Participative decision-making in contested societies:

Examples from the field of community philanthropy

Abstract

This article examines participative, place-based philanthropy in two locations – Northern Ireland and Palestine. Drawing on the work of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Dalia Association in Palestine, the article considers the rationale for a participative grantmaking approach as well as the manner in which local communities and residents experienced the methodology. The fact that both Northern Ireland and Palestine are politically contested societies is factored into the analysis that is presented by the authors who have conducted interviews with key informants to supplement the literature made available by both community foundations. The role the community philanthropy organizations played in providing an important added value dimension to traditional grantmaking is described and conclusions drawn.

Introduction

The past twenty-five years has seen a marked growth in community philanthropy organizations; most notably community foundations, but also place-based women's funds, YouthBanks and other forms of local multi-stakeholder grantmakers that mobilize resources for this purpose. Although these organizations are as diverse as the contexts within which they operate, three key characteristics mark them out as a field. The first feature is that of resource mobilization, which unlocks local philanthropic funding and community assets in order to respond to needs and opportunities through grantmaking and convening. Then there is the investment in building the capacities and capabilities of community-based organizations, with an emphasis on the sustainability of a sector that underpins community resilience; the third feature relates to the work of community philanthropy organizations in building trust, within and between, the communities that they serve, as well as between various sectors in society.

The Community Foundation Atlas (Tittle, 2014) released in October 2014, identified over 1,800 community foundations around the world, with the majority outside North America established in the last 25 years. This number increases if other community philanthropy organizations are included. Knight, when analyzing a sample range of those organizations charted in the Atlas concluded that community foundations are: *"Organizations that typically are grantmakers that are highly accountable to local people, playing key roles in building trust, inclusion and equity*

in communities, while strengthening the capacity of civil society and building assets for the benefits of the community. The key words are 'trust', 'assets' and 'capacity'." (Knight, 2014).

This analysis extends the understanding of the field developed in previous work drawn from the grantmaking experience of the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) and consultations carried out with community philanthropy organizations themselves (Hodgson, Knight & Mathie, 2012 and Hodgson & Knight, 2012). While there are multiple stories of community philanthropy which provide a rich and diverse narrative, there is agreement around a shared focus on building vibrant and sustainable communities.

It is this focus that sites community philanthropy geographically and provides it with a sense of place. Murdoch (Murdoch, Garrigan, Lavin-Loucks, Murdoch, Hess & Thibo, 2007) compared place-based philanthropy with 'traditional' philanthropy, where the latter prioritizes issues and problems in isolation rather than considering them in the context of communities. The very adaptability of community philanthropy, in its practice, allows for attention to be given to community priorities in the context of place, particularly where community philanthropy organizations subscribe to values such as the building of an inclusive and equitable society (Knight, 2012). The situation is considerably more complicated, however, when community philanthropy organizations find themselves working in violently contested societies. In these circumstances the question needs to be posed – what are the specific challenges, and opportunities, for a place-based funder?

This study looks at the experience of two such funders – the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the Dalia Association in Palestine. Although the political contexts that they are working in are very different, both share an acute awareness of the politicisation of both local communities and resource allocation. The study describes a participative grantmaking approach adopted by both funders and considers broader issues related to place-based conflict transformation strategies. Finally, it will draw out learning considered relevant to the practice of community philanthropy in situations of conflict.

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) was established as an independent grantmaking foundation in 1979 in response to community advocacy for a funding source that was not curtailed by government narrative or security considerations. Political instability, combined with high levels of deprivation, fostered the growth of large numbers of community-based groups responding to the needs of a society that was both internally divided and experiencing high levels of violence. The Board of Trustees of the new foundation was structured to reflect both sections of this divided society and included individuals with a working knowledge of community development. Serving a region with a population of some 1.6 million, CFNI mobilized resources, engaged in grantmaking and purposely adopted a networking role to bring diverse communities together around shared concerns (Kilmurray, 2012).

Working in the context of ongoing violence the three main options for CFNI were: (i) to ignore the conflict as being too divisive and off-putting to potential donors; (ii) to focus on community relations and conflict related issues as the primary area of concern; or (iii) to support local community groups by responding to their priorities while being cognisant of the impact of the

political conflict. In adopting the third approach much effort was invested in building relationships of trust and respect with activists in the many "single-identity" communities across Northern Ireland, which are characterized by populations that are either 90% Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist or 95% Catholic/Nationalist/Republican. The theory of change adopted (although rarely articulated) was that community development and empowerment, when based on principles of inclusion, participation and equity, would contribute to eventual conflict transformation.

