

Foundations for Peace

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Introduction

This paper reports progress of an action research study of community foundations working to build peace, social justice, and inclusion in post-conflict societies from all continents of the world. The study involves developing and learning from a network of community foundations over a three-year period from 2003 onwards. The study is at an early stage, and results reported here are the first to emerge.

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland initiated the project described here. The first meeting of an emerging network called 'Foundations for Peace' was held in October 2003. CENTRIS, a charity that promotes social justice in civil society, is responsible for helping to facilitate the network and to write up results.

Research on grantmaking foundations is thin. As Anheier and Toepler (1999) point out, there is a 'curious imbalance' in the literature on the voluntary nonprofit sector. They note: 'While research on nonprofit organisations, voluntary associations, and civil society has gained much momentum in recent years, little attention has been paid to philanthropic foundations'. Even less academic attention has been paid to that subset of foundations known as 'community foundations'.

The study reported here aims to contribute to the literature on community foundations by focusing on the social role of such foundations in places that have suffered from violent political conflict. There is almost no research on this. Although there is research on the development of community foundations (Sacks, 2003), a number of detailed private evaluations,¹ and much material on how to develop and run community foundations,² there is much less research on the contribution that community foundations make to the communities they serve. The collection of essays edited by Magat (1989) partly addressed this question, though this work was restricted to the United States and is now out of date.

Leshchenko (2003) has assessed the role of two charitable foundations – the Soros Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation - in post conflict societies in

¹ For example of the Transatlantic Community Foundation Network, WINGS-CF, and the Transatlantic Community Foundation Fellowship

² See <http://www.wings-cf.org/> for helpful material and references.

South East Europe, though neither of these is a community foundation.³ The current paper concentrates on community philanthropy and the scope of the research is global.

Project objectives

The action part of the project has four objectives:

1. To identify community foundations and independent funders that have experience of funding community development, social justice and peace building in divided societies.
2. Bring together these funders into a network with the purpose of exchanging experience and drawing out models of good practice.
3. Work together to examine the role of independent funders in promoting social justice and peace-building approaches.
4. Develop links between grantees of these funders that have experienced the impact of violence and division.

The research part of the project has one main objective:

5. To record learning about effective community philanthropy in divided societies

Project outcomes

The project will have three main outcomes:

1. A learning circle among community foundations and similar organisations about effective peace building and social inclusion strategies.
2. The development of longer-term grant-making capacity around shared peace-building programmes that have the potential for financial support.
3. A contribution to the literature on community philanthropy in divided societies

Divided societies

Following the end of the Cold War, the world has become beset by conflict. In the years, 1989 to 2002, there were 111 armed conflicts across the globe (Björkdahl, 2002). Most of these conflicts were civil wars within countries, commonly involving low-level technology, but nevertheless causing the loss of many lives and resulting in social and economic devastation. Van Creveld (1991) saw this coming many years ago and predicted that civil war could become the norm in situations of social

³ The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation is one of the foundations that has pioneered the development of community foundations. See www.mott.org

injustice. Civil conflicts tend to be difficult to resolve and are commonly resistant to outside intervention (Serrano, 1999).

A role for community philanthropy in dealing with conflict

Leshchenko (2003) has shown that foundations can play a major part in bringing about transition towards normality in post-conflict societies. She notes that, in setting out terms of engagement in the use of money, foundations can set standards for good community relations. Moreover, Leshchenko notes that ‘maximising input from the local actors and capacity building are arguably the main imperatives for post-conflict assistance from the point of view of strategic philanthropy’.

This suggests a clear role for community foundations. Developing strategies to involve local people and build their capacity is their stock-in-trade. The current study tests what community foundations can offer to post conflict societies and what such foundations can learn from one another in tackling difficult community issues.

Methodology

The study involves an empirical investigation of community foundations across the globe. The main method is to use a case study approach. Information is being collected from each of the foundations in a structured way to enable cross-comparisons between foundations using identical criteria. By the time the study is complete, there should be up to 15 foundations included. Currently nine foundations are included in the sample,

Developments are being followed over time so that the study will take a prospective – as opposed to a retrospective - approach. Information is being shared, discussed, and analysed between foundations in the sample and detailed comparisons will be made, among other things, about context, resource and logistical factors, approaches to the work, and impact on communities.

Criteria for selecting foundations

In selecting foundations for inclusion in the action research project, there were six criteria used. First, the network organizations needed to be working in places that are emerging from political conflict where there has been a record of communal violence. Second, organisations should have an independent identity, registered as a charity, a not for profit organisation or similar. Third, organizations should be community foundations or local independent funders. Fourth, organisations should have values in favour of social justice, inclusion, peace building, equality and human rights and work with both ‘sides’ of the conflict. Fifth, organisations should have sufficient capacity to become involved, participate, and contribute to the network. Finally, in making choices, between different organizations, there would be an attempt to gain representatives from all global regions.

Recruiting and selecting foundations

A variety of methods were used to find foundations that matched the criteria. This involved searching websites, speaking to knowledgeable people in relevant

organisations, and advertising the project in key 'trade' journals such as *Alliance* and on websites such as WINGS.

Searches revealed a long-list of 30 foundations, but closer inspection suggested that there were only seven that met the core criteria. These were invited to an initial meeting that took place in Portaferry, Northern Ireland in October 2003, and five foundations were able to send representatives.

