



**AFRICA**  
**Grantmakers'**  
**Affinity**  
**Group**

# **CONVERSATIONS WITH AFRICA GRANTMAKERS**

**REFLECTIONS ON NAVIGATING  
ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

**“ AGAG HAS BEEN SHAPED AND SUSTAINED BY THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN PART OF ITS EVOLUTION... THEY HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE POSITIVE INFLUENCE THAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN COLLEAGUES COME TOGETHER IN A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE SPACE.”**

— Niamani Mutima

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# INTRODUCTION

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The work of the Africa Grantmakers' Affinity Group (AGAG) is grounded in the belief that a global network of diverse, knowledgeable, and connected grantmakers will help to grow and strengthen the impact of private philanthropy targeting Africa. For two decades AGAG has been a gathering place for a diverse community of grantmakers based inside and outside of Africa. 2020 marked two decades of our work. We took advantage of this important milestone to learn how grantmakers navigate their roles and relationships.

*Conversations With Africa Grantmakers: Reflections on Navigating Roles and Relationships* presents snapshots from our conversations with a diverse group of 17 individuals currently or formerly working as grantmakers with responsibility for grants targeting Africa. They reflect the diversity of those who have been a part of the AGAG network, and the themes reflect those that are inherent in grantmaking. As a dynamic network AGAG has been shaped and sustained by the people who have been a part of its evolution. They have demonstrated the positive influence and results that happen when grantmakers come together in a welcoming and inclusive space with colleagues funding outside of their respective grantmaking interests.

Thank you to those who participated in the interviews. We hope their reflections will provide useful perspectives for new grantmakers who are developing their own practice and insights that resonate with those with more experience.

Niamani Mutima  
Executive Director



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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To mark the 20th anniversary of the Africa Grantmakers' Affinity Group (AGAG), we wanted to learn more about the grantmakers who have been part of AGAG's network, and how they navigate their roles in the grantmaking process. The grantmaking staff of a funding organization are its primary public face and source of information about the organization's funding priorities. Their role is central in the internal process that reviews and determines who and what get funded, the external relationships with potential and actual recipients, and building collaborations with colleagues from other funding organizations.

*Conversations With Africa Grantmakers: Reflections on Navigating Roles and Relationships* presents snapshots from our conversations with a diverse group of 17 individuals currently or formerly working as grantmakers with responsibility for grants targeting Africa. They reflect the diversity of the AGAG network. They were born in different countries and come from

different backgrounds; they work for different types of funding organizations, including ones headquartered in Canada, South Africa, and the United States. They have a range of titles, some more senior than others. But all have had key grantmaking responsibilities and extensive experience in funding organizations working in communities across Africa.

In this report, we use "grantmaker" to refer to the individual program staff person and "funding organizations" to refer to the organization they represent. We have featured excerpts from our conversations with these grantmakers about their experiences and insights. We hope these reflections will provide useful perspectives for new grantmakers as they evolve their own practice, along with offering a view of their work that may resonate with experienced grantmakers.

The following is a sampling of their reflections that we organized across four themes:

## NAVIGATING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

- **Few of these grantmakers started their careers intending to work in philanthropy.** Many of them previously worked in academia or for NGOs. Others worked for funding organizations in roles other than grantmaking, and a couple characterized this career move as accidental. We also heard from grantmakers who took a more intentional approach to working in philanthropy.
- **Grantmakers are often seen as the primary arbiters of funding decisions.** Many discussed the challenges they face in influencing strategy and funding decisions, especially within organizations that are hierarchical and where leadership has limited knowledge about the communities they are funding. Although none of those interviewed expected to have complete autonomy about who and what gets funded, some shared the constraints under which they operate, reflecting how little power grantmakers can have on specific funding decisions.
- **Many grantmakers said their experiences have taught them to embrace the “messiness” of the process.** Several grantmakers acknowledged the power dynamics inherent in grantmaking that can hinder candid conversations and preempt the important two-way learning that can help to balance these dynamics and enable the formation of real partnerships.

## UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

- **Listening and learning are ongoing fundamentals if grantmakers want to understand the dynamic contexts in different countries.** The issues and actors are complex in every situation, but especially for those working outside of a familiar environment. Regardless of their individual backgrounds, most grantmakers emphasized that continuous learning is both a responsibility and a benefit of working with a range of different organizations and colleagues seeking positive change.
- **Grantmakers underscored the importance of exposing themselves to different opinions and perspectives.** They emphasized that the organizations they fund provide important sources of information and analyses. However, they are one part of a broader landscape of sources about the forces and actors who are shaping current situations.



## FORMING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- **There are numerous informal and formal ways grantmakers funding in Africa work together.** The grantmakers we spoke with described options ranging from seeking advice to engaging in shared learning to being a part of pooled funding efforts. All of these can be valuable, successful, or challenging experiences but collaborative efforts help to advance the funding goals of their organization and their own professional development. For grantmakers based in different countries, other grantmakers based in the countries where they fund are a valuable source of information and understanding about the local context. This is especially true for those funding organizations without offices or an ongoing presence in the countries where they fund and grantmakers new to funding or interested in funding in Africa.
- **Most grantmakers found that building strong collaborative relationships can prove difficult.** Many factors can impede collaboration, such as the different regulations, structures, and operating principles that govern philanthropy within and between countries. The reality that most funding organizations establish their priorities and strategies without extensive consultation with other funding organizations or stakeholders, and the demands to demonstrate the impact of their specific funding investment often leads funding organizations to view their support in isolation.
- **Funder networks are valuable resources for collaboration and learning among grantmakers.** The individuals we spoke with highlighted the importance of networks of funding organizations for building collaborative relationships and providing opportunities for grantmakers to get to know and learn along with others. AGAG has played an especially unique role in providing a forum that helps to connect diverse funders based inside and outside of Africa.


## UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

- **Grantmakers emphasized the importance of understanding how the changes within the philanthropic sector impact their work.** Learning from experience and using those insights to shape practice is an ongoing process. Grantmakers described growing recognition that funding programs can do harm when decisions about what is needed are made for people rather than by and with the people who will be affected. They also spoke about the positive impact of more diversity in the leadership and grantmaking staff of funding organizations, including those from Africa involved in funding in Africa. In addition, they cited the growth of grantmaker networks and philanthropy support organizations across Africa.

- **Grantmakers increasingly recognize the importance of supporting organizations that are anchored in their respective communities.** When the majority of funding goes to organizations headquartered outside of Africa it does not help to strengthen or sustain new or existing civil society infrastructure. Those we spoke with voiced that this approach also ignores Africa's large youth population, who are creating organizations and movements that reflect their priorities and aspirations for a greater role as change agents.
- **Some grantmakers voiced concern about issues in philanthropy that still need attention.** Among those shared was a critique of the agendas, attitudes, and narratives about Africa that shape the grantmaking process. All of these can engender perspectives that must change to build real partnerships and make an impact on the issues funding organizations are trying to influence. Additionally, the desire to show immediate results runs counter to the understanding that significant change requires long-term investments.



# **CONVERSATIONS WITH AFRICA GRANTMAKERS**



The grantmaking staff of a funding organization are its primary public face and information source on its funding priorities. Their role is central in the internal process that reviews and determines who and what get funded, as well as the external discussions and relationships between potential and actual recipients and with colleagues from other funding organizations. Managing these roles and relationships is at the core of grantmaking practice.