The advent of the main republican and loyalist ceasefires in 1994, and the acceptance of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (even the naming is divisive) four years later, allowed CFNI to develop a more explicit peacebuilding/conflict transformation role. This extended the remit of the foundation to work with political ex-prisoner and victims/survivors' groups, alongside extending its theory of change to recognize the contribution of local communities to peacebuilding by making political negotiations relevant to community priorities and concerns and encouraging cross-community understanding.

The Dalia Association, Palestine

Dalia Association is Palestine's first community foundation, starting its work in 2006, with the mission to mobilize and utilize resources to empower a vibrant, independent and accountable civil society. The association was established by members of the Palestinian community from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Israel and the Diaspora, in the incredibly challenging political circumstances of the region. Three different elements influenced the formation of Dalia: (i) the impact of political developments, including Israeli occupation and recurring violence; (ii) extensive consultation with Palestinian civil society leaders, activists and potential donors; and (iii) an interest shown by leaders in international philanthropy. A shared vision was agreed around working to realize Palestinian rights to control their own resources and sustain their own development.

Dalia Association developed a programme of work which included the mobilization of both financial resources and assets in kind; linking knowledge and expertise with those community activists working in local areas; designing community-controlled grantmaking; and acting as an advocate for systematic change, with particular reference to the management of international aid. Unlike the changing circumstances of Northern Ireland, Palestine is still caught in a cycle of political violence and occupation, with the priorities of the Dalia Association reflecting this reality.

Let the people decide: Two models of participative grantmaking

As early as 2008, the Dalia Association implemented a pilot initiative in community-controlled grantmaking in the small Palestinian village of Saffa. Located to the west of Ramallah, the village has a population of some 4,000. Initial information about local community priorities, needs and capabilities was gathered by representatives of Dalia. The grantmaking resources allocated to the pilot amounted to $12,000, reflecting both the limited resources available, and the belief that small grants can unleash community creativity and facilitate community participation. The approach adopted involved the following steps:

- Invitations issued to village residents to attend an open meeting to discuss community priorities;
- 38 people turned up for the meeting and were told that they would be deciding which four local Saffa community organizations would be funded (this information was not shared in advance in order to prevent lobbying);
- Representatives of Saffa-based community groups were given 10 minutes to present their current work and their plans for the future, as well as to answer any questions from their audience;
- Every person in attendance voted for their four preferred organizations (those chosen included the Saffa Sports Club, the Farmers' Committee, Morooj Cultural Center and the Saffa Women's Committee);
- The available $12,000 was divided amongst the meeting participants (each controlled $353) who could then allocate their holding among one, or more, of the four selected organizations;
- The ballots were opened in front of the audience and the grant amounts calculated (they ranged from $1,768 to $3,600).

Follow up took the form of visits and workshops to support the local activists in thinking through issues from planning to budgeting, and from community engagement to evaluation. A report-back meeting was also organized to ensure transparency and local accountability, with grant recipients reporting on the work funded and carried out.

Over the following years the Dalia Association refined its methodology and extended the approach to the Al Zawiya village in Salfeet, and Sanour village, one of the historic 'throne' villages, located 14 km. from Jenin. Each village is home to some 5,000-6,000 residents and both are heavily dependent on agricultural, although Al Zawiya is particularly disadvantaged, losing over 40% of its agricultural land to the nearby Israeli 'Annexation'/'Security' wall. One of the selection criterion identified for participation in the Village Decides programme was the number of active community-based groups operating at village level, and the acceptability of the consensual grantmaking approach. Another addendum was the election of a local village Monitoring Committee during the course of the open meeting in order to ensure complete transparency.

The programme designed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland differed in certain regards. The funding was provided to CFNI by a large UK grantmaker, the Lottery Charities Board, which was concerned that there were specific geographical areas that had either not applied for, or received, their 'fair share' of lottery grants. CFNI agreed to work with 49 such areas across Northern Ireland, with grant monies averaging some $50,000 available for each area. The challenges faced included the fact that in some of the designated areas there were few active community groups; while in other areas there were competing political and/or social groups. CFNI was also concerned that a traditional responsive grantmaking programme would simply result in grant 'winners' and 'losers', which in single-identity communities could be portrayed in terms of a sectarian grant count. It was decided to do things differently.

