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Susan Wilkinson
University of St. Andrews

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#ShiftThePower: Community Giving as a Critical Consciousness-Raising Tool

Susan Wilkinson-Maposa, Ph.D., University of St. Andrews, and Bernie Dolley, Ikhala Trust

Keywords: #ShiftThePower, collective giving, community philanthropy tool

Introduction

Asymmetrical power relations in international aid and development efforts,¹ which favor the funder and cast the recipient as supplicant, are facing renewed challenges. Foundations, defined in this article as grantmaking institutions of all types, are being called upon to advocate for adjustments that allow people to decide what is best for themselves. The Global Summit on Community Philanthropy, convened by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) in December 2016, used the banner “#ShiftThePower” to catalyse a discussion on what community-led development — based on community priorities, leadership, and ownership — can contribute to shifting power away from funders and toward communities (Hodgson & Knight, 2016).

This appeal comes at a critical moment globally where, alongside a growing narrative on the failure of aid and civil society, there are new conversations about “disruptions” — restrictions and policies that frustrate development efforts (Disrupt & Innovate, 2017). These dialogues signal the possibility that we are poised to usher in a new era in thinking and practice about aid and development. Yet history warns us to temper our optimism. The community-led orientation toward development and aligned trends in philanthropy have surfaced and resurfaced for decades, under various guises and with various intensities (Howarth et al., 2003, Knight, 2017). Yet they have consistently failed to transform the conventional top-down, outside-in paradigm of official development assistance (Keidan, 2016).

Key Points

- This article proposes that foundations committed to community-led development must be prepared to invest in efforts that empower the community. In particular, there is potential for funders willing to challenge the top-down nature of the current aid and development system through use of critical consciousness-raising to claim a transformative role in shifting from a “recipient” to a “citizen” approach to community development.
- For foundations to assist communities in criticizing this power imbalance and using the insights that result to challenge the system requires the “three-legged stool” of community philanthropy — strengthening capacities, developing assets, and building trust — to become a “chair” by adding a fourth leg — growing community power.
- This article explores community giving, a norm in communalist societies, as a viable entry point for helping communities explore and understand their own experiences, and presents a tool that calculates the financial value of a community’s contribution to its own development, defining it as equity that can be brought to the development table.

Proponents of community-led development argue that funder priorities have historically taken precedence over sustainable development. Claude Ake (1988), an African academic writing on “sustaining development on the indigenous” (p. 1) more than 30 years ago, argued that for change to endure, development efforts must build upon what people do organically: their

¹The “international aid” system refers to official development assistance by bilateral and multilateral organizations. “Development efforts” involve a broader set of actors and include contributions from civil society, philanthropy, the private sector, and the governments of recipient countries.

Behind the suggestion that foundations invest in community power and use the phenomenon of community giving as the starting point for critical consciousness-raising is the intention that foundations take on a leadership role in assisting communities in criticizing the power imbalance found within aid and development systems, and then in using these insights to challenge the system.

priorities, assets, leadership, knowledge, relationships, and their ways of working. In other words, they must embrace systems and structures that have been tried, tested, and trusted. Today, Jenny Hodgson and Barry Knight (2016), thought leaders in community philanthropy, speak of “durable development” (p. 33) — a paradigm grounded in the principle that people should determine and control their own destinies and in practices that support the agency of local people and their institutions. Common to both approaches is an agreement that power should be close to the ground.

If foundations are committed to effective development and are responsive to the request to “shift the power,” their task is to pursue concrete actions that will fulfill those commitments. Good intentions, while laudable, will lead to where community-led development has been before: in and out of style, but never resetting the course. While “#ShiftThePower” may be a fashionable mantra in certain development circles, there is still no strategy for this end game. This

article proposes this strategy: that foundations invest in community power.

This article — a reflection on what philanthropy can contribute to recalibrating the power dynamic in aid and development — explores what popular education theory and, in particular, Paolo Freire’s (1983) notion of critical consciousness-raising can offer foundations seeking to take a leadership role in growing the power of communities. Critical consciousness involves a deep understanding of a community’s experiences and subjugation and of its potential for transformation. Guided by appreciative inquiry — assigning value to community strengths and sites of power — this article explores collective giving, a norm in communitarian societies, as a viable entry point for arousing critical consciousness. It then describes a tool, developed in South Africa, that measures and imputes a financial value to a community’s contribution to its own development, defining it as equity that can be brought to the development table.

