

## “What is Community Philanthropy?” Podcast Series



### Transcript of Episode 4

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**Terry:** Welcome to part four of this podcast series ‘What is community philanthropy?’ Janet, Mariane, Masha [Maria], Rita and Tarisai, set the scene for us in the last episode showing how community philanthropy is gaining traction in many different localities, urban, rural, less prosperous, and even in affluent economies. Across all these situations, there seem to be real benefits in starting from local peoples’ insights, priorities and capacities, rather than reinforcing a dependency on funding, aid and projects. Isn't this all a bit fanciful? Idealistic, how could it ever work in practice? Let's turn to our group and start by clarifying what's at the heart of community philanthropy, and then move on to how it can work in practice.

**Tarisai:** Here, we have a picture that communities are not poor, though they have traditionally been regarded as poor. When we say they are not poor, it means that they may not have finances, or they might not be able to give financially, but they can give in other forms, like contributing their time. In also using the different assets that they have, this can even be, like in a rural area that you're working with, this can be the goats, the chickens, the cows, that can be translated to monetary form and they can be used. So for us, it's just about local giving, by ordinary people, that's how we see local philanthropy.

**Janet:** So it's really working in ways which allow communities to be part of reflecting on how they got to where they are and how they can come out, so that they can be in charge and be drivers of their own development so that they can influence even government resources that need to be allocated for service delivery, for example, and also so that they can be engaged. When development actors come to the community, they are able to ask questions and be part of deciding what is good for us. So they're not just there to receive, they can tell someone: “from where we are, this is what we need, not what you want to give us.” So, it works for empowered communities.

**Maria:** I think there's three aspects of doing things holistically: working with the resources which are available, and finding these local assets, and through this process, building trust and allowing people to work together. This is really very important.

**Terry:** Okay, so how can communities be mobilized and empowered in the ways that Tarisai, Janet and Masha described there? Obviously, there are a lot of technical aspects to this. But one word that came up again and again was the word “trust.”

**Rita:** For them, it's about when they give money and who they give money – over time they develop real community. I mean they have relationships, they have relationships of trust and relationships of friendships and many networkings that goes on. So therefore, it's not just about that fundraising, but it's about that whole act of how we do it.

**Maria:** It's not easy because first of all, well, people tend to be mostly passive and not very engaged. And it takes some work to get the traction, but also, all of those resources, trust, time, initiative, It's a very valuable asset which is scarce everywhere. So yeah, I think that's not easy at all. And it takes a lot of leadership and courage to start doing something like that, making this step forward.

**Tarisai:** The issue of trust is really important because this organization, these communities, they give to organizations that they have trust. So as civil society organizations, we make

sure that our work is rooted within the communities. We are not just fly by or pass by organizations that are not well known within the community. So trust is an important factor in terms of getting the communities to give.

**Mariane:** I think the trust piece is very important to talk about because it's very hard to make it work if you don't have the trust piece. So the trust piece is fundamental and it's something that is built over a long time, long periods of time, right?

**Terry:** If the starting point is building trust then the key word that leapt out to me from what Rita, Masha, Tarisai and Mariane said there was "time." The trouble is, time is often in short supply in the development industry. And that's what needs to change. Tarisai said we're not "just flying by or passing by as organizations." So after trust, our second building block is time, trust and time, essential building blocks for community philanthropy. What about resources?

**Rita:** A community foundation, with the support from the local community, be they donors, be they allies, be they just volunteers, be they grantees themselves, who also give back. Many of our grantees have given back to Tewa in a small way. Nonetheless, it's very valuable and important. And they also like, they'll sell raffles for you, they will do other kinds of campaigns. So in this way, the entire community is involved in whatever. We are learning from each other, and we also gifting each other. It's not a one way street.

**Terry:** Making use of the community's own resources and building ownership is clearly vital. But what happens when external resources are involved? I asked Tarisai about this.

**Tarisai:** The bigger issue is their own sustainability. So the communities are determining the use of the external resources in ensuring that they address the challenges that they have and to improve their own quality of life. So it's more around co-creation of different projects where the communities are involved such that when external funding is gone, there is still sustainability. So there is this marriage that has to happen between external resources and local resources, so that even the local people – if a borehole has been drilled in their community – take better care of it, because they know that they have contributed something. But if money just comes in, is splashed on them from the external funders, the way they take care of it is different. There is no attachment, there's no ownership. So we cannot totally do away with external resources. There has to be a balance with it, to work together.

**Mariane:** We opened a community fund that's really impressive, that's growing, we were able to fundraise with a small, very small business, and they're doing monthly donations to the fund. Last year we launched this fund. So it's been one year and a half and we grew from only two members to 20. Now we have 20 people and corporations that donate monthly to support social justice issues. And we decide together, so we have a shared governance. So last year, we supported LGBT rights. And this year, we supported gender issues. And we gave grants to a group of people that do workshops for women that are in jail. So when they come out of jail, they can have a better job. So we're always working with groups that are invisible to the society.