How grantmakers approach their work and the perceived and actual roles they play in the decision-making process is not always understood nor uniform between different funding organizations. In the philanthropy sector, “funder” is often used interchangeably to refer to the organization and the individual—perhaps because the individual is viewed as the personification of the organization. In this report we use “grantmaker” to refer to the individual program staff person and “funding organizations” to refer to the organization they represent.

Africa Grantmakers’ Affinity Group (AGAG) has been a gathering place for a diverse community of grantmakers based inside and outside of Africa. To mark our 20th anniversary, we wanted to learn more about the grantmakers who make up the network and how they navigate their roles in the grantmaking process: What was the career path that led them to working for a funding organization, what has shaped their approach, and what insights could they share about their experiences with colleagues and those entering the field. The following presents snapshots from our conversations with a diverse group of 17 individuals currently or formerly working as grantmakers with responsibility for grants targeting Africa.


The individuals we spoke with reflect the diversity of those who have been a part of the AGAG network. Most are based in the United States, but we also spoke with grantmakers based in Canada and South Africa. (See page 49 for a complete list of interviewees.) They were born in different countries, came from different backgrounds, and had various career paths. They work for different types of funding organizations. Some work for large independent foundations with endowment funds, others for family foundations funded from personal wealth, and others for institutions that raise the funds they grant. The grantmakers we spoke with have a range of different titles, some more senior than others. But all have key responsibilities for grants targeting Africa.

Some of the interviewees have spent most of their professional lives as a grantmaker, while others moved into this role from other careers or have stepped into and out of this work. For many, their training and experience aligned with their organization's funding interest in a specific sector, such as health, law, or education. Others had experience working or living in a specific part of the world. For some, their grantmaking has always been connected to organizations in Africa, while for others Africa has been among the geographic areas where they have experience making grants. Still others were born in an African country and work for organizations based or headquartered on the continent.


Our conversations took place during Fall 2019 and Winter 2020. All of those interviewed have been a part of the Africa Grantmakers' Affinity Group network over the years. They represent the practitioners who have helped to identify the perennial challenges that have been at the center of the network's discussions. Our 20th anniversary presented an opportune moment to ask them to share reflections and insights that we hope will provide useful perspectives for new grantmakers as they evolve their own practice, as well as offering a view of their work that may resonate with experienced grantmakers. In each of the following sections, we have featured excerpts from these conversations.

## **WE HAVE ORGANIZED THEIR REFLECTIONS INTO FOUR THEMES:**

 **NAVIGATING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

 **UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CONTEXTS**

 **FORMING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

 **UNDERSTANDING CHANGE**





# NAVIGATING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

## CAREER PATHWAYS

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There is no one path leading to a career as a grantmaker, and each grantmaker brings their own perspective, experience, and learning styles. We began our interviews by asking each grantmaker how they came to work for a funding organization and then explored how their approach, perceptions of “philanthropy,” and sphere of influence have evolved.

Few of the grantmakers we spoke with started their careers intending to work in philanthropy. Many previously worked in academia or for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Others worked for funding organizations in roles other than grantmaking, and a couple characterized this career move as accidental.

Among the broad array of experiences grantmakers shared with us were:



After completing an advanced degree and living in West Africa for a year and a half, “[I] became disillusioned with academia. I wanted to work with the most progressive NGO in the area, doing real solidarity programming.” This led to doing research and evaluation across the continent for a funding organization that wanted to do “embedded funding.” After eight years, they moved to working for a foundation in the United States that focused on providing support directly to grassroots organizations.





“I got into philanthropy by accident” through answering a job ad referencing Africa non-governmental organizations. “I wanted to learn and also test whether to stay in the development field and I was thinking politically about what a role for an American is in international development...Getting private money from the U.S. to good African projects was not a bad role for an American, and I was thinking this may be the way I could engage. I did not want to work for the U.S. government or UN [and wondered] ‘Would I be replacing an African if I worked for an NGO in Africa?’”



“Seeing programs come and go and not fulfilling what they should fulfill” led to considering a move from academia to philanthropy. “I wanted to know how to do long-term sustainable work and support communities [in ways] that address people’s needs,” and not just the needs of donors. “So much come and go [in funding] reflected the wishes of the donors and not making long-term investments. What is it that people on the ground need, and what is the role of the money? Is there a way to reorganize what we think about development that will help them in the long-term? Also, philanthropy is not only about money. How do we engage in different ways with the issues relevant to people we’re supporting?”



Work in corporate social investing led to considerations of how philanthropy can “think more strategically about how they engage in communities.” But when an opportunity first came up to work for a foundation, they demurred to continue on in a new role with an NGO. When the opportunity came up again a year later, they took it but found that the work was “not as easy as I thought it would be and not as glamorous as I thought it would be. Not as easy because you are charged with quite an important responsibility, needing to move dollars in the most thoughtful and impactful way. A lot more thinking, learning, planning goes into it all the time...Also, it’s not as glamorous because it takes a lot of commitment of your time. You invest a lot of time on the road, at airports.” The rewards of the work were also greater, including “how nice a feeling and what an impact it has for me and for the people it ultimately benefits. It’s very fulfilling. Being able to contribute to civil society outweighs some of the discomforts I sometimes feel.”



## NAVIGATING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

“The opportunity to get involved in Africa was the driving motivation” for taking on a high-level administrator role with a funding organization where “my responsibility was hiring the program people who would do the funding.” Over time, they became the head of the organization, at which point they “had to have a broader perspective. Not just about knowing Africa but about how to guide resources for Africa.”



A long-time activist in social and economic justice characterized their experience as having been “drawn into grantmaking and then [making] a conscious choice that that was where I wanted to go.” Having worked for several different types of funding organizations, they observed that, relative to bilateral donors, “private donors were more flexible. I’m not sure whether they’re more risk tolerant but certainly more flexible in discussing ideas.” By comparison, they “found the bilateral donors...to be far more tolerant of autonomy in making decisions, but far more bureaucratic.” Working as a grantmaker has led them to conclude that “the way money flows is at the heart of effectiveness in doing the work,” particularly in terms of whether the priorities being funded are seen as having legitimacy by the communities being served.

### We also heard from grantmakers who took a more intentional approach to working in philanthropy:

“My own life benefited from philanthropic support to help with schooling. Without philanthropic support, I would not have ‘made it’ educationally. I always had the dream of giving back.” After completing advanced studies, they chose not to pursue a career in academia but rather to focus on philanthropy. Reinforcing this decision was a desire to “look for a way give back that was intersectional and multi-sectorial...Philanthropy in many ways is one field that allows for multisectoral approaches, even if an entry point is specific. For example, you can have a program on human rights, but it can focus on civil and political rights and economic rights, which gets to the overarching focus. The 360-degree approach excited me.”





“When I was a college student, I got a foundation fellowship grant to study South African literature and culture during apartheid, and it changed my life completely.” This grantmaker had an internship during graduate school at a major foundation and after completing school tried to get a job there and at another foundation, without success. They “ended up working in NGO development and anti-apartheid organizations.” But once the sanctions imposed on South Africa were lifted, they were hired by a foundation to evaluate fellowships applicants and have worked in philanthropy since. In terms of expectations about what it would feel like to be a grantmaker, they observed that “the sense that you can change people’s lives was confirmed.”