Investing in Community Power: A “Simple” Framework for a Complex Challenge

Behind the suggestion that foundations invest in community power and use the phenomenon of community giving as the starting point for critical consciousness-raising is the intention that foundations take on a leadership role in assisting communities in criticizing the power imbalance found within aid and development systems, and then in using these insights to challenge the system. This could involve facilitating group explorations of personal experiences of violation and/or empowerment, which can lead to a critical understanding of the root causes of oppression and result in solidarity and a shared political commitment to change the status quo: to dismantle what exists and come up with an alternative architecture.

To “dismantle” implies the ultimate replacement of what is inherently flawed, rather than merely tweaking a current system to position communities more favorably within it. However, it will take time to shift the culture of

aid and development in ways that affect underlying strategies and processes entrenched for decades in systems, structures, and mindsets. #ShiftThePower is not an overnight fix: It calls for a long-term vision as well as an iterative, building-block approach — and a good dose of modesty as well. Community philanthropy is a relatively small and emergent field, still on the margins of the space where the heavy hitters in development — bilateral, multilateral, and international NGOs — are operating. This condition, however, is not necessarily a liability. Foundations have the strength that comes from personal relationships, based on trust, with communities and networks of communities around the globe. And these relationships position them, probably better than any other actor, to do the deep and reflective work of critical consciousness-raising.

Supporting communities in resisting the ineffective aid system to which they are accustomed is a way for foundations to confront the irony that community-led development often operates with a “top down” approach. Currently, such mobilization appears to be coming from international and national NGOs exemplified by the GFCF and the Movement for Community Led Development,² a community of practice seeking to elevate discourse related to policies and practices. Beyond this, however, foundations can support communities in claiming power by leveraging two strengths — their credibility and their reach. For foundations, community-led development is not a fad — it is at the center of community philanthropy (Bernholtz, Fulton, & Kasper, 2005). This has equipped them with practical tools as well as experience in such approaches as participatory grantmaking and inclusive governance structures. In addition, both foundations and communities are capable of “blending” vertical and horizontal philanthropy — how funders mobilise and use resources and practices favored by communities (Wilkinson-Maposa, 2009a, Mawiyoo & Ngule, 2016).

The wide reach of foundations in supporting community-led development stems from the fact

The wide reach of foundations in supporting community-led development stems from the fact that community philanthropy is globally the fastest-growing institutional form of giving. More than 1,680 foundations practice this form of philanthropy — most located in North America and Europe, with the remainder scattered across Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa.

that community philanthropy is globally the fastest-growing institutional form of giving. More than 1,680 foundations practice this form of philanthropy — most located in North America and Europe, with the remainder scattered across Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa (Worldwide Initiative for Grantmaker Support, 2010). Foundations have access to a vast network of communities, among them those hardest to reach. They can also tap into national and regional networks and alliances to build political clout: steps taken to grow community power at the local level can feed into state-level efforts, which can then cascade into national, regional, and ultimately global work.

From a Three-Legged Stool to a Chair: Expanding the Community Philanthropy Paradigm

The community philanthropy paradigm described by Hodgson & Knight as a “three-legged stool” (2016, p. 31) balances on three interconnected interventions:

²See <https://communityleddev.org>.

Just as Freire has faith in the student's ability to see beyond personal success or self-interest and in the teacher's ability to see education as a way to make historical progress — one epoch marking an advance on the preceding one — community philanthropy has to be grounded in the belief that community has the ability to see beyond the narrow prospects of “receiving money” to realize the role it can play in demonstrating the inefficiency of the aid and development system.

1. strengthening capacities, including relationships, knowledge, infrastructure, and leaders;
2. developing assets, financial and otherwise; and
3. building trust so that communities unite and act together.

The stool becomes a chair, however, with the addition of a fourth leg: investing in community power. The essence of this is the idea that foundations with the political will to challenge power asymmetries can enable communities to claim their power by investing in relevant capacities that allow them to do so — including

the development of a critical consciousness as a transformative force.

