TRUSTAFRICA:
A CHRONICLE
key Ndibe, the celebrated Nigerian author of Arrows of Rain, once wrote: “A story that must be told does not forgive silence.” Every story that is told has a context and every narrative a perspective. This Chronicle of TrustAfrica is told from the context of an African philanthropic foundation finding its own space. It brings into focus the perspectives of its founders, board members, staff, grantees, funders, and friends spread around the world.

Akwasi Aidoo, the founding Executive Director of TrustAfrica, notes that the stories of our institutions are rarely told unless something goes wrong: “The birth stories are never documented. Whether public institutions, academic institutions, or governmental bodies, a large part of organizational memory lives in people’s minds, and once those individuals leave, those who come after lack the correct knowledge about the institution.”

Chronicling the roots and development of TrustAfrica therefore begins a new tradition of telling the stories of our institutions and making it easier to access the organizational landscape. It is our hope that it can provide vision and leadership in setting a standard against which institutional memories can be told and institutional stories in Africa recorded, thus relieving individuals from being the sole repository of organizational memories.

The process of writing the Chronicle reminded us of a story about three men working together. A stranger passed by, stopping before the first man who was wielding a hammer, to ask what he was doing. Annoyed with the inane question, the worker retorted: “Can’t you see I am cutting stones?” The stranger then moved on and posed the same question to the second man working. “I am earning a living as a stonemason,” he replied. Not satisfied, the stranger moved on to the third man, who was shaping stone. “I am building a cathedral.” He went on to explain that while the cathedral would not be completed in his time, its future depended on his dedicated work. His eyes sparkled and face glowed as he spoke of the importance of the cathedral, and the millions of people who would someday visit it from all corners of the world seeking solace. The third man spoke of his hope that other builders would continue with this vision long after he was gone.

Not only does this fable remind us of the long-term vision that has always been the cornerstone of TrustAfrica’s work, but it also illustrates the multiple interpretations of one situation or story that different individuals can carry with them. As such, when putting together this Chronicle, we have tried to stay true to the multiple dimensions and viewpoints that are chronological, self-reflexive, and dynamic. We have listened, read, and delighted in meeting the various storytellers to document their accounts. It has been a journey of joyful synergy (spread over several years) putting together these accounts, tracing the relatedness and interdependency between the stories. The result, we hope, will be a refreshing tool in revealing the steps and adventures involved in building an African-led philanthropic foundation.

Equally important, this Chronicle is about the many builders who played a part in the story of TrustAfrica. They have been more than generous in sharing memorable experiences, mistakes perhaps better forgotten, as well as deep reflections. It is our sincere hope that this Chronicle celebrates the spirit and enthusiasm of those who came together to found and support a foundation led by Africans, for Africans. We hope it does not read like a chronicler’s interpretation of events, but rather as their story: an organizational memory made alive and exciting by the very minds that began an initiative purely devoted to gathering creative African energies to deal with continental challenges.

We thank all of those who took the time to share their stories, and to answer our questions with such great enthusiasm. For easy reading and brevity’s sake, throughout the Chronicle we will introduce interviewees’ full names and titles, and any references made therefrom will be by their first name or most used shortened name. Please enjoy this work, which we hope paints an accurate picture of TrustAfrica: what it is; what it does; and the individuals behind it who have a unique and fervent passion and vision for the organization, as well as for Africa.

Mildred K. Barya and Wendy Richardson, co-authors
The new millennium ushered in a phase of reflection in Africa, with many considering it to be a time of hope for the continent. A number of African countries were rising from military dictatorships to one-party and multi-party rule. A new wave of democracy was tangible, ushering in fair elections, a resurgence of constitutionalism, and the beginnings of a vibrant civil society. Indeed, many African nations were seemingly moving away from the instability, corruption, violence, and authoritarianism that had previously plagued them.

Conversely, the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam had been bombed in 1998, inaugurating a new wave of terror and insecurity across the continent. A May 2000 issue of *The Economist* presented a cynical and depressing snapshot of the entire continent. It summed up millions of individuals on the continent into a faceless humanity, illustrated with the map of Africa on the cover with the headline: ‘The Hopeless Continent.’ This disparaging coverage echoed the crude distortions of an earlier era, when Europeans dubbed Africa ‘The Dark Continent’ and saddled it with the infamous metaphor ‘Heart of Darkness’, coined by the Polish-born writer Joseph Conrad.

In a remarkable way, and perhaps in response to such continually damning depictions of the continent, around the millennium many foreign donors were pulling out of Africa and moving their work to Asia and other regions. But the positive trends on the continent were enough for some, including the Ford Foundation, to believe that this was an important moment for Africa. A tipping point, and a time when it seemed possible that the burgeoning continent would meet its potential and finally shrug away Conrad-isms and the burdensome reputation of being the problem continent. Many felt that *The Economist* was grossly wrong in its portrayal of Africa, having overlooked Africa’s recent shift from colonial states and apartheid rule to political independence. Indeed, according to Bradford K. Smith, then Vice-President of the Ford Foundation’s Peace and Social Justice program: “There were more African democracies than at any other time since independence. There was a new crop of highly educated African leaders coming of age.”

Not only was the Ford Foundation steadfast in its commitment to Africa, but it was also considering amplifying efforts across the continent. Coupled with that, fortuitously, the foundation’s investments were doing well. The markets were strong and Ford was exploring the possibility of contributing a lump sum to one priority, rather than increasing various program budgets in different regions. At the time, Ford had offices spread around the world. The question was: if
There were more African democracies than at any other time since independence. There was a new crop of highly educated African leaders coming of age.

Bradford K. Smith

The foundation had to choose just one region to support with extra resources, which region should it be?

The JOURNEY OF CONTEMPORARIES

As early as 1999, it had been communicated to the Ford Foundation's Representatives in Africa that the foundation was considering channeling more serious resources to the continent. At the time, Gerry Saleile, who would later become Chair, was Ford’s representative for Southern Africa, based in Johannesburg. Akwasi oversaw Western Africa based in Lagos, Katharine Pearson-Criss worked on East Africa from Nairobi, while Steve Lawry was the Representative for North Africa and the Middle East, based in Cairo. The Ford Foundation requested that the Representatives plan a series of consultative meetings to discuss how this new funding ought to be most effectively harnessed. These colleagues eagerly joined together to begin sowing the seeds of what would eventually be TrustAfrica.

From the outset, the four Representatives were adamant that this particular initiative be approached with new thinking, and they were deeply committed to working differently. At the time, it was becoming clear to many African leaders that the prime responsibility for Africa's future was with Africa itself. As such, and at the insistence of the four Representatives, TrustAfrica came into being through a series of consultative meetings that began the journey of looking into the continent, not claiming one solution to Africa's challenges, but rather trusting the hope, creativity and inspiration that lay within Africans themselves.

Brad will now readily admit that there was some tension around how early decisions were taken. While he agreed that the onus was on Africans to identify the priorities, this was not an easy message to convey to the colleagues at the Ford Foundation during a particularly memorable board meeting. "It was sort of a tense meeting, but one thing that emerged early was that the Representatives were clear that whatever needed to be done had to be spearheaded and governed by Africans," Brad says. This later became TrustAfrica. It led to a series of consultations that eventually spanned four years. Brad adds that "this was a mark of patience for the Ford Foundation to incubate and test the idea for all of those years."

The Representatives' consultative meetings began amidst busy schedules for each of the regional Representatives. Gerry, Steve and herself was formed. Alongside this, the East Africa Learning Group had also just released a report which showed the great number of African foundations in existence – about forty including local trusts – all sharing the similar purpose of wanting to invest with extra resources to the continent. At the time, Gerry Salole, the Ford Foundation's Senior Vice-President at the time, "Around 2000, when many other private funders were pulling out of Africa, Ford wanted to do something important to signal that not only were we not going to pull out, but we would, for a long time, increase the level of resources on the continent." Suzanne Siskel, a former Ford Foundation Chair, was Ford’s representative for Southern Africa, based in Johannesburg. Akwasi oversaw Western Africa based in Lagos, Katharine Pearson-Criss worked on East Africa from Nairobi, while Steve Lawry was the Representative for North Africa and the Middle East, based in Cairo. The Ford Foundation requested that the Representatives plan a series of consultative meetings to discuss how the extra funds should be devoted to Africa. As noted by Barry Gaberstein, the Ford Foundation's Senior Vice-President at the time, "Around 2000, when many other private funders were pulling out of Africa, Ford wanted to do something important to signal that not only were we not going to pull out, but we would, for a long time, increase the level of resources on the continent." Suzanne Siskel, a former Ford Foundation Director confirms that: "The foundation had a longstanding commitment to Africa and building the philanthropic resources of indigenous organisations on the continent. We also believed that those closest to the problems would be those best placed to offer solutions. Africa had been under-resourced for so long, and the gap that remained made the case even more compelling." Feeling that this could be a moment of great change for Africa, Ford firmly committed to a more specific African focus.
A few months after the Macushla meeting, two new members joined the Representatives' group: Omotade Aina (Tade), who would later succeed Katharine as the Representative for Eastern Africa, and Adhiambo Odaga, who was eventually named Representative for Western Africa after Akwasi left the Lagos office. The next planning meeting was held in London: a gathering that is now most remembered for the negative tone of the day.