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

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In talking about what their experiences have taught them, many grantmakers said to listen, have humility, embrace the messiness of the work, and let communities take the lead. They also talked about what their experiences in their role as a grantmakers have taught them about how they can help organizations in achieving their goals. Following is a sampling of what we heard:



“I don’t lay claim to the work. It’s not my work. I don’t go into anything thinking this is the way it should be done. I go in saying, ‘Why do you want to do this, and how do you think it might work?’ During their time in philanthropy, someone said to them, “‘Funders have breadth and the big picture.’ If I bring something to the table, it’s generally that.” At the same time, they described sometimes getting “my wrist slapped internally [within their organization] for not being more directive.” The implication being that, “If we have to ask grantees [what should be done], I’m probably not working with the right people. But they have to own it...whose project is it anyway?”

## NAVIGATING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Reflecting a belief that directly funding organizations in the communities where you want to have an impact makes a difference, they observed, “If you want to help Africans and Africa, you really need to give that money to them. ...you need to support Africans to be responsible for their own situations and development. If you don’t help Africans directly, nothing will ever change.”



“Some philanthropists think they know best, others that community knows best.” But they see it as being both. “A former boss always talked about being a ‘critical friend’ as the role of a philanthropist. Try to build authentic, real relationships and trust. Really listen and be a bridge builder and think critically and creatively about the work.” Part of what it takes to do this is “long-term grantmaking. You can’t be changing your strategies all the time.” They also emphasized the critical importance of “funding the ‘how’ and not just being about the product,” which “means taking more time and letting it be a little more messy and having the feedback loops.”

“I’m critical of myself, as I need to know my place. I’m a funder and not an implementor.” As such, “[I’m] left with a dilemma of ‘What is my role, should be my role?’ My ‘art’ is just good grantmaking. Being in the field...connecting the dots, saying, ‘Do you know about this other group doing this thing?’ Making others aware of what the environment looks like. When people need capacity building, structuring it in a way that works for them. What I have learned is, you must temper your enthusiasm. Grantees only see the work in their own organization, while we have the privilege of seeing a much broader picture. So, we are tempted to tell them how to course correct. It’s one thing to tell them what you’ve seen and another to be prescriptive...Maybe it’s okay for an organization to be messy, and ultimately it will get to where it needs to be. Since I’m not doing [the work] myself, I can’t decide what’s the best way to do it.”



“[There is] a kind of corporatization of philanthropy” where “business skills [are seen] as being essential.” In reality, “People are complicated. Lives are messy. And we need to work in a way that embraces and acknowledges that and don’t need innovations and technical solutions that will solve our way out of this. I think [our role] is very much to engage with the messiness of this work, and that being the most important part.”

“Avoid at all costs this idea that we can bring technical solutions and our notions of innovation and efficiency to the continent. We really need to balance [this perspective] with community-driven approaches that address systemic inequity.” Starting in philanthropy, they “already had a moral and ethical compass that people with money shouldn’t make decision. So, I was very open to hearing what communities told me and not informed by academic training.” The bottom line is that philanthropy “is not a science. It’s about human connection and shared politics with the people you’re purporting to help.”



**“ PEOPLE HAVE TO GET OUT OF THEIR BUBBLES AND GET OUT OF THEIR TECHY-TECHY SOLUTIONS AND THEIR ENTREPRENEURIALISM. WE NEED TO TRUST PEOPLE TO BE RESILIENT AND GET THEM THE FUNDS. ”**

“The one thing I have brought to this space is my local experience on the ground and knowing that I don’t have all the answers. And I don’t feel insecure about not knowing everything. I’ve been a grant recipient and now I am the one who is giving the money. I have been in the position where I didn’t have the power of money. But these people are in the position to solve the problem. It’s humbling for me to know that I don’t really have the answer and need something from [these organizations] to do what I’m doing.”



Several grantmakers noted how money introduces power dynamics into relationships that not only hinder candid conversations but preempt the two-way learning that is important for funding to be an effective tool in helping an organization carry out its work. For example:



“I’m always saying [to organizations], ‘Don’t tell me what I want to hear.’ Because you’re guessing. And I can tell because you’re saying something that has nothing to do with what I’m asking.” What gives rise to this situation is “the language of funding [which] is generally defined by the funder and not the recipient. So, the recipient is always trying to figure out what the funder wants to hear.” To address this inherent challenge, they tell organizations to “send me a proposal that tells me exactly what you want to do and why. Don’t use a lot of language for other things. You tell me what it means if [you don’t think I’ll be] sure. I want to make sure I’m not defining everything on my terms and am forever open to learning and hearing what other people have to say. I’m very pointed about getting people to say something that is true rather than what they think I need to hear.”

Grantmakers also shared their critique of the agendas, attitudes, and narratives about Africa that shape the grantmaking process. All of these can engender perspectives that must change to build the authentic partnerships that are needed to make an impact on the issues they are trying to influence. Among their observations were:



“I feel like we need to return to a sense of international philanthropy being primarily about solidarity and not about a highly strategized agenda.”

“There’s still this really difficult element in the white middle class that feels pity for Africa and sees it as a problem place, and that’s fairly heavily infused in a lot of the foundations.”



**“ ONLY LOOKING AT ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE WELL-ESTABLISHED AND CAN DELIVER [YOUR AGENDA] LEAVES A HUGE GAP FOR EMERGING COMMUNITIES.”**

“Be careful about what you call success and what you call failure. Anything can be successful when you’re pumping money into it. And things that appear not successful can come back. The timing may not have been right.”



“[Grantmakers] need to look at consequences of supporting one field of work on other fields of work and consider the principle of do no harm to progress in Africa unintentionally. Funders tend to be well meaning but very siloed in their approach...and not aware of how [their work] undermines other work. Social justice can undermine economic advancement. Economic advancement can be blind to social justice concerns. [They need to be] more interested in an approach that advances African development in a broad, systemic approach and need to look at things together.”

“Philanthropy is expanding, and it’s feeling like if you make money or have money it qualifies you to have an opinion on any issue. So, now more than at any time we need models of how to do funding.”



Grantmakers are generally the exclusive point of contact and reference organizations have with funding organizations. Often they are seen as being the primary artibeurs of funding decisions. While grantmakers do play a pivotal role in presenting how a prospective grantee's work aligns with their organization's funding priorities, their level of authority is not always apparent. How much—or how little—authority grantmakers can have in influencing funding decisions within and across institutions can be quite different.

Many discussed the challenges they face in influencing strategy and funding decisions, especially within institutions that are very hierarchical and where leadership may have limited knowledge about the communities being served. Grantmakers are called upon to play several roles in the funding process. They described the different mechanisms and strategies for identifying the aligned interests of the funding organization and the organization receiving funding and ensuring that both understand the other's perspective.

For many, working in organizations where the leadership encouraged grantmakers to learn has helped them to grow professionally and develop successful grantmaking practices. For example:



“All decisions are made here by the staff.” In fact, this foundation made an intentional decision “not to rely on an outside board and technical committee that would slow down our ability to respond.” At the same time, decision-making is being directly informed by “people with the most expertise and vision” who know the organizations the foundation may want to fund. Specifically, program staff will review proposals based on mandate and geographic fit, and “then will send field representatives to visit the organizations.”



“One of [my] best and most affirming experiences” was working for a foundation that remained engaged in the same sectors over many years. “You had the backing of the organization and you were heard.” With this foundation, they “had the privilege of spending a lot of time in the field on site visits. That helped inform what I then went back to recommend as to what the foundation should be supporting. At [this foundation], the role of a program staff was being out in the field, capturing what people were doing and making sure that is recorded.” The foundation’s leader “would tell us how important it was to make mistakes and take those lessons. We did grantmaking with the utmost humility. There was a lot of values alignment between me and [the foundation]. It was very affirming.”



