

Establishing an Africa Grantmakers Network (AGN)

A Discussion Document for the Inaugural Meeting, April 3-4, 2009: Accra

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Introduction

The establishment of an Africa Grantmakers Network is well overdue. For many years, various groups, initiatives and processes have been put in place to not just institutionalize philanthropic practice in Africa; but also give philanthropy the status it deserves. These vary from the emergence of new African foundations and the creation of regional grantmaking associations, studies in philanthropy and various continental and international convenings. The need to establish AGN is well accepted and appreciated by different philanthropic actors across the continent, primarily for the purpose of collective action.

Several planning meetings have taken place since early 2000 primarily to clear the conceptual as well as the practical considerations around establishing such an entity. Will it be a virtual network or a freestanding organization? Can it best be established as an affiliate of a long-standing institution or can it be established in partnership with a university or similar institution? How will it be governed? What will be its main goals, functions and deliverables? All these are questions that were the focus at these previous planning meetings. More consultation on these issues still needs to be conducted given the seeming consensus that there is a need to respond collectively in the field (philanthropy) in terms of sharing experiences, identifying needs; coming up with initiatives and asserting own identities as African philanthropic institutions/actors.

The need to reposition and clarify Africa's position in global relations is critical and so are efforts to unite Africa's response(s) to global challenges. The formation of the AGN has the potential to function as a platform for diverse philanthropic actors and institutions for the development of the continent. Such a network will collate views and ideas; amplify African perspectives and methodologies; conduct mapping studies to understand the terrain; hold dialogues and convenings to catalyze ideas and collectively identify needs and strategies to address them.

It is in this context that this concept paper outlines two purposes: first it gives a concise and brief historical background on the conceptualization of AGN, focusing mainly on the rationale; key issues, processes and institutions that have been involved in planning. Secondly, the concept paper focuses on the April (2-3) convening to establish AGN. The meeting will be held in Accra-and will be jointly convened by African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) and TrustAfrica. This section of the paper outlines some activities before, during and after the meeting. These include primarily the organization of the inaugural meeting, key areas of discussion, participants, organizational matters such as governance, structure, membership, functions and strategic plan

A: Background to AGN

Philanthropic activity in Africa is as old as the first human being to exist on the continent. Philanthropy has taken many forms: some vertical (for example, the rich giving to poor); others horizontal (the poor giving to poor); while increasingly there is a hybrid between the rich and the poor. Studies across some states in Africa show that giving is not a preserve of the wealthy: the poor also give to the rich; albeit in small amounts. Thus, anyone can be a philanthropist. It is this realization that has driven many to want to anchor their development initiatives on people. Until such a time that people are at the centre of their development; any attempts to develop nations, communities and societies will not be sustainable. For philanthropy to be able to transform unequal relations in societies; address issues of social injustice and assist societies democratize, it needs to be anchored on the cultures and societies of those it seeks to assist. This means that there is a clear need for understanding both intellectually and practically what philanthropy looks like in different contexts; building an infrastructure for the thinking and practice of that philanthropy or philanthropies in that particular context, or those particular contexts as well as developing collective strategies as build blocks for development thinking and practice that respects local knowledges, perspectives, value systems and skills.

Although a number of existing philanthropic institutions remain committed to building knowledge, practice and even create new institutions of philanthropy; there is a need for a dedicated network of similar institutions. Something similar has been attempted at regional levels with the formation of the now defunct Southern Africa Grantmakers Association (SAGA) and the still nascent East Africa Grantmakers Association (EAGA). Learning from the successes and challenges of these two institutions and similar structures/organisations elsewhere such as the Africa Grantmakers Affinity Group (AGAG), European Foundation Centre (EFC), among others, the proposed AGN can become an effective network for a continental agenda.

The idea already enjoys acceptance. In previous meetings such as the Ford Foundation Retreat in Jinja (2004), the Joint Global Fund for Community Foundations and TrustAfrica Symposium (Naivasha, 2007) and other planning meetings conducted by TrustAfrica, African Women's Development Fund and the Kenya Community Development Foundation; the urgency to establish this network has been expressed. The issue therefore is not whether there is a need for such an entity but when and how it will be established. This paper presents the first concrete step towards operationalising some of the recommendations of the previous different processes and meetings. The holding of a continental meeting on the desirability to establish AGN is the focus of this discussion.

