *…a more relevant theory to explain social movements in Africa will have to contend with many issues including inequalities driven by global economic and political forces, class, identity in its various forms, culture, distribution concerns, as well as the question of expanding political rights by increasing democratization of politics.*

Looking at classifications, Eckert (in Berger and Nehring, 2017), citing Mamdani and Wamba, warned against conflating civil society and social movements, and Berger and Nehring (2017, p. 6) reflected that western conceptualisations of civil society meant that certain movements "that could easily be classed as authentic African movements, did not come into the focus of social movement researchers". Obedare and Williams (2014) reflected how formalised and legally registered civic institutions have come to dominate discourse on civic action, with disregard for the multitude of other fora that reflect resistance and agency.

Then there is critique on the issue of 'voice' and the sentiment, by African movements, for space to use their own experiences and frames to engage in practiced-based knowledge generation. Talking to this, Choudry and Kapoor (2010, p. 1) noted:

> *… the intellectual work that takes place in movements frequently goes unseen, as do the politics, processes, sites, and locations of knowledge production and learning in activist settings … many powerful critiques and understandings of dominant ideologies and power structures, visions of social change, and the politics of domination and resistance in general, emerge from these spaces and subsequently emphasize the significance of the knowledge-production dimensions of movement activism.*

Even the lexicon relating to practical discourse is problematic, with characterisations about what can or cannot be included inherently excluding many African movements. For instance, an increased tendency by some writers/funders in the United States to define movements using very narrow criteria; for example as broad-based or cross-class or excluding single issue campaigns/formations, or including multi-layered organisational alliances (New World Foundation, 2003; Masters and Osborne, 2010). In African contexts, where seemingly single-issue movements are often prevalent, such analyses miss that they demand much more broad-ranging changes or, where mass movements with distributed centres of power are seen as more legitimate than formalised alliances of civic institutions, such external tick-box notions of what does or does not constitute a movement cannot apply.

Philanthropy and social movements

McCarthy (2004) reflected on the several divergent views on the influence of funders on movements. One group, exemplified by Jenkin's (1983) channelling theory, focuses on the effects of funding on professionalising grantees and fostering institutionalised forms of action by channelling funds to fora characterised by centralised decision-making. Another group highlights the potential dangers that co-optation posed to grantee goals after funding (Roelof, 2003). McCarthy (2004) however, noted the limitation that assumes one-way power flows that does not contend with agency of activists, seeing them as passive in relation to funders, and draws attention to social relation theories (Proietto, 1999; Ostrander, Silver and McCarthy, 2000), which highlight a dialectical model in which there is mutual influence between grantees and funders. McCarthy (2004) also drew on Foucault's (1976) understanding of power as ubiquitous and emerging from interactions, seeing potential for grantees to maintain independence while influencing the philanthropic arena. Lastly, McCarthy (2004) noted the limitation of the channelling thesis in not accounting for the role of activist funders – foundation staff with activist backgrounds – in preventing or mediating channelling effects, and of collaboration between these and movements in preventing co-optation, noting that there are a range of experiences between outright co-optation and grantees influencing philanthropic spend.

Corrigall-Brown (2016) noted that while social movement funding has a long history of scholarship, the perceived importance of funding, and the relative roles of different groups were shaped by the theories of the time. Early work, which focused on collective behaviour as a critical lever to movements, did not see much importance in funding, while later resource mobilisation theory, which saw resources as critical to translating grievances into action, highlighted the role of internal and external resources. The proponents of resource mobilisation theory (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Oberschall, 1973) saw the movement's mass base as being too poor to generate resources to seed or maintain a movement, thus necessitating external resources. The critique of this theory is that it over-emphasises the importance of elite funding, and "undervalues the political capabilities of the masses by overlooking the crucial importance of indigenous resources" (McAdam, 1982). Corrigall-Brown (2016) further reflected on the existence of negative inducements, such as the ability to disrupt via protest, and Tilly's (1978) view that elites would resist supporting changes that threaten their interests. In addition, the potential negative implications of funding, from channelling dissent to professionalization and bureaucratisation, mission drift (Minkoff and Powell, 2006), acting as mechanisms of social control (Allen, 1969), and discipline (Faber and McCarthy, 2005) is considered. Lastly, Corrigall-Brown (2016) noted a key debate on elite funding as not about whether it can support contentious actions but in what context and in what types of relationships (McCarthy, 2004; Ostrander, 1995).

