



WINGS FORUM 2017

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**CRITICAL PHILANTHROPY:
ADDRESSING COMPLEXITY,
CHALLENGING OURSELVES**



WINGS

WORLDWIDE INITIATIVES
FOR GRANTMAKER SUPPORT



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Barry Gaberman Lecture

Author: Dr. Atallah Kuttab, Chairman of SAANED for Philanthropy Advisory

Title: Role of global philanthropy in building bridges among cultures and assuring just society.

1. It is a great privilege to give the Barry Gaberman Lecture this year. Over many years Barry has advocated for and supported the infrastructure of philanthropy across the world. I dare to say that without his efforts many organizations, among them WINGS, might not be where they are now. At a personal note, with his support and guidance I would not have been able to initiate and found the Arab Foundations Forum, a network of Arab foundations, in 2007, which is now vibrant and growing.
2. When we met in Istanbul three years ago at the WINGS Forum, my friend Avila Kilmurray gave this lecture and talked about the role of philanthropy in difficult times. It is even more difficult three years on...Our values are being challenged, inequity and injustice on the increase, intolerance on the rise, and in my region many countries are disintegrating, with many of their citizens now refugees. However, let me say that American citizens have experienced in one week what several hundred million of fellow Arabs (men and women) have been experiencing for the past half century: power structures that are controlled by a small number of men, revolving around a single family, closely tied to corporate business

interests, and taking decisions unilaterally with little interaction with any governance structure, let alone being accountable to their citizens, including civil society.

3. I will not talk about the difficulties, as I am sure you have been hearing enough of those. By no means I am blind to them as they have accompanied me for all of my life in the Middle East. I would like to talk about the opportunities that lie ahead of us such that if we act wisely and jointly, we will be able to play a leading role in balancing the destructive forces against equitable just societies.
4. That's why I picked up the title "Role of global philanthropy in building bridges among cultures and assuring just society". I would like to clarify first, that global philanthropy is the blend of various discourses and practices from around the world with their distinctive characteristics embedded in local cultures. It is definitely not the old understanding of the word of one kind of philanthropy applied globally. It is important to be clear of that distinction.
5. We come all from rich cultures of giving, encouraged by our faiths and traditions in the form of compassion or solidarity. My work has allowed me to visit countries and look at philanthropy (formal and informal) in many countries in almost all continents. The strong traditions of giving spans several hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Governments, considering the welfare of their citizens as their sole responsibility, often disrupted this, by taking control of philanthropic resources, including endowments, lands and property. To give an idea of the scale I am talking about: in the mid 1860's one third of the agricultural land of Egypt was endowed (as waqf) in support of social services for the poor. Those included education and healthcare and in many cases dealt with inequities in society. Then a disruption happened, when in 1863 all of the land came under the management of the government. With this takeover waqf declined over time, as it was run inefficiently and used to buy loyalty rather serve the poor. This indirect expropriation led to fewer waqf being established and the concept ended up voided of its original noble meaning.

Another example is closer to my home in the old city of Jerusalem. There is hardly any private property and most properties are waqf allocated for residential places, education, and other services. They are still being used until today, managed by the various religious institutions, though not run efficiently. We still have remnants from such endowments in

Jerusalem by French and Russian philanthropists, but disruptions happened in those countries through the respective social revolutions that took place.

6. The last 25-30 years has witnessed a renewal and surge in philanthropic organizations of various kinds. While this renewal shows many similarities across countries, there are also many differences, and it is this diversity that makes the philanthropy of today so rich.
7. An example of such trends or growth trajectory are the various philanthropy models that are gaining prominence around the world. For example, in parts of Africa, the concept of “Ubuntu” is considered a key value in traditional African culture. It means “I am who I am because of who you are.” “Ubuntu” as a form of giving and self-help continues to prevail. Linked to this is the better understanding of community philanthropy and horizontal philanthropy, meaning people of equal means (not rich) helping each other and together helping their community. Some colleagues advocate that the currency of philanthropy is not money only, but can be volunteering and other services, based on the shared economy. In many cases this always existed, but it was neither seen nor acknowledged. We failed to recognize this philanthropic currency, because we were fixated on specific institutional models and dismissed others. Now, we have started to acknowledge their existence, understand and build on them,. By capitalizing on their relevance and local context we make these models more resilient and not susceptible to mood swings of big donors.
8. Another example is the growth of social investment in Latin America, the term now being used more often than philanthropy. It is more common in Latin America to avoid the word philanthropy and talk about private social investment. Private social investment refers to sustainable approaches to social change. Whereas, the word philanthropy implies actions that have no focus and with short-term results. We find, that social investment in Latin America is more daring than in other regions in dealing with edgy issues, the term Barry Gaberman uses when describing efforts dealing with root causes of injustice and lack of human rights. There is less sensitivity from the governments in Latin America on such daring roles. A reason for that is that governments rely on social investment to provide much needed social services.
9. In China, our colleagues from the China Foundation Center are using the concept of ‘transparency’ to create more space for the sector by way of using incremental improvements rather than a revolutionary effort for social change. For example, rather than talking about

children rights, they practice those rights in all child related activities. In a gathering that SAANED helped organize for philanthropists from Asia, Latin America, the Arab region and Africa, a famous Chinese philanthropist, James Chen, is well known internationally for his investment in adjustable glasses to correct eyesight. He told the gathering, 'my dream is, when my I tell my child about the social achievements of Bill Gates, he will answer me who is Bill Gates? Is he Jack Ma of USA?'. This is indicative of the self esteem and ambitions that local practices and discourses are gaining.