Against this backdrop, attention can turn to a more detailed consideration of what popular education and Freire's theory of critical consciousness can offer philanthropy in taking this leadership proposition forward. It sets the stage for suggesting that community giving is a potential entry point for consciousness-raising, before offering up a tool that measures and imputes a financial value to this social norm for an estimate of the equity that a community brings to the development table.

Critical Consciousness-Raising as a Transformative Leadership Strategy

Popular education — an approach to education in which people engage with each other and the educator as co-learners to consider the issues that affect their community so they can act on them, is not new. Indeed, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's (1983) book on popular education theory, continues to inspire more than 30 years after its publication. Rather than a proposal for a learner-centered model of problem solving, it is an argument for active learning as a radical act with the potential to transform the scaffolding of oppression (Halves, 2015). According to Freire, popular education is a vehicle for “the downtrodden” to develop a “critical consciousness” — a shift in mindset that allows them to question their own behavior as “prescribed” by “the oppressor” (p. 19). In other words, communities can begin to see themselves in a different way — through their own story and experience rather than through an external lens. The theory is that if individuals, communities, and community organizations³ are empowered through an appreciation of what they can do with what they have in order to advance their own aspirations and vision, a reversal occurs: from an internalized sense of disempowerment to a predisposition to claim power. Only the oppressed — those misused and taken advantage of, Freire maintains — can liberate themselves.

³The definition of “community organization” embraces a diversity of grassroots community structures that include registered community-based organizations; associations, societies, and clubs; and projects or activities. “Members” of these organizations include staff, board members, volunteers, and interns.

Freedom, he argues, begins with realizing you are the “host” of the oppressor (p. 33).

Just as Freire has faith in the student’s ability to see beyond personal success or self-interest and in the teacher’s ability to see education as a way to make historical progress — one epoch marking an advance on the preceding one (Halves, 2015) — community philanthropy has to be grounded in the belief that community has the ability to see beyond the narrow prospects of “receiving money” to realize the role it can play in demonstrating the inefficiency of the aid and development system. This framing raises the bar, asking foundations engaged in community philanthropy to interrupt a system that is fundamentally flawed. Freire argues that the best hope for breaking a cycle and changing history is a critical understanding of the systems in which we operate. This requires looking beyond what is no longer tolerable and toward a better order that has yet to be built. The task for philanthropy, Freire would argue, is to be a leader — to work with communities to find ways of creating awareness, encouraging reflection, and supporting the community’s ability to act on that new consciousness.

Suggesting that philanthropy can elicit community self-awareness is not to patronize community. Rather, it recognizes that the internalized notion of community as the inferior in the development partnership positions it as a “client” — a recipient of services — rather than a body of citizens with the assets and ability to make decisions and act as an agent of its own change (Mathie & Cunningham, 2008). Responsible leadership must recognize that change is not achieved spontaneously — a lesson demonstrated in the 1980s by the focus in international development on participation and decentralization. It was presumed that despite years of community exclusion from centralized development planning and implementation, communities had the necessary preparation to participate in government planning and budgeting at the local level. This lesson — not to assume readiness — is important. It can’t be predicted with confidence when communities and community organizations will be prepared to challenge a system, however unfair and ineffective, within which they have become

Producing data on community equity — a calculation of the value individuals and community organizations add to the development process — is a way to enhance an understanding among community members, foundation staff, and their constituencies of the norms and features of collective giving that play out in a specific location and context.

accustomed to working. This brings to mind the adage, “better the devil you know than the devil you don’t”: The status quo, however failed, can be seen as a safer bet than taking a chance on the unknown.

Collective Giving as an Entry Point for Philanthropic Leadership

Collective giving is a strategic entry point that philanthropy can leverage in helping communities question their ascribed role in aid and development. For the purpose of this article, collective giving refers to noncoercive, “collectivistic” giving that groups “initiate, inspire, and oversee” and in which individuals participate through group ties (Eckstein, 2001, p. 829). Such giving enables people to address community problems and aspirations through community structures.