On the role of funding in demobilising movements, McKie (2019) noted that prior research (Clement, 2018, Corrigall-Brown, 2016, Marquez, 2003, Tilley, 2002, Markowitz and Tice, 2002) explored how external funding has depoliticised movements. Furthermore, it is primarily based on experience in 'western' contexts, Latin America and Asia, and with the exception of Pommerolle (2010); exploration in sub-Saharan Africa is absent. Pommerolle (2010), reflected on the internationalisation of mobilisation and the extraversion of protest, and highlights that existing configurations of relationships between African movements and Northern donors reproduce existing inequalities by prioritising northern models of protest (themes and tools) and that transnational mobilisations depoliticise social and political issues.

Writing about the Barabaig land rights movement in Tanzania, McKie (2019) noted the weakness of traditional theories in explaining its decline, reflecting on the role of funding in (i) professionalising leadership, which redirected accountability upwards to donors and away from the movement base; (ii) de-politicising the movement to focus on service delivery issues safer to donors rather than political issue of land rights, which was its core. Lastly, (iii) they created competitions among different social movement organisations within the broader movement, weakening solidarity and diverting leaders' time to courting donors instead of engaging on the ground.[e]

Similarly, Jalali (2013) highlighted the influence of foreign resources on demobilisation through fear of loss of funds, projectisation, fragmentation, professionalisation, and restrictive domestic laws. Jalali (2013) further highlights the free rider problem, noted by Schwartz and Pau (1992), where movements that do not have to rely on their constituencies for support pursue strategies that do not

[e]Note, while McKie's work looks at state affiliated donors support, the issues it raises provide relevant lessons for all types of external support.

require mass mobilisation. Known as 'consensus movements', they are different from 'conflict movements', which confront organised opposition and rely on constituent support. Jalali (2013) saw funding as potentially turning conflict movements into consensus movements, but notes evidence from successful cases of transnational studies that reflect the importance of first building strong local movements before engaging international support.

One particular knowledge gap is that of the relationship between institutionalised philanthropy and social movements in Africa, noted earlier by McKie (2019). Even at the level of practice, while several debates on movement funding are underway in the global North, the conversation is only just emerging in Africa – and at a nascent level. While anecdotal evidence is increasing, literature specifically reflecting engagements between philanthropy and social movements in African countries is scarce, even more so on a Pan-African level. Moreover, literature on movements and philanthropy most often talks about social movement organisations (SMOs) – formalised, legally registered movements – without reflecting on the differentiation between the formalised movements, and those that prefer to remain without a legal registration. The African continent has many of the latter; little is documented about how funders interact with these movements.

The exploration closest to this research's scope is a broader ten-country study (which includes four African countries) by RHIZE, which explores activists' views on support from outside actors. The study includes, but is not limited to, philanthropy (Miller-Dawkins, 2017), and provides a macro view, making findings on the nature of relationships and recommendations for future engagements, some of which resonate with this research. Given that the scope and scale of this research was significantly different to the RHIZE study, comparisons are not appropriate. Moreover, the RHIZE study included not only activists within movements, but also other types of activists. It is quite possible that literature on philanthropy and social movements in Africa could exist in other languages, though none of these was mentioned by the respondents interviewed. This requires further exploration.

SOME BASIC REFLECTION OF THE MOVEMENTS UNDER DISCUSSION

Form, structure and decision making

The movements studied were targeted at political and/or socio-economic justice. While some had one major focus area, often this was the rallying call for a range of issues. Understanding intersectionality in these movements is an important area of further exploration.

Most of the movements were mass-based, with two including institutions. While some comprised several hundred individuals and institutions, others comprised many thousands of individuals. Some had a formalised membership system that could be readily traced, while others operated as fluid movements where anyone participating in activities was considered as part of it, and no membership list existed. Methods of attracting people to movements varied, with some engaging in physical and/or electronic outreach to mobilise interest and others drawing in those who voluntarily showed interest. Most of the movements had a national scope, with two focusing on particular geographies within their countries. One was Pan-African in orientation.

Most of the movements were characterised by distributed leadership structures, with elected localised and central co-ordination structures, or both. Two were led by a central structure comprising founding members and two had some level of collective or localised decision-making but operated within the constraints of their host institutions. One movement was a collection of different geographic movements all advancing the same issue but with localised decision-making systems that co-ordinated with each other but had no centralised structure.

Most of the movements had well planned and operationalised systems of functioning and decision making but operated without legal registration. Three had formal registrations. All those that operated without registration had no bank accounts, receiving donations through a variety of means.

Two movements had some form of mandatory political education/movement philosophy component.

Depending on the fluidity and urgency of contexts, organising and mobilising strategies varied. Some organised through weekly local meetings to plan actions for the next week/month and others, in critical moments, had daily (or more) discussions to plan responses to rapidly changing circumstances. In others, there was a mix of regular localised meetings and centralised meetings to enable immediate actions and longer-term planning. While some used electronic media for mobilisation, the majority used personal and electronic channels, differing by context.