“In a foundation where the level of autonomy is “maybe a six or seven out of 10,” leadership establishes the program areas, while “program staff sit together and design a rubric for the funding strategy. Within that we have a bit of flexibility in terms of what we think we need to take forward.” Senior management and the board must still approve the strategy. “But in most cases, staff strategies have been approved. I can think of only one instance where the board asked [program staff] to rethink” a strategy. Once the strategies are approved, “program officers have autonomy to find and recommend partner organizations to support but still need to get approval for these recommendations.”



“Because of having been in a place for so long, I know the difference between law and policy [within the foundation]. That’s harder for someone who hasn’t been in the field and the same place as long.” Although, it is not only institutional knowledge that contributes to this sense of autonomy. Having supported organizations that have been successful in helping communities has also been essential. “[Foundation leadership] can’t question your track record because you have one.”



Although none of those interviewed expected to have complete autonomy about who and what gets funded, some shared the constraints under which they operate, reflecting how little power grantmakers can have on specific funding decisions:



A “program officer has very little decision-making authority at [my foundation]. First, topics are decided by the board and senior leadership,” with a separate sign-off process for strategies by non-content experts. It is extremely difficult for program officers, who have content expertise and local knowledge, to get their strategies approved, which is a “most disempowering and frustrating experience.” It has led the program staffer to “question whether my approach is the right one,” which is letting the grantees lead.

**“ PEOPLE ARE DRAWN INTO THE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR. IT’S EXCITING AND SEDUCTIVE. BUT SOME PROGRAM OFFICERS HAVE NO SAY. THEY’RE JUST GETTING THE MONEY OUT.” FOR EXAMPLE, “FAMILY FOUNDATIONS WILL APPOINT AN ADMINISTRATOR, BUT THAT PERSON MAY HAVE LITTLE EXPERIENCE.” THE QUESTION IS “WHOSE VISION IS IT AND WHO IS DRIVING THE MONEY?”**

Despite the limitations of working within hierarchical funding institutions, grantmakers can have an influence on those involved at the different levels of decision-making. Among the comments shared were:

“Board education is key and must be done with humility and understanding. I go in thinking it’s their money and there’s a certain way of doing things and I’m helping them understand what is happening on the ground and understand my expertise and listening to them and not being afraid to produce my experience to explain issues. While I’m trying to educate them, I try to figure out how [board members] process what I’m saying. I want to know where they’re coming from and add to their knowledge and shed light on the issue and not always argue what is right or wrong...[But] there’s a difference between educating and mindreading. Many of us are trying to please the donor, and I try not to do that. My wanting them to understand where they’re coming from is to be able to provide knowledge in a way they can understand.”



“I have “complete flexibility. I recruit the proposals.” Yet, they still need to help their foundation leadership to think more expansively. “I deal with a US-based board. They like to think that they’re progressive but still have a ‘bricks and mortar mentality.’ I have to remind them that not everything is about building a school or buying seeds.”





# UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

## UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CONTEXTS


Arguably, to make an impact grantmakers need to understand what is happening. This is especially important when working at a distance and in countries where they have limited knowledge about the circumstances of local conditions. As one grantmaker put it bluntly, “Context, context, context matters. Expertise matters and is great, but it’s not everything.” Whether a funding organization is seeking to improve access to higher education for women, advance the rights of the LGBTQ community, or improve the livelihoods of farmers, identifying what can help to make a difference comes from understanding the dynamic at play within that community.

Listening and learning are fundamental and an ongoing priority for understanding context. The issues and actors are dynamic and complex, especially for those working outside of a familiar environment. Regardless of their individual backgrounds, most grantmakers emphasized that continuous learning is both a responsibility and a benefit of working with a range of different organizations and colleagues with similar interests.

Among the specific observations grantmakers shared were:



“When trying to do philanthropy at an international level you know nothing. You did not grow up in that place. You don't understand the tiny differences.” Therefore, it is essential that those seeking to work in philanthropy “take this job as an opportunity for learning.”



“We can live in a conceptual world as funders because we're trying to fund strategy. But getting on the ground and looking through the eyes of a range of people helps to ground the work and identify what's really important.” This does not mean “just sitting in a village.” Rather, grantmakers need to “[talk] with a range of people who are building their lives and organizations and creating the lives and society they want.”



“When I came from academia, I really thought you could carry solutions to places.” However, with experience they realized that “solutions are never straightforward. I go thinking one thing and get completely turned around. It’s important to hear and listen and assess and work with people to try to figure out solutions.”

“You can’t impose on a community, a people and expect that you will have the biggest impact.” You have to “recognize that communities are the best place to define problems and solutions.” However, this in no way negates the potential contribution of grantmakers. “A little advice and perspective from outside can get even better results. Respect and give space to local solutions, but also allow for new learnings and ideas from the outside.”



“It has to do with how you show up. At the end of the day [grantmakers shouldn’t] ‘spray and pray.’ But don't go with a fully developed strategy either, even if it was developed carefully.” Instead, “[go in] with an open heart and open mind, and you listen and let the local actors drive the process. It’s going to be the local people doing the work and driving the strategy and you have to listen to them.”

“As we expand into new geographies, I'm quickly learning that [the country I was focused on] is not the same as the other countries in the continent.” This has shifted a major focus of the work toward “understanding the new spaces we’re getting into and how my grantmaking needs to adapt to those contexts.”



## UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Grantmakers underscored the importance of expanding and diversifying their sources of information and exposing themselves to different opinions and perspectives. The organizations they fund provide important sources of information and analyses, but grantmakers emphasized that they should be viewed as part of the broader landscape that grantmakers should explore to have a more comprehensive insight about what is happening. They identified a broad array of other ways to learn more about how the issues they are trying to influence are affecting the organizations they fund and communities where they are located:

“One of the most important things is having local partners with whom you can have candid discussions and back and forth. Another thing is to talk to people in different spaces, not just partners. Otherwise, you can miss important things...[Bring in] advisors from local backgrounds and pay them to be your advisors, so you're not just relying on [your partner's] local knowledge.” What is most critical in all of these relationships is “being open to hearing from people who are not telling you comfortable things or things that are consistent with your plans. You must have a diversity of advisors.”



“We try to stay as in touch as we can around arts and culture, literature, the music of the country we support so we're not just seeing countries through an ‘NGOified’ lens. How are young people talking and fashion moving? [This is an] important part of how we engage and remain in touch, and it gives us a fuller picture.”

“As a non-Africa based funder, I find that talking to local funders, even if they don't fund in my area, is useful. We could all read the papers and watch the media of other countries. But most of us never do it. So, local funders are critical allies and colleagues, and we hope that we are too.”





In emphasizing the importance of learning, they also shared the impediments. A sampling of the concerns grantmakers shared with us include:



“Leave some room to really enjoy where you are. I'd been to Africa I don't know how many times now and I'd never really experienced Africa beyond work...What I didn't fully appreciate is how much you learn by not doing anything and just talking to people about how is your day and what is your village like. It's a texture you don't get when you're working all the time. And it provides greater clarity around the people you're serving.”

“You really have to listen, and it's often very difficult. It's difficult because of the prestige attached to being a program officer. Often grantees want to hear from you and where your thinking is so they can shape their request around that. And that makes it hard to listen.”



