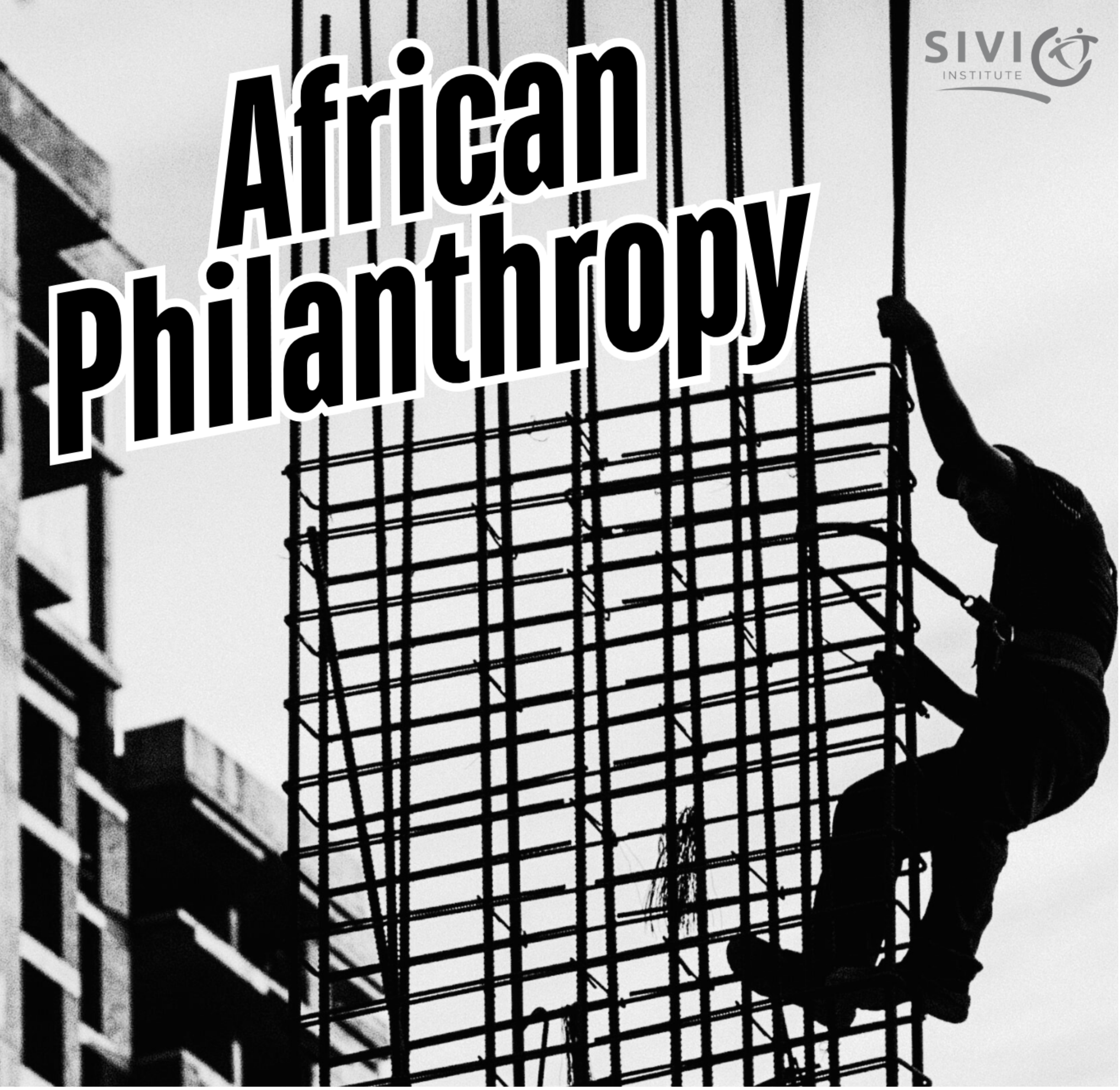
African Philanthropy



KICKING AWAY THE SCAFFOLD

Tendai Murisa

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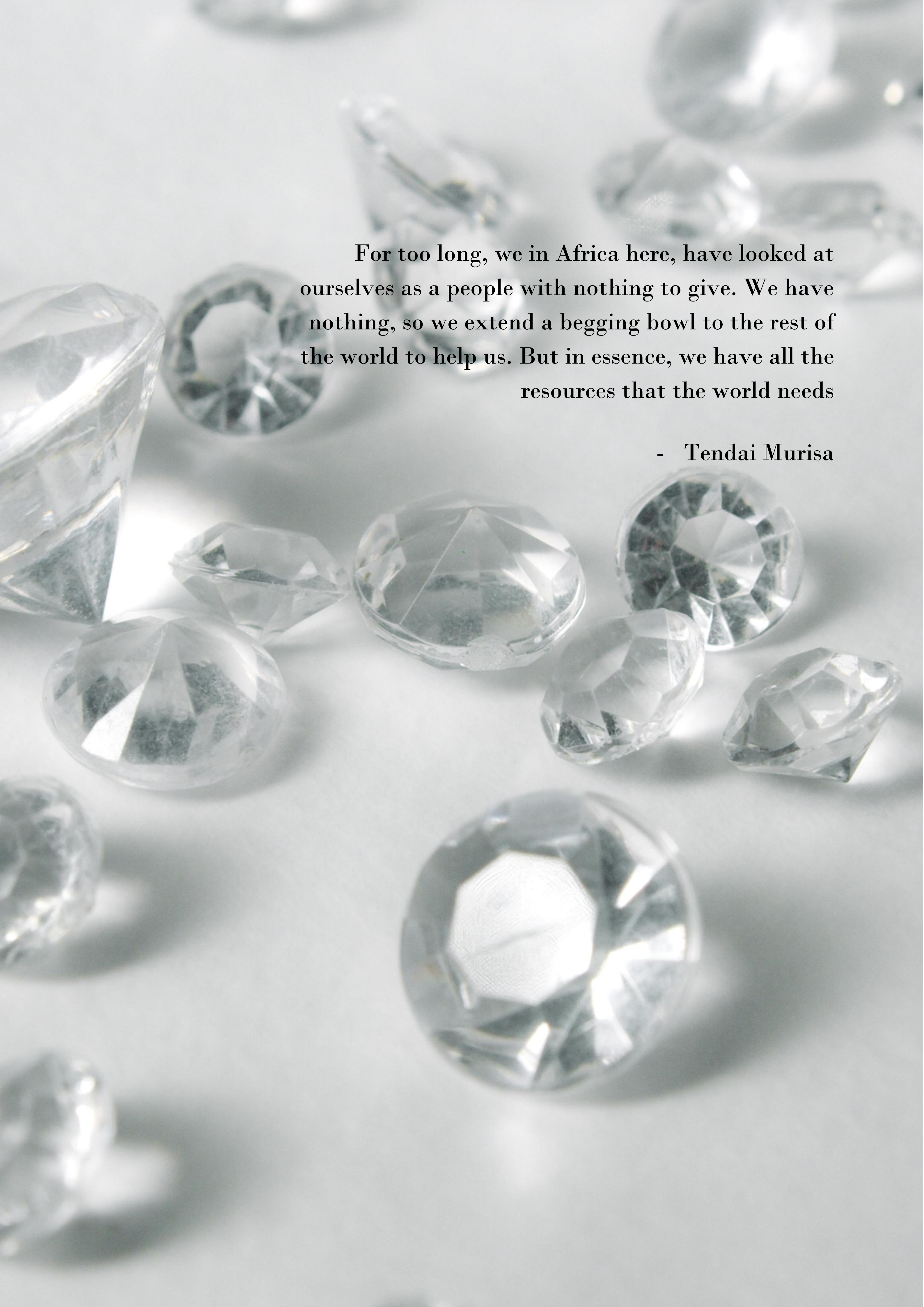

For too long, we in Africa here, have looked at ourselves as a people with nothing to give. We have nothing, so we extend a begging bowl to the rest of the world to help us. But in essence, we have all the resources that the world needs

- Tendai Murisa

Introduction

As the field of 'African philanthropy' grows, there is an emerging divergence of what the term actually means. There are three notable tendencies in trying to answer this question; first, there is a school of thought which states that African philanthropy is about the growth of a new set of resources (financial and otherwise) that are purely African in terms of source. The second tendency argues for the inclusion of non-African resources provided by philanthropy foundations from elsewhere outside towards causes on the continent. Finally, others argue that the source of funding is not the real issue, but instead the focus should be on where it is deployed and in this case, it is African because it has been deployed to causes on the continent. Beyond the contestations around 'definition by source of resources', there is a tendency to include all forms of solidarity carried out within communities as part of African philanthropy. These differences are not immediately obvious, but it is essential to mention that if not resolved, the subject or rather African Philanthropy, faces the risk of being superfluous without a coherent agenda. In this brief essay, I propose to carry out a number of things, first to revisit the subject of concepts. What does the term African philanthropy mean? Should we be concerned about the inherent challenges of a loose and broad definition? Secondly, I propose to explore the possibilities of African philanthropy as both a moment/space and a movement towards a rethinking of the continent's development path. The gatherings under the banner of 'African Philanthropy' have grown in number and so has their popularity. Could it be the place for re-imagining Africa's transformation?

Origins of 'African Philanthropy'

At its core, philanthropy, especially when we use its Greek origins, is about human love (or the love for humanity). Any endeavour in service of humanity can thus be referred to as philanthropy. It has a longer history than widely acknowledged, and broader meaning than just the spread of financial resources. It is a universal term and practice. It is found within the DNA of many cultures. Today it is mostly used in reference to financial donations. In most of the developed world, the philanthropists are usually high net worth individuals giving to the less privileged. Global South based development scholars have in the past decades played a crucial role in challenging the mostly Western framing of philanthropy as mostly entailing giving away of money. These have argued that philanthropy is not just about money but about the giving of self (skills, time, assets) in service of others at no cost.