The range of movement action varied considerably. While primary forms of action centred on protest, some loosely organised and others with intensive levels of planning and accompanying activities. Several movements also engaged in different forms of advocacy, from local and national to transnational, while others incorporated awareness building, training, and community organising. No one tactic applied at all times; mobilisation was determined by context.

The nature of movement resourcing

Internal resourcing – the philanthropy of movements

With one exception, all the movements emphasised internal reliance and dependence as core to their resourcing, with some highlighting that this was not just about money, but about a philosophy of independent action, self-reliance, and agency.

Mechanisms for internal resourcing varied. For some, a core strategy was linked to weekly and/or monthly meetings, where short- and medium-term actions were planned, and resourcing needs identified. Members would contribute as they were able; in no cases were contributions mandatory. For others, internal costs were taken on by different members. Where movements included people from different socio-economic levels, some wealthier members contributed significantly towards everyday costs, but even those who were struggling financially often contributed over and above what was affordable to them. Contributions included money, food, transport, meeting spaces, printing, banners, t-shirts etc. In two cases, smaller costs were covered by the movement members at large, and bigger costs came from founder members directly.

In some cases, movement resourcing included a longer-term strategised and formalised activity. One movement included solidarity cells, whose function included mobilising resources and ensuring that those who are at risk or in prison have support. Another movement used task teams to coordinate various elements, one of which was resourcing. Another included intensive planning looking at movement activity, budgets, and resourcing over a longer-term, coupled with short-term resourcing for activities from its membership. One movement had a policy that it does not solicit external resourcing for its localised activities at all.

Several respondents emphasised that their most valuable and often unrecognised or under-recognised resource is the voluntary contribution of time, effort, skills, and social and intellectual capital. Internal monetary contributions were secondary to that, and for most, played a far greater role than external funding.

External resourcing – solidarity support and institutional philanthropy

External resourcing took different forms, from individual contributions to solidarity actions and support from institutionalised philanthropy, directly or indirectly.

Several respondents talked about donations from people who sympathised with the movements and contributed either at organised meetings or in ad hoc ways, in cash or kind. Others reflected how crowd funding helped significantly. These individual contributions, varying in size and nature, were often from the communities they worked with, but also from society broadly, and the diaspora. Contribution mechanisms varied depending on context and were particularly tricky for movements under threat. For most, these involved direct contributions to activists or coordinators. For one large movement, all of its support came from the communities it served and it deliberately sought to maintain that way of working.

With two exceptions, most of the movements had some experience with solidarity support from local NGOs or INGOs. These often included legal, bail, or medical support to activists' post-protest, extending to awareness raising on the legal parameters of protests, training on human rights, leadership support, among other matters.

With regard to funders, with one exception, most of the movements had some interaction, albeit with varying frequency. Importantly, with one exception, respondents indicated that they were not averse, in principle, to receiving funding. Critical, however, is the nature of the relationship within which support is given, the level of independence and autonomy over decision-making that accompanies it, and the resulting conditions. Support from funders was cautiously welcomed; most acknowledged that external solidarity and support could add value to overall aims, but these had to be based on particular principles of engagement. It must be noted that, with some exceptions, institutional funding is rarely the largest resource for these movements – primary dependence on resourcing for most is internal.

A few respondents reflected that while everyday costs and local actions were covered by their internal resourcing, larger once-off costs like national training, international advocacy and solidarity, protection and emergency support, international travel, and other costs benefited from external support. This funding was more the exception than the norm and varied in scope and frequency. The funding was primarily from international sources, though in a few cases, local funding contributed.

For governance and political justice movements, funding tended to be directed towards protection and support for activists, emergency assistance, legal or bail costs, among others, though a small number indicated support for core costs, coordination, and convening. For socio-economic justice movements, funding ranged from legal and medical support to operational activities.

Only one movement had formalised, long-term philanthropic funding agreements. Another was working towards developing consistent funding relationships, but the rest received ad-hoc support.

External Resourcing mechanisms

Three of the movements had their own bank accounts and theoretically, could accept funds directly. Two of these noted that formal registration and bank accounts did not necessarily mean that the majority of the funding flowed through these accounts. For one, funding mechanisms included both direct funding as well as funding through a fiscal agent. For the other, a bank account had made only a marginal difference to the mechanisms used; the majority of funding was mediated through NGOs or made directly to the movement in small monthly tranches, bringing with it considerable reporting. They generally felt that registering did not yield the financial advantages envisaged.