Producing data on community equity — a calculation of the value individuals and community organizations add to the development process — is a way to enhance an understanding among community members, foundation staff, and their constituencies of the norms and features of

collective giving that play out in a specific location and context. These data can be used to more accurately measure and describe a contribution to a community — a familiar question found in grant applications in the United States and elsewhere; to put the resources mobilized by funders into perspective, in particular if levels of “sacrifice” made by the poor are factored in; and to fill an information gap. Financial figures are typically presented to quantify government spending, corporate social investment, and other forms of development assistance, but not to demonstrate a community’s contribution to the effort.

Detailing and valuing community giving, as demonstrated by a case study for this article, can also build community confidence that awakens it to its own worth and lead to the dismantling of existing architectures and their replacement with a new system, partnership regime, and power dynamic.

The tool for measuring community giving is informed by an asset-based community development (ABCD)⁴ approach, which highlights a community’s assets and resources—including agency (Mathie, Cameron, & Gibson, 2017). It also applies the concept of horizontal philanthropy, which supports self-help through the mobilization of resources by and for a community, as distinct from verticality, or resources mobilised by one community for the use of another (Wilkinson-Maposa, Fowler, Oliver-Evans, & Mulenga, 2005).

Measuring and Valuing Collective Giving: A Five-Step Process

The tool detailed here emerged as a response to concerns that communities enter into grantmaking relationships as “beggars,” lacking a full appreciation of their own considerable efforts toward development. Community organizations developed skills in filling grant applications and identifying what they need and did not

have, but were not being asked to detail, in any systematic and evidence-based way, their own contributions to their development (Wilkinson-Maposa, 2009b).

The tool was developed with funding from the Ford Foundation and using social action research, and tested by 10 community-based organizations (CBOs). Its design was a collaborative effort by a researcher from the University of Cape Town’s Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town⁵; the Ikhala Trust,⁶ a community grantmaker in South Africa’s Eastern Cape Province; and one of the trust’s development partners, the Janensville⁷ Development Forum (JDF), an umbrella body of CBOs. It is particularly relevant for foundations working with grassroots organizations and in communities where collaborative ways of working are the culturally embedded norm. It can be used across any sector, is suited to rural or urban locations, and is uniquely designed to be used in contexts where an economy operates on both official and nonformal levels — a feature widespread in the Global South. It is useful for single organizations as well as networks or similar groupings of community organizations.

Use of the tool involves five steps.

Step 1: Community Consultation

The initial task is to identify why it is useful to measure and give a financial value to community giving: How does the community help itself? Who helps the organization, and how? What kinds of help should be measured? What are the benefits of knowing this?

Next, practicalities and logistics are sorted out: Will the tool be self-administered or facilitated? Will the assessment happen in real time — collecting data from the outset — or in retrospect? What will be the period of assessment: a matter of months, or a year? Who will lead the process

⁴ABCD, an acronym coined by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), is used to draw attention to how communities self-organize and use local skills and capacities through formal and informal associations.

⁵See www.gsb.uct.ac.za.

⁶See www.ikhala.org.za and www.abcd.org.za.

⁷JDF is no longer in existence.

and provide the information? Finally, templates must be customised and a pilot test conducted.

Step 2: A Community Profile

The next task is to have the community organization describe itself by creating a profile, a project that can be facilitated by considering seven questions:

- What funding comes into the organization, and where does it come from? Membership fees? Grants? Donations?
- What skills, experience, and knowledge are available to the organization — planning, bookkeeping, organizing, recording and minutes-taking, guidance, fundraising? Where do these come from? Who provides them?
- What people — employees and volunteers — are available to the organization? What do they do? Who manages it — executives, a governing board?
- What access does the organization have to infrastructure and equipment — buildings, equipment, vehicles? Are they owned (e.g., a computer)? Are there access rights (i.e., to land), or permissions, such as the loan of a venue?
- How important are assets — money, people, physical objects — to the organization's work, and why? Is any one of them more important than the others?
- Does the organization work alone or with others? Can it create a picture or map that illustrates the organization's relationships with and links to others?
- What has the organization accomplished? What difference has it made? What is the most important change it has contributed to the community? What do others in the

community have to say about the organization and its work?