The Representatives had received many questions from Ford's leadership about why they had decided that Ford could create an independent entity in and for Africa was the best solution. By coming up with the idea of an endowed African foundation, the group had moved beyond the programmatic scope and had chosen an unexpected path. In a sense, during the London meeting, the group went back to the drawing board in order to consider less ambitious, more predictable options. Gerry remembers discussing ideas such as opening an office for Central Africa, expanding current programs, and introducing new thematic areas to grantmaking work. Any of these would have met with direct approval from the Ford board at the time, but being asked to scale back, and there was a marked change in gear and fall in enthusiasm as a result.

Katharine says that the group was uncomfortable with Ford's leadership about why they had decided that establishing a foundation entity in and for Africa was the best solution. By coming up with the idea of an endowed African foundation, the group had moved beyond the programmatic scope and had chosen an unexpected path. In a sense, during the London meeting, the group went back to the drawing board in order to consider less ambitious, more predictable options. Gerry remembers discussing ideas such as opening an office for Central Africa, expanding current programs, and introducing new thematic areas to grantmaking work. Any of these would have met with direct approval from the Ford board at the time, but being asked to scale back, and there was a marked change in gear and fall in enthusiasm as a result.

The expanded group kept in close contact following London, trying to arrive at a solution that would also be acceptable to Ford's leadership. "After the London meeting, we tried to refocus on the real issues facing the continent. We met often to conceptualize and talk about programming options," Steve adds that this time was like "a new dawn for the enterprise, a very important time: for the idea of an African-based, African-focused funding institution did not die."

MEETING THE LEADERSHIP IN BAHIA (DECEMBER 2000)

The meeting held in Bahia, Brazil, was notable for the first time that the Representatives were to set up a wider Steering Committee that would continue to move the proposal forward. As you can see from this photo of Gerry, Akwasi, Steve, and Katherine taken after the Jerusalem meeting, the unadulterated joy, affection, and hope that radiates from this photo speaks of the pure optimism that the Representatives were experiencing in that moment.

THE FINAL MEETING IN JERUSALEM (OCTOBER 2000)

Steve describes the meeting in Jerusalem as the one that got to the crux of the matter: a defining moment when nitty-gritty issues were finally put on the table and discussed. "The result of the foundation became clear, as well as the overarching mission and the areas of focus for the organization. We basically explored and crafted what was really important and relevant to Africa and how we knew that the entity had to be African led and developed." The meeting and discussions in Jerusalem remain the most memorable part of the process for Steve: "It was the excitement and passion that the four of us felt. We had a sketch of what the foundation might be, and to be able to focus on that and make another collective proposal was really very exciting. We all felt very important and that the foundation would be an entity that radiates from this photo speaks of the pure optimism that the Representatives were experiencing in that moment.

PATIENCE AND INCUBATION

It began slowly. Instead of hitting the ground running, building from the excitement fostered in Jerusalem, what actually happened next was a protracted incubation period. This came as a shocking reality check to the Representatives, and served to delay the work of the newly established Steering Committee. Gerry remembers that some involved in the process did not understand the patience
exercised by others. Many felt that the process needed to be sped up, but Gerry credits Akwasi for taking the time and pains to do the right thing: to mobilize support for the entity within the Ford Foundation, and to consolidate it at a cost to himself. “It was a tough time when one could have easily made enemies if not guided by the right instincts,” Brad notes. “Akwasi did a brilliant job of including people from all walks of life within Ford. Not only program staff, but also the investment division, mail room…all sorts of people provided their time and services. This was Akwasi’s own tremendous leadership.”

During this incubation phase, the new Steering Committee continued to explore where the foundation could be based, and how its thematic priorities could be more closely defined. Out of numerous consultations and countless deliberations, the Committee had initially identified three preliminary thematic areas of work: peace and conflict, regional integration, and citizenship and identity. Gerry suggests that working within the Ford Foundation must have influenced their choice of themes: “To a large degree there was always the feeling that what the African foundation was to do, this had to be relevant to the priorities of Ford.” Regarding the process, Steve says he was extremely excited about the discussions because they focused on what could be addressed effectively given Africa’s talent and potential. “We recognized the capacity to solve problems on the continent. There were resources, encouragement, funding and good will. I was involved in a very exciting process of framing the goals which also proved to have traction within the Ford Foundation.”

As discussions progressed, the Steering Committee learned that Susan would be retiring from the position of Ford President at some point in the near future. Their shared concern was that this could mean an eventual change in the promise and prior commitment made to the new initiative by the Ford Foundation, particularly if the Committee took too long to get the entity off the ground. Gerry notes that Akwasi used his foresight to manage this critical period, as well as the group’s expectations: “Akwasi was flexible in a manner that made people with varying opinions comfortable. He was obviously the right person to manage the incubation period, as well as the next steps.” As plans continued to take shape during this pilot phase, a name for the work was soon found: the Special Initiative for Africa (SIA).

**LIVING IN TWO WORLDS**

The pilot phase really kicked off in November 2001 when Akwasi left Ford’s Lagos office to take on SIA as his full-time job at Ford’s New York headquarters. Brad notes that: “Ford asked Akwasi to come and lead the entity. There was a question of where he should be based, but he needed to be in New York. It is natural for donors to want to give funds to see that their own priorities are implemented. This is common of any donor.” From Akwasi’s office on the tenth floor, he spent much of his first few months getting organized, developing programs, and dealing with governance issues. He was keen to solicit input from anyone interested, and as such built a broad base of support early on. Gerry remarks that by the time Akwasi had left the Lagos office, it was already clear
to many that Akwasi had to be the first director of the fledging institution, for Akwasi possessed a track record of trust and skill. “There was a lot of bureaucracy and politics to deal with. Akwasi was trusted by the Ford Foundation. He understood when to engage people and when to keep his head down. He compromised. He managed a slow but sure incubation. He went about getting the right things done, the right way, and got us solid backing from Ford itself.”

Megan Burke, a consultant who joined SIA in January 2002, notes that however trying, this phase was necessary as it allowed Akwasi to secure the buy-in and financial support needed. It meant being closer to those in New York, as well as those involved spread across Africa, and in reality meant that Akwasi was living in two worlds. “He travelled much of the time and spent hours on email and the phone, concretely piecing together SIA,” Megan recalls.

ADDITIONING NEW PERSPECTIVES TO THE MIX

Adding to the challenges, SIA was built amidst major internal changes within Ford. In addition to Susan’s imminent departure, Katharine had also announced that she would be leaving Ford. From the moment of letting go, a time of struggle.” Katharine’s departure also marked a new beginning, with the arrival of Tade as Ford’s representative for Sub-Saharan Africa. What Katharine had been to Ford, Tade was a beam of light, providing indefatigable enthusiasm for SIA. He spoke of the ‘we can’ attitude that surrounded the Steering Committee at the time, energetically engaging each member. “There was a feeling that we could do it differently, creatively, imbued with the Pan-African spirit. We had all emerged from the anti-colonial struggle and we did not want to get confused about what needed to be done. That was the key: the determined choice not to be confused,” Tade notes.

Tade also suggests that the building of SIA and its sustenance relied on two important elements: “The first was the essence of our objectives; the desire and commitment to establish a SIA that was African-led focused on engaging Africans in Africa and the Diaspora in creating solutions together. The other element was the African professionalism, integrity and competence that characterized SIA. These two elements facilitated the bigger dream of mobilizing resources on and off the continent, convincing Africans to give, and connecting African perspectives to build good leadership. We were, and are, committed. We are not about competition, but rather about building a strong institution that is responsive to stakeholders and has the capacity to renew itself, render voice to Africa, and to be relevant.”

Like Tade, Adhiambo formally joined the SIA Steering Committee when she became Ford’s Representative for Western Africa following Akwasi’s relocation to New York. Gerry describes Adhiambo as being extremely resourceful, critical, not a ‘yes’ person, and one who always has new ideas and directions. Her interventions were critical as SIA continued to shape and gain traction. With even more changes afoot, Steve soon after left Ford’s Cairo office to be based in New York, and Emma Playfair took up the position of Representative for North Africa and the Middle East. Emma says she encountered SIA after several meetings had already taken place. She was extremely supportive of SIA, and played an effective role in critiquing the developing process. “She helped look at the continent not only as Sub-Saharan, but also with the North and South in mind, as well as the Diaspora,” Gerry notes that she reminded the group “how to make all of Africa fully engaged.” It was never far from Emma’s mind that in North Africa it would be a challenge to focus on Sub-Saharan issues, and vice versa. “It was a Senior Program Officer in Ford’s Peace and Social Justice Program, recalls the enormous excitement around SIA carried them forward: the overwhelming feeling that such important work was needed and that its time had come. “Over the years there were lots of foundations, but we felt great need for an African entity led and governed by Africans, based on the African continent, that would serve African civil societies and other leaders.” Although the need for the SIA was great, the Steering Committee often felt trepidation about the broad and daunting scope of its work, which would undoubtedly require substantial resources and take a long time to gain shape.