For movements without bank accounts, funding mechanisms varied. Several indicated that funders would often transfer money directly to bank accounts of individuals or develop a variety of informal mechanisms for getting cash

to individuals for movement activities or personal emergency, protection, and/or legal costs. For some this was a productive arrangement, but predicated on strong and cohesive movement coordination, alignment of values, and internal accountability. However, one respondent reflected that direct resourcing to individuals for movement activities enabled concentration of power in the hands of individuals rather than the collective, negatively affecting the movement as a whole. Another reflected how individual funding, in the context of a movement that itself had multiple factions, privileged some perspectives over others; here transparency was raised as critical.

In other cases, especially for international travel and international advocacy or solidarity, funders would pay for logistical arrangements directly. For those working under high levels of surveillance, this provided a form of protection. Others found alternative mechanisms to get funding to the movement, though the exact nature of such mechanisms were understandably vague.

In addition, some movements also had relationships with NGOs who accepted funds on their behalf or would collaborate on specific activities using funds raised separately. The choice of NGO partners was an incredibly careful one. Several movements indicated that this was not done easily and noted the difficulty of finding partners who were aligned in philosophy and respected the movement's independence in decision-making, irrespective of where funding was held. Issues of power to determine priorities and transparency over the funding received by the NGO was an issue for some, though not all.

> *NGOs are organisations. They are independent organisations but the fact that they are supporting 'us' does not make them 'us'. So, they will tell you we are an organisation, we have our staff, we have our own turnaround strategies, we have our own systems … they will never tell you how much has been given to them to serve you. They never tell you, which becomes a fragile relationship … and then some comrades do not have a better understanding how to manage this relationship. They would want to go behind the back of the intermediary NGO straight to the donor and the donor would say 'well I feel sorry for you, but I do not have a relationship with you'…. We are clear that we accept support and we appreciate support, but support has to be in a way that we walk the journey together so you don't lead from ahead or even from behind for that matter, at least you walk side by side with, in the name of solidarity. That's what we have said to NGOs, funders, and people who want to express their support and solidarity; walk the journey with us, walk side by side with us, be careful not to dominate because by that act it's sort of undermining. Do not speak for, speak with, not speak about, but make sure that your support is grounded …. Even the good intellectuals, we are clear that you can help us with great ideas but if it is not grounded within the popular masses, it is likely to fail. (Interviewee #6)*

Views on whether funding should go directly to a movement or via intermediaries varied. Some respondents preferred direct funding as a way of retaining independence and control, some preferred the use of intermediaries to lessen reporting burdens, others accepted both, while some cautioned against intermediaries who spoke on behalf of movements without including them.

> *I think there is a need for more money, more allocations to go to movements directly because a lot of money is stuck in the bureaucracy of administration and different service elements. So, while there is a need for certain strategic and genuine organisations to receive money that will be able to support movements, certain movement agendas, but there is also a need for a (mechanism] that is created that can go into the movements directly. But as well, certain bigger movements on the continent should be entrusted to be given a flexible pot that can directly support movements, not financially but materially. (Interviewee #3)*

> *Direct funding means setting up structures, appointing people to manage funds and be accountable and paying salaries – this then turns it into something that is not a movement. (Interviewee #13)*

> *Where you think the funding from organisations could get really destructive is when they were funding like summits or like conferences [about us] and some of us who were at the forefront never ever got invited to these conferences. (Interviewee #15)*

While several respondents saw direct funding as more flexible, one pointed out that while allowing some predictability in planning, the limitations of constantly checking compliance with funding specifications is a downside. For another respondent, using an intermediary was problematic as the movement appeared to morph into something directed by the intermediary. For another, the problematic dynamic was raised, of NGOs willing to support the movement when it demonstrated peacefully, but then withdrawing once the movement became disruptive, in what it saw as a necessary tactic to counter repression. Overall, sentiment was that this must be a contextualised decision, based on what movements deem appropriate at the time, rather than what funders think might work better for their own systems.

Reporting and accountability

Several respondents reflected that funders saw the lack of structure and registration as a significant deterrent. While several resisted this and opted to continue as is, two respondents noted that they registered primarily because of the pressure from funders; in both, external funding was a sizeable portion of their overall resourcing. Both indicated that formal registration did not result in significant additional direct funding, and one noted that registration

did not automatically mean they were capable of managing grants in ways required by donors; nor did it result in greater trust of the movement.

> *… the pressure came from the very funders, other than the state or anybody else, that we should [register] because they don't want to be seen as supporting terrorists' groups especially because we are radical. (Interviewee #6)*

This respondent noted that they resisted the pressure for many years, but gave in, thinking it might help with resourcing. Setting up a separate institution to receive funds was considered but eventually it was felt that the complications and contestations over control of resources between the two entities may become problematic.

