



Pathways Towards Justice

International Working Group on Social Justice Philanthropy
Meeting Report and Proceedings

August 26-27, 2002
New York City

Report compiled by John Heller & David Winder, The Synergos Institute

International Working Group on Social Justice Philanthropy

A ten member international group of foundation leaders, researchers, and activists came together at the Synergos Institute on August 26-27, 2002 to discuss and help develop a research and action plan to promote social justice philanthropy. The group brought rich experience and a diversity of perspectives from countries around the world including Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Africa, and the United States. Seven Synergos staff members participated in the discussions. Please refer to the attached biographies of meeting participants.

The motivation to assemble this group of individuals was a desire to better understand how philanthropy can be an agent of inclusion and enfranchisement, a promoter of justice, and a vehicle to address the underlying causes of poverty and other complex social issues. Discussions centered on philanthropy within countries of the global South, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and sought to bring clarity to a number of fundamental questions: What is social justice philanthropy? What is known and unknown about the approach? How could social justice philanthropy be further researched or promoted? The conceptual, cross-cultural, and time challenges in coming to definitive responses to these questions were considerable. Despite these obstacles, the meeting did succeed in surfacing a healthy spectrum of views, identifying critical issues and possible contradictions, and pointed out a range of next steps to move dialogue, research, and action on social justice philanthropy to the next level.

The meeting formed the centerpiece of a five-month planning process at the Synergos Institute on the issue of social justice philanthropy, made possible by the Ford Foundation. Together with the other components of the planning process, which included a preliminary survey of foundations in five countries and a research paper, concepts and reflections from the meeting will serve as input to the development of a Synergos Institute research and action plan to encourage and promote social justice philanthropy in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The meeting was divided into six sections, each presented in detail below:

- 1. Case Studies** Offering on-the-ground examples of social justice philanthropy through four cases studies from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
- 2. Principles and Practices** Distilling key concepts related to social justice philanthropy from cases presented.
- 3. Challenges** Recognizing the main obstacles to social justice philanthropy.
- 4. Knowledge Gaps** Assessing what is and is not known about social justice philanthropy in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and identifying research options.
- 5. The Big Picture** Exploring the universe of possibilities to promote social justice oriented philanthropy.
- 6. Synergos Next Steps** Identifying a Synergos research and action plan to promote social justice philanthropy.

1. Case Studies

Four participants were asked to present a case study describing a specific foundation grant, activity, or program that they believe has advanced social justice in their society.

Case I: Approaching Social Justice by Transforming Relationships

Presenter: Annemarie Hendrikz

Annemarie Hendrikz, former Director of the Social Change Action Trust (SCAT), based in Cape Town, South Africa, focused her comments on the nature of relationships between grantors and grantees and between staff at all levels within philanthropic organizations. “Boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ between the ‘philanthropist’ and the ‘beneficiary’...must be deconstructed, or at least, fractured,” according to Hendrikz. “The business of social justice philanthropy should be to revolutionize relationships, to enable understanding of, and a well developed ability to live with, diversity. The ‘other’ - the one who does not have -must be seen as real and equal in the process.”

In exploring further the issue of boundaries and relationships within organizations, she posed two challenging questions:

- Is it important that inside an organization there is evidence of the ‘social justice’ which it seeks to promote?
- To what extent can efforts toward social justice within an organization be extrapolated to provide useful lessons in examining social justice philanthropy more generally?

In response, Hendrikz described the case of the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT), which under her guidance had embarked on a program of extensive institutional change and reorientation. She drew attention to the boundaries within SCAT, based on multiple factors, including: race, age, culture, gender, education, language skills, religious practice, political affiliations, interpretations of democracy, interpretations of justice, material rewards and benefits based, donor agendas and expectations, and experience in the NGO and grantmaking sector.