They have also argued, based on several years of studies on cultures and economic models, that reciprocity is the essence of social organisation norms, especially in Africa. In many ways, reciprocity is viewed as similar or equal to philanthropy. The varying cultural informed practices of mutual solidarity across the different African people groups has most recently been described as philanthropy.

In the midst of all these developments, a new term ‘African Philanthropy’ emerged perhaps as part of an attempt to differentiate giving practices that are local as opposed to those from outside. A brave attempt at a response to those who were labelling the continent as merely a recipient or beneficiary of philanthropy rather than as an active participant/source. Halima Mohammed (2013) noted two broad sets of actors within the African Philanthropy landscape. She argued; thus,

> African philanthropy involves a much greater range of players than has been traditionally recognized. First there is the smaller, more formal set of philanthropic institutions referred to above. Then there is the larger, but much more prevalent, set of diverse practices, mechanisms and traditions of giving – from merry-go-rounds (rotating savings and/or credit associations) to communal asset building mechanisms such as Harambee; from provision of assets such as oxen or equipment for farming to communal grain savings schemes for those who are in need.

The response was part of a broader attempt to reassert agency. It was not about proving whether Africans can match dollar for dollar what the West gives. Instead, the response focused on amplifying the ways in which African societies are organised to provide support. Those at the forefront of this framing amplified cultural norms and practices within Africa as emblematic of philanthropy. Ubuntu took centre stage as a form of best practice in the African philanthropy landscape. Next was the mapping of different names used in the various African languages to depict giving or solidarity. Social organisation platforms including community granaries, asset and labour pooling, savings societies and burial societies were depicted as part of the African philanthropy landscape. The practices mentioned above usually comprise or consist of platforms of generating mutuality within communities around labour or asset sharing, welfare support and ongoing contributions towards a redistributive economy. It was mostly localised within a specified geographical boundary.