Some respondents indicated that direct funding often involved onerous reporting requirements, necessitating the establishment of bureaucratic reporting structures, contrary to the ways in which they operated. These placed significant additional time burdens on the movements' leaders who could be using their time on more grounded activities. For more than one person, this caused a significant deal of internal self-questioning around their mandated roles versus the time they were being asked to spend on administration.

> *I am a leader, elected leader, I am the activist, I see me making fruitful contributions in the community by engaging the state and community. Now one of the disadvantages of this is that I have to sit in the office because I'm accountable. Now, I'm a computer person, sometimes I do not know whether I am the administrator because I must work on the deadline. It limits and it compromises what I am most capable of – being in the streets and being in the community. And that's the danger ... so when I am called [by comrades] and I am not available because I am held up in the office, I am working on the deadline with a UK-based funder, for them that is really, you have been co-opted, you are no longer serving our interest. (Interviewee #6)*

Linked to this was the question of 'accountability to what'? Some donors were seen as focusing on technical and statistical metrics of accountability, rather than enabling a discussion on what metrics the movements deem valuable. Others reflected that accountability was aligned with metrics that have no alignment with their fluid contexts, and that the metrics and systems placed great negative effect on identity and integrity.

> *You kind of work towards dignity, you act on the basis of [it] and you then find how do we enact this. Because funders function from a position of certainty, control, and measurement, because there is a sense of accountability, always, controlling the resources you have … and it just closes down possibility of exploring. It closes down the possibility of asking the question, and that, for me, is the place of dignity … and we have to find ways to function and explore the accounting on the basis of those questions, and not on the sense of control and predetermined outcomes and watching. I'm sorry; because we don't want to be held accountable to some assumed projections over the next three to five years over which we have little control. We name goals, objectives, and indicators at all different levels and things like that, all of which are made up, you know … and we have to report on how those 'not truths' are becoming truthful, and it's just a whole circus that actually just stunts our organisational life, our sense of integrity and accountability. [So], can we be held accountable to that which we do have control over, and that which we are making careful choices about. (Interviewee #2)*

> *It's very technical and again it makes managing these relationships so fragile. Donors asking about how many protests and how many trainings.… For us it's about the mindset of the people, turning the mindset of people. It's about the living inequality in particular ways. It's about how the state views us, how we view the state. It's about managing this power relationship with the powerful office for the possible change. So, you can see the priorities are really not the same. I'm not suggesting that numbers are not important as a way to report the inputs versus the output. But again, that language for the activist, I am struggling with that, because I'm the activist I am not a manager. (Interviewee #6)*

Several respondents indicated that even when funding was received either directly or informally, they ensured that reporting was given, thus the objection was not to being accountable, but that the manner of accountability was imposed unilaterally and designed to meet the needs of the donor, not the recipients, resulting in disruptions to the movements functioning and a view that donors were outsourcing their accountability requirements. Another respondent reflects:

> *We, as organisations who received money from organised money, must have our own systems and our own financial capacity and accountability. Otherwise, we're at risk of being undermined. But, I think just as much organised money must take responsibility for their own requirements, why can they not be providing ways for interface between actual practice and the world of log frames to it? it's always passed down the ladder and its passed down to the lowest point it possibly can so that funding staff check-boxes meet requirements, because it's easier to do that. Organised money, that's what it is, needs to try to find a way to engage with the power of organised people. (Interviewee #2)*

For another respondent, absence of registration was seen as an excuse not to engage in the kind of issues the movement took on, and that many funders were just unwilling to support such movements.

> *At the end of the day a lot of the change that happens in communities and, broadly speaking, even across the country is catalysed by movements and so if these philanthropic institutions were willing to support movements, they would be able to analyse that trend and say, 'ok this is where the*

greatest change per se is coming from let's direct resources here'. And I am sure there are ways of supporting these trends. So, if they have not shifted their funding priorities or resource allocation priorities, it then shows that they are unwilling. (Interviewee #5)

The absence of registration, for many movements, is a conscious and deliberate one, for a range of reasons, linked to distributed leadership structures, downward accountability, bureaucratic requirements that accompany registration among other things. For several respondents, it was also an ideological issue.

We cannot register .... It's actually a discussion we have had before, because if we are up against the system then how do we confront them by playing by their rules. So, this is not something we are considering. (Interviewee #5)

Who controls the agenda?

The heart of the question is who sets the agenda? … Because if you don't ask the question in organisational terms, rather in terms of practice and politics, ask the question: is it possible for those who are not within movements, but within a participatory political space, to act in solidarity? And then the answer is yes. Now, let's talk about how. And there your question of agency becomes critical in setting the agenda. And I think often the question is asked, can international philanthropy and funders support movements? Some of the problems we've identified … the potential exists within to crush movements and destroy, and I think that is real and it's both on a political level and a technical level. On a political level, in a sense of organisations with money have power and they're wanting to support movements that have a different form of power, and that power of money is so deeply embedded that it can undermine the very nature of the power that we wanting to support. (Interviewee #2)

For several respondents, intense negotiations need to first happen around ideology and philosophy, and the role that funding plays in the movement's philosophy, and only once resolved and the movement is comfortable with the relationship, is funding welcomed.

