

Olga Alexeeva Memorial Prize 2016

The shortlist

This is the fourth time we have held the Olga Alexeeva Memorial Prize, founded to honour the memory of Olga Alexeeva, a tireless promoter of philanthropy the world over, who died in July 2011.

The prize is for an individual 'who has demonstrated remarkable leadership, creativity and results in developing philanthropy for progressive social change in an emerging market country or countries'. This year's finalists demonstrate these qualities in abundance.



While Bhekinkosi Moyo and Neville Gabriel have led the way in fostering an understanding of a distinctive African philanthropy and creating African philanthropic institutions, Laurence Lien has been playing a similar role in Asia, in his case as a philanthropist himself.

Both Artemisa Castro in Mexico and Maria Amalia Souza in Brazil have created socio-environmental

funds to make small grants available to grassroots community groups, while Audrey Elster's mission is to encourage the wealthy of South Africa to support social justice work.

Paul Bacher is the first prize finalist whose focus is on volunteering. His dream is to help create the jobs

that are so badly needed in South Africa through volunteer mentoring of small businesses on a mass scale. 'Everyone in the world should ideally be either a mentor or in receipt of mentoring,' he says.

It is striking how much experience our finalists share. The slowness of progress and the difficulty of bringing people with you are recurrent themes. While Artemisa Castro's biggest disappointment is to see how reluctant Mexicans still are to adopt more progressive ways of doing things, for Amalia Souza the challenge is how to convince more wealthy people in Brazil to get involved in grantmaking. Audrey Elster expresses her disappointment that so many wealthy people in South Africa are not interested in funding social justice work. Most Asian philanthropists remain very traditional and risk-averse, says Laurence Lien, disappointed that there has not been much take-up of his family foundation's 'radical philanthropy' approach. For Bhekinkosi Moyo, the biggest challenge is overcoming existing mindsets.

A central aim of the Olga Prize is to encourage the development of philanthropy in emerging economies. Hopefully, bringing together philanthropy pioneers like our finalists, who clearly have so much in common, will contribute to this aim.

Maria Chertok, Caroline Hartnell and Jenny Hodgson

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The final winner will be selected by a panel of five distinguished judges:

Amitabh Behar
National Foundation for India

Andre Degenszajn
GIFE, Brazil (chair)

Atallah Kuttab
SAANED for Philanthropy Advisory
in the Arab Region

Janet Mawiyoo
Kenya Community Development
Foundation

Larisa Zerkova
Potanin Foundation, Russia

The judges' decision will be announced in September, and the prize will be presented at the Global Summit for Community Philanthropy, to be held in Johannesburg on 1–2 December. All shortlisted candidates are funded to attend the Summit, and the winner will be invited to give a short lecture.

CAF Charities Aid Foundation

Olga Alexeeva understood the philanthropic potential of new wealth emerging in fast-growing economies. CAF shared this vision with Olga, who was a highly valued member of the CAF team for many years. She first led CAF Russia before moving to London to head up our global philanthropy services. CAF has been supporting the development of philanthropy and civil society in emerging economies for the past 20 years. We are delighted to support this supplement, which celebrates Olga's legacy and showcases the significant achievements of the shortlisted candidates.

John Low Chief executive, Charities Aid Foundation

Paul Bacher

Founder of ORTJET and of the National Mentorship Movement (NMM) in South Africa



Paul Bacher is the founder of ORTJET, an organization to enable business leaders and practitioners to provide mentorship to struggling small businesses, mainly in South Africa's Jewish community but also in the broader underprivileged black community. In 2015, he went on to found the National Mentorship Movement (NMM). Its aim is to recruit 100,000 mentors to mentor 1 million mentees throughout South Africa and to add millions of new jobs to the economy by 2020.