It is important to note that this amplification of existing norms of African agency and solidarity is significant in many ways. First literally, a couple of decades ago, almost everything that African communities did together had been seen as part of this backward ‘economy of affection’ that is destroying or limiting African progress. Second, Africa, like other developed regions, was expected to adopt new ways of doing things and quickly catch up with the rest of the developed world. In what is today referred to as Modernisation Theory, there is an all too familiar notion that Africa is backward and the task for the rest of the world is to help her catch up. These discourses were not limited to the 1950s. As late as 2000 the Economist magazine described Africa as “the hopeless continent” on one of its covers. The accompanying article painted a picture of a continent ravaged by war, famine and disease. In 2001 Tony Blair stated "*The state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. But if the world as a community focused on it, we could heal it. And if we don't, it will become deeper and angrier.*" (Tony Blair, 2 October 2001). The statement, whilst expressing good intentions or guilt, unfortunately continues on the centuries old path of trying to do things for Africa, rather than allowing the continent to forge its own path. The statement does not also acknowledge the role that ‘others’ or the world, as Tony Blair called them, has played in undermining Africa’s autonomous path in search of development.

Third, the second decade of the century was associated with a new and unprecedented excitement around prospects of Africa. Even the Economist Magazine made reference to ‘Africa Rising’ in its December 2011 issue. The magazine caused quite a stir when it came out with a cover titled ‘Africa Rising’ together with an illustration of a boy flying a rainbow-coloured kite in the shape of the continent. In the related article, the Magazine noted that Nigerian cement tycoon Aliko Dangote has overtaken Oprah Winfrey as the richest black person, and that countries such as Ghana, Ethiopia and Mozambique are now among the world’s fastest growing economies. The Economist magazine was not alone. Exactly a year later, TIME, the world’s largest weekly printed news magazine, highlighted Africa as the “world’s next economic powerhouse” on its cover and the cover title was: ‘Africa rising’. There was indeed an unprecedented double-digit growth in GDP coupled with the rise of Africa’s High Net-Worth Individuals. All of a sudden Africa had sprinklings of billionaires whose fortunes were secured from largely legitimate businesses, unlike in the past where the fortunes of the continent were privatised by military dictators. The growth was not only limited to the billionaire class, but it was also a moment for the resurgence of possibly one of the largest middle classes outside of the developed regions. These HNWIs were actively making connections with their counterparts across the globe and also giving away some of their wealth through newly established foundations.

The middle class had surplus to give away too, and many studies demonstrated the extent to which Africans are giving to various causes. Over the last two decades, we have seen a growth in high profile African giving to big causes across the continent. The number of billionaires and millionaires spread across the continent has continued to grow. Their philanthropic contributions have gone beyond the US$ 1 billion mark. Their contribution in many instances is not just about money, but they bring their entrepreneurial capabilities and leverage their global influence in raising more resources and become advocates on important causes. There is evidence to suggest that they are already connected and interacting with multilateral development agencies.

Finally, it is perhaps a combination of the above. A renewed understanding of the role of African norms and traditions in fostering a certain form of development, and a decades-long frustration of continuously being viewed as a basket case by others who have undermined the continent's attempt at forging a framework of development. Academics and practitioners coalesced around the need to defend (or develop for some) the idea of a long tradition of African agency which could be equated to or seen as a field that we are now calling African philanthropy. According to this line of thinking, Africa no longer needs modernisation as previously claimed, it has achieved its own modernity separate from the narrowly framed linear like catch-up process. For others this fits within the different paradigms of development beyond the monoculture narratives of global development. These developments were perhaps emboldened by the mega narrative around claims of Africa's rising or renaissance as Thabo Mbeki called it. According to Mbeki, the envisaged renaissance was about self-determination, unity, identity, development, and transformation of the political and economy of the continent. The main objective behind the call for African renaissance was to help define and clarify African identity and its place in the global community, and to formulate practical strategies and solutions for future action that would benefit the continent. Phemelo and Mompati (2018) note that the presentation done by Mbeki was intended to equip Africans to react against the overwhelming influence of globalisation and to advocate for indigenous systems in various sectors of African life. The continent was indeed something to marvel at, promising so much and the 'African Philanthropy' sector was part, if not central, to the reimagining of African agency.

Towards A Definitional Crisis

However, the excitement around the rediscovery of identity and forms of agency led to a new challenge of creating recognisable boundaries of the subject under discussion. African philanthropy has been used loosely to refer to many human social interactions of reciprocity and solidarity. It faces the danger of being an all too ubiquitous term. Using the law of first mention prefixing the adjective 'African' before 'philanthropy' suggests an active intent that this subject or area should be defined by what comes first. In this instance, the philanthropy (universal) under discussion is African. Could the subject matter of African Philanthropy mainly focus on those in or with links to Africa in the area of philanthropy? Should we perhaps limit ourselves to studying/discussing how African resources (monetary and otherwise) are mobilised and deployed? Such an approach would lead to a focus on analysing the quantum of giving of their time, skills, finances and the role played by institutions that mobilise African resources. It is also important to note that the African philanthropy resources are not only spent on the continent, they have been deployed to service various causes outside of the continent. The practice of Africans donating to causes outside the continent, including to US- and UK-based universities, is quite common. Some have established funds to support Africans to study in the US; others have sponsored buildings; others have contributed by way of endowments to universities[1].