Like Steve, Christopher Harris, who at the time was a Senior Program Officer in Ford’s Peace and Social Justice Program, recalls the enormous excitement from people of all walks of life, which were energizing each member. Unlike more established institutions, did not carry the same baggage. “The new and focused SIA would not fear to criticize or condemn the work of any state. We could put aside differences and be smart and sharp in our thinking and solutions. We had the chance to build good leadership. We were committed. We are not about competition, but rather about building a strong institution that is responsive to stakeholders and has the capacity to renew itself, render voice to Africa, and to be relevant.”

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In spite of the natural challenges that come with managing collaborations of this scale, as well as the internal changes at Ford, Steve says the excitement and optimism were ever-present. “There was a sense of being extremely resourceful, critical, not a ‘yes’ person, and one who always has new ideas and directions. Her interventions were critical as SIA continued to shape and gain traction.”

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all deeply moved by what the idea represented. They expressed genuine pride, great expectations, and antici-pation of being genuinely African. It was something not being imposed by the State or Europeans, but was finally an entity owned and oper-ated by Africans themselves.”

The beginnings of the SIA marked a unique op-portunity to focus on regional African philanthropy. To rise above the usual cry that there are no resources in Africa, despite it being a continent with numerous wealthy individuals that could give. The SIA phase of-theorized Ford at enough of a distance so as not to reflect only on Pe ACe AnD ConfliCT

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The participatory process kicked off with con-sultative meetings in which diverse groups of African scholars, activists, business and government leaders were assembled to discuss and formulate creative ideas, as well as forge new partnerships in order to tackle issues collectively. Gerry speaks about this ap-proach as being “rejuvenating and ground-breaking. It was something that no other foundation known to us had done.” This approach also characterized how the organization would conduct business, as noted by Aïcha Bah Diallo, Advisor to Director-General of the UNESCO and later a TrustAfrica board member: “Our way of working together.” As much with the work before, the Steering Committee was venturing into unchartered waters with the hopes of many on their shoulders.

From 23 to 27 June 2002, forty-four partic-ipants gathered in Maputo, Mozambique to discuss SIA’s first identified priority: peace and conflict. While the participants were diverse in their backgrounds, geographic origins, and perspectives, they shared a passion for Africa and for resolving current and po-tential conflicts through non-violent means. Most par-ticipants had never met before, though in their own in-dividual ways, in their own corners of Africa, they were all working towards the same goals. Some were wary of others’ work, and arrived at the convening doubtful that a conversation could happen if they were placed in the same room. This mixed group was presented to the table cultural, military and religious approach-es: all different from what peacekeeping missions, for example, would contribute to matters of securi-ty. Megan remembers how exciting it was to witness first-hand these encounters: “All the participants had something to share and to contribute towards each other’s work.”

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Akwasi Amosu, a Senior Policy Analyst for Africa at the Open Society Institute and later a TrustAfrica board member, attended the Maputo convening and describes the experience in rapturous terms: “The wave of energy was invigorating. The various influen-tial personalities around each separate issue was involved in human rights and security work, and Maria Timane, a traditional healer in Mozambique, gave a true picture of political urgency and the determination to work together in seeking and providing a wide range of solutions.” The participants discussed various paths to achieving peace, and Akwe remembers that the stories were nothing short of inspirational. She was struck by the grassroots stories, from women in par-ticular, who were resolving conflicts for themselves and involving their communities in the peace process. To this day, Akwe keeps a photo taken at the Maputo convening on her wall. It speaks to her of the exci-ting and jovial moment when something beautiful was planted, and it is a photo that has lived in her mind and work since then.

Gerry provides a detailed account of the optim-ism about the state of political leadership and gov-ernance at the time. The hype was around the emer-gence of a new crop of promising African leaders. National High Courts had also been established or re-vived, which was fueling participants’ hopes for just-ice and peace. “There was some kind of new wind with two strands to conflict resolution,” says Gerry. “A new self-awareness on the part of civil society or-ganizations, and an energized feeling that there was a new movement in Africa that was not about power, but about development. The Cold War era had come to an end. The early 1990’s had ushered in a wave of de-mocracy and many African countries had witnessed elections for the first time. There was a huge expan-sion of civil society never seen before, and within that

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umbrella we located our empowerment feeling, not so much intellectual but optimistic: optimistic about Africa, and optimistic about doing something important in Africa.” Gerry readily adds that, “It was very exciting, yet we didn’t quite hit it. We were still very theoretical and this helped us put much more energy into the next two convenings.”

After the convening, SIA’s first grant was made for media outreach on the promotion of peace in Africa, and SIA established a web presence at www.peaceafrica.net. In spite of this positive start, Megan recalls the challenges that were present: problems around communications, as well as the credibility issues to think through for potential grantees. Especially those invited to New York to discuss the Initiative were suspicious about how ‘African’ SIA really was. “We tried to deal with this by always concentrating on the African perspective,” Megan says. “Having Africans on board and doing all that could have been done to consult and engage with Africans on the continent. The intensity, energy and enthusiasm for SIA was nevertheless still alive and well, and was carried over into the next two convenings.”

ADDIS ABABA CONVENING ON REGIONAL INTEGRATION

The second of SIA’s agenda setting workshops took place from 25 to 28 November 2002 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Like the Maputo convening before it, the regional integration convening brought together more than forty diverse participants, representing all sub-regions of the continent. Also similar to Maputo, the excitement and positivity of those gathered was undeniable.

One of the remarkable recommendations coming out of this convening was to promote ‘people-centered’ approaches to make regional integration more effective, accessible and beneficial for all Africans. This was interpreted in two ways: the aim of integration was to benefit ordinary people across the continent (not just governments and business leaders) and second, more intrinsically linked, the process of integration was to be inclusive. Decision makers were cautioned to ensure that ordinary people were involved at all levels in order to develop integration policies. This convening also led to a grant on harmonizing African languages across borders, as during the course of the four days, language had been identified as one of the most complex issues related to the process of integration.
The final SIA convening also took place in Addis Ababa, from 9 to 12 June 2003. The majority of participants at this particular convening were young Africans with urgency, eloquence, vision and a willingness to work collectively. They demonstrated the ‘we can’ attitude that had been present in the SIA since its inception.

Most participants had complex backgrounds and identified strongly with several different cultures. This sparked lively, passionate debates about what citizenship and identity meant to them, and how. This dynamic young group was made up of human rights activists, Pan-Africanists and funders. The diversity of the group, combined with the intellect and passion that it brought to the table, created a unique atmosphere.

By the close of the convening, participants had offered recommendations to: promote more inclusive citizenship laws; take full advantage of the potential of regional human rights mechanisms; create space for writers and artists to advance a culture of tolerance; and research and analyze common ground between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, while promoting collaboration among sub-regions of the continent.

Tajudeen Abdur-Raheem, a pan Africanist and one of the few participants present at all three SIA convenings (now deceased and ironically passing on at a young age), remembered this third workshop to be the most crucial as citizenship and identity in fact proved to be the foundation for delivering peace as well as regional integration if Tanzania can expel Ugandans, Uganda can deport Kenyans and Kenya does likewise, and this is while all of them are supposed to be building a common East African Community? How can we talk of an end to conflict if the rights of citizens are not respected in the face of rampant xenophobia in many of our countries?

Tajudeen highlights that this convening exposed the lack of inclusiveness in African social, economic and political systems: “Unless we free ourselves from this exclusion and allow our diversities to flow and enrich one another, all efforts to create stable democracies as well as sustainable economies with steady growth that can lead to overall development, may be doomed.”

He further remarks how every convening was like a reunion for many Africans who had shared visions but had lost contact over the years, or who knew of each other by reputation only. “You could not be at any of SIA’s convenings and come back saying that Africa’s future was bleak. There are too many talents known and unquantifiable, veterans and spring chickens alike, raring to go in all fields and from all corners of the continent.

Gerry suggests that this collaborative grantmaking approach was one of SIA’s signature processes, as it was refreshing and different: “When it came to making grants, we convened, argued, talked, disagreed, then asked different groups of people in a
non-competitive way to put their heads together and submit joint proposals. How many funders ask for joint proposals from would-be competitors and then actually make grants to them? We were not making isolated decisions towards grants. This is a very important part of how we are organized to work.”

