

Responsive Philanthropy

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The Prize for Peace

The Nobel committee places a stamp of approval on the environmental social justice movement, but how does this group stay alive before and after the accolades?

By Omolara Fatiregun and Mira Gupta

The Nobel Committee's Year of Firsts

In October 2004, the first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to an African woman, Dr. Wangari Maathai, for her efforts in advancing a green movement. Maathai's Green Belt Movement (GBM), a nongovernmental organization in Kenya, was founded in the early 1970s to raise environmental awareness and promote self and community empowerment within the country.

Nobel committee members have expressed hope that their decision will raise awareness about the relationship between securing living environments and keeping the peace. Natural resources are at the root of many bloody conflicts in Africa, and nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, are essential to the cause of social justice on the continent, often

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Prof. Wangari Maathai and Prof. Vertestine Mbaya, founding Board Member of the Green Belt Movement celebrate the Nobel Peace Prize

GBM Thrives on Varied Sources of Funding

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Indeed, the Green Belt Movement has a long history with varied sources of funding. Project support grants usually fund the GBM tree planting or civic education programs... Infrastructure funds and in-kind contributions enable the organization to carry on its daily activities... Advocacy/awareness funds publicize the organization and its social and economic justice initiatives.

taking the form of protecting the lives of citizens and empowering the most disadvantaged in the midst of war. On the link between natural resources and conflicts in Africa, Maathai explains, "When our resources become scarce, we fight over them. In managing our resources and in sustainable development, we plant the seeds of peace." Maathai and the GBM tree-planting campaign are responsible for planting 30 million trees nationally, providing a source of inexpensive wood fuel for poor households and empowering and engaging women in the uplift of their communities.

African Civil Society Organizations and Social Justice

It is clear that social justice doesn't just happen in the United States. Moreover, resource-related conflicts are not isolated in Africa. Where wars have been plaguing the continent—in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and neighboring countries, in Liberia, and between Eritrea and Ethiopia—NGOs have been integral to carving out peace agreements and rationing scarce resources, particularly when hostile governments do not adequately represent the needs of indigenous minorities.

In the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, the mineral coltan has been responsible for the deaths of 3.5 million people over the past four years. Coltan is in great demand because it is both indispensable for the production of cellular phones and valuable for military purposes, such as transporting radioactive materials and penetrating armor. The DRC is blessed and cursed with harvesting 80 percent of the world's supply of coltan. The blessing is the abundance of a valuable natural resource; the curse presents itself across three countries as wars ensue between the DRC and neighboring states over the grand prize—the lucrative rights to exporting the mineral to the West.

John Murhula Katunga of the Nairobi Peace Initiative advocates for reconciliation in coltan-related conflicts through nongovernmental organizations. In his efforts, Katunga makes specific recommendations to international funders of civil society on bolstering nongovernmental organizations so they can better advocate peace and social justice. Katunga's recommendations echo those of nonprofit advocates in the United States.

He emphasizes the need for: (1) core operating support, (2) long-term sources of funding rather than short-term grants that support causes only when they are popular, (3) donors who do not set nonprofit agendas, and (4) donors who are more interested in salient mission statements than financial reporting and program evaluations.

So how does the Green Belt Movement exist?

Before its founder won the Nobel Peace Prize, little was known about the Green Belt Movement. As Dr. Maathai notes in her book, *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, "Unlike many other organizations in Africa, it [GBM] is not a branch of a foreign NGO but an indigenous initiative, registered and headquartered in Nairobi." Because GBM is an independent entity, it falls under the radar screen for the few funders interested in supporting indigenous social justice movements abroad.

Indeed, the Green Belt Movement has a long history with varied sources of funding. In 1974, the organization existed as Envirocare Ltd., a company created to hire unemployed Kenyans of the Lang'ata province to plant trees. Envirocare was funded with Maathai's own money. Later as Save the Land Harambee, the organization became a pet project of a few funders, who provided small donations. Now as GBM, the organization has five notable funding streams and various funders that offer specific types of support.

Project support grants usually fund the GBM tree planting or civic education programs rather than the organization as a whole. The United Nations Fund for Women, for example, has supported GBM tree-planting projects. The Open Society Institute, Commission on Global Governance, National Endowment for Democracy, Earth Love Fund, Norwegian People's Aid and Heinrich Böll Foundation all fund GBM civic engagement programs. And the United Nations Environment Programme and the U.K.-based Comic Relief make specific project support grants to the GBM Pan-African Training Workshops.

Infrastructure funds and in-kind contributions enable the organization to carry on its daily activities. These grants are integral to the survival of GBM. The organization has had a history of being

Tree seedlings waiting to be planted in the Aberdare Forest, a major water catchment area in Kenya.



Photo Credit: Mia PiacDonald

expelled from office space when its advocacy initiatives for land conservation were in opposition to the business interests of Kenyan government officials who wanted to exploit lucrative land resources. Oxfam Netherlands, Steven Rockefeller of the Rockefeller Foundation, and Joshua Mailman of the Sirius Business Corporation in New York City all made donations for the organization's new headquarters in Kilimani, Nairobi. Another facility at Lang'ata, which serves as a training center, was erected with donations from the government of Austria through CARE-Austria. Renovations to office space were carried on with the support of Tudor Trust of London.

Advocacy/awareness funds publicize the organization and its social and economic justice initiatives. The African Development Foundation and others have funded documentary films about the movement. Maathai's book, which documents the strategies of GBM and its development in Kenya and expansion to the United States, was made possible with the funds from specific individual donors.