Step 3: A Record of Community Contributions

Members of the organization — staff, board members, volunteers, interns — should discuss and record what and how much they receive from the community over a set period of time in order to take stock of the total resources the organization is able to access from within the community. These resources might include:

- unpaid labor — time donated by volunteers toward management, governance, and meetings, as well as hours spent delivering products or services to the community;
- money — membership fees, donations (including remittances and diaspora contributions), and proceeds from fundraising activities; and
- in-kind gifts and loans — goods and materials (e.g., catering equipment, furniture), space or venues (including tents for events), and transportation.

These calculations allow members to reflect on what the resources allowed them to do, opening the way for appreciating their value and importance. The process of itemizing can also be an organizing tool: identifying, for example, what types of contributions are likely to come regularly and can therefore be anticipated, and what types are largely ad hoc.

Step 4: The Financial Value of Community Contributions

An annual tallying of the financial value of contributions allows an organization to calculate the equity it has generated from the community's own resource base. That tally makes a statement about the amount of community giving it attracts, leverages, and converts into action. Financial value is assigned to the labor time of volunteers, using hourly rates comparable to equivalent paid work in the area. The value of in-kind resources, tallied in terms of units received, can be difficult to quantify if the

This tool is by no means flawless. It favors assets and agency that are tangible and recognizable and is silent on other forms of capital, such as moral and intellectual investments, that communities bring to the development table (Joseph, 2016).

contributions are recorded retrospectively; it is easier to assign values if their receipt is recorded in real time because the current value of a contribution can be used.

There are a number of factors to consider in imputing financial value: Are there gaps and inconsistencies in the information? Has the best locally comparable paid-work rate been identified?

Step 5: Measurement Results

Documenting the results and sharing them within the organization can help members vet and verify the measurement, analyse its meaning, and explore its potential use. The best format for disseminating the information should be determined based on the intended audience, the purpose of the documentation, and its intended use.

Using and Adapting the Tool

This tool is by no means flawless. It favors assets and agency that are tangible and recognizable and is silent on other forms of capital, such as moral and intellectual investments, that communities bring to the development table (Joseph, 2016).

This excludes from consideration the values and principles a community can contribute to development and social justice efforts, access to local systems and institutions that can enhance efficiency and effectiveness, and knowledge of the local environment and context — a most critical factor.

Assessing community giving can be problematic; four considerations stand out. The first is variations in terms and meaning. There are various ways to define a “volunteer,” for example; a strict interpretation of “unpaid work” does not always apply. In some communities, volunteers can be compensated to varying degrees: with a reduced wage or a stipend, or with benefits such as transportation or a meal. Secondly, imputing a financial value requires particular flexibility in the context of a dual economy: value can be pegged to an official market value or to a rate valid in the informal or local economy. The cost of giving someone a lift to the workplace, for example, could be calculated using the automobile association mileage rate or using what one would pay to hitch a ride or hire a local taxi (a six-fold cost differential in one calculated case). Experience shows that community members have no trouble arriving at realistic calculations by drawing on a range of benchmarks: the government-awarded stipend, wages paid commercially in the area, what a volunteer has been paid previously for similar work, or what a volunteer would expect to be paid if employed.

The third consideration is how to frame data collection — in real time or in retrospect? The former has the benefit of deliberate record-keeping as an investment in accuracy; memory can be incomplete and unreliable. However, experience suggests that most organizations that rely on volunteers have some form of a labor roster. And it can also be the case that a once-off donation is so unusual that it is unlikely to be forgotten.

A final consideration is that in-kind contributions can prove difficult to capture and represent in a financial calculation. Contributions can be overlooked or undervalued, which can be unjust in contexts of poverty and scarcity. A workaround strategy is to simply list these practices, even if it is not to impute a value.