“Once you're moved to a new country, you have to learn a new local context,” noted a program staffer whose foundation requires staff to limit time spent working on one country. As a result, “program officers are only getting the context when they're leaving.”





# FORMING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the ongoing discussion about the need for more collaboration between funding organizations, most grantmakers found that the field is not very conducive to building strong collaborative relationships. Most foundations establish their priorities and funding strategies without extensive consultation with other funding organizations or stakeholders. Additionally, the demand to demonstrate the impact of their funding often leads funding organizations to view their work in isolation.

Yet, there are numerous informal and formal ways that grantmakers work together to support each other—to advance the goals of their funding organizations, as well as their own professional development. The grantmakers we spoke with described the range of options from seeking advice to engaging in shared learning to being a part of pooled funding efforts, all of which can be a valuable, successful, or challenging experience. For most grantmakers, networks of funding organizations play an important role in helping them to identify and connect with other grantmakers with similar interests, increasing the opportunities for forming collaborative relationships. Their remarks included:



“Collaborating helps you become a better grantmaker.” Asking other grantmakers to review your strategies and provide their perspective can “help you from making terrible mistakes.” It also helps to ensure that resources are distributed most effectively. “We don’t have unlimited funding” and want to avoid supporting activities that might compete with activities being supported by other funding organizations or that “no one else thinks are valuable.”

Many of the grantmakers we interviewed have had extensive experience with different types of collaborations. We asked them to share their insights about what makes them successful, and they offered several thoughts:

“When you look at communities, they bring a huge basket of issues they need to deal with. And no single organization can address all of the issues.” This reality “creates a lot more room for funders to come together and think about how to work together.”



“I believe that, if we had a collaborative lens on a whole lot of what we do, we would see a lot of what we want to achieve come to fruition a lot quicker.”

“In solving the complex issues of our time, no funder can do it alone.” However, it can be “tricky to work with funders” in formal collaborative efforts, which necessitates giving thought to “how you structure the touch points,” “the right kind of facilitation,” and “[needing] to be opportunistic.” Collaboratives “need to have trust and relationships with an initial group of funders,” while also recognizing the “need to bring new people in [over time] and to be inclusive.” What a formal collaborative effort ultimately needs to succeed is “to get stuff done.”



There must be “a clear purpose” for collaboration, which is easier “when the agenda is defined by the field and not by the funders.” It is more challenging “when we try to collaborate based on each of our own strategies.” Another way they collaborate with grantmaker colleagues has been through joint site visits. “Sometimes we look at things so differently, and reflecting together is helpful.”

“If you're doing work informed by other foundations' work, you should also go back and see if they would be interested in supporting what you're doing. And be open to what they want.” This approach led to a collaborative experience with a “phenomenal donor partner” that was “open to sharing their experience and network. It was not transactional. It was not, ‘here's the money.’ It was ‘here's the money and here are other ways we can help.’ They connected other funders...and that was especially valuable.”

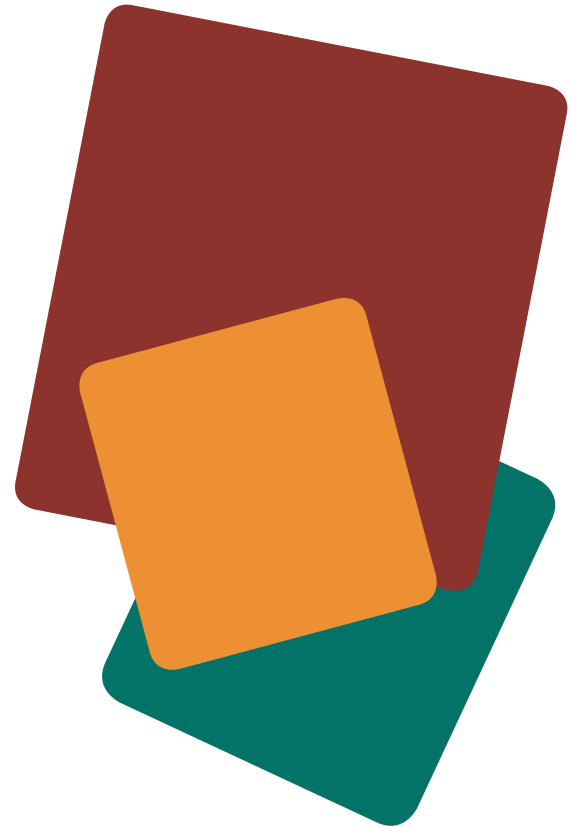


## FORMING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Collaboration allows participating funding organizations to support activities that none would have funded on their own. In this case, the grantmakers focused on a similar issue area but in different countries and with unique priorities. However, “we learned about things together and so had a common experience and knowledge base” that enabled them to identify shared needs and solutions. At the same time, they cautioned that “building toward collaboration took a while because people had to build relationships and trust.”



Grantmakers were clear that a range of factors can impede collaboration, including some resulting from the different ways philanthropy is structured and operates within one country and in different countries. They also shared insights on how to avoid them from becoming obstacles. Among their insights were:



“It’s not a natural thing for funders to collaborate,” especially with “the corporatization of philanthropy using metrics and branding and...having to account for our funding doing ‘this.’” Funding organizations are required to move fast and alone to show their individual impact. In this context, the work of funding organizations is “about attribution and not contribution [which] precludes collaboration.” They emphasized the importance of funding organizations moving beyond this perspective so that “true collaboration” can take place.

"I think oftentimes donor collaboratives exist based on the donors' needs and not the grantees' needs." "It's so there's less duplication and a more streamlined approach [as well as] showing impact." When funding organizations talk about collaboration, they often focus on activities and "trying to access other dollars, as opposed to actually looking at the impact of these dollars to serve the objectives and mandate of what we want to do." To address this challenge, "I think partnerships need to be entered into really deliberately with really specific objectives in mind and values and approach front and center."



"The beauty of philanthropy is independent resources and judgement. But that's also the bane of philanthropy" when it comes to collaboration. Nonetheless, having an awareness of the priorities of other funding organizations is helpful because they can then "call a foundation interested in the same thing" and look for opportunities to work together.

"We often pay lip service to collaborating because it's the right thing to do. But there's not a lot of commitment to it." Part of the challenge is that "once we go back to our separate spaces, our energy and excitement fizzles out unless someone is tasked with keeping up the momentum. If we don't have that, it becomes wonderful ideas that really don't come to much." In addition to having "someone who is pushing us continually" to keep the collaborative momentum going is the importance of establishing the right mix of funding organizations. "Some foundations are more hands on, others are more behind the scenes. If we can find a nice blend to bring to our collaborative efforts, it can go a long way."



"There's a pecking order in the funding world" that can make any type of collaboration between larger and smaller funding organizations challenging. "If you're a bigger funder, you feel like you have power over smaller funders." Representing an institution that raises funds from other foundations and individuals, larger funding organizations "consider us a junior partner. They don't take our perspective as seriously. If there was more of a sense of working together [from larger funding organizations], that would be helpful."

Understanding the red flags that can hinder building collaboration also comes from experience. Among those grantmakers spoke explicitly about is disconnects within a foundation:

“I have had collaborations that have worked very well and others that have not worked so well. The ones that have not worked well are ones that were negotiated by my boss or someone else.” When arranging their own collaborative efforts, they have sought to understand the other funding organizations’ “philosophy on grantmaking and...develop a relationship and be very clear about our respective authority and limitations and what are you willing to do to make it happen.” If there is no alignment, the collaboration does not move ahead. “For me, the only reason I’m willing to go through the complications of collaboration is because I can do better with you than alone.”