10. On incremental changes, the same could be said of Saudi Arabia, where many philanthropists are involved in creating employment for women; an effort that is supported by the government. On its face value, it would seem as providing a service and not dealing with root causes. However, can anyone guess the social change that can happen by raising the employment rate of women from 13% to 30% in a country where women are legally and for all practical purposes of their life are dependent and under the control of men? What tremendous empowerment would such plans bring to women? I guess incremental yes... but bringing significant changes to the life of women and leading to large scale social change. The list of examples is long and the growth and development are taking different routes. I agree with Barry Knight when he says that the path "is not a linear development".
11. As a last example of development and one visible across countries, is a trend that will have implications on our sector, and that I think is positive and enriching. This concerns the blurred boundaries between the profit and the not-for-profit sector. I will come to this later but for now I would say that such development in blurred boundaries will significantly increase the funds for dealing with societal ills. However, we need to make sure that these "social businesses" exercise what they claim and ensure that the bottom line goes beyond just money. This cannot be done by dismissing them, but by engaging with them.
12. All the above shows that currently there is a wealth of diverse models of philanthropy and social investment being developed around the globe; models that are connected and I dare say, globalized. What better proof than a meeting like this one that WINGS is convening, with umbrella organizations among us, that have a wide reach. However, our globalization is not one causing increased inequity and injustice, focusing only on money. Of course, we depend on resources to implement our programs, but we practice values and that makes our

globalization effort more viable and gives us the credibility and capability to maintain open bridges between cultures.

13. This is happening at a time, when we are hearing strong voices against economic globalization. Where walls are being erected and not torn down, like recently with Trump in the White House and in the UK with the Brexit; and also in many other countries across all continents. A meeting I convened for Arab moderators in last December, could be held only in Germany as there was always one or more Arab countries where a participant would not be admitted, sad indeed...
14. The economic globalization favored the rich countries and favored the well off in these countries with almost everybody else excluded. The relationship and the rules of the game were so much skewed, that humans from most countries of the world were never allowed freedom of movement. A world with no borders was possible for citizens carrying a European or American passport, but not necessarily for other passport holders. We know with freedom of movement comes opportunities and those were denied for many. I have personally experienced what this means. As a Palestinian, I was stateless and could only travel (if indeed I could) on a travel document (not a passport). I can tell you how often I got stranded around airports with my travel documents with the usual six months expiry periods. When I was 40 years old, I acquired German citizenship and of course a passport. Overnight I was able to cross borders that were impossible or to be crossed only with difficulties before. This left me so cynical of the concept of globalization, that offered opportunities only for the lucky few from the rich world. How could people respect economic globalization if it came with such shortcomings that led to inequity and lack of opportunities?
15. Also, we are witnessing the closing of space for civil society and especially NGOs that are dealing with the edgy issues. In many countries this is aggravated by the trend that philanthropists and philanthropy institutions increasingly are implementing their programs directly rather through NGOs. This shift prevents NGOs from attracting local funds and creates dependency on foreign funding, which in many cases is blocked by governments (Arab region, India, China are just some examples).
16. The closing space on civil society and negative effects of economic globalization is not something new to countries of the "South". It has always been there. However, now that the "North" is feeling these effects, it might be a wake-up call to all of us to work together.

Nobody remains unaffected by this trend. Our colleagues in the "South" have endured a lot and developed creative coping mechanisms enabling significant achievements, despite the constraints imposed by governments. A small sample of global success stories can be found in the winners of the Olga Alexeeva Memorial Prize. The "north" can learn from the "south" how to cope with tightening laws and closing spaces and find creative ways to deal with inequities. It is remarkable in a meeting I convened in 2015 on global philanthropy in Berlin (many of you were there at that time), pessimism was coming from colleagues from US and Europe, but optimistic views with a sense of achievements were voiced by colleagues from Saudi Arabia and China, not the easiest places to operate in. King Khalid Foundation in Saudi Arabia tried hard to improve social norms by campaigning for a law to criminalize violence against women. After years of lobbying it was accepted by the government and brought lots of benefits for women. The creative use of language is an effective strategy to attain government approval in countries with heavy civil society restrictions. For example, instead of using the term poverty line - poverty being a condition whose existence can be denied – philanthropy institutions use the term “sufficiency line” for a decent living when broaching the issue, thus making it acceptable. Or in other cases, focusing on concrete problems in local communities is allowed so long as rights-based language is avoided. For instance, a program to feed rural children is safe, and can even be supported by the state, as long as it is portrayed as simply meeting a need. If it is clothed in the language of rights, the story would be very different and most definitely governments will be blocking implementation of such programs. .