SIA devoted its pilot phase to listening to diverse African voices. In so doing it shaped its program strategy, approach, and methodology according to priorities defined by men and women from across the continent, as well as in the Diaspora. Thereafter, SIA made grants to implement recommendations emerging from the three convenings, while allowing grantees substantial freedom in defining project activities. Following the Gorée workshop, more specific convenings on sustainable peace, religious pluralism and migration informed subsequent rounds of grantmaking.

Despite this transparency, Tajudeen notes that some associated with SIA at the time, particularly early grantees, were confused by what was happening, partly because “we are not used to being asked what we want. People are used to responding to donor-driven agendas that have made too many of our NGOs, in particular, become project mercenaries.” But once better understood, this open process was deeply appreciated. Tajudeen calls it: “Doing business in an unusual way.” He gives credit to the collective vision of SIA, particularly the leadership from Akwasi, whom he calls a “Pan-Africanist veteran and consummate team player with the gift of being able to lead you while you believe he is following you.”

When asked about why SIA was launched so successfully, Akwasi points to the fact that African thought-leaders were allowed to set their own agenda: “We didn’t take our cues from external donors, nor did we push an agenda of our own making. Instead, we hosted convenings that enabled leading figures from across the continent to guide our program strategy by identifying needs, setting priorities, crafting solutions and making funding recommendations.” Akwasi argues that in the face of growing globalization, Africa faced challenges that could not be addressed by solutions invented and imposed by individuals not on the continent: “We supported new ways for Africans to work together regionally, addressing challenges beyond the capacity of individual countries to overcome.”

During its grantmaking phase, SIA developed a portfolio of 22 grantee partners in ten countries. Particular attention was given to collaborative projects that used a combination of strategies such as research, advocacy, and dialogue to produce practical and lasting impact across the continent. Projects coordinated by institutions with effective links to governments, the private sector, and civil society were also supported in order to strengthen their institutional capability. A total of $5 million was given to 23 major projects (run by 22 organizations) that grew out of the consultative dialogues, and the seeds were sown for the establishment of a robust pan-African foundation.
After SIA’s successful grantmaking phase, the Initiative was left with a number of open questions. Where should the Initiative be permanently rooted? Was SIA really the right name? Who was to lead the process from this point on? Following the thematic convenings, Sara Rakita, a lawyer by profession who had joined SIA after Megan’s departure, set to work on the official documents that would set out a tentative legal structure for the foundation. Moving from Rwanda to New York, she worked from 2004 until 2006 to ensure that the legal aspects of the organization, including set-up and incorporation, were covered. Although the lengthy planning phase was finally drawing to a close, much work still remained before this new entity was officially off the ground.

In Africa, name giving is an extremely important function that requires special consideration, talent, and reasoning. Continuing with the collaborative process that had defined SIA to that point, the Steering Committee issued a call for name suggestions from participants at the Maputo, Addis Ababa, and Gorée convenings. Above all else, the Committee wanted to avoid clichés, and hoped for a name that was simple and memorable. One of the guiding principles was that the name of the foundation had to include the word ‘Africa’, which could be woven around other recognizable values of the continent without losing originality or beauty. Early suggestions such as the Foundation for Africa, African Foundation for Peace and Democracy, and several others, were unanimously deemed by the Committee to be rather tired and too familiar.

Christopher H. was largely uncomfortable with the Steering Committee leading the naming process, as so many individuals on the Committee were not African themselves: “In my usual helpful manner, I argued that we shouldn’t be the ones to choose the name. Many of us present were not African. There were disagreements about my point and conversations continued. Tade was sitting next to me, being extremely quiet. There was a discussion on the suggestion ‘Foundation for Africa’, and Gerry commented that in the South African context, they use the word ‘trust’ more commonly than the word ‘foundation.’ Tade began to think aloud, mumbling ‘Africa Trust Africa Trust Africa Trust Africa...’ He kept rolling it on his tongue and the room gradually grew silent. When he stopped, we all said ‘That’s it! Trust Africa! That’s clearly the name!’ We therefore credit Tade with assistance from Gerry for the name. I don’t think Tade was even aware that he was coming up with it at the time. He was speaking softly and humbly (as that is
his nature). I could only hear him because I was in the seat next to him.”

The subsequent discussion was whether to have the name as one word, include a hyphen, or to spell it out in two separate words. The consensus was that it should be one word in order to keep it original, catchy and short. TrustAfrica was born. Tade says that the name arrived in a moment of serendipity: “Trust is one of those words that comes up many times in African examples, languages, and situations. It rings reso- nantly in many people’s minds, especially Africans. I was pleased to come up with a name that could be embr- aced easily across the continent, while at the same time echoing the values of an institution. Through the word ‘trust’ I envisioned that our work on philanthro- py could be shaped, communicated, and understood. It was like the process around the vision, the values that exist in the African context and what is possi- ble in organizational implementation that helped me coin the name.”

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Katherine agrees that Tade coined a brilliant and meaningful name that nobody could ever add to or subtract from. Emma too recalls that Tade coming up with the name was her most memorable moment dur- ing his tenure at TrustAfrica. “He was a keen supporter of SIA, and recalls the period when during which Akwasi officially assumed leadership: “It wasn’t taken for granted that an African with depth, knowledge, and understanding of the African conti- nent, situation, and issues should lead it. Akwasi had the fervor, eloquence, and ability to connect people. The task fell on him to steer the leadership.”

After it had been named, the next priority was to determine how the foundation would be led. Early on, Akwasi had emerged as the natural founding Executive Director of TrustAfrica. Natalia Kanem, a Ford Foundation staff member from 1992 to 2005, was a keen supporter of SIA, and recalls the period during which Akwasi officially assumed leadership: “It was a genuine surprise for me to be a part of an African agency and self-expres- sion,” Akwasi points out. Against this background, Akwasi thinks that the name TrustAfrica evokes an in- spiriting message and promise.

ESTABLISHING THE LEADERSHIP

After it had been named, the next priority was to determine how the foundation would be led. Early on, Akwasi had emerged as the natural founding Executive Director of TrustAfrica. Natalia Kanem, a Ford Foundation staff member from 1992 to 2005, was a keen supporter of SIA, and recalls the period during which Akwasi officially assumed leadership: “It wasn’t taken for granted that an African with depth, knowledge, and understanding of the African conti- nent, situation, and issues should lead it. Akwasi had the fervor, eloquence, and ability to connect people. The task fell on him to steer the leadership.”

The informal survey in 2007 revealed how grant- ees and partners perceive the name. Common an- swers were that the name generates hope, freshness, and of course, trust. Many institutions and part- ners choose to work with the organization not only because of the credible work done so far, but also be- cause of the higher ethical and moral standards of working that the name TrustAfrica implies. “The de- velopment landscape in Africa is replete with broken promises and trust failed donor projects and initia- tives, and externally driven agendas that bear no testi- mony to the power of African agency and self expres- sion,” Akwasi points out. Against this background, Akwasi thinks that the name TrustAfrica evokes an in- spiriting message and promise.
work, having participated in all of the SIA convenings. The third board member to join that year was Fouad Abdelmoumni, Executive Director of the Al Amana Association for the Promotion of Microenterprise in Morocco. Fouad provided a vital link to North Africa with his network of institutions spread across the North of the continent.

Bahru notes that in the beginning, the board members acted more like staff to TrustAfrica, a characteristic that he attributes to Akwasi’s nature of wanting to involve the board at all levels. Despite the fact that there were a number of consultants like Sara working on the SIA transition, structure, operations, and projects, the board was requested to review every detail. “The plan to launch TrustAfrica was well thought through and carefully laid out by the board,” Bahru says. “So was the program focus, required institutional processes, and all the necessary start-up steps.” This careful analysis of both program and procedures continues to be a fixture at board meetings.

DEFINING A VISUAL IDENTITY

The next challenge was to determine a recognizable identity for the foundation, one that suited and matched not just the name but also the qualities and values that the board members foresaw as key to the organization’s character. Christopher Reardon, a Communications Consultant who worked with TrustAfrica from June 2005 to July 2011, says, “The process of designing a logo was part of a larger effort to develop TrustAfrica’s identity, not in a crass commercial way, but as a vivid and memorable expression of whom we are, what we are trying to achieve, and how we work. We wanted the organization to look, and be, authentically African as well as trustworthy, inclusive, professional, efficient, and effective.” The choices made about colors, font, images, and tagline were therefore shaped every step of the way by how well the proposed designs served the overarching goals of TrustAfrica.

Christopher R. contacted a designer, Saki Mafundikwa, who he had come to know through his book African Alphabets. After being briefed, Saki was charged with the task of designing the overall image concept and stationary suite. Saki remarks, “It was, and still is, one of the most enjoyable projects for me as a designer. It also felt great to be involved in the birthing process of something so important, a fact cemented by my chance meeting with Akwasi.” When Saki found himself at the Ford Foundation in New York on unrelated business, he was introduced to Akwasi who talked with him at length. “We discussed the ongoing tragedy in Zimbabwe and we both marveled at the failure of most African leadership. I liked this man right away and felt that he was a class apart.”