With unemployment in South Africa at 36 per cent, job creation is at a crisis point. Apart from the economic benefits, Bacher believes that mentoring is transformative for mentors as well as those mentored, inspiring those who donate time and skills, promoting a culture of giving, breaking down barriers between people from different backgrounds, increasing social cohesion and, ultimately, building a stronger society.

I've been involved in charities since university days, and my family was always very involved in various community initiatives. In the Jewish view of charity, the highest merit lies in enabling a person to find or keep a job or a business. For a healthy functioning society, financial security is paramount for every family.

I had done an MBA and was involved on the periphery of the management consulting world. I thought, why can't we take the management consulting idea and turn it on its head by offering it for free to businesses in trouble? We'd use the same calibre of people but as volunteers. The South African Jewish community is extremely generous so I sensed I would be able to recruit a lot of mentors from them, so that's how it started.

Ten years on, ORTJET has about 700 pro bono mentors and we have assisted over 1,000 businesses. The services we offer now include recruitment, training, networking events and an annual entrepreneur competition. We don't give money. We transfer skills and experience and help hundreds of people each year to improve their financial situation.

NMM came about because I wanted to do this on a national scale. I believe that South Africa has two major problems. First, high unemployment, which produces

all kinds of social and economic problems. Second, while the culture I grew up in was steeped in generosity, we're becoming more of a culture that asks 'what's in it for me?' If we could do mentoring on a mass scale, we could change the country financially; and if we could get, say, 100,000 of the top people in the country to give back in this way, we could transform the culture of the country, given the powerful role-modelling from people in positions of power.

My dream is not just to do this for South Africa. Once it works, as I believe it will, I want to take the methodology to other countries in the developing world. For anyone who wants to improve in any area, spending time with someone who is an expert in that area is fundamentally transformational. Everyone in the world should ideally be either a mentor or in receipt of mentoring. I'd love to create a global platform for just that. I want to create a norm that, if you have got skills, you have an obligation to offer those skills to someone who doesn't have them.

The biggest challenge was trying to identify the right technology for NMM. I didn't want to build it because it would take too much time and I didn't believe we had time, but we've now found an organization whose technology we can

adapt. The second biggest challenge was finding the right CEO, who we now have in place. Luckily, I was able to recruit a powerful steering committee, made up of many of the top business leaders in South Africa, who have been an enormous help. Many aspects are now in place, and we are running our first pilot test with 1,000 mentees and mentors in August 2016.

In terms of South African philanthropy generally, while there is some tax deductibility for gifts, it's a small amount in percentage terms. We're behind, say, the US in creating an infrastructure that encourages donations. There's not enough of a public culture of giving. When people give in the US, their names go up on the side of the building. South Africa is much more modest. People give money but a lot of big donations are made behind the scenes. I think there would be more giving if there were more overt examples.

Finally, I think there should be more courses on philanthropy or social entrepreneurship at university level. We're not doing enough to educate people to take an active part in philanthropy, which is a shame, as the country is historically rooted in giving.

Artemisa Castro

Executive director of the Fund for Solidarity in Action (FASOL), Mexico



Artemisa Castro is executive director of the Fund for Solidarity in Action (Fondo Acción Solidaria – FASOL) in Mexico. She is also a member of the Global Funders Alliance for Social Environmental Action, whose aim is to advance support for grassroots action on socio-environmental challenges around the world.

A biologist by training, she founded a local organization in Baja California Sur in the 1990s to promote community action to improve local social and environmental conditions and to empower local women. This led to her collaboration with a

group of environmental activists and ultimately to the founding of FASOL in 2007.

FASOL is the first socio-environmental fund in Mexico dedicated to supporting grassroots community action through a programme of small grants, mentorship, capacity building and networking. It brings together community foundations, family and corporate foundations and others. It has supported more than 700 community groups across Mexico to achieve, among other things, the advancement of sustainable agriculture and an increased community voice in policymaking on the critical issues that affect communities.