Name of the Network

It is suggested that the network of African grantmaking institutions be called Africa Grantmakers Network (AGN).

Goals and Objectives of AGN

The proposed network will among other things, aim at:

- Establishing systematic mechanisms for fostering learning, sharing, exchange and collaboration among Africa's burgeoning grantmaking community;
- Harmonizing current and existing informal attempts to have a continental body that brings together ideas, skills and people working on philanthropy;
- Building on regional associations such as the EAGA by providing a platform for cross regional learning and exchange;
- Conducting a number of studies that will deepen the sector and institutions' understanding of the philanthropic terrain, for example grantmaking landscape, in Africa;
- Building a participatory platform for broader engagement with development processes;
- Holding regular convenings on philanthropy and other related development issues;
- Conducting studies related to building a knowledge base and evidence-based grant-making;
- Advocating for an enabling tax/fiscal environment in African countries;
- Becoming a resource for stimulating giving including from the Corporate sector and the Diaspora

B. Proposed Convening

The convening in April will take place amid growing global challenges facing the sector, including the financial and economic downturn. While acknowledging the enormity of the challenges ahead in the sector, this meeting will use the crisis to find collaborative ways to respond to what seems would be many more months of uncertainty. Nevertheless, the global crisis presents an opportunity for Africa to find ways of self-sustainability. If anything, the crisis has exposed the vulnerability of African economies and other small scale ones; especially those that depend on export commodities. Although economies of the world will shrink, including growth rates, there are positive developments that the

meeting can build on. These include the new US administration and the implications on foreign relations, multilateralism, and international security. In Africa, the push-back on democracy by many states and their subsequent repression of civil societies is a clarion call on civil society, democracy actors, including philanthropies to reposition themselves on the side of the vanquished. The inaugural meeting to consider the desirability of AGN is an opportune time to reflect on these developments and find new ways of collective response and collaboration.

Issues for the Convening's Discussion

Among other pertinent issues, the convening will focus primarily on establishing the AGN. Of critical importance here will be a discussion around:

- *Structure of AGN*: what form should AGN take? Four suggestions have been put forward before. These include a virtual organization that exists only when delivering programming. The other is a cost-effective and efficient structure that can be hosted by one of the initiating groups. The third is a partnership with a university or similar institution. Finally, the meeting might consider a freestanding network, similar to other philanthropic service organisations.
- *Governance framework of AGN*: how will AGN be governed? What controls need to be put in place?
- *Functions of AGN*: what should be the functions of AGN? How will these functions be administered without encroaching into members' specialist interests? As stated above the objectives of AGN will include among others establishing a platform for systematic learning, exchange, sharing and collaboration; harmonization of informal philanthropic networks; conducting mapping studies; convenings and catalyzing regional exchanges.
- *Membership*: the convening will develop the criteria for membership. There are many philanthropic actors in the continent. For purposes of strategic focus, it might be useful to start small; but also representative of both geographic and sectoral interests. A criteria needs to be developed. The meeting will dedicate some time and thinking into this critical matter.
- *Fundraising*: how will AGN be supported? For any organization or network to be viable, there is need for substantial amounts of resources. Where will these come from? What role will individual members play in fundraising for AGN? Membership fees on their own will not be adequate. A fundraising strategy that will sustain AGN will need to be developed.

- *Inaugural activities:* in its early stages, AGN will need to conduct some activities especially those that will inform whether or not it is a player in the market place. Chief among these will be: 1) developing a strategic plan, 2) developing a fundraising strategy, 3) conducting mapping studies especially field surveys on African foundations that primarily focus on grantmaking (who is doing what, where and how, institutional needs, pivotal moments, scope and size, as well as staff components); 4. Meetings especially on the margins of major conferences/gatherings on philanthropy, for example, EFC, Council on Foundations, etc.

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