**Terry:** What happens though, if local funding comes with strings attached? I asked Janet about this.

**Janet:** I think sometimes that when people realize "this is what is popular now" sometimes they are just really happy to jump into it, but they're not necessarily very serious about really

supporting people-led development. Because it really means that if you're the funder, or whoever is the giver of the resources, you are open to the things that emerge from the people, you are happy to be informed, you're happy to listen, you're happy to give the time that is needed to create that kind of rapport with the local community, that kind of trust. And I think not too many actors are really thinking seriously about these things or are genuine about it. I think that is where now we end up, with a bit of a problem because sometimes people want to do things very quickly, you know, and this is about people, human beings developing trust with one another.

**Terry:** Interesting that we've explored local resources and external resources. But Janet has brought us back to those two key words: "time" and "trust." It seems you can't escape from the fact that effective community development involves more than just systems or projects, it involves working with people, gaining their trust and spending the time to do so. What does this look like in practice? Let's look at a couple of case studies from Russia and Brazil.

**Maria:** Well, this is one of my favourites recently. It's a community foundation, which is called "The Mill" or "Melnitsa" in Russian, which was founded a few years ago. It's one of the recent ones, in a village in Karelia in the Northwest of Russia. In this village is 3,500 people. So it's a rather small settlement, in a beautiful setting, on a lake in a forest – it's very, very nice, with nature around. It was founded by a group of young women who were doing different projects, different community projects, and they thought that the community should be doing something together. One of the things which they do, they have started reviving the local crafts. One of the fundraising mechanisms they use, is that they make these specific local pies, engaging with other women to sell them at different events. And that's how they brought in some initial money into the community foundation.

Then what they did recently, they introduced Giving Circles in their community. A Giving Circle is a kind of live crowdfunding methodology which allows communities to raise funding. On the night, during a nice event, members of the community actually present their projects to the community. If the community likes those ideas, they chip in and collect the money to deliver those projects. So they started in their main village, and then they also rolled this out to other smaller villages which are part of their municipality. So, over the course of the summer, I think they organized, about ten Giving Circles. And these are not projects which are presented by any NGOs because there are not many, they're presented by specific members of the community. And they give this event – the Giving Circle event is actually organized outside, or in a green space with a marquee. I attended one of these in June. And it is really very, very good. It just feels so exciting because people actually know what this is all about, they understand. And you would never expect this group of people to come up with these impressive amounts of money for the projects.

**Mariane:** We were discussing about the community, the city hall didn't know how many homeless people were there and didn't know the profile. And we discussed with them, okay, let's do a project together. And we decided to do a diagnostic study involving the homeless people themselves. So we gathered 12 people in homeless situations and we gave them a little money so that they could participate and pay their expenses. And we decided which questions that we wanted to ask from the streets, and they decided with us, so it was really sharing the power. And we mapped 1,000 homeless people, and they were talking amongst each other. So in the process of them interviewing other people, homeless people, they really got together and strengthened. So we not only have a report that we can go to the public policy makers with, and they can ask for their rights. But they got strengthened because they got to know more people in homeless situations. And these people joined the movement. And then they started to fundraise, for the first time, and they started to fundraise for things

like theatre. They started to go to the university to present the data, and then the university, they would pay them to go give a talk. So that's how we really changed one reality.

**Terry:** In both those snapshots, people started to take action using their own capacities and finding their own resources. And in both cases, the things they've done have started to gather momentum and draw in more people and more action.

**Rita:** Everyone is an agent here, and everyone owns it because everything is transparent. I think that's really important and how we run our foundations.

**Tarisai:** There is some sense of togetherness that we see each time that we are visiting a community: they're speaking with one voice and contributing, they're agreeing to say, "Okay, let's do this, let's work together as a team."

**Maria:** It really leaves people with no choice but to do something for themselves. I think this is the reason why community philanthropy has been so successful in Russia recently, just because people don't have other mechanisms to really introduce some changes and improvements in their lives.

**Mariane:** The way we are able to put the community together, this community leadership, to be able to unite all sorts of groups, different groups and classes and power within the community – this ability, the community leadership and the ability to facilitate conversations about the well-being of the community, the end result is reducing inequalities and improving the quality of life within the community.

**Terry:** If community philanthropy has been for you, as it has been for me, a hidden story, then I hope that Janet, Mariane, Masha, Rita, Tarisai and Renji have brought it to life for you. And also made the case for starting with community capacities, listening, building trust, taking time, working together, recognizing that everyone is an agent.