Critical Consciousness-Raising: Potentials and Limitations

The methodology established in this tool is ready for further testing, specifically the extent to which it is useful in contexts other than South

Africa and what it can contribute to philanthropic leadership in raising a community's critical consciousness. In the Janensville case there was an immediate and positive impact. Some organizations revised the calculations themselves and were able to confirm satisfaction. One individual repeated the process with her church group and reported that measurement added value and was an eye opener. Most of the organizations reported that the results had a motivational effect on their staff and volunteers, noting shifts in attitudes toward working overtime and "going the extra mile" as people came to see such contributions as adding value more than as a burden. The process also emboldened community organizations to see new uses for the data. "In our fundraising," observed one participant, "we can now point to our local contribution or local income with confidence because we have a value for it. We no longer thumb-suck our own contribution." Another noted that "we now have a clear picture of the value of our relationships with other organizations." Said a third: "This makes us more confident to approach funders; we don't feel like beggars." Another participant said, "We can use this information to build from the inside out. To strengthen ourselves."

These examples of impact on critical consciousness are encouraging and indicate a promising start. But these observations, that the data can be used by communities to better position themselves within the existing grantmaking protocol, reveal little critical thinking about how the aid and development system is structured. And that is not surprising: At the time the tool was being developed and tested, the narrative on the aid system's failure was not fully developed. The historical moment we have today had yet to mature, and our objective was to shed light on and value community equity rather than to pursue the macro goals of dismantling the present aid architecture and shifting funder-recipient power relations. More significant still for philanthropy in pursuing a leadership role in reaching this goal is what Freire (1983) labels the "fear of freedom" such that the "oppressed" have so deeply engrained the ideas and teachings of the "oppressor" that they resist casting off their vision of the

The first, "power within," refers to a person's sense of capacity and self-worth that comes from "reversing internalised powerlessness" (Mathie et al., 2017, p. 11). The second, the "power to," refers to the potential possibilities for action, including breaking free from the shackles that have held a community back (p. 3).

world and replacing it with self-determination and responsibility (p. 31).

Mathie et al.'s (2017) handling of power for an assessment of ABCD's effect on shifting mindsets and behavior aligns the transformational potential of Freire's notion of critical consciousness with two types of power. The first, "power within," refers to a person's sense of capacity and self-worth that comes from "reversing internalised powerlessness" (Mathie et al., 2017, p. 11). The second, the "power to," refers to the potential possibilities for action, including breaking free from the shackles that have held a community back (p. 3). Their findings from three countries — South Africa, the Philippines, and Ethiopia — indicate that a shift in focus from needs to assets helps to prompt a "momentary change in subjectivity as people begin to see themselves and others in a new light," and they refer to "aha" moments "in which an internalised sense of powerlessness is challenged as people reframe themselves as subjects capable of acting in concert with others" (2017, p. 3).

Similar to Freire, however, they signal that enabling a new mindset to take hold is a long-term process and continuous challenge in a structurally disempowering context. The

implication is that for critical consciousness to lead to long-term change, a community's awareness and understanding of its own power and context cannot be a fleeting or temporary effort. Instead, growing community power has to be a more consolidated, continuous, and multifaceted process, one that requires leadership and agenda setting. Foundations have a critical role to play here.

Conclusion

Power is a problem in international aid and development when funders have too much of it and communities too little. This equation adds up to bad development — the impact is not what is needed and inequities are disguised under a pretense of partnership. The ultimate challenge is to dismantle the system, rather than position community more comfortably within it, and to replace it with something else that is currently unknown. Foundations that are proponents of community-led development are responding to an invitation from the Global Fund for Community Foundations to explore what development could look like if the power dial was turned downward, closer to community, and to deliberate on the role of community philanthropy in making this happen.

This article contributes to that conversation, proposing that foundations embrace a transformative leadership strategy as a way to assist communities in stepping into their power and resisting the current aid and development system. The way to bring this about is to explore what Freire's theory of critical consciousness-raising can offer with its argument that it is the recipients — subjugates within the current aid and development system — who have the power to throw off the shackles, yet who at the same time can be fearful of shedding that to which they are accustomed and stepping into the unknown. From an appreciative inquiry perspective, the norm of community giving is one entry point for awakening communities to their own development experience, and the tool to measure and give a financial value to it, discussed in this article, is a potential starting point.

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Susan Wilkinson-Maposa, Ph.D., is a fellow at The Centre for the Study of Philanthropy & Public Good, University of St. Andrews. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Susan Wilkinson-Maposa, 1A Klaassens Road, Chart Farm, Cape Town, 7800, South Africa (email: swilkinsonmaposa@gmail.com).