SCAT, in Hendrikz’s view, was “determined that all voices should be heard in new policy formulation and in the organization’s strategies and operational plans; that each person should grow able and willing to take full responsibility for her/his work and development; that the conventional notions...of ‘who knew what best’ should be challenged; that in fact, ‘social justice’ should be discovered and become a reality within the organization.” SCAT took a number of steps along this path, including the following:

- Staff at all levels participated in at least one of four teams related to the following themes: poverty, HIV/AIDS, access to justice, and gender and ability equity. Programmatic theme teams participated in strategic reviews and planning with trustees.
- Each staff member had a small support team of three other staff people that could be called upon at any time to talk through problems, strategies, and objectives.
- Staff could participate in learning of their own choice plus on-the-job training.

- Staff created a forum to explore and develop non-management relationships and present proposals for consideration of the Trust.
- Policies on gender and salary were collectively reviewed and reformulated.
- Complete transparency throughout the organization on all issues was encouraged.
- The management team took time out two days per quarter to review strategies and develop its capacities as a team. Team building with the full group also continued on a regular basis, with different people from within the organization taking responsibility at different times.

The results of this change of relationships within SCAT were “breathtaking” and “often nerve-racking” said Hendrikz. “As the given boundaries fractured and differences emerged, new boundaries emerged, new solidarities developed and various forms of leadership emerged. ‘Other’ was no longer manageably in its place somewhere ‘out there.’ It was in here.”

Case II: Results at the Community Level through Organizing and Institution Building

Presenter: Nelson Colón

Dr. Nelson Colón, Executive Director of the Puerto Rico Community Foundation, explored the issue of access to affordable housing in Puerto Rico. According to Colón, a significant number of families in Puerto Rico cannot afford “affordable” housing. “The structure of the housing market impedes the access of these families to adequate housing resources and deprives them of their right to adequate living,” said Colón. The affordable housing demand in Puerto Rico represents 53.4% of the total demand for housing units; private developers cannot match the supply. The problem is compounded by the high cost of imported materials; costs that are partially affected by the restriction on using the US merchant marine for transportation.

In 1992, the Puerto Rico Community Foundation established the Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) program funded by HUD. CHDOs are independent non-profit organizations that developed the capacity for affordable housing development in local areas. The Foundation built the capacity of these organizations through a threefold approach: grant-making, technical assistance, and training. As a result, twenty-seven Community Housing Development Organizations were established, 1,175 units were built and 817 are currently under construction. Two thousand families have unimpeded access the housing and twenty-seven communities are reclaiming the right to safe and adequate living conditions.

According to Mr. Colón, the program is promoting social justice by:

1. Creating affordable housing in low income communities;
2. Reclaiming of the right to adequate housing;
3. Increasing economic activity in communities;
4. Empowering non-profit organizations to address the housing issue.

Colón made a special point in commenting that rather than waiting for or trying to prompt governmental action, communities took ownership of the solution themselves. Community Housing Development Organizations are now beginning to advocate for government policy changes that would create a more favorable economic and legal environment for affordable development housing in Puerto Rico.

Case III: Focusing on Values....Investing in People

Presenter: Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi

Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi presented a case on the organization she directs, the Africa Women's Development Fund (AWDF), based in Accra, Ghana. The fund was established in 2000, and since then has made grants to 68 women's organizations in 25 African countries, totaling over \$616,000. According to Adeleye-Fayemi, "the creation of a women's fund in Africa committed to mobilizing resources for women to use for their work is a huge step towards achieving the most fundamental objective of the women's movement in Africa: the affirmation of women as complete human beings who are entitled to live with dignity and in peace."

Adeleye-Fayemi believes that it is critically important to orient the AWDF around a core set of immutable values. The central tenet of AWDF's work is an abiding belief in a woman's personhood. Building from this central idea, the Fund's work as a philanthropic institution is guided by the following values:

- Diminishment of fixed lines or hierarchies between donors and grantees. In the AWDF worldview, donors are partners who share the visions and dreams of grantees and work with them to achieve them; grantees can also be donors who take part in decision-making.
- A belief in non-discrimination, accountability, creating opportunities, providing access to resources, and building the leadership capacities of the marginalized. Grant making focuses on strategies and issues which enhance women's leadership skills and which acknowledge their contributions in their communities.
- Grantee constituencies shape AWDF's priorities, not the other way around. Program funding areas include women's human rights, political participation, peace building, economic empowerment and reproductive rights, and HIV/AIDS. All these are priorities for the African Women's Movement.
- Investments in women's leadership by funding work that enables women to develop their skills and that of their organizations.
- Promoting a culture of partnership and collaboration within the women's movement by providing grants for organizations to learn from each other and network.

