

“What is Community Philanthropy?” Podcast Series



Transcript of Episode 3

Terry: Welcome to part three of this podcast series ‘What is community philanthropy?’ Renji set the scene for us in the first two episodes, with his story of the journey of the Dalit Community Foundation. Now we’re going to meet with five people involved with community philanthropy in very different contexts.

Tarisai Jangara works with the Zambian Governance Foundation, supporting community foundations in rural and urban areas.

Tarisia: For the Zambian Governance Foundation, with the approach that we have taken of adopting local philanthropy, it is an attractive model for development. We see it as a way of liberating communities.

Terry: Janet Mawiyoo works in East Africa, with the Kenya Community Development Foundation. In Nairobi, where she is based, there are massive challenges in huge urban slums, such as Kibera.

Janet: I think because of the way the aid industry works in many developing countries, it is very common to find communities are expecting things from whoever wants to give. So they end up with a mind-set of receiving things, and not a mind-set of being in control.

Terry: The landscape is very different in Nepal where Rita Thapa founded Tewa – meaning “support” in Nepali. Alongside larger scale disasters such as the 2015 Gorkha earthquake, there are many smaller scale threats to the lives of urban and rural populations.

Rita: In Nepal, “philanthropy” as a word and a practice existed primarily through religious and cultural giving, and the transition into urbanization, modernization, pushed by processes of globalization. So all these things had an implication, but this is what we have practiced: raising money and support from really everybody around us.

Terry: Maria Chertok, Masha, is Director of Charities Aid Foundation Russia, working in a society which – on the face of it – is much more affluent, but where many people are left behind.

Maria: Community philanthropy allows people actually to come together, and to decide what they want to do and where they’re going to take the resources, where they’re going to find the resources, how they’re going to contribute themselves. Maybe what they have is not enough, but this is where they start: with what they have rather than what they haven’t.

Terry: Mariane Nunes works with ICom in Florianópolis, superficially one of the most highly developed cities in Brazil.

Mariane: You start by building trust. That’s one fundamental piece to be able to do the work here, to build trust: with the social movements, with the groups, the non-profits, and also the people in corporations and businesses that want to do something to their community. So that they see a place where they can do some things.

Terry: I talked to them about the “where”, “what”, “how” and the results of community philanthropy. *Where* is it relevant? *What*, exactly, marks out community philanthropy from other forms of community development? *How* is it mobilized and organized? And what *changes result* from it? Let’s start with where. Poor countries, rich countries? Cities, towns, villages?

Maria: Loads of places, particularly outside of big cities, they find themselves in a situation where nothing really happens to improve the life of people, and with roads and other infrastructure in decay. People feel very remote from basic services, even healthcare and education gets more and more centralized. People have to travel hundreds of kilometres sometimes to get to the doctor. So it really leaves people with no choice but to do something for themselves.

Rita: When hard times come, we have had different things with our grantees – like accidents, and like you saw when the earthquake happened here, this is who Tewa reached out to first of all. But the interesting thing is not just the grantees who were affected, but grantees we called on who wanted to volunteer, and to go to these affected areas. I think in our first batch we gathered around 25/30 of them. They came to volunteer. Not just for a few months, but some of them for years.

Terry: Whether struggling with a lack of services in Russia, or facing an earthquake in Nepal, involvement in community philanthropy mobilizes people to take action, and support each other. The same seems to be true, even in a highly developed Brazilian city.

Mariane: Florianópolis is the capital of the state of Santa Catarina, which is in the South of Brazil. When you look at some indicators, we have some of the highest indicators in Brazil. But on the other hand, we have a lot of inequalities here. So, for example, we have around 67 areas where people live in vulnerability, poverty. The city is an island, a lot of tourists come here and, usually, all of those areas are hidden. So they don’t see it. Also, we have a lot of social issues. Because people are very conservative. When you look at the rates of violence against women, we have one of the highest rates of violence against women, against transsexual people, so these are just some of the issues that we see. A lot of people from here, they don’t want to talk about the inequalities – or they don’t know they exist. They only see this beautiful place, tourists coming to spend the summer here.

Tarisai: I think from the community perspective, trust is a big issue which we can say is a barrier. Then, the resources themselves are a barrier because in some communities, the poverty levels are too high. As much as we are trying to unlock the local assets that are within the communities, at times the poverty levels are just too high. Then the mind-set shift is also a big barrier, because we are coming from a point where civil society organizations and development actors, they are going into communities and they are giving out things like t-shirts and food. So there is still that expectation from the community, to say “Ok, when we have development actors coming in, we are supposed to be given such things.” So I think the major ones are mind-set shift, trust and the resources themselves.

Terry: Whether we are looking at a highly developed city, or the vast rural areas of Russia, or disaster-prone Nepal, community philanthropy seems to have the potential to mobilize people. But Tarisai highlights the challenges to this that they face in their work in Zambia. Challenges like building trust, finding resources where people live in poverty, and changing mind-sets where people have become dependent on the hope of outside help. So while community philanthropy might be great in theory, how does it work in practice? We’re going to look for answers to these questions in the next episode.