17. The NGO sector is under unprecedented pressure and in need to redefine itself. Once reliable large donors are not any more providing the needed funds or many new entrants to our sector are bypassing the NGO sector by advocating direct implementation. In the Arab region, there is a reluctance by philanthropists to award grants to NGOs due to perception, that NGO's reliance on government and/or foreign funding makes them unable to promote a local agenda. The same I find when talking to philanthropists in Africa. NGOs are seen as conduits of outside funds that should leverage the philanthropist's funds rather than being recipients of those funds. The reasons are many fold, but the fact is that the ecosystem of supply and demand with intermediary in-between, is changing. We see sources of funds reaching end

users without passing through intermediaries like NGOs and most of us in this room. What do we do about it to ensure that we stay relevant?

18. In all this turbulence, we see that our philanthropy sector is flowering and as mentioned earlier, with revival and new models evolving in many regions in the form of social businesses, crowd funding, community philanthropy, better understanding of local philanthropy including individual/family/corporate philanthropy, and innovative ways to use faith based funding like "sadaka or zakat" whether in Indonesia or many Arab countries.
19. For example, Rumah Zakat in **Indonesia**, a professionally managed and highly collaborative foundation, was set up to channel and manage zakat donations. Normally such funds of zakat and sadaka, are closely regulated by religious institutions which dictate for what purpose they should be used. Normally zakat and sadaka funds are used for hand outs. Rumah Zakat has managed to allocate these funds for community empowerment programs. It has currently 121,000 donors, contributing \$15.2 million annually. Rumah Zakat illustrates that even conservative, religious giving in the region is entering the social investment sphere.
20. In India it was expected to have a surge in philanthropic activities after the passing of the CSR legislation in April 2014, requiring all big companies to contribute 2% of the average net income to charity. However, the list of approved CSR activities under the new law and the reluctance of business to engage in "edgy" or unpopular causes limits supports to efforts to tackle root causes of societal problems. The injection of extra funds for social causes has lots of potential to make a difference, leading to real social change and will mark a distinguishing feature of contemporary Indian philanthropy.
21. It is encouraging to expand the role of social businesses! It encourages businesses to consider more than a single bottom line in running their operation. Here I am not talking about more CSR, but actually businesses that sees financial returns to shareholders deriving from broader contributions to society. We need to encourage investment models where interest of society add to shareholders returns, not ones that consider them as a cost. This is a trend that is here to stay and as mentioned earlier. it is important for us to stay engaged with it, as there are several advantages:

- a) Firstly it boosts the funds available to deal with local and global issues and make our world a better place. We are not talking anymore about a certain percentage of profit

allocated for social investment, but a business model where all the capital is invested for activities that benefit society - it is significant increase of the pie,

b) Secondly the blur between the two sectors, the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors mentioned earlier, will allow philanthropists at times to operate under the cover of the profit law, which provides more latitude for action than the existing not for profit laws and allows more range of maneuver against government restrictions, and

c) Thirdly, more players also mean more allies and hence better chances for success in our efforts: to balance the effect of closing spaces for civil society, put right to what went wrong with economic globalization, and place ourselves in the middle rather than at the fringe on initiatives like SDGs - to be counted not for just being a source of money but for driving the agenda and open the space for civil society.

22. To sum it up; with new alliances, new players, a large diversity of approaches, social businesses challenging the single bottom line, all the richness in cross learning and mutual support, our sector has the potential to play a key role in building bridges among cultures and assure just society. The key tasks moving forward would include drafting new social contracts in our societies and institutionalizing the new approaches to doing business, to protect the poor and ensure equity in our societies.

23. I would conclude by saying that:

- We need new thinking predicated on empowerment, rather than “exporting help.”
- We need more holistic solutions that get to the real root of the real problems.
- We need new models of leadership based on a systemic approach to innovation, rather than a conservative approach to stewardship.
- We need to be able to leverage all the tools available to create public will and real activism on a global scale
- We need to capitalize on the new kinds of collaborations and partnerships to ensure everyone is playing the most effective role they can to achieve the greatest possible impact.

24. For that monumental task, who is better equipped than WINGS to build bridges to the best ideas. Acting as convener—bringing together leading edge thought from umbrella organizations of every size and type—so that all of us may learn from each other’s successes and failures. Our reputation is not based on what we “do” ourselves on an individual basis, but, instead, by how much we can “get done” together through collaborations, partnerships, and forging alliances.

To close with a quote from Khalil Gibran (a Lebanese writer, poet, artist, philosopher):

"Progress lies not in enhancing what is, but in advancing toward what will be."

Thank you....