A Fair Shares Advisory Committee was set up by CFNI to agree the strategic framing of the programme. Its membership was selected from regional NGOs working on youth development, active aging, community development and anti-poverty issues. The agreed process involved:

- Organizing information roadshows in each of the 49 areas (or a combination of adjoining areas) to explain the programme approach and the grant money available;
- Holding meetings in the areas with an invited attendance of all existing community-based organizations/groups and other stakeholders, such as health agencies, local authorities, etc. working in the community in order to discuss community priorities;
- Inviting those attending the meetings to establish a Local Area Steering Committee;
- Once local priorities were agreed, inviting 'expressions of interest' from local groups as to how the money might be allocated and used;
- Sharing the 'expressions of interest' received with all those attending the community meetings and continuing facilitated discussion until agreement was reached on one composite proposal for the area funding;
- This proposal, supported by a CFNI staff member, was duly presented to the overall Programme Advisory Committee and CFNI Board for ratification. A letter of offer for the grant was issued to an agreed lead partner organization in each area to fund the composite work programme.

As in the case of the Dalia Association, follow up was in the form of visits, further discussion and training provided by CFNI staff, with the emphasis being placed on developing a cooperative rather than competitive mode of work within each local area. The Fair Shares programme took place over a six year period and was externally evaluated (Horsley & Grant, 2009).

While there were some similarities of practice in the approaches adopted in Northern Ireland and Palestine there were also differences as reflected in the table below:

TABLE 1 – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN APPROACH

	No. of Communities Served	Level of Grants Available	Timescale	Nature of Grantmaking to CBOs (Community Based Organizations)	Nature of Decision Making	Residents take Final Decisions	External Funding Partner Involvement
Palestine	3	$12,000 per village	1 year	Support for selected existing CBOs	One open residents' meeting	Yes	No
Northern Ireland	49	$5,000 - $50,000 per area	6 years	Emphasis on partnership working between CBOs	A number of facilitated meetings	No – ratified by CFNI Advisory Committee and Board	Yes

Voices from the field

Notwithstanding the differences in the grantmaking design, the similarities in approach were reflected in the comments received from community residents involved. People felt that:

i. The processes adopted were open and transparent;
ii. They liked the sense of engagement and respect shown for local priority setting; and
iii. They welcomed the fact that both Dalia Association and the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland had shaken the comfort zone of traditional grantmaking approaches.

A community meeting, attended by the authors, in the Al Zawiya village community centre in Palestine included members of the local Village Decides Monitoring Committee. The village is decorated with noticeboards publicizing physical infrastructure programmes funded by international donor organizations, but the community representatives pointed out that transparency is equally important for "small community-based organization grants". Financial reports on the work funded are presented to the whole village, as well as being placed on the Dalia Association website. It was a similar story in Sanour, where community activists confirmed that Monitoring Committee members could not be representatives of the funded groups – a first lesson in conflict of interest policy. They also explained the transparent procurement procedures adopted. As some of the projects funded included the purchase of sheep, and another involved mechanical work on an old tractor, the Monitoring Committee oversaw the tender selection process, including the opening of bids. Furthermore, they followed up on the implementation of the agreed community activities. Transparency was also flagged up by local people as an important aspect of the Fair Shares programme.

The level of community engagement offered by the funder was reflected in feedback received from participants in both The Village Decides and the Fair Shares programmes. In Northern Ireland a Belfast community activist remarked – "They (CFNI) came to us – they wanted to engage with us. They were proactive in their approach. This was encouraging and we went on to engage with many young people to get involved in volunteering in the community . . . and building social capital that had a lasting impact here". A woman working with the Gailliagh Development Trust in Derry (Northern Ireland's second city) agreed – "Inviting communities to say how best funds could be used to meet need is unique in grantmaking experience and very empowering. Involving all in the debate around local need and local solutions meant it democratized grantmaking and created an opportunity to realize our ambitions and to succeed in meeting the objectives we set. It also attracted other funding opportunities." In Palestine, a Sanour resident expressed surprise when he found that the Dalia Association was "Not just coming to collect information", as was the case with many other donors. It was specifically noted that Dalia always remained solution focused if there were any problems (and there were), without 'punishing' them. Appreciation was expressed for the fact that –"Dalia gave us the push; Saeeda (then Dalia Association CEO) gave us the courage".