However, others have argued that beyond official gifts donated by Africa to other parts of the world, the continent has porous borders and it is difficult to differentiate with certainty the amount of local versus international resources in any venture. They proceed to argue that, besides, Africa is a net creditor to the world thanks to both licit and illicit flows of capital. However, that line of debate may lead to murky waters. It is important to differentiate philanthropy flows from other flows of capital into the continent that could be in the form of purely business investments, loans in the form of official development assistance and even reparations. It is important to note that the study of and continuous engagement with the flows of philanthropy coming from outside the continent to serve African needs is equally important, especially given the size of that portfolio of resources. What if we called that side of giving 'Philanthropy in Africa'?

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1 https://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/african-philanthropy-still-work-to-be-done/

There are a number of ongoing initiatives that are focused on the quality of outside funding such as the localisation processes and the hashtag #shiftthepower. These localisation and #shiftthepower initiatives complement each other as they aim to reform the global philanthropy architecture (and even Official Development Assistance-ODA) to be sensitive to local needs and to ensure that more resources are actually spent in the global South. These are part of a long-drawn-out global campaign aimed at restructuring and redistributing power from the centre to the periphery. Development practitioners and thinkers have for a long time argued for the need to emphasise local knowledge (epistemes) in framing development solutions[2]. The need to restructure global patterns of funding is important work. However, at times it has been emphasised at the expense of the even more empowering framework of promoting African agency through the mobilisation of their own resources - what we are referring to as African philanthropy rather than philanthropy in Africa.

In developed countries, the philanthropy landscape is usually easy to define; through the laws of registration, financial flows made, thematic sector focus areas and the quantifiable evidence produced over time. The broadening of African philanthropy to include associational platforms ranging from the informal to formal, focused on a variety of solidarity like activities, leads to further conceptual confusion for many. Rather than seen as an act of giving by the rich to the less privileged, the argument has been made that the flows of giving are not just vertical (from wealthy to poor) or horizontal (from poor to poor) but consist of a range of things in between (Mohamed, 2013).

Furthermore, there is still a need for a consensus on the set of actors and activities that should be categorised as purely local philanthropy. Is it the case that when communities gather together during a funeral, to pool productive assets, to create a labour pool and when they contribute to the communal granary, they are actually engaged in voluntary service to humanity? To what extent are some of these practices imposed upon members of a community based on the fear that non-participation will lead to exclusion and isolation? If there is a level of subtle/implicit coercion, shall we still view these as acts of service out of love for humanity? These community-based formations and practices are vital, they have ensured collective action within communities for a greater good. The lessons derived from these practices are significant.

[2] Robert Chambers Putting the Last First

They inform the strategies of new organisational forms of philanthropy, especially the value of small gifts that are gathered from many to address a particular problem. The fact that metrics of measuring the impact of these are not yet adequate does not diminish the fact that the resilience of African communities is derived from within. But should we just call all this philanthropy? There is value in understanding the various ways in which resources and solidarity flows within and across communities, but there is an equal danger in the naming of what that means.

Kicking Away the Scaffold?

About two decades ago, the former chairman of the board of trustees at Trust Africa made reference to African philanthropy as emergent, relying and dependent upon a scaffold for it to grow and sustain itself. The scaffold was, in essence, literally speaking, global philanthropy or maybe Western philanthropy. When building a structure, a scaffold is established as a workstation when working at higher heights. It is essentially an enabler and is temporary in nature. Two or so decades later, have we reached a time where we can kick away the scaffold so as to allow the new structure and field of practice called African philanthropy to stand by itself? First of all, let's look at the role that the scaffold has played to date.

To date, the scaffold has contributed immensely in terms of developing a space called African philanthropy, which has mostly depended on funding from outside. In the process, the influence of Western traditions cannot be hidden. The institutional form and structure that has emerged does not borrow from the 'African' cultures and mosaic of practices but instead it mimics Western institutions (form and structure) and norms of giving. It has been influenced by the institutional developments that we have seen in other regions, especially in the United States of America (USA). For instance, the emergence of foundations and intermediaries aligns with practices in the USA. Most of the prominent intermediaries (the Big 5) have a direct relationship with global resources. They have positioned themselves to leverage global philanthropy (and at times Official Development Aid) resources which they then redistribute via smaller grants to partners across the continent. It was assumed that these intermediaries would at some point grow their own reserves/endowments to enhance their standing as African funders. However, to date the majority have remained as regranters. So now, 24 years later, into the 21st century, we ask the question, is this the time for African philanthropy to kick away the scaffold and become mature and stand by itself?

The "scaffold" however has faced criticism for a variety of reasons, it is seen as often undercutting rather than advancing Africa's development. One major controversy revolves around the conditionality tied to aid. When it comes to grant-making and disbursement processes, some development initiatives are compelled to realign their initial priorities to fit the thematic preferences of donors. For instance, an initiative originally focused on climate change mitigation might be forced to shift its focus to democracy and human rights causes if that is where the donor's funding is directed. As a consequence of being overly dependent on donor funding, these organisations may pivot away from addressing the original community needs they were founded to solve. This shift leads to a significant mismatch between the priorities of the community and the preferences of the donors. Ultimately, the pressing needs of African communities remain unmet, as the focus diverges towards the interests of external donors. The Fundraising Effectiveness Project's (FEP) Q2 2024 Report indicates a -3.9% drop in donor participation and a -4.5% decline in donor retention globally, a trend that is also reflected in Africa.