In order to diversify its funding streams and not be completely dependent on foundation grants, GBM strategically added a for-profit arm to its activities—the Green Belt Safaris, which brings in revenue through cultural tourism.

A few key funders have contributed vital core support to the organization. These donors make contributions to be used at the discretion of GBM management. We had the opportunity to speak with Anna Lappé, who co-manages the Small Planet Fund with her mother, Francis Moore Lappé. Small Planet Fund makes core support grants via a donor-advised fund handled by the Marion Institute. Anna Lappé, a grant-

maker who used to be on the receiving end of nonprofit grantmaking, understands the daily struggles of operating a nonprofit organization. From her experiences in nonprofits, she views core operating support as the most necessary type of funding, but the most difficult to attain. For that reason, the Small Planet Fund offers core operating support to GBM and other global social justice movements.

Insights from a Social Justice Funder: Give them what they Need and ask Just Enough Questions

Small Planet Fund is a new and indeed small operation that runs on the volunteer efforts of Lappé and her mother. Subsequently, all grants made are small—usually less than \$10,000 per organization per year. Because of the small awards, Lappé does not require extensive program evaluations or documentation from her grantees. She feels that most importantly, social justice advocates must act out their missions. Extensive documentation of expenditures for small grants would take valuable time away from GBM staff.

Lappé's grantmaking strategies at the Small Planet Fund offer noteworthy insights for funding social justice organizations. First, core operating support is an integral component of the nonprofit funding stream that foundations should acknowledge. Second, though nonprofit accountability is important, it is possible for documentation to become excessive. If the cost in staff time of program evaluations and tracing grant dollars closely rivals the total amount of a grant, perhaps there should be more informal, less costly mechanisms of measuring efficiency. Third, the Lappé team at Small Planet Fund proves itself to be a group of funders who educate themselves on the various organizations that meet their mission and funding requirements. Small Planet Fund found out about Maathai and other international social justice advocates through vigorous academic research in preparation for a book that was to be written by Francis Moore Lappé. In the process of researching international social justice movements, the Lappés discovered several exciting projects, including GBM, and began raising funds to support them. This brings us to the final noteworthy grantmaking strategy revealed in our discussion with Anna Lappé.

Though Small Planet Fund operates on minimal resources and its future is uncertain, the grants made to social justice nonprofits are intended to support a few well-researched organizations for the long run. Lappé hopes that with additional fundraising, she will be able to grow the group's endowment. Lappé seems to

be concerned not with fashionable funding but with making changes through sustained, reliable support. All donors interested in impacting social justice movements could learn a few lessons from this small but well-executed grant-making initiative.

Advancing Social Justice Research

Though NCRP usually concentrates its efforts on research and policy affecting the American nonprofit sector, a recent request from an NCRP partner and supporter of the Green Belt Movement inspired a case study of this social and environmental justice organization abroad. NCRP is committed to studying domestic social justice movements and conducting research that will educate the foundation world and greater nonprofit community on the indispensable activities and subsequent needs of these organizations. Nonprofit advocates for social justice take on deep-seated systemic issues, incorporating service delivery and negotiating public policy in their work. Because advocacy is such a large component of their day-to-day operations, social justice groups require liberal core operating support to navigate between their policy and service delivery responsibilities. ○

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501(c) (4) Organizations

sure, and foundation staffs' discomfort or lack of expertise or experience with the mechanics of advocacy. Given this reluctance to support 501(c)(3) advocacy, it is not probable that foundations will help these groups establish 501(c)(4)s. But if foundation board and staff members want to use their grant dollars to eliminate basic social and economic inequities, then putting more resources into supporting advocacy organizations and programs is critical.

Based on the record amount of money that people gave to candidates for public office in this past election—and the deep ideological divide across the United States—this is clearly one of the most politically charged eras in the nation's history. The nearly 1 million charitable nonprofit organizations in the United States come into contact more frequently with people and communities most in need than any other type of institution. Giving them the capacity to maximize their voices at this time

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personal lives by advanced technology, economic and social change, and militarist adventurism abroad are tearing the heart out of our communal life and threatening our constitutional liberties. As I end this article, I am unable to set aside my memories of the McCarthy period in order to assure myself and my readers that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself, as the nation was able to reassure itself when hearing that call to action in FDR's inaugural address. Perhaps fear itself, when institutionalized by government and used as a building block for legislation, is a more formidable foe than even FDR imagined. ○

Notes

1. (I have quoted here from a position statement by the National Council of Nonprofit Associations.)
2. which as you know is a proclamation by a [Russian] emperor with the force of law .
3. <http://www.opm.gov/cfc/opmmemos/2004/2004-12.asp>

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in the policy process is a responsibility to which foundations should give more serious thought and consideration. Providing technical assistance that really matters—related to advocacy, lobbying and political representation—is a good place to start. ○

Notes

1. Organizations should consult attorneys for specific legal advice. 501(c)(4) organizations are governed by both FEC and IRS regulations which can sometimes be competing and confusing. Recently, the FEC has threatened to limit the activities of 501(c)(4)s in an effort to increase campaign finance regulation.
2. The IRS defines "lobbying" as a specific activity that ultimately involves urging lawmakers to take specific positions on specific pieces of legislation. See the IRS's instructions for Schedule A (Form 990 or 990-EZ) at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-03/i990sa.pdf>.

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