By far the most extensive area of comment (Horsley & Grant, 2009 and Al Zawiya and Sanour interviews, 2015) related to community participation. Fourteen Al Zawiya village activists proudly presented a video of their work and commended the Village Decides experience for recognizing that local people can make a difference. One woman described how she felt during the allocation of the funding – "My vote works – I have power." Another spoke about the importance of accepting that "Any small amount of money would make a difference (where the

decision-makers) know the people." A member of the Sanour Women's Club agreed – "People really felt the ownership of the money (offered by the Dalia Association), they divided it down to half a dollar". The process itself was felt to be empowering, enhancing local confidence. These themes of local ownership and empowerment were also reflected in the Northern Ireland experience. A community activist from a rural area commented - "We like being trusted to know what needs there are in our community"; whilst in West Belfast another participant noted – "The programme was really user friendly and not just a tick box. It was about reality. We were allowed to take ownership of the project. We knew the problems that existed and how to resolve them."

Another important issue that emerged from both the Village Decides and the Fair Shares programmes was the need for funders to encourage cooperation rather than competition between community-based organizations. Interviewees from both Northern Ireland and Palestine made this point, saying that the participative approaches adopted by the Fair Share and the Village Decides programmes helped community-based groups to adopt a holistic approach rather than competing with each other. In the village of Sanour people recognized that prior to the Village Decides initiative there had been in-fighting between local families, but that they were now -"Discussing things with each other that they didn't before. . " Prior to this people would not attend each other's meetings; indeed the situation was so bad that when Saeeda (the Dalia CEO) took the bus from Ramallah to Sanour, to initiate the grantmaking approach, she was told by other passengers – 'Turn back, they'll never cooperate!' Events showed that change can happen.

Learning from the participative approach

Comparing the Village Decides and the Fair Shares approaches, it can be seen that there were differences in terms of (i) levels of funding available and the time period for grant spend; (ii) design of the local decision-making process; (iii) resources available for the management and administration of the programmes; and (iv) programme follow-up. Overall, CFNI had considerably more resources to call on, although, unlike Dalia Association, was in a re-granting relationship with an external funder. While this funder was open to the participative design promoted by CFNI, it did entail additional layers of programme reporting.

The levels of funding available to the programme areas were substantially higher in Northern Ireland, and the time period for both community planning and implementation of the agreed activities was also considerably longer than in Palestine. The latter offered funding on the table within three weeks of the village vote, but was flexible with timing if difficulties were experienced, as when one of the organizations selected in Sanour had to be negotiated out of bankruptcy. The limited availability of funding was also used as an opportunity to encourage the villages themselves to identify additional resources to increase the money available. In Sanour this was contributed in kind, often in the form of organizational fees; in Al Zawiya connections had already been made with philanthropic community members living in Jordan. The community consultation and planning approach took place over an extended period in Northern Ireland but unlike the Village Decides approach, the opportunity was not taken to encourage local donations to maximize the funding available. However, where seed grants were provided under the Fair Shares programme they often levered in additional statutory resources for longer-term support.

Another difference related to the direct democracy methodology that underpinned the Dalia Association vision for the Village Decides work. This is clearly linked to the philosophy of the Association itself which emphasizes the importance of Palestinians participating in supporting Palestinian-led social change and sustainable development. This approach was described by one participant as being "More transparent than any other election" that they had experienced, although it was dependent on who turned up to the community meeting and what organizations won support on the day. The determining factor was more local organizational credibility than forward looking community planning, an issue that some municipal representatives were unhappy with. The fact that local residents were responding to an invitation from Dalia that did not specify that the allocation of grant money would be on the agenda, in order to prevent lobbying, had to be balanced against the benefits of the village having time to think through community priorities. The CFNI strategy was more about engaging with existing community-based organizations to enhance local participation in cooperative and consensual community planning. While the area information roadshows were open and accessible to all residents, it was community activists, and local statutory sector stakeholders, that formed the participants in the various follow-up seminars and workshops. Equally, both the process to be adopted and the grant money available, was publicly stated from the outset. The emphasis was placed on the agreement of community priorities rather than local people engaging in direct democracy; indeed, the final decision-making process involved the CFNI Board of Trustees signing off on the grant allocation.