In the same spirit as many other decisions taken early in TrustAfrica’s existence, defining the logo was a collaborative effort. A questionnaire was sent to some of the first grantees soliciting their thoughts. Grantees were to respond based on a classic imaginary
Different board members have varying rationales for the final logo featuring a straight acacia tree was selected. While the process of choosing the logo was not straightforward, it forced those involved to seriously consider TrustAfrica's reason for being, and how this could be visually communicated.

Christopher R. reveals some of the initial thinking that was behind the logo: "We did not want the logo to be cliché; hence we shed away from drums, dancing, joined hands, and maps of the continent. Some initial designs suggested that we were an environmental group or a safari tour operator. Some of the fonts that had elaborate serif and ligatures seemed too clever or ornate. We kept coming back to the tree, with its connotations as a gathering place and a place of shelter from the sun. As I looked into the etymology of the word 'trust', I was pleased and surprised to find out that it comes from 'true', which in turn comes from 'daru': a Sanskrit word for tree."

In a joking manner, Akwasi says that if TrustAfrica didn’t have the image of an acacia to convey its rootedness, resilience, and multiple functions, an alternate symbol would be that of a tortoise: the slowest, most patient, and surest animal that lives a long life with its strong and hard shell. "TrustAfrica's style is not to sprint but to work patiently; to survive in a difficult environment. It isn't competitive, but it is protective of itself, its own, and its environment."

The acacia symbolizes access and participatory decision-making. Traditionally, discussions took place under the acacia tree. This is where justice was discussed in indigenous Africa and authority was adapted. Unlike the baobab, the acacia is also found everywhere on the continent." Akwasi says the acacia was selected because of its "qualities of robustness and resilience. It can survive all situations and provides relief." Adhimbo adds more generally: "Trees represent presence, for they are everywhere."

The final result was clean, simple, without embellishments or artistic distractions, but with a gentle stroke that suggests a mixture of something personal or handmade with something professional and modern. The word 'Africa' stands out to drive home the organization's raison d'être: an organization led by Africans, for Africans. Christopher R. describes the careful choice of colors: "We liked blue because it is generally perceived as a calming, natural, and peaceful color. The yellow of the tree suggests hope, prosperity, and the African sun. The brown later used on the website and in other communications is meant to mirror the skin color of many Africans, and perhaps also the soil beneath their feet."

Commenting on the process, Saki notes that: “It gives me great pride to be part of a successful story and to give its beautiful face through my design work. I feel extremely honored that I was chosen as the TrustAfrica designer…to be an African designer, to work. I feel extremely honored that I was chosen as the TrustAfrica designer."

"The TrustAfrica tagline, originally intended to be woven into the visual design, went through as many evolutions as the logo. Initially, 'An African Foundation and Collaboration' was deemed to be fitting, followed by a different suggestion of 'For a Safer, Freer, and More Prosperous Future'. Subsequent iterations included: 'A Foundation for African Solutions', 'Creating Solutions Together', 'Securing Conditions for Democracy and Development in Africa', ‘Helping to Secure Democratic Conditions for Africa’s Development’, 'Creating Opportunities for Africa’s Development’, and finally 'Working to Secure the Conditions for Democracy and Equitable Development in Africa'.'

Discussions along similar themes also ensued when it came time to decide the vision and mission. While the vision was originally defined as: 'Promoting a safer, freer, and prosperous Africa', and the mission as: 'To promote peace, economic prosperity, and social justice throughout the continent', both have been redefined several times. The ongoing tagline, vision and mission debates show that certain elements of organizations remain works in progress, continually changing and sometimes returning to previous variations.

Such discussions also reveal how one organization can mean different things to different people. Some involved in the tagline evolution emphasized TrustAfrica’s role towards the promotion of democracy, whereas others felt that the collaborative aspect of the foundation was more important. Depending on an individual’s viewpoint, varying elements of the TrustAfrica...
organization’s character were deemed more important, or more representative of the TrustAfrica spirit. Gerry attributes this modifying aspect of TrustAfrica to the organic manner in which the organization has grown, and encourages the organization to keep challenging its own vision for greater efficiency, purpose, and achievement. He also believes that an organization that is capable of such change is also a shining example of a learning organization that is continually reflecting and striving to improve.

WEB READY

With the basic message and visual representation in place, it was time for TrustAfrica to take to the web. “We wanted a clean look, again reflecting the openness, accountability, professionalism, and efficiency TrustAfrica brings to its work,” Christopher R. explains. “We shied away from bells and whistles (like JavaScript) that would make the site take too long to load on slow internet connections.”

Obtaining suitable pictures and graphics for the site was, and remains, an ongoing challenge. “It is not easy finding quality photographs that relate to the issues TrustAfrica works on,” Christopher R. says. “Professional photographers often present negative, violent, desperate, or destitute images of ‘basket-case’ Africa. Perhaps because that is what the international news media thrives on.”

From the beginning, it had been clear that this new entity would be based in Africa, in order for the foundation to serve best the continent for which it was created. According to Janet Mawiyoo, Chief Executive Officer of the Kenya Community Development Foundation and later a board member of TrustAfrica, this is significant because: “The organization belongs to the continent. It was never meant to be a distant relationship.”

Sara, who spent countless hours on the incorporation documents, describes how the location of the organization was decided: “The major cities under consideration were Accra, Addis Ababa, Cairo, Dakar, Johannesburg, and Nairobi. Kenya presented issues around registration. Besides resentment and under-rating the rest of the continent, acquiring a legal status in South Africa was difficult. Addis Ababa presented stability and flexibility issues, while Cairo was not central enough, and not well connected to the rest of the continent. Accra was very promising and the government of Ghana was eager to welcome TrustAfrica, but with Akwasi as the Executive Director, there was fear that TrustAfrica might be received as a Ghanaian institution. Dakar remained the most possible place—stable, secure, and seemingly democratic.”

“"It is not easy finding quality photographs that relate to the issues TrustAfrica works on, professional photographers often present negative, violent, desperate, or destitute images of ‘basket-case’ Africa."

PLANTING IN AFRICAN SOIL

"It is not easy finding quality photographs that relate to the issues TrustAfrica works on, professional photographers often present negative, violent, desperate, or destitute images of ‘basket-case’ Africa."
After many deliberations, Senegal was finally selected as a country for the new TrustAfrica, in ad-
tify, given that it allowed much freedom of movement, coupled with the fact that the Senegalese government was willing to accept the foundation with open arms. The shift from English-speaking New York to Francophone Dakar was also desirable. It was impor-
tant to cross that divide, Akwasi believes: “We decided to locate TrustAfrica in a country that was hos-pitable and where we could operate in an unfettered manner. We also decided to structure the office in a way that would enable us to host our partners.” Even in its physical set-up, the emphasis on collaborations and network-building was apparent.

LIFT OFF

Six long years after the Ford Foundation had origi-
nally toyed with the idea of devoting more resources to Africa, on Tuesday 6 June 2006 TrustAfrica was publicly launched at Hotel Savana in Dakar. The day-long event, for which the sun was shining brightly, be-
gan with Gerry ebulliently welcoming the attendees, who were a mixture of grantees, artists, government officials, NGO representatives, foundations, media, and academic institutions. “Today has finally arrived,” Gerry remarked. “We have waited a very long time. I’ve been very worried about how I would tell the sto-
ty of TrustAfrica. How do you praise something you are a part of?” He later commended the leadership and patience that Akwasi had demonstrated in the years prior to the official launch: “It takes great skill to navi-
gate a project like this. Akwasi did it with incredible tact and diplomacy. He navigated the boat from New York to Dakar and built a coalition that included peo-
ple who normally don’t get involved in projects such as this. I am not a praise singer, I am telling the truth: Akwasi is a master builder.”

TrustAfrica must not only continue to build itself as a foundation, but must also help nurture institutions of civil society that will be its partners in making Africa a place that offers both dignity and livelihoods to its people.

On behalf of the Ford Foundation, Barry was present to offer his thoughts: “I hope that TrustAfrica will be a beacon for all other old and new trusts and foundations here on this continent, as they attempt to move to a more strategic development agenda, in ad-
tion to the really challenging activities they are al-
ready undertaking. Today, TrustAfrica stands on its own feet. It is launched with a strong board, leader,
program focus, and with an enormous reservoir of good will...TrustAfrica must not only continue to build itself as a foundation, but must also help nurture institu-
tions of civil society that will be its partners in making Africa a place that offers both dignity and livelihoods to its people. The Ford Foundation will be proud in that task to be a partner to TrustAfrica.”