If African philanthropy is to stand on its own, it has to be able to make its resources to advance its mandate. Having such autonomy will enable it to make decisions based on what works for the African continent. Perhaps the question could be asked differently; is there a way of increasing the portion of philanthropic resources from Africa to match or surpass global sources? There are many reasons for the stagnation. First the base of African Philanthropy is weak. In many instances, global philanthropy's growth has been dependent upon its capitalist sector. There seems to be a close but unexplored umbilical cord-like relationship between capitalism and philanthropy, the former is focused on accumulation of wealth and the latter on giving it away. Big philanthropy has been fuelled and associated with big capitalist ventures. It is no coincidence that the prominent philanthropy foundations/houses were established and funded by successful business enterprises. In 1889 Andrew Carnegie wrote the *Gospel of Wealth* where he called upon the millionaires of the age to distribute their wealth for public good. Since then, the majority of millionaire and billionaires in the USA have either established foundations or given to foundations that already exist. The outgoing President of the Ford Foundation, Darren Walker (2023) makes the connection between a functional capitalist sector and growth of philanthropy very clear. He observed that the roots of most US foundations are in a well-functioning market economy. However, he sees the philanthropy playing a different role by working to address the root causes of inequality, rather than just giving money away, and to give recipients more say in how they spend grants as part of efforts to enhance justice.

Africa on the other hand has not done well in terms of developing its capitalist sector. The industrialisation strategy has mostly been abandoned. The liberalisation agenda has not led to the development of a vibrant African-driven capitalist sector. Instead, there is an ongoing deepening of the globalisation project in terms of consumption of global goods on the continent. Africa spends at least US$2 billion every year on foreign products, including manufactured goods, financial services (use of Visa and MasterCard), entertainment (subscriptions to Netflix and other streaming services), IT (paying licenses to software developers such as Microsoft, SAP, etc.) access to the internet (Starlink). The continent spent $175,345 million on finished consumer goods imports alone in 2022. There are approximately 2.5 million subscribers to Netflix, a global streaming service, and these pay an average of US$15 per month to access the service. The majority of African corporates, nonprofits and governments use software purchased from outside the continent. The capitalist sector is dominated by multinational corporations, especially in mining, agriculture and tourism. Various studies have already demonstrated that the multinationals are usually associated with illicit financial flows. According to UNCTAD's Economic Development in Africa Report 2020 every year, an estimated $88.6 billion, equivalent to 3.7% of Africa's GDP, leaves the continent as illicit capital flight.

African capitalists are locked or kicked out of these lucrative service chains by global players who are mostly from the North. Unfair lending conditions continue to constrain the continent's development. The economic boom experienced at the turn of the century was based on an increased demand for agricultural and mineral commodities. It has slowed down. According to GDP forecasts for 2024, only one country, Benin, is expected to have double-digit GDP growth. The average GDP growth in Africa is going to be 6%. This 6% may be higher than other developed regions but it is not adequate to spur inclusive economic growth, given the low base from which the continent is starting. The African capitalist sector has retreated into trade opportunities without a substantial industrial production base. Whilst other regions (see for instance China) have moved to produce and compete globally, Africa has retreated. Furthermore, the extractive sector comprising mining and forestry (timber, rubber and related products) dominates economic activities across Africa. The sector is dominated by foreign investors and there are allegations of illicit financial flows in these sectors. According to experts, Africa has in the past decades lost more money through illicit financial flows than it has gained through aid and investments. These are deep-seated structural flaws requiring a continent-wide approach. In terms of balance of trade, Africa imports more finished, primary goods and services than it did at the turn of the century.

The existing levels of economic diversification are not adequate for job growth or social development to create wealth and lift millions of Africans out of poverty. The African middle class is also in a precarious position because it is driven and based on earnings rather than savings or assets. Unfortunately, the capitalist path depicted above does not have the adequate capacity to generate the growth of high-net-worth individuals and corporations required to enhance African philanthropy dollars.

Second, limited collaboration between the high-net-worth foundations and the rest of the philanthropy ecosystem. The growth of high net worth individuals' philanthropy has mostly been independent of efforts being done by the intermediary foundations' community. During the initial stages, they seemed to be not aware of each other. The high-net-worth philanthropist mostly started giving based on a number of impulses such as religion, the strong desire to create a change or to make sure that the next generation does not face similar challenges like they did (see Murisa, 2018). The trigger for establishing an African network seems to, amongst others, have emerged from engagements that took place outside of the continent, especially in the USA.

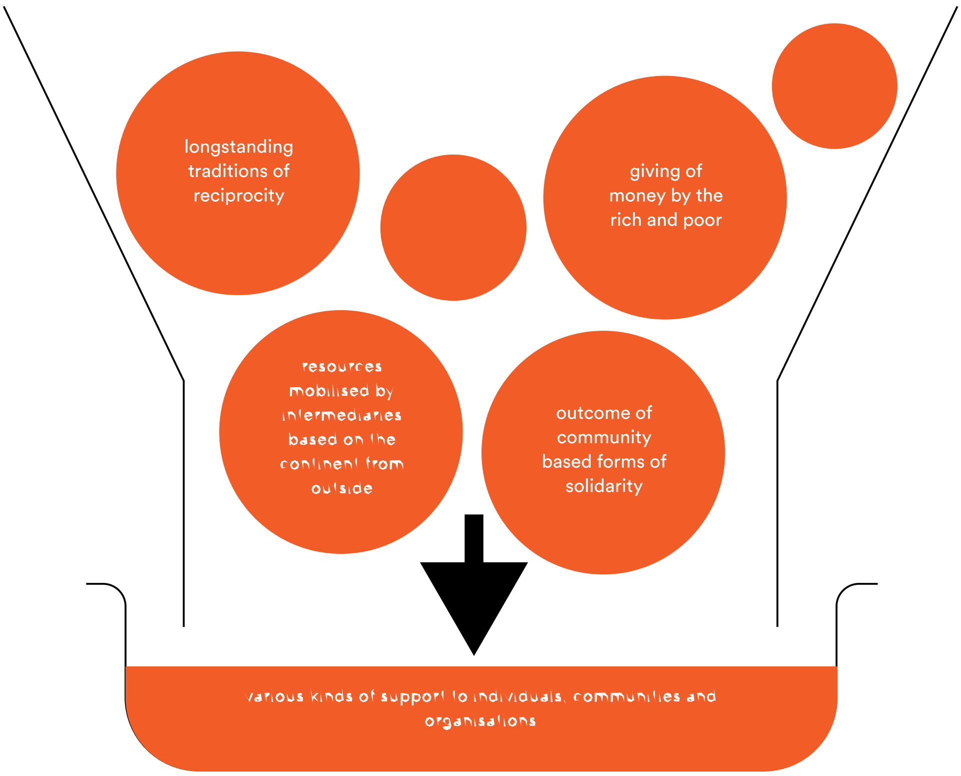
Third, and perhaps controversially, the small gifts exchanged within communities are not adequate for the kind of transformation required across Africa. The community-driven gifting frameworks are without a doubt an important bedrock for a certain basic form of social organisation and existence, however, they are not a justification for kicking away the scaffold. The challenges that African countries and communities within them face require significant amounts of philanthropy or official development dollars.