Two other issues of importance are:

- The administration and management of the Village Decides and Fair Shares programmes; and,
- Consideration of sustainability issues.

In terms of administration and management both programmes required considerable staff time, and, in the case of Northern Ireland, the cost of additional facilitators and mentors to support community agreement. The ability to respond in a sensitive and flexible manner to local people required Dalia Association and CFNI staff to be readily available to travel to meet the local groups. This can be a major issue for poorly resourced community philanthropy organizations, despite the fact that it is one of the most valuable attributes of being a place-based funder. The two community foundations also invested in technical support in the areas of project planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation, and other related topics to help build the longer term effectiveness of the groups and communities involved. The provision of this capacity-building approach is not always attractive to donor funding that is necessary to cover the costs of ensuring added value in a 'grants plus' approach.

The question of sustainability was addressed in a more considered fashion by Dalia Association, where efforts were made to encourage the selected villages to establish their own Village Funds. This did happen in Al Zawiya, where two $1,000 challenge grants provided by Dalia were duly matched by village donors and a diaspora philanthropist; a further $6,000 challenge grant was partially matched. Several public meetings were held to agree priorities for the fund and Dalia provided training on grantmaking and financial processes, as well as continuing to be the fiscal sponsor of the village fund. In Al Zawiya, local activists are currently evaluating the impact of a micro-loan scheme that they put in place, with a view to looking at a longer-term fund. Sustainability in Sanour is tied up with the refurbishment of a Farmers'

Cooperative tractor undertaken with the help of an initial Village Decides grant. The tractor has now been sold for triple the value that it would have brought in as scrap metal. A decision has been taken to invest the profit in a chicken breeding initiative rather than a village fund. There were no similar approaches adopted in Northern Ireland where longer term sustainability was seen more in terms of better intra-community relationships and enhanced linkages between local area activists and other funders and statutory agencies. The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland did organize a series of conferences and meetings to facilitate networking and inter-sectorial relationship building given that the benefits of both maintaining and building on good community relationships is particularly important in contested societies, where the existence of trust is critical.

The specific challenges of place-based work in contested communities

The nature of both the political landscape, and the conflict itself, influences how place-based community philanthropy organizations work in violently contested communities. One common challenge is the rapidity with which conditions can change, requiring a responding adaptability and flexibility from local funders. However while these elements are essential, so too is the need for a clear value base in order to maintain a bedrock of principled strategy. Without the latter, the inherent community suspicions that flourish in situations of violent conflict, can distort and misinterpret the funder objectives.

The situation in Palestine meant that Dalia Association was working with villages that were uniformly resentful of Israeli occupation, security apparatus and settlements, but still grappled with intra-community tensions within the villages selected for the Village Decides programme. One area of tension was highlighted in Sanour, where 80% of the village belonged to one 'family'; another related to the public position of women. In the Northern Ireland situation, CFNI was working with both single-identity Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities, often located in the most violently contested areas. The stage of conflict transformation in the North (post ceasefire and post Belfast/Good Friday Agreement) did allow the Community Foundation to be proactive in bringing local activists together across sectarian divides. While not always enthusiastically welcomed, the credibility of the Community Foundation itself enabled it to build in a cross-community networking approach to augment its grantmaking through programmes such as Fair Shares.

Specific challenges of place-based grantmaking in divided communities include dealing with circumstances and perceptions of:

- Mutually exclusive physical territoriality within which single identity communities take refuge from 'the other side'. This can result in different levels of community development with less developed/active areas feeling victimized.
- Internal intra-community tensions with local 'gate-keepers and controls often linked to political and/or paramilitary allegiances.
- Anxieties about being seen as cooperating with 'the other side' for fear of accusations of collaboration or political sell-out.
- The perception that 'their' community (whichever side that might be) gets more resources/attention/power than 'us', causing suspicion about funder motivation; and
- A sense of being marginalized, mistrusted and demonized by decision-makers, both internal and external.