John Githongo, Kenya’s former Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics, and one of the most respected anti-corruption campaigners in the world, delivered the launch’s keynote address, focus-
ing on the opportunities and challenges of improving governance and accountability in Africa. Closely con-
ected to this, he made the point that: “The most in-
teresting, and I should like to argue critical, issue that TrustAfrica and similar institutions can assist many nations in Africa address is ‘development with eq-
uity’...Distribution of wealth has been extremely un-
equal. People are afraid of being called Socialists at a time when even in Europe the distinctions between left and right in terms of economic policy have be-
come blurred. This is doubly problematic for us in Africa because inequality quick-bly finds regional, eth-
nic, tribal, and religious expressions that complicate the politics in an extreme way.”

Returning to the specific role of TrustAfrica, he noted his hope that “the principle of equity will in-
form the outcomes of the debates that are underway and those that are yet to happen. TrustAfrica, from its vantage point in Dakar, will try to inform and to help shape this debate, to frankly address the eq-
uity issues that we have tried to sometimes sweep under the political carpet.” He concluded on a pos-
itive note: “The setbacks on the democratic front in Africa are not causing a generalized feeling of de-
cline, despondency, and failure. The maturing democ-
acy thus far seems able to absorb the shocks. The TrustAfrica launch is yet another demonstration of this maturing.”

Following the morning’s speeches, the afternoon of the launch featured thematic panel discussions on two of TrustAfrica’s program areas: citizenship and identity, and regional integration and peace. After tak-
ing part in the panels, Adhiambo brought the launch forward, giving part in the panels, Adhiambo remarked how mo-
mentous it was to listen to grantees’ discussions in par-
icular, and commented that the launch further confirmed that TrustAfrica’s collaborative approach to solving issues was indeed the best way to bring disparate voices together. She summed up the day as follows: “Leaders shaping the Africa we all want, us-

ing different methods, finding technical assistance, and creating solutions.” Represented by the acacia, the vision that Akwasi, Gerry, Katherine, and Steve had spoken about so many years before, and count-
less times since, had become a reality.
Since its 2006 launch, TrustAfrica has been steadily establishing a broad base of support, building relationships across Africa and beyond. As Akwasi explains it: “We are in the business of making a forest out of trees and building a dense ecosystem of organizations, communities, and borderless fields.” He stresses the need for more foundations like TrustAfrica to take up the challenge of supporting African institutions, organizations, and people with innovative ideas. Despite being operational for only a short period, TrustAfrica has already carved out a respected name for itself, through its range of successful programming, as well as its ongoing commitment to organizational development and growth.

Program reflections

Program strategy development and review has been an ongoing exercise at TrustAfrica. Bhekinkosi suggests that rethinking TrustAfrica’s strategy on a regular basis is healthy. “TrustAfrica doesn’t have the tendency to be comfortable and complacent. We are questioning ourselves time and again, and that’s a good sign. It gives hope that we won’t become part of the furniture, but that we will keep changing and reinventing things, ourselves, and the way we work.” After consultations and discussions with grantees, staff, and the board, TrustAfrica is now committed to focusing on three areas: democracy and civil society, equitable development, and African philanthropy. To advance these programmatic goals, major projects and initiatives also focus on: African perspectives on HIV/AIDS, agricultural development, civil society in Liberia, enhancing women’s dignity, higher education, investment climate and business environment, and religion and pluralism.

The underlying philosophy of the organization has always been to gather disparate voices, but in reality mobilizing African support requires time, patience, resources, and the building of solid relationships. “This is a big challenge,” Akwasi admits. “It was easier thought of as an idea, but the practical implementation is very tough.” Staying true to what the organization set out to do, Akwasi believes that TrustAfrica continues to bring a new approach to philanthropy and development in Africa. Bishop Malusi Mpumulana, who would eventually join the TrustAfrica board, speaks highly of Akwasi’s vision in this regard: “From the beginning, Akwasi was specific about the process. I have expressed to Akwasi on several occasions how impressed I’ve been with his focus and development of the organization. He had a deliberate gestation period that was nurtured and sustained, born into maturity, and ready to grow.”
Since its 2006 founding, TrustAfrica has funded 211 organizations in 30 countries to the tune of $12,861,109 (USD). To maximize impact, TrustAfrica hosts agenda-setting workshops, makes grants to collaboratory projects, and provides technical assistance to strengthen African institutions under the premise that Africans need a louder voice among international donors.

Gerry confirms that: “TrustAfrica allows Africans to take their rightful seat at the table among donors and others who influence development.” The several cycles of reflection and analysis have allowed TrustAfrica to consistently produce quality programs that serve to address Africa’s most critical challenges in non-conventional ways. Malusi further suggests that TrustAfrica’s programmatic work is so special because the organization: “Picks up agendas that aren’t taken care of by anyone else.”

Within each of its three overarching programmatic goals, TrustAfrica works on the principle that institutional collaboration across Africa offers the best hope for developing lasting solutions to intractable challenges. Aïcha suggests that one of the organization’s strengths is that it does not always insist being at the forefront, but rather brings together diverse voices around TrustAfrica’s programmatic goals, and “Collaborates with coalitions, but lets them do the work themselves.”

Work around democracy and civil society seeks to secure the conditions for democratic participation by strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations. This is based on the belief that an active citizenry is an essential part of a prospering, sustainable, and democratic society. The recent proliferation of civil society organizations in Africa holds great promise for strengthening democracy, but these groups’ efforts frequently fall short due to lack of coordination, duplication of efforts, competing agendas, perceptions of elitism, and insufficient transparency. TrustAfrica aims to counter these challenges, and its civil society work now encompasses several flagship initiatives, including one aimed at strengthening African regional organizations. Work around the Liberia Civil Society Initiative as well as the Enhancing Women’s Dignity Project fall under this stream of work.

The second strand of work, equitable development, supports efforts to foster African enterprise and extend the benefits of economic growth to all members of society. TrustAfrica is of the firm belief that the lives and livelihoods of Africa’s people are shaped to a great extent by the vitality of its economy. By easily workers can find gainful and fulfilling employment, how readily businesses can clear bureaucratic hurdles and find capital to grow, and how broadly prosperity is shared. The mounting consensus that the continent needs ‘trade, not aid’ points the way forward. Already many African nations are growing their economies at a rapid pace, and investors are beginning to see the promise their stock exchanges and capital markets hold. While creating new wealth is critical, it must be done sustainably and equitably, in ways that minimize environmental impacts and extend the benefits of development to all members of society.

At the center of this second programmatic priority is the Investment Climate and Business Environment ICBE Research Fund. In partnership with the International Development Research Centre and the Foundation for Sustainable Enterprise and Development, set up a special fund to promote the investment climate and business environment in Africa through research and advocacy. The ICBE Research Fund uses competitive research grant mechanisms, training workshops, and partnerships between business schools and private-sector organizations to contribute to a better investment climate and business environment in Africa. During its first phase, the Fund awarded roughly $1,481,000 (USD) and the second phase, launched in 2010 was planned to provide $2,500,000 for cutting-edge research over a three-year period.

Thirdly, TrustAfrica focuses on African philanthropy, leveraging new and traditional forms of African giving to advance democracy and development and to minimize reliance on external donors. Africa is already home to a deep-rooted culture of giving and mutual support, though it operates mostly at the family and community levels. Efforts to reenergize these traditions, and extend their reach, could give civil society organizations greater leverage with funders overseas as well as wary governments closer to home. At the same time, strong economic growth in many parts of Africa is creating new pockets of wealth. With them has come the next generation of African philanthropists and a new set of formal philanthropic institutions that can play a vital role in sustaining African initiatives for democratic governance and equitable development.

The Three Programmatic Goals

1. Figures current as of May 2011.

Work around democracy and civil society seeks to secure the conditions for democratic participation by strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations. 1

Members of the Enhancing Women’s Dignity project gather in for an agenda-setting workshop in Saly, Senegal. 
So while the programmatic priorities have been clearly defined, on the topic of grantmaking, Akwasi admits that: “The tendency to behave like a normal donor agency is our greatest threat. That tendency consists of being too sure of what the priorities are without consulting those for whom our programs are designed.” Bhekinkosi hints at another challenge: “The scope of our capacity is not aligned. The demand is huge while the supply is small financially and staff-wise. We need to focus on our tools. Imagine shoot- ing a buffalo with a pistol. Chances are you won’t kill it. You will only wound it and then it will turn its an- ger on you.” Malusi agrees that: “Given the enormity of the organization’s responsibilities, we are thin on staff capacity.”

Janet sees TrustAfrica’s programmatic strategy as being different from other organizations because of the efforts put into monitoring the progress and impact of grants: “If you receive a grant, years down the road TrustAfrica still cares and keeps in contact. Not all funding organizations are this dili- gent.” Ongoing reflections will serve to ensure that these threats are minimized, and strategic program- ming, if properly handled, will spur new people-cen- tered approaches that will place TrustAfrica at the de- velopment forefront, speaking the language of change, and making a coherent link between the three pro- grammatic themes.