When approached, we first ask what is the need that the funds will meet, and then, whether it enables upholding of our principles and values as an independent movement … our fight is not only to fight the social problems. The fight is also against bad values, the fight for independence, the fight for the values and principles which will build a great country; we have to practice them. (Interviewee #11)

We make it clear to anyone giving us resources that we are accountable not even to the persons giving us resources but to the membership of the movement, that is the first person or the first group of people we're accountable to. Then, we can be accountable to them [funders] so then anything or any agenda that goes contrary to or counter to the membership of the movement and its missions definitely cannot be honoured by us. And we've had to break even a few relationships midway because of that. (Interviewee #5)

Several respondents noted that all funding came with agendas, and that it was a matter of determining whether that agenda was harmful or helpful to their goals, and managing that agenda, provided there was alignment in ideology and philosophy. One respondent reflected that while not all funding initially came with strings; sometimes, relationships that begin on the basis of independence and non-interference are later compromised, in subtle and not so subtle ways; this needs to be guarded against.

They keep on funding you; they keep on supporting you, then they will start coming with suggestions to say, 'why don't you guys start talking about this, this is what is happening'. It might be a particular issue, or particular government entity, or a particular multinational company, or a particular issue that is of great interest to them- but might not be a great interest for the movement or the membership of the movement. And then they start suggesting all these ideas, and then you know this whole challenge around in Africa, that's the culture, that when somebody is giving you money all this time, when the person is telling you to do certain things, it is difficult to say no in the face of the person. So, this even brings some challenges within the movements. Some of the leaders will start saying they are bringing new ideas and say we should start working on this particular thing' … But they will not even directly or indirectly say that this particular issue is being suggested by this particular funder who support us on A, B and C. So that's how they keep starting to influence in these areas. (Interviewee #3)

As much as movements are open to receiving external funding, respondents noted that often they found themselves in the position of having to decline funding. While some funders have said that they have tried to support certain movements, but that these movements have rejected the funding; it appears that for most movements, receiving funding is not the problem, what is the problem is the nature of the strings and the agendas attached. These range from political agendas linked to regime change, to changes in particular geographies, around branding and recognition. They see funders assuming that money equates to decision-making control.

As problematic as the external agenda setting is at face value, it holds a deeper symbolic representation about power relations, dignity, respect, and agency.

… they want to dictate the terms that would be good for them, sometimes not helping us, influencing even our programmes. What becomes their priorities versus our own priorities? They tell you what they want to see versus what we want to see. For me this is the difficult position. We have experienced this, some of them will tell us we want to meet you, sometimes not even ask you, but tell you we want to meet you on this day. Now, the language changes from mutual

respect to bossy power. Then it becomes the question of power relations ... maybe they want to meet you over two days or even three days … to take you through the programmes. They would even suggest how those two days meetings are going to be managed through the programme that is predetermined, which carries more weight about what they want to install or plant in you. And come that meeting, you have your own priorities and how you want them to be to be done and again it [the programme] moves slowly from your informality which has its own strengths and advantage, to a more formal way, which again teaches you how to be good boys and good girls. In other words, it's changing you from being a militant to be more compliant, somebody that can easily take orders. And it pains you in a way, it sort of teaches you that you are barbaric, uneducated and again it takes away the energy and the very same intelligence … it also neutralises you. (Interviewee #6)

On the opposite side of this, several movements were quite empathic about retaining agency in movement interactions with funders and being able to either deny funding or influence it based on a principled position. One respondent noted:

… we are not explicit that for this and this we can take support from outside and for this and this we will not take support, but then as issues come we evaluate each and every occurrence or each and every event independently and just make a conscious decision; does it make sense that we get resources from outside? (Interviewee #11)

Two movements had funders involved at different capacities, one in a central role and another at a broader decision-making role. More needs to be explored on this relationship but indications are that there were positive and negative impacts for movement agency.

A further issue was around selectivity. Funders were seen to only be interested in the aggressive and progressive movements that can push for faster change, but not smaller emerging movements who require support. In addition, emergency funding focused on high profile activists seen as worthy of being given bail or legal support, among other types of funding, but lesser known activists were ignored.

There are a lot of activists who are in prison because they are not known, they are not considered human rights defenders, but they have taken action and they become activists from their actions ... nobody is talking about them". (Interviewee #3)

Moreover, a gap highlighted was that of a lack of support for community organising; funders who were keen to see movements flourish were not interested in supporting or enabling spaces that would eventually lead to the emergence of a movement.

