

A pan-African and feminist transformation



Leila Hessini is senior strategic adviser to UAF-Africa and Trust Africa
leila.hessini.strategies@gmail.com
@LeilaHessini

Rachel Kalera-Mhango is a senior programme officer at UAF-Africa
Rachelm@UAF-Africa.org
@Rachel_Mhango

Halima Mahomed is a senior fellow, Trust Africa and member of the *Alliance* editorial advisory board
halima@trustafrica.org
@HalimaMahomed

A gathering in Naivasha, Kenya, may prove a landmark for African philanthropy

The world is shifting in worrying ways that demand radically different actions to counter them. But it is also shifting in inspiring ways, where justice-based movements and other constituency organising forums are leading the agendas for systemic change. While formal civic space is being closed down, it is opening up organically, and demands on philanthropy for a fundamental reimagining of its role and *raison d'être* – a reimagining that is ideological, political, systemic and practical – are growing.

Yet, even though conversations about prioritising the importance of African and feminist-centred philanthropy continue to gain momentum, sadly, African philanthropies, activists and movements are often only invited to feed into discussions – not define our own. Moreover, dominant narratives of philanthropy aligned to Global North ideas of formalised ways of giving too often marginalise the essence of everyday individual actions of African and feminist traditions and disregard their historical background.

We are the ones we have been waiting for

The Reimagining pan-African and Feminist Philanthropies initiative is a deliberate aim to set a transformational agenda for philanthropy on our terms. This work is born out of collective efforts that define the fundamentals of our philanthropic activity according to our contexts and embedded in African wisdom and agency. It aims to advance a political vision, discourse and practice around pan-African and feminist philanthropies, grounded in solidarity, mutuality, and collective humanity.

It feels important that deep partnerships rooted in constituencies of pan-Africanists and feminists have combined in the making of this political moment. TrustAfrica is a pan-African foundation which operates from a conviction that Africans must work together to set their development priorities, as informed by the aspirations of African citizens. Urgent Action Fund – Africa is a pan-African



feminist, rapid-response grantmaking fund committed to advancing women's rights and feminist agendas in Africa, funding African Women Human Rights Defenders. While these two organisations are now convening the initiative, it is both built on theirs and others' prior efforts – a range of feminist funds, research institutions, advocacy organisations and community philanthropies – developing specific



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elements that feed into this work and, going forward, premised on a collectively developed agenda.

Breaking the elite funder model

This work is interrogating how top-down institutionalised ways of giving limit the power to decide on the most needed changes – both in society and within the philanthropic ecosystem. The logic of effective philanthropy derives not only from the ethics of virtue and duty but also from sustained inequalities of income and wealth. The elite funder model gives control to wealthy individuals and foundations without being mindful of the constituencies being served. While we see some change, it is change that is limited at best and harmful at worst and is not transforming the status quo in society or within the philanthropic sector.

To advance a different philanthropic ecosystem, the initiative has taken a step beyond the ‘power of networks’ approach, to building and strengthening networks by engaging in deeply substantive and collaborative work. As we reimagine the philanthropic transformation and shift the narratives, we reaffirm the need to

understand what pan-African and feminist philanthropy entails, recognising ecosystems as more vital than a collection of individual organisations and ideologies pursuing their missions.

Naivasha Indaba

In early February this year, 80 prominent African and pan-African feminists, philanthropists and activists convened over three days of dialogue and commitment-making at the Naivasha Indaba in Kenya (*Indaba* is a Zulu term for an important conference). The discussions were grounded first and foremost in pan-African and feminist values and community agreements that emphasised respect for and appreciation of difference and diversity, the centring of collaboration and joint ownership, and the integration of care and community time. We began the convening with an analysis of the challenges and opportunities of the unique political moment we are in, which includes both the intersecting and compounding crises of our world as well as new opportunities to reimagine

Above: Transformative – the Naivasha Indaba in Kenya.



Our overarching goal is crystal clear: we aim to build a sustainable, equitable, accessible locally-owned and driven resource infrastructure for pan-African and feminist philanthropies.