Given that the process of engagement with social change agendas is a complex and fluid one, AWDF relies on a combination of strategies to achieve desired results. Adeleye-Fayemi believes that it is not possible to de-link consciousness-raising from women's economic empowerment. Therefore, the Fund supports a combination of capacity building, advocacy, and empowerment programs at the local, national, and regional level. In terms of strategies to promote social justice through philanthropy, Adeleye-Fayemi offered the following suggestions:

- Seek out leaders of movements for social justice and change. Develop strategic relationships with them, listen to them and nurture them as individuals and as leaders.
- Be willing to invest long-term so that movements can grow, learn, evolve, and hopefully sustain themselves.
- Aim to fund organizations not just projects.

- Let funding be value-based and not just issue based, people focused and not project driven.
- Leave room for innovative and dynamic thinking. Adeleye-Fayemi noted that “people do not live their life in funding boxes, which can be ticked off. Social change movements do not fit neatly into ‘categories of funding.’”
- Pick winners and invest in them. Adeleye-Fayemi counseled: “stick with visionaries, those who can talk to you with passion, who are not asking you to fund a proposal they have submitted, but to buy into a dream that they have. Choose the ones who are crazy enough, passionate enough and stubborn enough to do it with or without your funding. *That* is social justice philanthropy.”

Case IV: National-Level Networking, Advocacy, and Organizing

Presenter: Eugene Gonzales

Eugene Gonzales, former Executive Director of the Foundation for Sustainable Society, Inc., based in Manila Philippines, described a bi-national network of non-governmental organizations called the Philippine-Canada Human Resource Development (PCHRD) program. Gonzales directed the program until it closed in 1996.

PCHRD was a major outcome of a bi-national Philippines and Canada advocacy campaign on agrarian reform, a key social justice issue in the Philippines. The Canadian International Development agency gave a C\$15 million for a multi-year block grant to a coalition of Philippine and Canadian NGOs working on the issue. Decision-making within the program was highly decentralized and involved a bi-national committee, two national committees, and four Philippine regional committees made up of more than 50 representatives of NGOs and NGO networks.

Over a six-year period, PCHRD made grants to hundreds of projects in the Philippines and Canada for training, research, exchange, and advocacy. Through the program, a network coalition of Philippine NGOs and Canadian partners became a strong voice in advocating for agrarian and urban land reform, women’s issues, and local government reform. The network provided capacity building support to 700 non-governmental organizations in the Philippines.

PCRHD contributed to formation of the largest and most influential coalition of Philippine development NGOs. The coalition, called CODE-NGO, has been able to influence national-level policy making through direct access to the president and cabinet; it has also been able to leverage significant funds for social development through a zero-coupon bond instrument.

The bi-national Canadian and Filipino coalition collapsed in 1996 due to political differences, and the PCHRD program ended.

Gonzales cited two additional examples of international collaborative efforts supportive of social justice philanthropy: Novib-Oxfam International’s Rights Based Approach to Programming and Funding and the World Bank’s Kalahi-CIDSS project that will provide approximately \$100 million directly to village councils in the Philippines.

According to Gonzales, “networks and coalitions are essential for the effectiveness and sustainability of social justice work” but “one must be ready for a principled break-up when needed.”

2. Principles and Practices

Javier Vargas, President and Board Chair of the Vamos Foundation in Mexico City, led a discussion to draw out key concepts related to social justice philanthropy as conveyed by the four case studies. Vargas opened by remarking that through this discussion on social justice “we are touching the nerve, the core of what philanthropy should be about.” In his view, the issue of inequality lies at the heart of social justice philanthropy. “Some players have been more on the stage than others. We need to bring out other actors who have not yet spoken,” said Vargas. He continued by asking: “Are poor people beneficiaries or real actors in the game? Is demand leading supply, or supply leading demand? According to Vargas, “social change and social justice is about the interconnectedness between different actors in society.”