These factors together demand funder awareness of the need for transparency; community insight; a commitment to inclusion and the building of community relationships, alongside a clear value base. Trust is hard won and needs to be nurtured between funder and local communities in their totality, but at a pace that is appropriate to the stage of the conflict and can win the effective participation of local people.

Another aspect that is common in contested societies is the experience of the impact of external aid programmes that are often designed and delivered in a top-down manner. There have been three European Union PEACE Programmes in Northern Ireland over the period 1995-2014; each further removed from the developmental needs of the most marginalized communities and from any sense of community decision-making. The multiplicity of development aid initiatives in Palestine offers an even more complex picture, where local reference is made to 'benevolent humanitarian occupiers', encompassing INGOs as well as aid agencies. Both Dalia Association and the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland has experience of how apparently well intentioned policies can be distorted in implementation by the rigidities of bureaucratic demands, oppressive administration and an emphasis on short-term project outputs rather than development outcomes. Consequently, both the Village Decides and the Fair Share programmes were consciously designed to model a funding alternative.

The need to emphasize the importance of cooperation and community empowerment in difficult political circumstances, rather than contributing to a fund 'winner' and 'loser' scenario that can all too easily be interpreted locally as investment on one particular political identity/allegiance rather than the other is critical. The drawn out community consultations undertaken by CFNI reflected the fact that the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community tends to be less organized in bringing forward community plans than their counterparts in Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities, thus time and support was invested to ensure their involvement. Meanwhile in Palestine, Nora Lester Murad, a founder member of Dalia Association, acknowledged that although the Village Decides process is democratic and transparent, it does not necessarily transcend traditional lines of conflict. To achieve this, people need the confidence to move beyond familial and political allegiances that splinter communities. While the current political context in Northern Ireland allows this to happen to a certain extent, the situation is more difficult in Palestine. In both situations, however, it takes long term relationships of trust and credibility to enable a place-based funder to adopt the necessary challenge role. The CFNI experience in recent years shows that it can be done.

Points of learning

There are a number of points of learning that can be drawn from the participative grantmaking strategies described. The first is the need to adopt an inclusive approach to community-based engagement, recognizing that even in contested societies communities are heterogeneous in nature. Consequently particular attention must be paid not only to participation, but the active involvement of marginalized and/or silenced groups. For its part, Dalia Association spoke about being conscious of the need to secure the representation of women's voices in such a manner that they felt safe and secure in their participation. CFNI was conscious of the need to ensure the full range of community engagement, across both political and social spectrums. The task of identifying potentially silenced and/or silent community voices is important in any

place-based scenario, but in contested societies requires an explicit willingness to think through the obstacles to effective engagement.

The second point is that participative, place-based funding offers the ability to hear voices that reflect the lived reality of people's lives rather than priorities that are determined by externally designed donor guidelines. The evidence drawn from Palestine and Northern Ireland suggests that by listening to local people with respect there is greater potential to build relationships based on trust, that can in turn allow funders to connect often diverse communities with each other around points of common interest, as well as being be in a position to respond to the pulse points of opportunity and change at community level as they arise. In contested societies, depending on the stage of macro-level conflict transformation, this can allow inter-community peacebuilding initiatives to be introduced.

The third learning point is about the potential power of small grants in building local community confidence and solidarity. As Dalia Association reflected on the situation in Palestine – "We have many projects with tens of thousands of dollars, but we learned best from this project with a small amount of money". What these grants offer is as much a validation of the importance of locally directed community action, as it is the scale of the resources themselves. However, to be effective in the longer term there needs to be the potential to build on the initial investment which underlines the importance of taking action to address the challenge of sustainability (Salam, Burghal & Jiryas, 2010).

The fourth point relates to the added value process that positions grantmaking as an essential part of a larger development process. Materials produced by the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group and cfleads (Feierabend & Merenda, 2014) draw usefully on the experience of place-based foundations in the USA with an interest in resident engagement, noting that – "As community foundations have become more involved with their communities, expanding their role beyond grantmaking, resident engagement has emerged as a practice that is helping them make more sustained impact" (Feierabend & Merenda, 2014). The experience of both the Village Decides and the Fair Shares programmes demonstrate how grantmaking itself can be part of that process, but it works best when there is the added value dimension of support, networking and the sharing of peer learning. In violently contested societies, there is a specific need for community funders to think around corners in order to engage in added value grantmaking that delivers participative community initiatives that are more than the sum of their parts.