‘Pan-African and feminist philanthropies’¹ refers to philanthropic narratives and practices that value both everyday and institutionalised philanthropic practices in Africa; are rooted in concepts that prioritise African solidarity, collective action, independence and agency, and ally with African-led efforts to advance inclusive and intersectional political and feminist agendas for justice and liberation of all people of African descent.

¹tinyurl.com/trustafrica-naivasha-indaba



Sonja Niederhumer



While we were clear about the importance of shifting the way we define what philanthropy is and who philanthropists are, we were also careful to clearly delineate the role of philanthropic institutions as tools for, rather than sites of, change.

the philanthropic sector. We cultivated our radical imagination to create both a vision of a world grounded in pan-African and feminist principles and the building blocks needed to create such a world.

The Reimagining pan-African and Feminist Philanthropies initiative is intentionally and unapologetically both ‘pan-African’ and ‘feminist’ in recognition of the histories of feminist erasure in pan-African spaces, anti-Blackness in global feminist spaces, and the practice of northern funders to prioritise certain African countries, identities and languages at the expense of others.

It is not often that there is room for people to exercise their agency in a meeting of this sort, so the *Indaba* was remarkable in many ways. Over three days we collectively: 1) strengthened draft Naivasha principles, narratives and the definition of pan-African and feminist philanthropies; 2) seeded a pan-African and feminist funding mechanism with initial resources exceeding \$520,000 by

activists and institutions; 3) created an advocacy agenda to collectively influence key sites of power, and; 4) emboldened a community of pan-African and feminist activists, philanthropists and allies who have made a variety of commitments to innovative philanthropic approaches, knowledge building and strengthening the infrastructures and leadership for this collective work. These range from developing a master-class teaching module by the Centre for Africa Philanthropy and Social Investment, to visual storytelling and evidence building by the Nawi-Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective, CivSource and the African Women’s Development Fund, to advocacy within specific philanthropic spaces and networks, and deepening knowledge building and support for fund development. This landmark event was well documented through a series of blogs that speak to the clarity of purpose, synergies, creative ideas and concrete actions that this meeting enabled.

The Naivasha convening recognised the importance of cross-generational work as these efforts are built on decades of activism to identify and shift the harmful practices of current philanthropic models, recognise the multitude of ways that resources are moved differently, and build new and innovative alliances across the continent and the globe. In particular, horizontal philanthropies and women’s funds, including some of the first feminist funds on the continent created in 2002 – African Women’s Development Fund and Urgent Action Fund-Africa – and pan-African funds such as TrustAfrica, are examples of approaches that are transforming philanthropy. They are advancing more participatory, inclusive and democratic grantmaking practices, resourcing those most affected by

the harms of our world, and supporting progressive, intersectional and pan-African movements.

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Where we are headed

Our overarching goal is crystal clear: we aim to build a sustainable, equitable, accessible locally-owned and driven resource infrastructure for pan-African and feminist philanthropies. This includes recognising and popularising the value of pan-African and feminist contributions to African development and human rights by advancing solidarity and inclusiveness in philanthropic systems and focusing on issues that matter most to the wellbeing and liberation of our constituencies.

In Naivasha, we created a Pan-African and Feminist Endowment Fund, led by and for pan-African and feminist movements that will enable individuals and institutional givers to take the ownership of pan-African and feminist ways of giving. It will be dedicated to resourcing pan-African and feminist movements and their constituencies. While the specific ownership and governance mechanisms of the fund are still being developed, it will be grounded in an abundance framework. The resources we mobilise will add to existing pan-African and feminist work on the continent and increase flexible resource flows with the goal of shifting philanthropic approaches and practices. The launch of the fund coincides with the 60th anniversary of the African Union.

There is an open invitation to join the movement. This bold and transformational work involves transformative action across a broad range of feminists, pan-Africanists and allies and we invite you to join us! ●

FIND OUT MORE



- To read more about the Naivasha *Indaba*, go to: tinyurl.com/alliance-naivasha-indaba