The flipside of this challenge is when program officers from different funding institutions share collaborative goals, but “that might not be true of their supervisors or the board.” Without a consensus within the institution, the collaborative activity will not move forward.

Others cautioned against thinking exclusively about collaboration with another funding organizations, rather than about how they might work with other sectors. Among the perspectives they expressed were:



“Often we see cooperation and collaboration as something within the community of philanthropy, whereas there are other important players and stakeholders that we need to reach out to and partner with that are not philanthropic in terms of grantmaking but also stand for the public good,” such as the private sector, government and policymakers, and religious sectors. For example, “if we want to do some peacebuilding work in Somalia, would it be useful to reach out to Coca Cola? Even where there’s absolute conflict, Coca Cola is still there... Reaching out to other sectors is increasingly required in our work. I’m increasingly exploring the question of how we look beyond the field of philanthropy for cooperation and how we search for common ground.”



"I tend to think funder collaboratives are less valuable than diverse, multisector collaboratives." The reasons for this include, "because our reach and mandate is small." An example is the SDGs, which are "well-conceived from a participatory basis as goals but that have poor implementation plans [that] a group of foundations is not going to solve." To address this challenge, funding organizations "need to have broader collaborations and specifically [collaborate] with entities that have mandates on the ground."



Funder networks are valuable resources for collaboration and learning. Building collaborative relationships requires having opportunities to get to know and learn along with others. Grantmakers highlighted the importance of networks of funding organizations. As the only network of funding organizations focusing on Africa, AGAG has played a unique role in bringing together a diverse group of funding organizations from inside and outside of Africa. Colleagues based in different countries are a valuable source of information and resource for understanding the local contexts. This is especially true for those funding organizations with a small staff or without offices or an ongoing presence in the countries where they fund. A sampling of their comments includes:



"I've relied a lot on colleagues, people who have worked in this space...This is where being part of networks such as AGAG becomes especially important. As work changes you have to understand that practices you might have become accustomed to may need to change."



**“ AGAG IS BRINGING IN FUNDERS FROM THE AMERICAN AND AFRICAN SIDE [SO THEY] CAN DETERMINE BETTER SOLUTIONS TOGETHER TO ADDRESS THE NEED.”**

“Many of us are sole proprietors within our foundations. Without going to AGAG, [we would] have no one in our community.”

“As our body of experience grew, we realized part of our responsibility is to better the field of philanthropy or at least contribute our learning to it. More and more we’ve done that through our participation in AGAG, FCAA, and a couple of other donor groups. It’s not a huge part of what we do but it’s growing, particularly around documenting our work in a way that’s useful for our partners. What’s most rewarding is not just saying what don’t we want but what we do want. How do we go about this in an ethical way? What does an ethical funder look like? I see such an important role for organizations like AGAG to stimulate those conversations.”





# UNDERSTANDING CHANGE



Understanding change is essential for grantmakers. Many grantmakers we interviewed have been working in the same sector and/or funding in the same countries for quite a few years. They have also been long-time members of AGAG, where they have heard from and talked with a range of activist, academics, funders, and civil society leaders from across Africa. AGAG's annual conference and other convenings have helped grantmakers to understand more about the philanthropy and civil society organizations in different sectors and countries.

Changing the narratives about Africa plays an important role in changing grantmaking approaches. As grantmakers gain better insights they can influence changes that are more responsive and effective, such as supporting organizations that are anchored in the communities they serve.

Among the perspectives they shared were:



Having peer grantmakers who continue to direct their funding primarily to organizations headquartered outside of the continent, despite evolving attitudes about funding, can lead to frustration. "People who say [they] can't fund African institutions just aren't looking. When I see people doing things the way it was done all those years ago, I think, 'You are missing the boat.' That might have been a good idea 40 years ago but not now. The landscape has changed."

“One thing that has exploded is a lot more conversation globally around justice and equity.” Also, a “big move to agroecology, which was just marginal before. The dominant systems on the planet are frayed, and we can't live that way anymore.”



“Systems created during the colonial times are still in place. And this generation of young people is understanding that it's not enough to vote in a new president, they need to change the systems. Young people have such enthusiasm about making their countries a better place.”



LGBTQ rights in the Southern Africa region are at a tipping point of irreversible positive change, with many countries having decriminalized gay sex—both voluntarily, as well as through litigation. “The sentiment is changing, and that comes from many years of activism and smart approaches” that do not rely solely on the courts “but by building alliances with government, media, sometimes churches” and emphasizing a de-colonizing agenda. The other major change is that “the LGBTQ movement has shifted from being in the shadows to being in public. A number [of activists] are no longer happy to be invisible, silent, and hidden and want to do bigger social change work.”

Civil society organizations are under constant pressure. They work to address the economic policies, political forces, and humanitarian and natural disasters facing their communities. As the watchdogs for citizens' rights and the first responders for emergencies, these organizations face internal challenges to their sustainability and external challenges. Among the insights grantmakers shared were:



“One of the most unfortunate developments that started long before is how the funding space has changed in [the country I fund in] and probably in the rest of the continent.” Funding organizations have cut back on support for organizations that provide training for the civil society sector. As a result, “civil society organizations are facing challenges today because some of the structures that support the sector are no longer in existence.”

## UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

“There’s been a more nuanced government strategy to shut down human rights organizations and close civil society spaces. Classically, [governments] had state agents who would beat up human rights activists. These were pretty overt physical acts up to killing.” Now, however, “governments are getting smarter... and using onerous administrative rules and reporting to keep activists from being activists. There are more ‘respectable’ ways to shut down human rights organizations.”



Equally important for grantmakers to understand are how the changes within the philanthropic sector, especially among funding organizations themselves, impact their work. Learning from experience and using those insights to influence practice is an ongoing process. A sampling of their comments includes:

“What has been refreshing is seeing...how the conversations around aid and development for Africa have shifted over time. There’s a lot more recognition of how what is designed and shaped can do a lot more harm than good if it’s being done to people rather than by and with people.” They did express some caution noting that, “I don’t know how much conversation has changed practice” with philanthropists still wanting “to impact something,” which can limit the ability of “individuals [to make] decisions for themselves.” Nonetheless, “the one thing I would say has changed is just the appreciation that philanthropy has its limitations.”



“One of the things I feel most pleased about in the foundation world is how many younger staff of African origin now have positions in foundations. These staff have huge struggles, and power isn’t necessarily being shared. But nonetheless, I find that really encouraging.” In addition, there is “more respect for organizations that fund at the grassroots and a greater willingness of big funders to give money to smaller funders at the grassroots.”

**“ [THERE IS A] GROWING DIVERSITY IN PHILANTHROPY, WITH DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS.”  
ALTHOUGH, “MORE NEEDS TO HAPPEN.”**

“What's shifted most is how philanthropy is understood in [the country where I fund],” which has resulted from the creation of a national network of funding organizations. While it received financial support from American funding organizations, grantmakers in the country lead the work and are actively engaged, making it a “valuable space to grow philanthropy.”



“Continent-wide affinity groups...working on philanthropy” have come into existence over the past two decades. “That's completely different from when we began [funding in Africa].”