BECOMING A KNOWLEDGE-HUB

Underpinning all programmatic work, TrustAfrica also aims to become a knowledge repository on philan- thropy in Africa. Bhekinkosi highlights the cutting-edge research work that TrustAfrica has undertaken and has built a strong reputation around: “In the field of philan- thropy, you need a good foundation, the right builders, and the right materials. We have gone past that with our research strategy, highlighting areas to begin with, ac- tivities to focus on, target audiences, partnerships and networks.” A huge gap has been identified in the field of aid that TrustAfrica hopes it can help fill.

Developing TrustAfrica as a knowledge-hub is an area that Bhekinkosi is excited about: “There are individuals and organizations that want to partner with us, not because of the money, but because of a genuine interest, what we mean to them, and the good name and knowledge that we have.” Bhekinkosi says, “Whatever is happening out there creates more op- portunities for TrustAfrica to address African prob- lems through African ways, and turn around the nega- tive connotations associated with the continent. Even if we fail, let us fail on our own terms.”

Rose Maruru, who joined the TrustAfrica staff in December 2009 as the organisation’s first Director of Operations, also sees this area of work as being some of the most exciting that TrustAfrica is undertaking. “TrustAfrica is truly a pioneer for African philan- thropy as we are generating much of the knowledge in this area.” Malusi agrees that this is an area in which TrustAfrica is truly groundbreaking: “TrustAfrica brings sharp minds together and allows best thinking to emerge. Publications and reports are a distillation of what is happening on the ground, and turn inno- vative thinking into digestible materials, allowing the organization to be a thought-leader.”
These efforts are seen as vital, as the works focusing on civil society in the Maghreb is already in progress. Given the Arab Spring of 2011 and the resulting political climate across North Africa, a second volume of the book provides a critical yet necessary look at the building of knowledge on philanthropic research and philanthropy.

Bhekinkosi Moyo, Program Director for TrustAfrica, shows off his latest book: '(Dis)Enabling the Public Sphere: Civil Society Regulation in Africa (Volume 1).’ Together with the Southern Africa Trust, TrustAfrica published a 429-page book about the African Grantmakers Network (AGN), work that falls under the AfriCA n GrAnTmAkerS neTW ork (AGN). The AGN aims to be the platform for the promotion of an African voice and agenda for philanthropy. The formation of AGN is the culmination of numerous formal and informal meetings among a number of African grantmaking foundations spanning a period of three years. The first formal meeting organized by the founder members, including TrustAfrica, was held in Accra in July 2009. The public launch of the network followed in November 2010 in Nairobi, an event which was labeled the ‘First Pan-African Assembly of African Grantmakers.’ The Assembly was successful in convening more than 200 participants, who came together enthusiastically to set an African agenda for philanthropy on the continent.

The establishment and subsequent successful launch of the AGN can be considered a feathert in the cap of TrustAfrica, as the organization has played a lead role in the establishment of this network. Although still in its infancy, the AGN will play a vital role in building the infrastructure of African philanthropy, giving, and solidarity, to another level. We need African foundations that are capable of mobilizing funds from across Africa and the African Diaspora for philanthropic goals anywhere on the continent. Our aim is to help catalyze the development of philanthropic institutions to take African traditions of philanthropy, giving, and solidarity, to another level. We need African foundations that are capable of mobilizing funds from across Africa and the African Diaspora for philanthropic goals anywhere on the continent.

On the theme of community, Akwasi emphasizes that: ‘We don’t believe that one tree makes up a forest. Our aim is to help catalyze the development of philanthropic institutions to take African traditions of philanthropy, giving, and solidarity, to another level. We need African foundations that are capable of mobilizing funds from across Africa and the African Diaspora for philanthropic goals anywhere on the continent.’

Connecting the Trees: The African Grantmakers Network

The AGN is now firmly committed to connecting funders across Africa, since its establish-ment TrustAfrica has also prioritized the represen-tation of Africa’s interests off the continent. While engagements around the globe have been num-erous, several more noteworthy occasions are worth mention.

In May 2010 TrustAfrica was spotlighted at the European Foundation Centre annual conference, fol-low ing its nomination of Mo Ibrahim for the Raymond Georis Prize for Innovative Philanthropy. Marking the first time that an African laureate had received the prize, TrustAfrica submitted the nomination to honour the Mo Ibrahim Foundation’s work to support good gov-ernance and promote accountable leadership across Africa. During the prize-giving ceremony, Raymond Georis made the point that: ‘Mo Ibrahim’s efforts to promote good governance in Africa should serve as a model for other continents, notably Europe.’ Testifying to TrustAfrica’s work on democracy and civil society, when accepting the prize, Mo Ibrahim noted the need for civil society organizations to increase dialogue with governments in Africa, and elsewhere.

Later in the year, in September 2010 TrustAfrica’s commitment to strengthening private enterprise and fostering pro-poor growth throughout Africa was fea-tured on stage at the Clinton Global Initiative’s annual meeting. Akwasi spoke about TrustAfrica’s commitment to provide $2,700,000 (USD) for pioneering research on ways to stimulate the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in order to en-
January 2010 Haiti earthquake, the campaign unit-
Graça Machel. Created following the devastating 12
lead partner in the ‘Africa for Haiti’ campaign led by
took the opportunity to explain to the audience.
reaching large segments of the population,” Akwasi
greater investment and higher returns have not been
most other regions in the world. But the benefits of
nature and scale and an opportunity to prove to the
world that when it comes to aid, Africans are not al-
tions. It was the first pan-African collaboration of this
trust is a win-win for those who pledgeAfrica.
BuDDin G GroWTh
All three of these interventions have allowed
TrustAfrica to present Africa to the rest of the world
through a more positive lens than is often used...
Rose notes that December 2009 was a critical
time, in terms of organizational growth, to join the in-
nstitution, and a time to both reflect on the past and
look towards the future. Rose was charged with the
immediate task of suggesting improvements to, and
strengthening, TrustAfrica’s standard practices and
processes. Specific actions have included: moderniz-
ing the financial management system, strengthening
expertise, nationality, and gender.

The organization continues to evolve, the staff
pay close attention to weave TrustAfrica’s core val-
ues into new day to day processes. This not only ensures that
these values continue to influence the organization-
aculture, but also ensures that the founders’ vision
of a transparent, efficient, and trustworthy organiza-
tion lives on.

We are friends and we respect differences of opinion.
Gerry readily speaks about why the board is an
effective one: “We know each other’s weaknesses.
While additional future recruitments are inevi-
table, Gerry readily speaks about why the board is an
effective one: ‘We know each other’s weaknesses.
We are friends and we respect differences of opinion.

EXPLAINING THE BOARD
Overseeing the accomplishments from 2006 to the
current day has been the gradually growing board,
which is currently made up of ten Africans from
across the continent and all walks of life. Since the
original board recruitments in 2006, four additional
members have also been added. In 2008 Malusi joined the
board, bringing hands-on experience with con-
cerns specific to Southern Africa. He had been a crit-
ical voice and independent observer when TrustAfrica
was hatching, and provided solid advice to Akwasi
and Gerry at the time. Malusi comes to TrustAfrica with
distinct charisma, one that is a combination of his pro-
fessional profile and persona. The former draws out
a serious determination towards work, while the lat-
ergives liveliness and mirth from his rich, echoing
to work, while the latter gives liveliness and mirth from
his rich, echoing
to work, while the latter gives liveliness and mirth from
his rich, echoing

PArT 3
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We know how to deal with our differences so they do not cause discomfort. We address each other on first name terms, with no protocol. Our level of interaction has quality. When we have meetings we are not worried about egos or certain members overreacting, and that is how we want to keep functioning.” Aïcha agrees that the board functions so well because: “We listen, explain, and understand each other’s viewpoints, which are not all the same. If we all had the same opinions, why would we need to meet?” Suzanne comments that: “The board is one of the reasons why TrustAfrica has the potential to be such a potent force for change in Africa. The individual board members have the clout, established networks, respect, and legitimacy to make a significant difference.”

Given the vastly different experiences and outlooks that the board members bring to the table, the individual members are like different windows opening up to different points of view on the same issues. However, regarding processes and standards of approach, which always brings them back to the same page, they are just one window, keenly observing the landscape in which they operate, and looking within their own resources and capacities to determine how their vision for the work on the continent is to be accomplished. While the founding board members will inevitably rotate off, Rose suggests that: “If the leadership transition is handled deliberately, it should not pose any problems. We just have to make sure that new board members are also infected with the TrustAfrica fever.”