I am a biologist and spent ten years working as a fisheries researcher. In 1997 I moved to the civil society sector and founded a small NGO to work with local fishermen, where I got involved in the social problems around natural resource management. I was invited to be part of the Mexican board of Global Greengrants Fund in 2002. After a few years, we began to explore the possibility of raising a larger amount of money from Mexican sources. Greengrants made a commitment to continue supporting us. This made it easier for us, so FASOL was launched in 2007.

I think our biggest achievement is raising awareness about social and environmental issues among grassroots groups. Even though we continue to be a small fund, we are now known throughout the country, and grassroots groups can identify a source of funding that is based on trust. Other funders, Mexican and non-Mexican, know we are there and that we have a model that works and that can help communities to protect their natural resources and their territories, and to work for more sustainable, just and harmonious development in their communities.

The biggest disappointment for me is to see how reluctant Mexicans still are to adopt more progressive ways of

doing things. Mexican donors talk about sustainable development or even human rights, but the truth is that, when you talk about social change or supporting the grassroots, you see a lot of reluctance. But I think it's a process and people have to go through it. I have no doubt that it will change in time.

One of our most successful strategies was to form an alliance with the women's movement on issues that we had in common and that gave us the opportunity to approach other Mexican funders who were interested in environmental and women's rights. That was an important step for us because environmental conservation is still a new issue for Mexican foundations in general.

Meantime, we will keep working on building alliances with Mexican foundations and other donors. We need to involve Mexicans in this work because we are in the same boat and we can't go on living in the system we have now. What happens to the grassroots happens to the privileged, too.

Though there is a lot of money in Mexico, our challenge is to get to it. Wealthy Mexicans tend to form their own foundations (mostly corporate

foundations). Last year was the first year that we really got Mexican money from a family foundation. We are a very conservative society in terms of philanthropy, and most philanthropic money goes to charitable causes such as the church, schools and specific health problems, etc.

One important obstacle for Mexican foundations interested in grassroots development is that Mexican tax laws make it very difficult for foundations to fund small groups. Groups need to have tax-deductible status, which is difficult for grassroots groups that may not even be formally organized.

But I think the biggest obstacle when it comes to philanthropy is to understand that charity is one thing and being part of the development process is another. We have formed a coalition – FASOL, Semillas (a women's fund), Oaxaca Community Foundation, a family foundation (Tichi Muñoz Foundation) and a corporate foundation (ADO Foundation) – to support women's groups that work on gender and environmental rights. As a result, members are interested in making changes to their own model and strategies, which is a huge step.

Audrey Elster

Executive director of South Africa's RAITH Foundation, where she established the Social Justice Initiative

Audrey Elster is executive director of the RAITH Foundation in South Africa, a locally funded foundation committed to financing social justice work. In 2012, she was instrumental in setting up the Social Justice Initiative (SJI), a badly needed development in a country where funding for social change work is thin on the ground.

The SJI raises funds for social justice programmes from high net worth South Africans, a group which has not traditionally supported such work. It works by linking them to social justice NGOs directly, or by receiving funds from them and disbursing them through existing grantmaking structures. To date, it has mobilized over R55 million.



When I first joined the RAITH Foundation in 2008, Atlantic Philanthropies had a huge human rights programme in South Africa. When their exit was brought forward, the sector felt threatened. It was pretty thinly funded even with Atlantic's money, and there was a worry that the whole programme would collapse at a time when South Africa needed human rights work more than ever. I felt that there were untapped resources within South Africa and that it was part of the country's democratic project to get local philanthropists to fund social justice work. That was how the Social Justice Initiative (SJI) started.

It has been a very slow burn, but I'm happy that we now have a stand-alone organization with a board of trustees and its own CEO. She brings new energy, enthusiasm and expertise to the SJI project. In the last two years, we've raised R55 million – a substantial amount by South African standards. We have on-granted R40 million of that to social justice projects and the rest is in a sustainability fund.