**Along with the positive changes that grantmakers have seen, those interviewed also voiced concern about issues that still need attention, such as:**



“I think what is changing is that we [in philanthropy] are obsessing about money and getting results now and not focusing on the people. Many [funding organizations] feel they need to scale everything and get results now, and this impatience is increasing with many donors. They don't see that this is a long-term process, and they don't respect that.” An additional concern is that “The new grantmaking does not respect experience. They just want people who do what they're told and don't understand how to engage communities.”

“I feel like there's been a push to the ‘flavor of the day.’ Funders get excited about something and put a lot of money in for two years then move on. But you need to stick with the long-term of what you're trying to do.” Another challenge is “this unhealthy competition as to who will identify the next new things and get credit for doing it.” This could have to do with “program officers having to justify their work all the time.”









# CONCLUSION





The experiences shared by longtime Africa grantmakers reinforce the central importance of continuous learning, understanding evolving local contexts, and being responsive and supportive partners to those seeking to make change and advance justice. Their perspectives also speak to the essential role of grantmakers as translators and advocates between organizations working in local communities and funding organizations that may be far removed geographically and experientially from those they fund.

As many of these grantmakers described, their role enables them to work in partnership with organizations on the front line of change and to be a part of helping to advance change. However, that role can be complicated by limited actual decision-making authority within their funding organizations. This tension can be heightened by external perceptions that individual grantmakers hold much of the ultimate decision-making authority.

What is also clear from these conversations is that there is no need for grantmakers to go it alone. Whether they fund the same priorities or in similar regions, are based in Africa, Europe, North America, or elsewhere, grantmakers can serve as informal learning partners, helping peers to grow professionally and refine their craft. They may also serve as formal collaborative funding partners in their roles as representatives of their organizations. In both of these cases, grantmakers have the opportunity to benefit from experiences, knowledge, and wisdom accumulated over many years being involved with Africa-focused philanthropy.

How do grantmakers funding in Africa connect with others? The answer given most often by those we spoke with was through grantmaker networks, especially AGAG. For more than 20 years, AGAG has helped Africa grantmakers to engage with peer funders beyond the walls of their funding organizations and issue silos. Throughout this time AGAG has provided a physical and virtual space for new and experienced Africa grantmakers who might never have crossed paths otherwise to meet, learn, offer support and guidance, challenge one another, and grow. It is through continual engagement and learning that grantmakers best understand opportunities to leverage their funding to support positive change. Networks are powerful. AGAG's work has been fueled by the belief that a network of informed, engaged, and connected grantmakers will help to leverage the impact of private philanthropy in support of communities across Africa.





# PROFILES OF GRANTMAKER INTERVIEWEES

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Titles and affiliation listed at the time of the interview.

## **Akwasi Aidoo** Senior Fellow Humanity United

Akwasi has spent over four decades working as a philanthropy professional and human rights and peace advocate. He has held senior positions with bilateral and private funders including Ford Foundation offices in West Africa and the International Development Research Centre in Canada. He was the founding executive director of TrustAfrica in Senegal and received the Africa Philanthropy Award in 2015. He has taught at universities in Ghana, Tanzania, and the United States. Akwasi currently serves on the boards of Human Rights Watch, International Development Research Center, and Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment at South Africa's University of Witwatersrand. He was board chair of the Fund for Global Human Rights and the Open Society Foundations' Africa office. Akwasi is from Ghana and is a writer and poet. He was educated in Ghana and the United States. He received a PhD in Sociology from the University of Connecticut in 1985.

## **Jane Maland Cady** Program Director, International Programs McKnight Foundation

Jane is a teacher, researcher, evaluator, and implementer in ecologically centered food systems. As Director of the McKnight Foundation's International Programs since 2008, she has managed their grantmaking on equitable and sustainable livelihoods in over 15 countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Prior to joining the McKnight Foundation, she was an independent research and evaluation consultant for 15 years. From the United States, Jane has a MA and PhD in agricultural education from the University of Minnesota. She has lived and worked extensively in Brazil and countries in Latin America.

### **Felicita “Flanny” Chiganze**

Chief Operating Officer  
SRHR Africa Trust (SAT)

Flanny has a background in gender and development with extensive knowledge of civil society in southern Africa. Prior to joining SRHR Africa Trust (formerly known as the Southern African AIDS Trust) in 1993, she worked with the Canadian International Development Aid as a Development Officer and the Ministry of Women's Affairs in her home country of Zimbabwe as the Under Secretary for Legal and Equal Opportunities. Since 1993, she has worked in community HIV and sexual reproductive health and rights programming with over 350 community organizations in east and southern Africa, that received multiyear grants from SAT. Flanny has a MBA from Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom.

### **Allison R. Davis**

Director of Regional Programs  
Global Greengrants Fund

Allison has a background in human rights, international philanthropy, and anthropology. After completing graduate school, she worked for one year in Senegal before joining Oxfam to support research and evaluation of their solidarity programming. In 2014 she joined the Global Greengrants Fund that focuses on getting support directly to grassroots groups. She is co-author of *Climate Justice and Women's Rights, A Guide to Supporting Grassroots Women's Actions*. Allison is from the United States and has a MA in Anthropology from the University of Arizona.

### **Neville Gabriel**

Chief Executive Officer  
The Other Foundation

Neville has focused on social and economic justice throughout his career. Prior to The Other Foundation he was executive director of the Southern Africa Trust. He is a member of Global Citizen's global policy committee and Africa policy advisory board of Bono's ONE campaign. He was a member of the founding steering committee of the African Grantmakers' Network (now African Philanthropy Network), the chairperson of the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, and the Open Society Foundations' Africa advisory committee. He also worked at Oxfam and the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference coordinating social and economic justice programs. Neville is from South Africa and received his BA in Social Sciences from the University of Cape Town and studied philosophy at the University of Natal and theology at St Joseph's Theological Institute concurrently, graduating with Honors in Social Sciences from the University of Natal.

## **Julia Greenberg**

Director, Governance and Financing, Public Health Program  
Open Society Foundations

Julia has been working in public health grantmaking, advocacy and community development for over a decade. She is a member of the board constituency of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and a board member of Funders Concerned About AIDS. As a founding partner of the Fremont Center (2008-2015), she advised a diverse group of clients, including the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, the Ford Foundation, and the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition, on the development of program, advocacy, and fundraising strategies. She was Director of the Grants Department at American Jewish World Service and the Associate Director of AIDS-Free World. Julia is from the United States and has a BA in Russian Studies from Wesleyan University.

## **Sarah Hobson**

Executive Director  
West Marin Fund

Sarah has extensive experience working with rural communities, organizations and social movements on four continents, to give voice to their perspectives and priorities. From the United Kingdom, she moved to California in 1998 when she became Executive Director of International Development Exchange (now Thousand Currents) that partners with community-led organizations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. As the first Executive Director of New Field Foundation, she helped build a program supporting rural women's rights and resources in West Africa, co-created the Agroecology Fund, and served as Steering Committee Co-Chair of the Africa Grantmakers' Affinity Group. Sarah serves as an advisor to the Louis Dreyfus Foundation and provides technical support to the African Women's Collaborative for Healthy Food Systems. She is a published author and documentary filmmaker with a passion for rural justice and community leadership.

## **Andrea Johnson**

Program Officer, International Programs  
Carnegie Corporation of New York

Andrea began her career as a Peace Corp volunteer in Ecuador. She joined the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1991 where she currently manages a funding program to develop and retain a new generation of African academics and has worked on issues ranging from gender equity in higher education, connecting academics to policy networks, and internet access to supporting development assistance reform and public and policymaker education about Africa. From the United States, Andrea is a trained community organizer. She has a MA in international affairs from Columbia University. She is cofounder of the Africa Grantmakers' Affinity Group and serves on its steering committee.