Perspectives varied on the impact of funders on the movement's internal dynamics. While some reflected that in hindsight they could see the damage caused, others strongly felt that while potential for negative impacts always exists, it depended on how the movement dealt with external resources upfront. In-depth discussions with external partners around independence, decision making, and other aspects, together with how cohesive a movement is in its values, beliefs, and philosophy, are key to mitigating potential negative impacts. One respondent noted that earlier dependence on internal resource mobilisation was affected by funding, and that in hindsight; this needed to have been engaged with upfront to prevent any unwanted effects. None reflected that their movements had any internal discussions about how external resourcing could affect existing internal resourcing. This is something movements could be more deliberate in discussing.

One respondent noted the difficulty of being in a movement hosted by an INGO with thematic focus areas allowed/disallowed depending on what that INGO had funding for – irrespective of what was demanded by communities. Another talked about the pressure exerted by funders on movements to work with government organised NGOs (GONGOs), which, particularly in a context of a repressive regime, is extremely problematic and heightens the movement's vulnerability.

Donors need to re-think the conditions to support movements – GONGOs are not the real civil society. Local level formations, in touch with people and without complicated procedures – they are the real civil society. (Interviewee #13)

There was a fair level of reflection on civil society gatekeeping and well-known NGOs acting as barriers to resources being spread further as a way of control. For some, risk aversion and donors needing to stay in comfort zones by funding those they know, issues they pre-determine, or spaces that enabled them to retain some measure of control were raised as critical.

There are donors who want the status quo to remain, so they just supporting things that would keep the middle class busy so that the middle class doesn't rise against the status quo". (Interviewee #4)

A lot of the philanthropy within the movement is also not really considered especially if it's a disruptive movement the way that [we were] because people see that and they don't want to support that, but it's necessary sometimes and I think it would be good for society to acknowledge that at certain *points it is necessary. And we do have to be more understanding about the risks and the complexities that lead to these disruptive movements, which do need the support of society and philanthropic organisations. (Interviewee #15)*

Lastly, there was acknowledgement that some donors were realising the pitfalls of existing funding strategies, and have the right intentions of wanting to engage with movements; however, funders do not know how to engage and were still applying tactics, processes, and approaches that were better suited to NGOs, but rarely suited to movements.

The nature of interactions was as varied as their number; no one mode of relationship dominates and different

modes apply at different times, depending on the individuals involved. Without generalising, a few observations are offered that can be looped back to theoretical considerations:

- For most of the movements involved, external resources were not the lever for mobilisation. These movements consult and plan what needs to be done first, commit to making it happen and then seek to figure out what resources are needed and how to enable them. For most, with the exception of once-off events, international advocacy, or high-level national actions, mobilisation could proceed independently of external resources. This, together with the emphasis on internal resources as the critical pillar of support, did not link well to the resource mobilisation theory that sees external resources as a critical lever for movements.
- Issues of agency, power, and control emerged strongly in the research findings, with considerable variation. The research showed spaces where concerns around channelling and co-opting are valid, but also where agency of the movements mitigated these influences, some with more success. Sometimes all of these were applicable within the same movement at different times, but the research showed that while donor power is often exerted in multiple ways, power is not necessarily a one-way flow between donor and movements.
- The activist/funder influence on power relations also emerged, in both positive and negative ways, but much more needs to be understood on this dynamic and its manifestations.
- Exploring whether African movements that choose not to institutionalise are better able to withstand or push back against donor power might provide interesting theoretical insights.
- Potential donor influence on some level of demobilisation through enforced professionalisation and its consequences emerged in some cases; however, these need to be explored contextually.
- Assertions that donor funding turns conflict movements into consensus movements did not bear out automatically.

It must be noted that given the limited sample size and the nature of conversations, which only sought to surface the issues on one particular aspect, generalisations must be approached warily. Overall, what this research pointed to was that considerably more in-depth exploration on movement resourcing, situated within a broader case-study analysis of these movements as a whole, historically, and contextually, is required.

SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Support spaces for movements on the African continent

An important issue that emerged was the limited connections and collaborations between different African movements. While some had developed good connections with international institutions, connections with other African movements was still in need of further attention. Emphasis was placed on movements being able to talk to each other, learn from each other, and show solidarity with each other's struggles. This had started to happen more frequently post-2015; some movements started to work across national borders, but this is still in the early stages and many are not connected enough or even know about these collaborations. These include:

- AFRIKKI, an effort that some respondents were involved in, but not all were aware of, was borne in 2016 when 15 movements agreed to collaborate towards a Pan-African framework for action. In 2018, they hosted the inaugural Université Populaire de l'Engagement Citoyen (*People's University on Civic Engagement*) which brought together 100 participants from 30 social movements in 23 African countries and the diaspora, focusing on teaching and reflection on citizen engagement, sharing experiences, advocacy and cultural activities (Rushenguziminega, 2018). AFRIKKI was officially launched to focus on solidarity support between movements, advance citizen engagement, strengthen movement actions, provide advocacy support, develop a rapid and flexible pooled financing mechanism, and continue hosting the *University*.
- Africans Rising, a Pan-African movement of people and organisations working for peace, justice and dignity includes a focus on solidarity support to movement actions/actors in different countries, enabling spaces for cross-border learning, strategising, advocacy and amplification of movements' voices, and facilitating protection of activists.
- TrustAfrica, a Pan-African foundation, together with Wallace Global Fund, American Jewish World Service, Open Society Initiative for West Africa, AFRIKKI, and Africans Rising met in 2019, resulting in the establishment of an African Social Movements Fund, which it hosts. Led by a steering committee of movement representatives (supported by an advisory committee of broader actors), the decisions made are led by the movements themselves. The fund provides both emergency and systemic support to African movements, with a focus on newer movements.
- The African Women's Development Fund, a pan-African institution is, among others, committed to supporting African women's and feminist movements through a variety of strategies – funding and otherwise – which focus on local movement support and enabling local priorities to link to and inform, national, Pan-African and global agendas.

There are other local institutions providing support to movements and actors within specific countries, as are there international agencies. The continent is also seeing the emergence of a cadre of movement trainers, who are

working with and supporting individual movements in various ways. It is important to note that the movement funding and support space in Africa is not well documented or known and considerably more attention is needed to understand and map this arena.

What kind of support is useful at this point in time?

This research has only touched the tip of what needs to be a much more intensive, in-depth, and focused area of knowledge building. Given fluidity of contexts, funding decisions can only be engaged on a one-on-one basis, as and if movements deem appropriate. It is neither possible nor appropriate to generalise recommendations on the nature of that engagement. There were, however, a few issues raised by respondents, which bear consideration:

Efforts to strengthen existing movements' leaders, provide support to emerging leaders, and bestow space for reflection and strategising, were noted as particularly important. While ad hoc spaces for this kind of movement strengthening have happened, it is not the norm, and calls for funders to think about how to support such spaces emerged strongly.

> *Movements, a lot of times in this context, are on the back foot. Because in an ideal sense the movement should set an agenda and work towards it but in this sense the state sets an agenda and the movement reacts to that agenda. And so, when the movement is constantly on the back foot then reflection is kind of pushed to the side and these spaces of reflection, because they are constantly in a process which is more of brainstorming as opposed to reflections and planning for actions. (Interviewee #5)*

Issues of principles and values emerged strongly, emphasising the need for funders to engage based on respect, humility, and dignity, which enable vastly different types of interactions, expectations, and support in ways that enable rather than destroy. The assertion that movement funding cannot be done in isolation of being connected to what is happening on the ground, in real-time was important. This requires a fine balance between being connected enough to understand the issues in-depth but removed enough to not have any influence. Support based on relationships of solidarity, where funding is but one aspect is not treated as a standard grant, and flexibility in modes of engagement and mechanisms for funding that went beyond existing boundaries was highlighted. There was also a call for mechanisms to be swift, a particular concern if using an intermediary whose systems inhibit rapid response.

Several practical issues emerged as important for funders to consider. These include support for:

- political education;
- collaboration, connection, and solidarity between movements;
- international advocacy and awareness of the movements and the issues;
- legal protection and support beyond high profile leaders;
- training around movement building and other contextually relevant issues;
- support for movement leaders to reflect, refresh, and learn from others;
- independent accessible resources under movement control or within a collective funding pot;
- support for layers of community organising that precede movement emergence; and
- learning from movement practice and experience.

CONCLUSION

In a space where evidence-based knowledge on the relationship between funders and African social movements is scarce, this research provided an overview of perspectives from a group of movement activists on their experiences and lessons emerging from funding relationships. Contrary to some assumptions that movements do not want or welcome external funding, for the majority of the movements, it is not the existence of external support that is objected to, but the nature of relationships and accompanying conditions that are problematic. The paper highlights that, most importantly, control over decision-making of resources needs to lie with movements themselves, not outside of them, and that funders needs to make significant changes to enable this to happen. While some respondents have advocated for donors to rethink the conditions and mechanisms used for movement support, others have noted that much more radical shifts in philanthropic thinking and ideology must occur before mutually respectful relationships can be developed. For them, the onus is on institutional philanthropy to make itself relevant to the needs of social movements – and not the other way around.

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