In the near future the SJI hopes to raise enough money from its sustainability fund to cover its own operational costs. At the moment, operational costs come mostly from international sources. Part of our value proposition to encourage local philanthropists is to say, 'This won't cost

you anything. We'll do the legwork for you, and find grantmakers/projects, etc.' All of their money can then go directly to the projects.

We do three things: we act as a broker and channel money from philanthropists through the SJI to social justice grantmakers; we put philanthropists directly in touch with projects they are interested in; and finally, we encourage philanthropists to support the SJI sustainability fund. We certainly don't want to be a gatekeeper. Of the R40 million we've secured for projects, at least R20 million has gone directly to the projects and another R20 million was channelled through the SJI to local grantmakers.

The slowness of the process has been disappointing. I went into it very excited. I assumed that all wealthy people would have a commitment to the South African democratic project and be interested in funding social justice work; that assumption proved to be wrong. People have found it very difficult to understand what 'social justice' is – and this is our biggest challenge, really. It's not like funding charities, such as cancer associations or the arts; it's a long-term proposition and a complex one. We can give people examples, but it's hard to say in one sentence what social justice is.

The next step for the SJI is to help the new CEO get the project bedded down. I am continuing to work on the difficult parts, which really means the sustainability fund. Most philanthropists like to give money to a project rather than overheads. We need to start looking at how we sustain what is a very small infrastructure – basically a CEO and an admin person. Ultimately, we'd like to be in a position where we can fund projects ourselves from the sustainability fund, but I've learned not to wish too big. One step at a time.

We're still at a point in South Africa where basic service provision is a huge challenge and the pressure remains to support people in their daily struggles, so we wouldn't recommend every philanthropist to start giving to social justice. But as the country develops, people will need to start thinking differently.

South Africa has a giving culture, but the challenge is to get people to invest in long-term funding for systemic change. That is happening a bit. I'm part of IPASA, the Independent Philanthropy Association of South Africa. We are all learning about what makes a difference in terms of funding, but it might take another ten years or even another generation for all of us to start funding things that challenge the status quo.

Neville Gabriel

Executive director of the Other Foundation and founding director of the Southern Africa Trust



Neville Gabriel is executive director of the Other Foundation, an African trust dedicated to advancing human rights in Southern Africa, with a particular focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people. He was one of the founders of the African Grantmakers Network, now the African Philanthropy Network, the first continent-wide forum for promoting philanthropy by Africans. He was also founding executive director of the Southern Africa Trust.

Listed for several years by South Africa's *Financial Mail* as one of the country's most influential black citizens in the development sector, Neville Gabriel is a justice advocate, a philanthropy innovator, a human rights activist at Southern Africa regional level, and a strong local voice in encouraging giving in support of social justice. 'Philanthropy should address power dynamics and be a brokering, bridging agency,' he has been quoted as saying. 'So far this role has been played by philanthropy from the North, and that does not work. This has to be indigenous.'¹

¹ Mark Sedway (2013) *How Can We Grow the Work? Ideas from Practitioners of Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace*. EFC IssueLab: <http://tinyurl.com/GrowWork>

I've always been involved in social justice advocacy. Coming from South Africa at the time of the struggle against apartheid, it was inevitable if you had a social conscience. Since then, I've been working more on the technical side of development. It seemed important to create credible and sound African institutions that could engage as partners with those in the north. In a very real way, though, creating philanthropic institutions in this part of the world is a matter of advocacy as well, so the skills of campaigning and advocacy carry through.

Creating African institutions that are rooted and owned in this region provides both local knowledge and greater access to information and influence. International actors focus on formal systems but don't have access to the broad social systems that enable change. So if we want to make real progress, African institutions are necessary.

The thing that has satisfied me most has been creating institutions like the Southern Africa Trust. That, and seeing people who I've worked with, sometimes for many years, who have grown and

advanced and moved on to very great things. That's inspiring.

Conversely, it's been disappointing that some institutions that made good progress initially and had great potential could not sustain that progress because of the fragmentation of interests of those involved.