Fourth, for there to be an alternative but radical proposal to kick away the scaffold, you need to first undo global capitalism that is currently accumulating from African resources. The case has already been made that philanthropy in its financial form is a handmaid of capitalism. Thus it is impossible to decouple from a philanthropy sector that is based on profits that are also made on the continent. This line of thinking feeds into the argument that the majority of those who give towards the continent have equally (if not more) benefited from Africa's wealth.

The Potential of African Philanthropy

Does the African philanthropy moment suggest a realisation of the need to break away from Western influenced theories of development towards one that is steeped in African culture? Admittedly African philanthropy has the potential to play a major role in influencing the continent's path to development. But first we need to have a minimal consensus on what is African philanthropy and identify what it is not. The figure below provides an illustration of the different facets of African philanthropy.

Figure 1: Facets of African Philanthropy



First, African philanthropy is about the giving of money both by the rich and the poor. The giving by Africa's rich has perhaps received more attention than that of their poorer counterparts. Wilkinson-Maposa et al (2005) argued that 'help between the poor is widespread, deeply embedded, morally grounded and operates as a vital element for both survival and progress. In Africa, a gift is not measured by how large it is. A gift is a gift. The everyday unannounced gifts by the poor to each other are possibly one of the explanations behind the resilience of many communities. Ouma (2024) posits that this giving is strongly connected with the desire both to ease suffering and to help society grow. They are a glue that binds society together regardless of social hierarchy. Moreover, contrary to popular belief, poor people do give to institutions; and individual and collective giving takes a variety of directional forms and different levels of scale (Mohammed 2013, EPIC, 2020)[3]. There is a wide-ranging set of actors involved in financial gifting including public trusts, corporate social investment units, foundations set up by high-net-worth individuals, community foundations and intermediaries that mobilise African resources.

Second, African philanthropy is codified and driven by longstanding traditions. Many solidarity-like platforms produce gifts (usually in kind) in service of others within a community. It can be permanent or responsive to a particular event.

Third, African philanthropy is an outcome of community-based or focused forms of solidarity. These manifest in modern-day institutions such as community foundations, community organisations and community chests.

Fourth, others argue that African philanthropy comprises of resources mobilised by intermediaries based on the continent from outside the continent[4].

The ecosystem and the goods it produces have led to what may be seen as a sector that we call African philanthropy. However, African philanthropy is not necessarily a sector, it is a set of ideas or could be considered as an ideology with many characteristics.

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[3] We built our platform www.africagiving.org on the basis of these assertions/claims

[4] The author does not agree with this notion. Rather these funds should be seen as global philanthropy resources in Africa

As an Alternative Paradigm of Development

At the core of African philanthropy is a set of ideas of self-determination focused on ensuring that the continent's path is defined, shaped and funded by local resources. In the formative years of the post-colonial project, leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania came up with what they thought was an alternative framework of development, which was given a shortcut of Ujamaa. In Ujamaa was a sense of equality and a collective approach towards development, starting with a focus on a model of social organisation focused on collective action rather than atomised family structures. Communities had to be re-organised differently to enhance collective production and service delivery. Ujamaa, had its own Eastern European influence at that time, but it was around a collective sense of belonging, production, accumulation and welfare. Related to Ujamaa was also another East Africa concept, harambee, meaning pulling together as one. These have a major bearing on the type of social organisation and agency that emerges. Whilst there is recognition of individual families as the smallest unit of production, there is an equal recognition of its limitations and dependence on community-based mechanisms that help establish collective action. Production, marketing and welfare are mostly defined and organised using community-based mechanisms such as asset and labour pooling, group marketing and delivery and community established welfare mechanisms (Zunde raMambo/Isiphala seNkosi). The present-day form of African philanthropy, especially the solidarity-like type, may be able to see itself as a paradigm, by borrowing from both Harambee and Ujamaa.

The framework of Ubuntu (loosely translated to. 'I am because you are') creates ongoing and organic solidarity especially in rural communities, whereby accumulation, production and welfare are not necessarily based or dependent only on the capabilities of an individual household, but instead are based on synergies established through community based associational platforms. In many instances, many writers have alluded to these agrarian-based forms of social organisation as influencing the origins and values within African Philanthropy. There is potentially a different angle to how philanthropy is being framed in the African context compared to the global North. The differences are significant, they potentially suggest that African philanthropy should be seen as a new paradigm or an alternative paradigm. There are many elements of this framework/paradigm that require discussion. First of all, we have to realise that we are probably putting the cart before the horse or thinking of the end before the beginning.

One can only give what they have earned. It is with this realisation that an argument can be made that African philanthropy could potentially help shape or sanitise the dominant capitalist-driven accumulation model. Second, the philanthropy under discussion is not about a few heroes saving society but about societies coming together to create equilibrium in how economic and social goods are distributed. Third, philanthropy is not an event, but a value embedded within societies and also a way of life.