Vargas opened the large group discussion by asking participants to reflect on the philosophical, strategic, and operational dimensions of social justice philanthropy. The ensuing discussion raised a number of critical issues and questions, drawing on the case studies presented. Key points included the following:

Process vs. Results In defining social justice philanthropy, how do we ascribe relative importance to process vs. results? Hendrikz’s case emphasized *process*: a social transformation within an organization. This raises the question of results: how can internal change improve desired outcomes with grant making or programs? Colón meanwhile drew attention to results: two thousand families now have adequate housing. How relevant is it to consider the process undertaken to achieve this result?

Scope and Strategy Where should efforts be focused for maximum impact: at the national, provincial, or community level? Similarly, how do we weight the relative importance of advocacy versus community programming or service provision? Much of what is termed social justice philanthropy in the United States, for example, centers upon organizing, advocacy, or influencing policy. In countries where people need food, water, or basic health care services, how much importance should be given to advocacy vis-à-vis direct service provision? Likewise, how pertinent is influencing policy if there is no functioning government or if the space for political action is very narrow? Where should foundations place a strategic emphasis for maximum influence on social justice issues: on advocacy (Gonzales case), direct programming at the community-level (Colón) or a mix of strategies (Adeleye-Fayemi)?

Measuring Success How do we characterize and measure success in terms of social justice? What would a socially just world look like environmentally, economically, socially, culturally, or politically? What are the milestones and markers to know if we are moving towards that world?

Ensuring Fairness A further line of inquiry centered on the issue of bias. Should social justice philanthropy be focused on serving the interest of the most marginalized or excluded

communities? Does this raise questions about the fairness given that the needs of particular communities could possibly contradict a greater common good? Could a bias toward the poor and marginalized lead to further polarization and greater fragmentation within societies already under stress?

Influence of Funding Source Although not discussed extensively, a question arose regarding the connection between funding sources and social justice philanthropy. The programs and institutions profiled in the cases all had different funding sources: SCAT (international NGO funds), PRCF (U.S. Government grant and private funding), AWDF (largely private funding), PCHRD (bi-lateral aid). How much influence does the nature of funding have on outcomes or approaches?

Universal vs. Local Definitions A final set of questions revolved around the possibility of being able to codify a universally acceptable set of criteria to define social justice philanthropy. Is a standard criteria list possible given the enormous variety in contexts in which philanthropy operates around the world? Would a single set of criteria be too limiting and not sufficiently embracing of diversity and sensitivity to place? Conversely, without a universal definition, how would the line be drawn between what is and is not social justice philanthropy? Is there perhaps a middle ground to this debate – a continuum or range of criteria that sets boundaries but is not overly prescriptive?

In spite of the number of contrasting views on social justice philanthropy that emerged during this discussion, meeting participants felt it was important to offer a working definition of social justice philanthropy:

***Working Definition of Social Justice Philanthropy:** The process of empowering marginalized groups to take control of their destinies by mobilizing, leveraging and distributing human, financial, and material resources. The process also involves transforming individuals, institutions, and relationships within society to reduce social, economic and political inequity and to increase access to rights, resources, and opportunities.*

3. Challenges and Constraints to Social Justice Philanthropy

Betsy Martin, Director of Programs at Community Foundations of Canada, led a discussion on the factors that inhibit social justice philanthropy. The session also sought to surface ideas about how to move around, beyond, and through obstacles. Martin started by mentioning the following inhibiting factors: donor interest or disinterest, gaps in research to show what works or does not work, lack of awareness of social justice issues among foundations and/or donors, legal and regulatory environments, funding sources and foundation leadership. She then highlighted other constraints that emerged from the discussion of the four cases presentations:

- The challenge presented by the need of many foundations to raise money and to give it away. A related issue is the concern that a social justice agenda may make it harder to raise money from those who have it –usually elites with some investment in the status quo.