Now, I'm really interested in demonstrating that scale can be achieved in mass-based social giving in Africa. That's what I want to get to. At the Other Foundation, the things we are doing are showing results, but it's not to scale, so the drive is to find innovative and effective ways that are sustainable from a cost perspective that can go to scale.

One of the hardest things, I find, is trying to maintain multiple relationships. At its heart, philanthropy is about relationships, and maintaining all those relationships at the same time is really difficult. Human rights is not such a hard sell among donors as in the past because there's great political interest in it, but it's high-intensity. The amounts of funding per donor are generally small, so there

is a large number of very intensive relationships.

In Southern Africa generally, the context is one of volatility. Big progress has been made, but the gains have not been secured because they were not adequately institutionalized. Mozambique, for instance, is to all intents and purposes going back to war; in Lesotho gains are being undermined by political turmoil. And the political situation naturally affects philanthropy; it also affects the economy, which again affects philanthropy. So the big challenge is to create sound institutions that are also resilient in a very volatile context.

Why philanthropy? The line between the public and private in general has never been as blurred as it is today, especially in Africa. The positive side of this is the possibility of using private resources for social benefit. The financial crisis has made it more possible and more desirable. While we do need strong and secure states in Africa, we equally need strong and resilient social institutions, which includes social investment agencies.

Laurence Lien

Co-founder and CEO of the Asia Philanthropy Circle and former CEO of Singapore's National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre



Laurence Lien combines a number of roles in the philanthropic infrastructure of Singapore and of Asia generally. He is co-founder and CEO of the Asia Philanthropy Circle (APC), launched in 2015. He is chair of the Community Foundation of Singapore, Asia's first community foundation, which he helped to create in 2008. He is a board member of the Lien Centre for Social Innovation at the Singapore Management University. From 2008 to 2014, he served as CEO of Singapore's National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC).

Laurence Lien is a philanthropist himself, and chair of his family foundation. He is an advocate for collaboration and a leader in implementing initiatives in this field. He believes that private philanthropists can play an instrumental role in creating a better community. Through APC, he hopes to change the way private philanthropy is done in Asia and the role it plays in the region's development. Following its first year of operation, APC has 23 members who have launched eight collaborative projects.

My philanthropy began when I got a seat on the board of my family foundation in 2002. I enjoyed it so much that I gave up my career as a civil servant in favour of helping to develop the non-profit sector, first in Singapore, through NVPC, and then in the region through APC. I saw the need for a regional platform because, although philanthropists want to have more impact, they are working in isolation. Unless you are Bill Gates, the size of your giving is very small compared to the problems you are trying to solve. We could do much more in collaboration – not just with our resources, but with the skills and the entrepreneurial spirit we have.

One of the things I'm most proud of is the work NVPC did in starting new programmes to promote a greater sense of ownership among Singaporeans in solving social problems. Our government is pretty effective, but the downside is that people leave everything to government and their sense of agency is lost. NVPC built platforms for people to contribute.

At the Lien Foundation, we've also tried to change the way that family foundations work, moving from a very traditional cheque-writing approach to one that we

call 'radical philanthropy', which sponsors innovative solutions to issues in areas like education, care for the elderly and the environment. Regionally, APC is still a work in progress but we are showing that philanthropists can be important partners, not just funders, in delivering outcomes on key issues like community building and developing the philanthropy ecosystem as well as education and healthcare.

Most Asian philanthropists remain very traditional and very risk-averse. This is true of most regions of Asia, even India and the Philippines, where I thought it would be less so. Very few work on advocacy or policy change even though it is high-leverage. If you can get governments to change policy, that's an intervention that affects the entire population. What I want to concentrate on next is to get traction and to build the membership of APC and to demonstrate that philanthropists can have greater impact working together. And also more fun – that's important, too!