African philanthropy is not alone in this. There are others such as social entrepreneurship who are equally frustrated with the current models of greed. It could be that a combined or hybrid model of African Philanthropy and social entrepreneurship may be the antidote to the greed framework. Embedded in this is the need to rethink profit and redistribution. Instead of heroically redistributing a surplus, the proposed framework that combines 'African Philanthropy' and social entrepreneurship suggests that all value created can be efficiently redistributed in an optimal manner without creating inequalities within society.

As a Platform of Giving

The formal giving ecosystem has been growing, thanks largely to the growth of middle, millionaire and billionaire classes across Africa. These have contributed significantly to shaping a fairly new ecosystem of giving. Africa has more than 20 billionaires, worth an average of US$ 5.1 billion. These billionaires have established various ways of giving that range from purely corporate social responsibility to independent foundations. The past decade has been associated with the growth of intermediary philanthropy institutions. These receive large grants, mostly from the global North based foundations to then distribute them as smaller grants to organisations spread across the continent. Furthermore, there is a notable increase in middle-class based giving. According to a 2024 report by EPIC Africa, approximately 65% of nonprofits receive individual donations from Africans within and outside the continent. Outside of these formal institutional and predictable forms of giving, there is a resilient tradition informed by a range of players and mechanisms that have hitherto not been widely recognised. They include the smaller, more formal set of philanthropic institutions, the larger, but much more prevalent, set of diverse practices, mechanisms and traditions of giving. They include practices such as merry-go-rounds (rotating savings and/or credit associations) to communal asset building mechanisms such as harambee; provision of assets such as oxen or equipment for farming to communal grain savings schemes for those who are in need.

The growth of African philanthropy, especially the formalised HNWI based giving, has been negatively affected by incidences of growing inflation. There was a significant decline in the wealth of billionaires in 2023. However, in 2024 a number of them seem to have recovered slightly. According to Forbes, the 20 billionaires on the 2024 Forbes list of Africa's Richest are worth a combined $82.4 billion compared to last year's $81.5 billion.

However, giving is not only limited to the privileged sections of society. Africans, regardless of class, are engaged in various forms of giving. There are more giving innovations at the bottom of the pyramid. Low-income communities leverage their numbers and contribute small amounts either as households or individuals. In today's language, these innovations come under the rubric of crowdfunding - a practice that has been made popular through the use of technology platforms to address a problem through small donations. Contributions through these community-led crowdfunding platforms have supported responses to wide-ranging problems such as food insecurity, lack of school fees, medical fees and travel support. In many instances, these forms of giving are informal/hidden. It is difficult to estimate the total amount contributed through these platforms.

The Table below provides a tapestry of forms of giving in Africa.

Table 1: Tapestry of Giving in Africa

Source	Approach	Type of Gifts
Community	From many to one	In kind/cash
	From many to many	In kind/cash
Individual	From one to one	Cash /time /skills/effort
	From one to many	Cash/time/skills/effort
Corporate	From one to many	Cash
	From corporate to foundations	Cash

Permanent vs Ephemeral

Global philanthropy is not just about dollars, it has established institutions with sophisticated bureaucracies that are spread across many regions. Foundations have become a permanent feature of our society. They are an implicit acceptance that the economic, social and cultural problems that we face as humanity are too large and may not be resolved soon. These foundations have come up with self-perpetuating models of existence consisting of endowments, clearly articulated strategies and policies that define how much of their resources can be spent at any time. Foundations have over the years been clustered based on the work they do; some are known as social justice focused, others are focused on human rights, democracy and governance, whilst others have social policy focus such as health and education delivery.

On the other hand, African Philanthropy, based on definitions above, has some of its formations being more ephemeral than permanent. Perhaps one of the biggest differences is that those who are deemed to need aid/philanthropy do not see it as a permanent feature of their lives. Rather, aid/philanthropy/charity is treated as a shock absorber. In the majority of cases, rural life is predicated on organising for production. However, when production fails, or disaster strikes a community, there are a number of mechanisms that are redirected to resolve challenges. Solidarity congeals through community-based and led initiatives that are pooling together resources without a formal structure in the Weberian sense. It is ad hoc in nature and probably connects with what Putnam (2000) has called social capital solidarity, which is characterised and influenced by bonds of trust, familiarity, mutuality and literally what many have referred to as Ubuntu (I am because you are). It also has undertones of coercion. Once in a community, one cannot opt out of providing support during a funeral or where there is need for a labour pool. These practices are eventually coded through cultural norms and traditions. These ad hoc pools of solidarity are the bedrock of African philanthropy and the most common across the continent. The majority of Africa’s population is based in the rural areas where these ephemeral pools of philanthropy usually surface during times of distress. It is important to note that these pools are the more dominant and, in many instances, usually are the first responders (and at times the only response mechanism) to a disaster/need/challenge within a community.

Conclusion: Beyond Winners and Losers

The current accumulation model ensures that there are winners and losers in our society. The number of winners is always smaller than the losers. Oxfam data on inequality has laid bare these contradictions by tracking the number of the rich and how they benefit even in times of disaster such as the COVID-19 period. According to Oxfam, corporations and billionaires are increasing their wealth at astounding rates while the rest of society is suffering the consequences of their greed. According to the same report, since 2020 five billion people have become poorer, while the world's five richest men have more than doubled their fortunes - at a rate of $14 million per hour. Meanwhile, people worldwide face a prolonged cost-of-living crisis, climate breakdown, and conflict. Many are still reeling from the pandemic and working harder and longer hours, often for poverty wages in precarious and unsafe jobs.