This meeting was useful in learning about the five foundations, and also in agreeing ways to expand the network. People at the meeting were asked to investigate further members and a total of nine foundations were represented at a follow-up meeting in Leuven, Belgium in January 2004.

We recognize that this method of including foundations falls short of the type of selection procedure found in scientific inquiries. However, the current study is based on a paradigm of action-research where the purpose of the research is to track and evaluate the action. In the present case, the population from which to draw the sample was small, and researchers could not choose freely between different options. The current study displays more of the characteristics of contemporaneous history than of formal scientific experiment.

Foundations in the network

The foundations included in the sample so far display considerable variation: in age, origins, history, geographical area in the world, resources, scope, and methods of working. In that context, not all foundations conformed to the model of community foundations first developed in the United States (Magat, 1989).

Despite variety, there was much communality. All foundations were small foundations with modest endowments (the largest being \$15m). Some relied on regranteeing from other funders. Small endowments were at least partly explained by the fact that foundations were new, typically formed in the past five years, though one began in 1989 and one stretched back to 1979. In the latter cases, the foundations were dealing with a longstanding conflict.

Since foundations were so new, the role of the founder was typically highly evident in operations. In some cases, the founder was actively involved, either as board member or staff member. It was commonplace for the founder to have a direct connection with the conflict – sometimes as a result of a personal tragedy – such as the death of a loved one.

'Passion' was a word that cropped up time and time again in the language of the leading lights of the foundations. This was particularly marked where the founder was still closely involved, but was present too among staff who had been hired to do a job for the foundation. There was much personal identification with the cause, so that staff said that 'it was more than just a job'.

There were other communalities too. These covered context, ways of working, internal organisation, and monitoring and evaluation. Each will be taken in turn.

Context

In divided societies, the public sphere is inevitably distorted. Words are loaded; politics are partial; and discrimination is the norm. The role of history is all-important, yet even basic facts tend to be disputed by each side. Symbols, signs, and myths play an important part in the construction of people's realities, and their presence is a persistent reminder of the division.

Resource allocation is commonly a zero sum game. This is based on a model of relationships where one side's gain is seen as the other side's loss. The game attracts unsympathetic politicians and others who feed on the continued division and make capital from it. The foundations in this programme all challenge this zero sum approach. They look to develop 'win-win' outcomes and relationships. Such an approach takes time, trust and care and the next section illustrates the unique nature of their ways of working to achieve such a strategy.

Ways of working

Since 'community' cannot be seen as a single entity in a divided society, and there are two (or more) competing interests, it is necessary to work with both 'sides'. It follows that a community foundation must work with tough issues in the community that it is serving if it is to make progress between both sides. Unfortunately, there are no clear methodologies for doing this and part of the current action research will be to develop such methodologies based on the experiences of participants in the programme.

Ways of working are more political than usual. Foundations working for peace often have to work in private spaces talking to people who cannot be seen in public together. Foundations have to work on difficult issues, such as politically motivated prisoners, victims and violence.

It is evident from the experience of foundations in the programme that peace comes slowly. Working across communities requires stealth and high profile activity is often counterproductive. Trust is paramount in the process, takes ages to build, and yet is broken in a nanosecond

It is important to work with both sides separately, meeting their needs and increasing their confidence. It is then possible to bring them together in private spaces because different sides often cannot be seen together in public. It is important to bring people together on safe issues, such as children's play, community health, poor housing, or youth provision. This strategy involves more than money and means that staff need to have community organizing skills. Grants may be useful, but the staff can bring the added value of encouraging people to work together across sectarian divides. This is a much more effective win win strategy than confronting the divisions head-on.

Logistics and operational issues

The ways of working have powerful implications for logistical and operational issues. Issues such as ethics, neutrality, and passion come to the fore and do not always sit

easily with one another. Accountability is not straightforward; and monitoring and evaluation systems cannot tell the full story.

Policy that aims at inclusion in the external world needs to be matched internally. Members of Foundations for Peace typically see it as an important feature of their organisation to include people from both sides of the divide on their board and in their staffs.

Ethical behaviour is of the first important. Although staff and board members may be passionate about peace building, inclusion, and social justice, they need to be equitable in dealing with one side and proactive, rather than passive, in taking action. Even-handedness does not imply passive neutrality. It means risky work on unpopular causes, such as violence, victims, and political prisoners. Such actions sometimes fall foul both of those in authority and men of violence. For this reason, the organisation has to remain vigorously independent and willing to challenge all those who threaten to impair peace, inclusion, and social justice. In some cases that has meant challenges to the State.

Such a standpoint carries risks for the organisation. It becomes more complicated for individuals within the organisation because each member of staff and board member will inevitably – in their basic identity – belong to one side or the other. This can be dangerous because they may be seen as traitors by their own side. This has implications for safety at work and how foundations employ people. The balance between risk and safety needs to be calculated as a recurring routine.

Measuring impact

Impacts are hard to measure and difficult to disentangle from other efforts. Many ‘outcomes’ that are claimed by nonprofits in other settings cannot be claimed in post-conflict societies, since the work often means that other people have to be rewarded – for political reasons. There are no good metrics for capturing the outcomes of community foundations in divided societies and this is a challenge that needs work. This is something that Foundations for Peace intend to take on

Later results

The work described here is at an early stage, and this is the first paper to emerge from the action research. There are many issues to be explored, but it is hoped that by beginning to understand what community philanthropy can contribute to peace building, inclusion and social justice, a sound contribution to the literature on ‘what works’ can be made.

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