- The sense that social justice issues are so large and daunting and really require structural change, that it feels as though there is not much that philanthropic dollars can do.
- The recognition that it will take a serious, long term investment to address social justice issues. Foundations often find it difficult to make long term investments.
- The appreciation that philanthropy in most world contexts is a relatively small actor, with limited influence or resources to make major changes.
- The desire for foundations-and especially donors to foundations- for results and the fact that much of the hard work of social justice philanthropy involves processes which do not typically yield immediate results.
- The belief that it is essential to truly engage constituents in social justice work and the recognition that this is enormously time-consuming and often expensive.
- The fact that foundations are not usually structured in such a way that reflects the community and the sense that the structure of foundations may not give them the knowledge and credibility to tackle social justice agenda.

Drawing on her experience with community foundations, Martin suggested that perhaps the problem is that foundations may lack vision and tend to think small. Could it be that the foundations focus their resources on local problems they know well without asking why those problems exist and whether or not there is something they could do to address the cause? Or perhaps it would be a lack of will or interest stemming in part from the fact that many donors and foundation leaders come from the elite which by definition has an interest in the status quo. In the discussion that followed a number of other constraints were mentioned.

- Fear on the part of Boards and staff that social justice grantmaking is too political.
- Government and other actors feel threatened by social justice initiatives that challenge entrenched interests.
- Skepticism in some countries about the role and capacity of foundations and other non-profit actors.
- Lack of capacity to communicate with, educate and engage donors in the field of social justice in a fulfilling way.
- Most foundations are not truly independent and autonomous actors.
- Social justice needs are addressed on an ad hoc basis in the absence of a systematic way to discuss and analyze social justice concerns.
- There is a lack of appropriate vocabulary to speak about social justice philanthropy. In some contexts, social justice does not resonate or is too political; in others the term ‘philanthropy’ is problematic.
- Absorptive capacity of civil society organizations is limited.
- The challenges inherent in changing attitudes, transforming entrenched patterns of thinking and relationships, of bridging different realities, and of sustaining learning on the part of organizations, donors, and beneficiaries.

The group then discussed opportunities to increase the flow of philanthropic resources into social justice programs. Participants stressed the need to communicate more effectively to donors the needs and opportunities for involvement with social justice work. One proposal was to find the

financial resources to encourage foundations with a strong record in grantmaking to take on a social justice agenda. Another was to encourage north-south learning for social justice philanthropists. It was considered important to identify foundations with a strong social justice focus, build in a research component to identify those approaches that work the best and use the results to guide other foundations.

4. Knowledge Gaps: What don't we know about social justice philanthropy?

Cynthia Sanborn, Bloomberg Visiting Professor of Philanthropy and Director of the Program on Philanthropy, Civil Society and Social Change in Latin America at Harvard University, guided a discussion on research related to social justice philanthropy. In her opening remarks, Sanborn drew attention to the general absence of research on the relationship between philanthropy and social justice in and the need for more systematic inquiry to inform an action agenda. Sanborn pointed out that in many countries, the following factors are still largely unknown:

- Indigenous philanthropic traditions;
- The variety and types of contemporary giving;
- Amount of extant wealth, amount given away, to whom and for what;
- Estimated total social spending and how private giving sizes up in contrast to public social spending;
- Role of international lenders and donors in promoting philanthropy and / or social change in different societies;
- Motivations of donors or would-be donors;
- Impact of existing legal and tax frameworks on giving;
- Impact of philanthropy on specific issue areas (i.e education) or processes of change.

In looking to future research possibilities in the area of social justice philanthropy, Sanborn proposed four guiding questions:

1. **How much do we need to know, about what, to make our action effective?** What type of research should be given priority: quantitative research and time series data, qualitative “thick description” and case studies, testimonials and practitioner reflections, historical and cultural studies, studies on legal and regulatory frameworks for philanthropy?
2. **How can we better disseminate what we know?**
3. **How can we protect and strengthen local research capacity?**
4. **Is it philanthropy we really need to know more about or social change?** Would it make more sense to study processes of social change, the actors and dynamics involved, and see where (or to what extent) philanthropy has made an impact in that process?

In discussing these questions, the following ideas were proposed:

- Case studies of social justice philanthropy showing what works, identifying critical success factors. Cases could be focused within particular countries and/or upon selected issue areas such as women's rights, HIV/AIDS and rights of indigenous peoples.
- Research should give priority to participatory research methodologies and partnership with local research institutions to assist in building local research capacity.