The hardest thing I've found is getting people to collaborate. Everyone has their own take on how problems should be solved. APC members have vast experience; they are very confident and

have lots of connections. The flipside is that they are used to doing things their own way. When you collaborate, everyone has to give up something for the greater good. Hopefully, we can demonstrate this by doing, and the encouraging thing is that there are seven collaborative projects under way. As they gain traction, we hope to use them as models for others to follow.

The biggest challenge in Singapore is dependence on the government. But there are problems that even the government finds it difficult to deal with – ageing, mental health, etc. Philanthropists need to give more and we need more innovation in these areas. Disappointingly, there has not been much take-up of our family foundation's radical philanthropy approach. We started 10 years ago and hoped others might copy us in some ways, but actually very few have.

But there are bigger challenges elsewhere in Asia. The non-profit sector in Singapore is fairly well regulated and has good institutions. In many places, this is missing. There is no trust in grassroots organizations and many philanthropists run their own programmes, which leads to more fragmentation and inefficiencies.

Bhekinkosi Moyo

Executive director of the Southern Africa Trust
and chair of the Africa Philanthropy Network



Bhekinkosi Moyo is executive director of the Southern Africa Trust and chair of the Africa Philanthropy Network. He has also been instrumental in setting up a Chair in African Philanthropy at the Witwatersrand Business School (WBS) in South Africa. Formerly he worked at TrustAfrica, where he helped to develop a pan-African philanthropy portfolio.

In a continent where philanthropy has long been marginalized, where very little infrastructure exists to support its development and there is little understanding of its role, he has consistently promoted African philanthropy locally and globally, and has led and supported efforts on both the practical and theoretical aspects of it.

“ Though I only heard the term later on, I have been a recipient of philanthropy since I was very young – as it supported most of my education. When I heard Professor Kathleen McCarthy of the City University of New York talking about it when we shared a panel at an International Society for Third Sector (ISTR) conference in Cape Town in 2002, I realized that she was using the word to talk about the same things I was interested in – I wanted to promote what my people had always done but had not called philanthropy. I made a decision to research and promote it. So I’m a hybrid between academic research and development practice.

I also realized that not many groups were even thinking about philanthropy, yet it provided an opportunity to address many of Africa’s development challenges. Together with other African philanthropy leaders, I helped lead the establishment of the African Grantmakers Network – now the African Philanthropy Network. I also used the ISTR network to expose African researchers to the global platform and introduce them to new ideas on philanthropy. Since then, I have been involved in setting up the African Union Foundation – I now serve as one of its Council members. I have also led in establishing the Chair in African Philanthropy at WBS.

My journey has just begun. We’ve tried to open some doors and now we need people to go through them. What I’d like to be remembered for is the success of the Chair at WBS, which is the first of its kind in Africa. If I’ve learned any lesson, it’s that persistence is important. Fifteen years ago, there was very little interest in African philanthropy. Fast forward to today and interest in philanthropy is huge. Even some of the major institutions like the UN and OECD are looking to philanthropy. That’s been satisfying, but I think we are still very far from getting African philanthropy to a point where it is solidly popular.

Sometimes, progress has been slow. For a long time, it didn’t appear as if Africa had its own philanthropy, no matter how much we talked and wrote about it. But we kept pushing in the hope that one day people would understand that African philanthropy enjoys the same position as philanthropy in America and Europe, and that’s where we are now.

Another frustration is the legal environment. In the entire continent, only Mauritius has a clear legal framework for philanthropy, especially foundations. This is an area where I’d want to work with others and with governments to create conditions for philanthropy to thrive. The opportunity is there because governments

now have an interest in philanthropy, so I think we have the leverage to ask them to provide an enabling environment. I’m working with some governments at the moment to develop strategies on how to work with philanthropy. If that’s successful, we will take it to a continental level.

Another thing I want to look at is how African philanthropy can become a resource for sustaining civil society on the continent, rather than depending on international funders, and that has to start with the energy that connects communities.

