How Does Transnational Philanthropy Lead Change? A Case Study of North American Jewish Philanthropic Support of the Israeli Arab Sector

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There is a distinctive American legacy of private wealth, invested throughout the 20th century through instrumental philanthropy to shape strategic policy and to create and support social welfare institutions (Sealander, 1977). Fleishman (2007) suggests that philanthropy leads change by seeding essential ideas, reforms, and social innovation.

Against the landscape of the intractable conflict in the Middle East, American Jewish philanthropy may be playing a new role in promoting change within the State of Israel. There is a well-documented history of American philanthropic support of Israel as a Jewish homeland; close to $12 billion was donated by North American Jews to Israel between 1948 and 2004, as recorded by the central fundraising body (UJC, 2009). A newly emerging model of transnational philanthropy is provoking change in response to several profound shifts in the political, economic and cultural contours of both the American Jewish donor community and in Israel (Cohen and Liebman, 2000, Haklai, 2008).

Israel’s population of 7 million is comprised of 80% Jews and 20% Palestinian, Bedouin and Druse (CBS, 2007). Current debates in post-Zionist scholarship point to an ethnic democracy where Arab citizens face barriers to participation in civil society (Smooha, 2002; Nimni, 2003; Ram, 2005). The proposed presentation will explore the new trend in American Jewish transnational philanthropy through a case study of the InterAgency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues. This coalition, established in 2006, brings together over 80 leading North American private foundations and umbrella fundraising and communal organizations to support strategic policy and funding for Israeli social institutions that engage, serve and/or are led by Israeli Arabs. Task Force members represent hundreds of millions of funding dollars annually that were previously dedicated solely to building a social welfare infrastructure in Israel for Jewish refugees from Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Ethiopia. The emergence of an entirely new funding agenda raises several challenging questions as the work of the Task Force focuses on its mission to educate the North American public about the gross gap in living, well-being, educational and occupational attainment between Israeli Arabs and Jews, while striving to stimulate economic development, third sector organizational capacity and government responsiveness to Israel’s minority (IATF, 2009).

The presentation’s central research question asks, What are the possible policy impacts of this newly emerging philanthropic funding agenda in Israel, at the heart of the middle east conflict between the Jewish state and her Arab neighbors?

The research is informed by a review of three primary literatures and a survey of philanthropic funding activities from such sources as the Foundation Library and Foundation reports. The scholarly debates of the post-Zionist literature set the stage to explore a critical view of Israel’s model of diminished democracy, and the experience of Arab citizens within the State of Israel who do not experience comparable civic equality and access to shared society as do Jewish Israelis. The scholarship of changing American attitudes toward Israel provides a literature to establish a basis to discuss trends in donor behavior. The academic discussion of philanthropy and change will set the stage for the survey of North American Jewish funding activity that explores patterns in this area of transnational philanthropy across several changes in the six decades since Israel’s establishment as a State.
The research method will employ the case study method to examine the coalition of funders, the InterAgency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues, as it strives to illustrate how philanthropy is leading change in American Jewish donor attitudes and beliefs, with a preliminary exploration of impacts of these funder actions in the Israeli third and corresponding government sectors.

KEY THEORETICAL AND/OR EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Key findings will focus on this emerging philanthropic trend of American Jewish philanthropists who diverge from the established historical record of support of Jewish projects in Israel. The Case Study will help substantiate the early stages of how American Jewish support of Israel is being redefined, and the degree to which the Task Force is gaining strength as an advocacy coalition with its focus on Israeli Arabs. This emergent coalition is primed to achieve broader policy impacts for Israeli Arabs when considered against the literature of philanthropy leading change. The response of the Israeli government to this North American funding behavior will be explored to further extend the discussion to include broader sector impacts of philanthropic change to include the government, and in one notable instance, the market sectors.

A key question for preliminary discussion and further study will include: Can this particular case of American Jewish funding focus on Israel's minority population have applications for other American philanthropic coalitions that focus their support on international communities with which they share social, economic or historical ties (e.g. African-American support of projects in Africa; Arab-American philanthropic activity abroad; Caribbean-American philanthropic activity abroad, etc.)?

SELECTED REFERENCES