### **Peter Laugharn**

President and Chief Executive Officer  
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

Peter has over 30 years of foundation and nonprofit experience. Prior to joining the Hilton Foundation, he was executive director of the Firelight Foundation and the Netherlands-based Bernard van Leer Foundation. He began his career at Save the Children where he served in several positions including West Africa Area director while living in Mali. He also served in the Peace Corps in Morocco. Peter was a co-founder of the International Education Funders Group and the Coalition for Children Affected by AIDS. He is on the boards of the Council on Foundations and the Pacific Council for International Policy. From the United States, Peter is a graduate of Stanford and Georgetown Universities with a PhD in education from the University of London.

### **Joyce Malombe**

Interim Program Director  
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

Joyce has extensive experience as an education expert, university professor, and philanthropy professional. She leads Wellspring's international Children's Education funding and, prior to joining the organization in 2012, held positions including Program Officer for Education at ELMA Philanthropies, and Director for Africa and Middle of the Ford Foundation's International Fellowships Program and Coordinator for Leadership for Social Justice in its country offices. As a Senior Scientist at the World Bank, she conducted a global study on community foundations. Joyce is from Kenya and was a founding board member of the Kenya Community Development Foundation. She was Associate Professor and Senior Researcher at the Southern New Hampshire University in the United States and a professor at the University of Nairobi where she completed her MA in urban and regional planning. She has a PhD from the University of Western Ontario in Canada.

### **Mamotshidisi "Mamo" Mohapi**

Program Officer  
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Mamo began her career as the national finance officer at the Planned Parenthood Association in South Africa. She was the business development manager for the Charities Aid Foundation of Southern Africa before joining the Mott Foundation in 2011 as an associate program officer. In 2016, she assumed her current position managing Mott's South Africa philanthropy development program. Mamo is from South Africa and serves as a council member of the Independent Philanthropy Association of South Africa. She holds a degree in cost and management accounting from the Vaal University of Technology and is fluent in Sesotho, IsiZulu, Sepedi, Setswana, English and Afrikaans.



**William “Bill” F.L. Moses**

Managing Director, Education  
Kresge Foundation

Bill has worked in higher education for much of his career. Previously, he served as executive director of the Thomas J. Watson Foundation and as an analyst in the South Africa department of the Investor Responsibility Research Center. He also worked as a research officer at TechnoServe and held various administrative positions in Alaska’s state legislature and the federal government, including the American Embassy in Cape Town. From the United States, Bill is a graduate of Claremont McKenna College and has an MA in international relations from Yale University. He is co-founder and serves on the steering committee of the Africa Grantmakers’ Affinity Group.

**Erana M. Stennett**

Director  
Bloomberg Media Initiative Africa

Erana joined Bloomberg LP in 2001 and managed its philanthropic initiatives in the Americas from 2001-2013. Prior to joining Bloomberg, she served as Vice President for New York City’s Central Park Conservancy and spearheaded the development of Frederick Douglass Circle, at the intersection of 110th Street & Central Park North. From the United States she has held senior positions in New York City government and currently serves on the Board of Trustees for the Central Park Conservancy and the Board of Directors for New York City Center. She is also Emeritus Director of the Public Art Fund.

**Vuyiswa Sidzumo**

Senior Program Officer  
Ford Foundation

Vuyiswa has been active in philanthropy for over 15 years. Prior to joining Ford, she was Director of the C. S. Mott Foundation office in South Africa. She also worked in government in her home country of South Africa as director of Donor Relations in the then Department of Provincial and Local Government where she focused on donor monitoring and evaluation. She also served as a program officer in the United Nations Development Program and for the Sedibeng Centre for Organizational Effectiveness. Vuyiswa has pioneered work in the local philanthropy space in South Africa and in the United States and currently serves as chair of the steering committee of the Africa Grantmaker’s Affinity Group and board of the Listen Charity South Africa. Vuyiswa has a Master of Science in biochemistry from Wits University.

### **Tony Tate**

Program Officer  
Fund for Global Human Rights

Tony has focused on human rights and Africa throughout his career. He joined the Fund for Global Human Rights as the program officer for Sub-Saharan Africa in 2010, managing programs in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. His prior positions include program officer at Unbound Philanthropy and researcher at Human Rights Watch where he investigated and published reports on human rights violations in African countries. Tony worked as a case manager at the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Comoros Islands. A native of the United States, he has a JD from the City University of New York School of Law and an MA in international affairs and African studies from Columbia University.

### **Leah Teklemariam**

Director of Programs  
Stephen Lewis Foundation

Leah has well over a decade of experience working in the struggle against HIV in Africa, and in pursuit of women's rights globally. Prior to joining the Stephen Lewis Foundation, she worked internationally as an independent consultant with a wide range of NGOs, large scale funding agencies, educational institutions and global leaders, and a secondment to assist the establishment of the Graça Machel Trust in Johannesburg, South Africa.

### **Marcia Thomas**

Executive Director  
USA for Africa

Marcia has a long career working with international organizations. Prior to working with USA for Africa, the organization that was established to distribute the proceeds from the song "We Are the World", she worked with Oxfam America as Deputy Director of programs. She was a consultant on the Jubilee 2000 Debt Relief Campaign, providing networking and outreach services for the campaign's UK office in the US. Marcia was a founding board member of the National Summit on Africa (Africa Society) and is presently on UCLA's James S. Coleman African Studies Center Advisory Board. She was a member of the Pacific Council on International Policy. From the United States, Marcia has a MA in education and worked in the Boston public school system during the 1970s when the system was under a federally mandated desegregation order.

# ABOUT THE AFRICA GRANTMAKERS' AFFINITY GROUP

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AGAG is part of the philanthropy infrastructure landscape of funder networks in the United States focusing on specific sectors, such as education, and health, issues such as climate change and human rights, or geographic areas, such as a state or region.

AGAG is unique because of our geographic focus on funding targeting Africa. We emerged from the Southern Africa Grantmakers' Affinity Group (SAGAG), an informal network active in the 1980s and 1990s that galvanized foundation support for ending apartheid in South Africa and its negative impact throughout southern Africa. In 2000, AGAG was formed as a project of the Tides Center with a new mission to promote robust, effective, and responsive philanthropy to benefit communities across the entire African continent.

For two decades we have been consistently connecting individuals and organizations, convening events and activities for our diverse community of funders, and curating useful information on trends, strategies and opportunities to strengthen their impact. Our multi-sectoral approach is a distinctive characteristic that has helped grantmakers gain a better understanding of how their funding fits within the broader funding landscape. Our annual convenings have provided a consistent meeting place where new and experienced funders have built professional relationships and improved their grantmaking process and practice.

We believe that the diverse and global community of Africa grantmakers who have become a part of AGAG play an important part in leveraging the impact of private philanthropy. They fund in a range of sectors and countries and use different approaches, ranging from supporting local grassroots and community organizations to academic, medical, and research institutions to international organizations with programs in Africa. Funding can be channeled through domestic or international organizations or directly to organization headquartered in Africa. But what they share is an interest in doing a better job of making grants that support the range of efforts taking place to create healthy, vibrant, and just communities across Africa.



**AFRICA**  
**Grantmakers'**  
**Affinity**  
**Group**

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