Several philanthropy foundations have noted the challenge of growing inequality. In fact, the Ford Foundation's strategy for the past ten years was focused on undoing inequality. However, as the Oxfam report suggested, inequality has deepened during the same period. There is reason to suggest that tackling inequality requires a more radical approach than the prevailing ones. Perhaps the dominant hierarchies within philanthropy have served to provide a band aid instead of radically restructuring power and development. Can African philanthropy resolve the challenge of many losers and very few winners? Currently, most global philanthropy dollars are based on allocations made from profits either by corporations with a direct relationship with a foundation or endowments' investment in capital markets. Funds allocated towards philanthropy are usually a minority of the profits made from business or from the share of the profits made on the endowment investments. There is a real risk that African philanthropy, especially the giving done by High-Net-Worth Individuals, may mimic what already exists in advanced economies. The rise of Africa's billionaires has led many to assume that the continent is ready to fund its development agenda. However, African billionaire foundations are yet to be fully seized with addressing the aforementioned systemic issues. Furthermore, foundations established by the HNWIs are usually under the control of the parent corporate entity, they receive funds either on an annual or monthly basis, and the majority of them are yet to set up endowments for perpetual existence like their northern counterparts (Murisa, 2016, 2018).

Furthermore, the giving by HNWI does not go to already existing NGOs. Available evidence indicates that their contributions in terms of grants to NGOs remain very low compared to international philanthropy foundations. In the process, some of the HNWIs have established implementing foundations which potentially marginalise local NGOs. In a survey carried out in 2018, no HNWI-established foundation was providing institutional support funding to local NGOs. Despite these challenges, we note that the rise of HNWIs is a necessary development, potentially contributing towards a locally led and funded transformation process. However, these are early days and there are a number of issues yet to be addressed to create effective ecosystems of development (Murisa, 2022).

Yet African philanthropy can potentially be an all-encompassing organising framework for production and distribution than just about allocating surplus. African philanthropy's starting point could be to focus on disrupting ownership of the means of production. There are many routes towards this, and some have dramatically collapsed, but that should not discourage new attempts. Currently Africa's natural resources are owned by a few corporations (mostly foreign), elites or state-connected elites or the state itself. There is limited connection with communities. The existing HWNI led foundations are yet to define an alternative vision. HNWIs' foundations have not demonstrated the need for an alternative framework of accumulation and governance. In many instances, actors under study became billionaires through the existing murky rules of capitalist exploitation. They have not spoken against it nor funded initiatives that improve conditions of work and more equitable frameworks of accumulation. Only a handful have committed their funds toward governance reforms. In many instances, the foundations established by HNWIs remain as appendages of the corporate company. In many jurisdictions, these corporations are subject to government compliance measures and/or tenders. There is limited interest in the government to re-imagine solutions to intractable public problems such as social service delivery. Furthermore, it is also unclear whether their collaboration with multilateral organisations will in any way correct the ongoing marginalisation of local NGOs.

On the other hand, intermediaries like Trust Africa, Africa Women's Development and others have been concerned about the existing status quo. They have been vocal around important systemic issues such as illicit financial flows, improved participation of Africans in agricultural value chains, gender rights and democracy.

A number of global North rich countries have come up with the sovereign fund model of ownership.

Text Box 1: A Disruption Model: The Case of Norway's Sovereign Fund

In 1969, one of the world's largest offshore oilfields was discovered off Norway and the economy grew dramatically. Norway nationalised the oilfields in 1972, two years after foreign companies started exploring oil off Norway's coast. Statoil, Norway's state-owned oil company was established with a principle of 50% state participation in each license issued. The state is now the majority shareholder, with a 67% stake in Statoil. The Norwegian government's ownership of oil has been reviewed over the years and is currently divided between its Statoil concerns, and the state's direct financial interest (SDFI), an arrangement in which the government owns interests in a number of oil and gas fields, pipelines and onshore facilities. Immediately thereafter there was a concern about the possible disruption that may happen to the Norwegian economy when the oil reserves run out. The government set up the Government Pension Fund Global with the mandate of investing revenues made from oil offshore. As of August 2024, the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund had over US$1.71 trillion in assets, and held on average 1.5% of all of the world's listed companies, making it the world's largest single sovereign wealth fund in terms of total assets under management. This translates to over US$307,000 per Norwegian citizen. Furthermore, the Norwegian government created a wide net of social welfare services that provide free education, healthcare and pensions to all the country's citizens.

Africa, unlike Norway, is yet to reap significant benefits from its natural resources. There are many countries that have tinkered with the idea of resource nationalism but not at the scale witnessed in Norway. The establishment of sovereign funds suggests a new and viable method of leveraging natural resources for long-term economic development. The Norwegian model does not do away with the idea of the private firm and profit. Instead, the government has placed itself at the centre of the accumulation model on behalf of the people of Norway. Multi-national corporations involved in the oil value chain are shareholders together with the government of Norway's state-owned enterprises. Every citizen of Norway is a stakeholder and beneficiary of the returns from the oil value chain. In Africa it's the other way round. Citizens are alienated from these natural resources in favor of corporations, which are usually multinationals. There are some exceptions. In the Northwest of South Africa for instance, the Bafokeng have considerable control over their enormous wealth generated from platinum mining, mainly through direct royalties and shareholding partnerships with major multinational mining corporations that operate on their territories. Zimbabwe at some point came up with a community share ownership scheme where mining companies were compelled to cede shareholding or commit specified levels of revenue to communities, but unfortunately it collapsed.

The ‘beyond winners and losers’ approach will depend on sincere partnerships between host governments, communities and corporations. Best practice already exists but can only be replicated when there is sufficient political will and the realisation that the current accumulation model is not sustainable. African Philanthropy in this instance will be geared towards disrupting inequality through inserting communities within the ownership structures and enhancing their voice.

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