Finally, genuinely participative grantmaking, which like Dalia Association appreciates the importance of the experience of direct democracy and active citizenship, has a role to play in offering an insight into effective civil society. This is particularly important when working with local residents and communities that have been effectively disempowered due to their circumstances.

On the more negative side there is the need for community foundations, and other place-based funders, to recognize that this work comes at a financial cost to the organization itself. Added value work needs to be resourced, and where there is a genuine sharing of decision-making power with local residents/communities, this can come with an element of reputational risk. These opportunities and challenges are summarized in the table below:

Opportunities and challenges from evidence-based participative grantmaking				
	Community Relevance of Grantmaking	Resource Mobilization	Positioning of Community Foundation	Building Social Capital and Trust
Opportunities	Grantmaking grounded in locally identified priorities.	Small grants can make a difference.	More equitable decision making between donor interests and local residents.	Relationships built with marginalized groups by participative approach that models direct democracy.
Challenges	Need to involve all sections of the community.	Need to mobilize resources to fund the added value work of Community Foundations.	Reputational risk-taking around issues and activities funded.	Need to consider community issues identified in terms of macro policy challenges.
Suggested Actions	Develop an inclusive network of local activists.	Importance of planning to address longer term sustainability issues.	Need to establish lines of communication between donors and local communities.	Importance of creating inter-sectoral policy channels and using enhanced social capital to challenge single-identit/issue perceptions.

The specific challenges and opportunities facing community philanthropy organizations working in contested societies have been outlined over recent years by two philanthropic initiatives - the Foundations for Peace Network, a peer learning network of locally based funders working in divided societies and the Global Alliance for Community Philanthropy, a learning consortium (comprised of the Global Fund for Community Foundations, Aga Khan Foundation, USAID, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Inter American Foundation and the Ford Foundation) that focuses on the contribution of community philanthropy. Both recognize the potentially important role of a community philanthropy that models participative and sustainable approaches to place-based work. If space is considered place with attitude, then it is certainly timely to create space for resident/community participation in philanthropic practice.

Avila Kilmurray, GFCF Director – Policy & Strategy

Nora Lester Murad, Dalia Association

June 2015

References

Dalia Association – www.dalia.ps

Feierabend, K. & Merenda, C. (2014) Resident Engagement Guidebook – Exploring Readiness Options: The Aspen Institute, Community Strategies Group & cfleads: www.cfleads.org

Foundations for Peace: www.foundationsforpeace.org

Hodgson, J. & Knight, B. (2012) A Different Kind of Wealth – Mapping a Baseline of African Community Foundations: GFCF & TrustAfrica: www.gfcf.org

Hodgson, J., Knight, B., & Mathie, A. (2012) The New Generation of Community Foundations: Coady Institute, Canada

Horsley, M. & Grant, P. (2009) Fair Share Northern Ireland: Community Foundation for Northern Ireland: www.communityfoundationni.org

Kilmurray, A. (2012) Learning as We Go, 1979-2012: Then, Now, the Future – The Role of Community Philanthropy in Progressive Social Change: Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

Knight, B. (2012) The Value of Community Philanthropy – Results of a Consultation: Aka Khan Foundation & C.S. Mott Foundation, USA: www.gfcf.org

Knight, B. & Milner, A. (2013) What Does Community Philanthropy Look Like? Case Studies in Community Philanthropy, Vol. 1.: C. S. Mott Foundation, USA: www.gfcf.org

Knight, B. (2014) Dimensions of the Field – An In-Depth Analysis of the Community Foundation Movement: www.communityfoundationatlas.org

Murdoch, J. with Garrigan, B., Lavin-Loucks, D., Murdoch III, J., Hess, L. & Thibo, M. (2007) The Place Based Strategic Philanthropic Model: Research Brief: Center for Urban Economics@UTD

Salam, W.A., Burghal, W. & Jiryas, F. (2010) ABC Evaluation Report – 'The Village Decides' Program: Dalia Association. www.dalia.ps/files/Zawia%20Evaluation-The%Village%20Decide%20Program.pdf.

Tittle, D. (ed) (2014) Community Foundation Atlas: Centris, Cleveland Foundation, GFCF & WINGS: www.communityfoundationatlas.org/about