- Research should be designed in such a way as to feed into subsequent capacity building programs in social justice philanthropy.

5. The Big Picture

Achmat Dangor, former Chief Executive of the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund, led participants in session to brainstorm about possibilities to promote and encourage social justice philanthropy. Dangor led off with the following questions:

- How can community oriented development transform society and how can it be sustained?
- Where do we begin? How can we be most strategic?
- Who are the actors and targets? (Individual foundations, networks, governments?)
- What do we do? (Research, capacity building, advocacy, networking?)
- What resources are available?

The questions inspired an engaging debate on options. A number of participants expressed a strong need for more research. Some discussants reiterated the need to prepare more detailed case studies on philanthropic organizations already engaged in social justice work.

An idea offered by Nelson Colón sparked significant interest and deliberation. He proposed a *Global Reverse Matching Fund for Social Justice*. This is how it would work: foundations in a country or region would address a shared interest on a social justice-related issue by pooling funds and coordinating programming. Local foundation networks would then challenge a Global Fund for Social Justice to match the funds (thus, the ‘reverse-match’). Large international foundations and bi/multi-national aid would provide resources to the Global Fund. According to Colón, the system would provide an economic incentive for collaboration among foundations. Local donors would be inclined to invest, as risk would be spread among a number of local and international partners. The arrangement would focus significant resources and energy to address priority social justice problems.

In reflecting on the proposal, discussants offered a number of questions:

- Is there sufficient clarity yet on the definition of social justice for this to be a motivating principle of a global fund?
- How could significant resources be accessed for the fund?
- Who would champion the Global Fund to make it happen?
- Would the Global Fund offer support in particular theme areas? If so, what would they be?
- Do local foundations have enough absorptive capacity to receive significant resources?
- How would the local networks of foundations operate?

6. Synergos Next Steps

Eugene Gonzales and Shari Turitz, Assistant Director, Global Philanthropy and Foundation Building Program at the Synergos Institute, worked together to close the meeting through a discussion to identify concrete recommendations to Synergos for moving forward with an initiative on social justice philanthropy. Turitz and her Synergos colleagues first offered a

detailed description of Synergos' programs and strengths. Gonzales then guided participants in a dialog on possible next steps, with a twelve-month time horizon. These ideas included the following:

- **Conceptual Work:** Working Group members recommended that conceptual work related to social justice philanthropy (refining the working definition, deliberating and validating criteria for social justice philanthropy) should continue.
- **Research:** This could include a series of case studies describing different foundation approaches to social justice issues. Cases could pay special attention to analyzing the internal factors (board, leadership, funding, etc.) that enabled the foundations profiled to engage in social justice programming.
- **Capacity Building:** Cases studies could further be applied as content input for capacity building work, possibly to unfold in 2004. This may involve workshops, seminars, networking, and peer-learning activities.
- **Communication and Coalition Building:** Cases, reports, and other materials could be distributed widely to foundations worldwide to help build a 'critical mass' of organizations involved in social philanthropy.
- **Feasibility Study:** Further exploration of a Global Fund For Social Justice aimed at mobilizing matching funds for local social justice philanthropy initiatives.
- **Engagement of the Working Group:** Participants expressed interested in staying connected with the initiative, as advisors, content providers, and leaders. One possibility for engagement included identifying a sub-set of working group members to serve on a steering committee to assist Synergos in leading the initiative. The working group suggested that all participants reconvene sometime in 2003.

Working Group members asked Synergos to further develop their recommendations. Synergos is preparing a concept paper based on the outcomes of the meeting and the other components of the planning period. The concept paper will be distributed to Working Group members for review and comment.

Final Thoughts

Through the thoughtful contributions of the dedicated individuals who attended the International Working Group on Social Justice Philanthropy, the gathering brought forward a rich and colorful palette of ideas, views, and visions for the future. The challenge ahead lies in adding to the momentum created, in finding greater clarity through focused inquiry, in translating research into on-the-ground change, and in meaningfully engaging actors in philanthropy at all levels to plot new pathways towards justice.