Seeking Financial Stability

While effective staff and a strong board are pre-requisites, future organizational successes of course rest on TrustAfrica’s ability to become financially independent and sustainable. This challenge became even more immense when, around the time of TrustAfrica’s official launch, the Ford Foundation announced that it would no longer be able to meet the full commitment that it had originally pledged. So while TrustAfrica still receives income from foreign donors, an integral part of the organization’s future stability, it is hoped, will be built from the $100 per year campaign. The campaign seeks to generate new philanthropic resources among fellow Africans, whether living on the continent or among the Diaspora. The goal is to inspire 10,000 individuals to each contribute $100 (USD) per year. Such support may ensure that TrustAfrica can sustain its work, and that it is not overly dependent on foreign donors.

Through those who have already contributed to the campaign, the various motivations for those who give have become clear. Many choose to give to the organization because for a long time they have been ‘friends of Africa’, some of them starting at an early stage in their careers as Peace Corps volunteers, or as permanent job-holders on the continent. They have fallen in love with Africa and its people, and even though they have left, giving has become a natural
part of their continued and extended relationship with the continent. Others in the Diaspora give to Africa as their Missionaries, seeking donors and former supporters of the independence movements of Africa. Still others are business people, youths, and Africa-focused organizations that transcend race and geographical barriers, who share a common concern for Africa’s future.

Bahri suggests that the $300 million campaign is TrustAfrica’s most daring action. Fully utilized, the group in its entirety is staggering huge, and its contributions have the potential to make lasting transformative change. Christopher H. suggests that TrustAfrica occupies a unique position, from which it can engage African American donors not only from the philanthropic side, but also from the emotional and personal reflections about TrustAfrica and its goals are paramount. “The ongoing success of TrustAfrica will rest on its capacity to build up funds in order to remain independent. Being reliant solely on external funding sources means abiding by what donors want, and this is a dangerous position to be in.” Janet chimes in that: “Flexible funding, that allows an organization to do what it wants, is key.”

There are of course other uncertainties also facing the organization as it moves forward, notably the lack of stability and security experienced so far. Indeed, the lack of stability and security experienced earlier in 2011 has led to serious discussions about whether the organization should be based, or whether it has been a long race and there is still a long road ahead of us as we move from the idea of TrustAfrica to its full development as a thriving institution on the African philanthropic landscape. The marathon can be won when we succeed in building the endowment, and when a substantial part of the endowment comes from African sources. STAYING ON COURSE

Excluding some foreign donors from funding the organization has allowed TrustAfrica to concentrate on the key issues and core programs that advance its mission. Yet in order to stay true to its objectives, TrustAfrica has had to make some careful and difficult choices about who it works with. Rose admits that on occasion it has been tough to turn away potential partners with generous resources, but that at the ends of the day the organization must be comfortable enough to do so, in order to ensure that it stays on course: “We have had to learn to strike a balance as not to be pulled into too many different directions,” she notes. “But over time we have become more ready, and more capable, to say no.”

It has been a long race and there is still a long road ahead of us as we move from the idea of TrustAfrica to its full development as a thriving institution on the African philanthropic landscape. DISTURBING THE SOIL

There are of course other uncertainties also facing the organization as it moves forward. One of them is a changing political situation in its main country of operation, Senegal. The country had been held up as a model of stability, but recent events have been decentralized and perhaps as a result of the influence of the Arab Spring, the capital Dakar was on several occasions the scene of rioting and protest. A young soldier who set himself on fire in front of the Presidential palace in February, echoing a pattern of protest used throughout the Middle East, became emblematic of the unrest. The situation for civil society organizations in particular became precarious. Malusi views this as one of the greatest threats to TrustAfrica’s future sustainability and prospects: “When one considers what has happened in Dakar, it becomes even clearer that the nature of progress threatens politicians in Africa. It may be difficult now for TrustAfrica to hold a stable position in the country because of the unfavorable political environment.” Indeed, the lack of stability and security experienced early in 2011 has led to serious discussions about whether the organization should be located in Dakar, or whether it may be a wiser tactic to have offices in several locations – so as not to have all of the eggs in one basket, so to speak. The board has committed to monitoring the situation closely and taking measures if needed. LEGACY

On the topic of legacy, Christopher H. is quick to recount a story from when he was working for the Ford Foundation in New York. One day he was admitting furniture in a shop, when he ended up in conversation with the elderly shopkeeper. When the older gentleman found out that Christopher worked for the Ford Foundation he expressed how thrilled he was to meet someone from Ford. He went on to tell Christopher the story of his life, specifically how he had received a
grant from the Ford Foundation in 1957 to support his education. He noted that the grant, although not huge-ly significant financially speaking, had made all the difference to him as a young man, as it had eventually spun him into his career as a successful engineer.

Christopher recounts this story to make the point that TrustAfrica should imagine what it will be doing 50 or 100 years down the line: what kind of legacy it wishes to create, and the hundreds of people and institutions that will be indebted to the foundation for its existence and support. When questioned about TrustAfrica’s potential legacy, Akwasi offers a quote from John D. Killens, who wrote in a seminal essay in The Black Scholar in November 1973 that: “We must construct institutions for generations yet unborn.”

Considering the impact that TrustAfrica may have on these future generations, staff, board members, and friends ponder Africa’s, and by extension TrustAfrica’s, future. The common thread that can be noted among these contemplations is the tone of optimism, positivity, and belief in something great. “For TrustAfrica the future is bright given the latest development of positive images of Africa within and without,” Bhekinkosi suggests. “We are not naïve to the challenges facing the continent. They are our reality checks.”

Many touch upon the hope that the capabilities of Africans will not only be more readily recognized, but also that the good ideas coming from the continent will be better harnessed in the future. Natalia comments that: “TrustAfrica can guide and fund the smallest individuals in order to make it work. What is affecting Africa is not lack of intellectual power. People aren’t voiceless but they are being silenced. We need TrustAfrica to be a credible voice in Africa that is not silenced.” Thinking along the same lines, Akwasi notes his hope for: “A future where the idea of Africans solving African problems is not in doubt.”

Rose thinks that TrustAfrica’s legacy will be built around its exciting work on fostering and encouraging African giving: “TrustAfrica’s future is as bright as it ever was, and with our work on African philanthropy we are seeing more and more the formalization of philanthropy on the continent. In Africa, we are all philanthropists in our own way already: supporting families and helping communities. But TrustAfrica is playing an exciting role in bringing this to the forefront.”

Speaking to the importance of the forest, twenty years from now, Bhekinkosi will say that: “I don’t want to see TrustAfrica alone. I wish to see many TrustAfricas, literally and figuratively; enlarged networks and brother and sister organizations across the continent.” Along the same lines, in two decades Suzanne hopes that TrustAfrica will: “Maintain its deep commitment to the marginalised and those not in positions of power, and mobilize its strong networks...”
of organizations and individuals across the continent to link the marginalized to those in positions of pow-

er." Indeed, TrustAfrica has never aspired to be the only one of its kind and its vision of Africa requires robust mechanisms for civic engagement, including a wide range of research institutes, advocacy groups, community-based organizations and social enterprises with the capacity to inform policymaking processes and to hold governments and the private sector accountable.

Tying all of this together, Janet notes her hope that in twenty years TrustAfrica will be a: "Household name. A name recognizable because of what the organization achieves in terms of impact and practical results, particularly in bringing together civil society organizations and governments."

**CONCLUSION**

In any journey, moving forward is possible as long as one can make sense of their experiences, and advance through space and time taking appropriate steps. TrustAfrica has confidently evolved from trying to define its niche and identity priorities to being fully aware of its operations, where and who it is, what it has done and how, and where it wants to go. Questions around relevance and specificity are no longer core. As stated in the preface, this Chronicle was written in part to celebrate the spirit and enthusiasm of those who not only made this evolution a reality, but who also ensured that Africa and its people were at the very core of every consideration affecting organizational priorities and direction.

These founders have been steadfast over the last decade - the approximate period of time covered by this Chronicle - in their unflinching belief that Africa is neither hopeless nor helpless. They have made a point of telling another story: the story of everyday Africans getting on with it, innovating, using new technologies and traditional institutions to tackle difficult problems.

In another decade it is likely that many of TrustAfrica’s founding board and staff, as well as the organization’s early supporters, will be engaged in new challenges, both personal and professional. But the hope is that the foundations these people have laid, as detailed in this Chronicle, will live for many decades and generations beyond. Until Conrad-isms and misconceptions of Africa as the ‘The Dark Continent’ are permanently shelved, TrustAfrica will continue to operate with the conviction that Africans must set their own agenda for development and take the lead in implementing it. The roots of this acacia have been carefully nurtured and tended to ensure that this becomes a reality.
The writers would like to sincerely thank the following respondents, whose stories, thoughts, and recollections have informed the writing of this Chronicle. Those respondents referenced directly in the text have been introduced with their full names and titles, and any references made thereafter are by first name or most-used shortened name.

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- **Yao Graham**, Executive Coordinator, Third World Network-Africa