The biggest challenge is overcoming existing mindsets. Anything is possible, but if you don’t confront the narratives that disempower a discipline or a practical approach, you can’t do anything.

At a personal level I have learned that restructuring institutions and making them into entities that respond to current realities is one of the biggest challenges. It means getting new resources and new skills and perhaps shedding old ones – and realizing that change causes discomfort.

I can’t overstate the importance of community philanthropy. It’s the basis for other forms of philanthropy and the basis for societies to transform themselves.

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Maria Amalia Souza

Founder and director of CASA
Socio-Environmental Fund, Brazil



Founded in 2006, CASA is a collective effort that Amalia Souza's 30-plus years in the field helped to shape into a unique philanthropic model. Its purpose is to enable funding to reach the communities most affected by the social and environmental challenges in South America.

CASA was the first, and is still the only, South American socio-environmental fund started and run by South Americans. It was set up to have a solid and accountable structure that can stand the most

rigorous audits, while being as flexible as possible to enable it to respond rapidly to the real needs on the ground.

Over the last 10 years, CASA has made over 1,300 grants in ten South American countries of between US\$5,000 and \$15,000. CASA is now promoting the replication of its model in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Colombia and Argentina.

I grew up during the dictatorship and the idea of citizen action was not part of my generation's education. With a chance to study in the US just when global movements to save forests, rivers and other major ecosystems like the Amazon basin were taking shape, I found my calling. Soon I began to meet indigenous leaders from many remote places and realized they were doing the hardest work with no support. Learning about philanthropy in the north, I worked on building bridges between funders and grassroots, with the aim of getting money into the hands of the people who are the best caretakers of our environment.

CASA is the result of this learning journey. In the early 1990s I left the Rainforest Action Network to work with groups on the ground such as the Amazon Forest Peoples Alliance. A few donors were making efforts to fund these kinds of groups. Global Greengrants Fund and the Brazilian Francisco Foundation were created at the same time, and became partners. When the Francisco Foundation was closed in 1999, Greengrants filled the gap and set up a Brazil advisory board, which I coordinated, while we planned another local fund. In 2004 the C S Mott Foundation gave us a planning grant, Both ENDS helped bring

in European funders, and we were up and running again, now as CASA.

While we activists learned to be funders, I became a fellow of the Donella Meadows Leadership Program, where I learned to use systems thinking tools to intervene in complex realities. This has greatly influenced the direction CASA has taken, with its agile structure and approach to grantmaking. Because South American rivers and forests have no borders, we knew we needed to work from a macro vision to tackle the challenges at the micro level. Our main goal was making sure local groups were strategically engaged in this effort.

The real challenge is how you make sense of our model to more conventional funders. It's hard for big funders to make small grants. We have formed a network with other groups, like the Human Rights Fund and other social justice funders, to try to open the eyes of wealthy people in Brazil, but they find it hard to connect the idea of small grants with large-scale impact that can improve people's lives and bring about truly revolutionary empowerment.

My biggest disappointment is that we can't raise enough money to meet the growing demand. We have increased our

funding a lot over the last two years, mainly because we attracted funding from the socio-environmental fund of a Brazilian bank, but the challenge still is, how do you convince more wealthy people in Brazil to get involved in grantmaking? Many have corporate foundations, but most of them don't make grants; they run their own programmes.

My next step is to make our model, which is simple, available anywhere. We've already started spreading the idea in other South American countries and people are beginning to move on it, but it could work anywhere. There is also some interest in Africa.

Making resources available to the grassroots is one of the most cost-effective investments a funder can make. That we have learned. By continuing to operate by the highest standards, while working with like-minded local and global allies, we have begun to make a difference, despite the increasing rights violations we face.

International donors are worried about how to continue funding in regions like ours and are looking for new paths. Local donors are doing the same. Structures like ours were set up to create a safe bridge. It will take time, but I'm sure we are on the right path.