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ARTICLE

Philanthropic donor agencies and social policy in sub-Saharan Africa – New perspectives to the “welfare mix”

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Abstract
The role of external actors has now been widely acknowledged in shaping social policy processes in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, the social policy roles and influence of philanthropic donors have been less recognised and examined. As various countries in the region seek to expand social policy implementation and delivery and revitalise the development of national welfare systems, it is important to better understand the roles and functions of philanthropic donor agencies in the processes of agenda-setting, financing, and delivery of social policy. This article discusses the complex social policy functions held by philanthropic donor agencies in sub-Saharan Africa through the lens of the “welfare mix,” drawing attention to the divergencies and convergences between Western philanthropic donors and their African counterparts, while reflecting on the direction of future research agendas.

Keywords: philanthropy; social policy; Africa; welfare mix; private foundations

Introduction

This article examines the characteristics, roles, and risks of social policy engagement by philanthropic donor agencies in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) through the lens of the welfare mix. Philanthropic sources for aid have become increasingly attractive for the global development community, including aid-receiving countries themselves. Incessant competition for funds by proliferating development agencies, a pressing need for external development finance in the Global South, and new social needs caused by climate crisis, health epidemics, and various development challenges have all contributed towards the emergence of philanthropic organisations as “donors” as well as policy innovators. At the launch of the post-2015 development agenda, the UN called for a “new global partnership” involving philanthropic organisations (UN, 2013). Today, this new partnership is evidenced in the incalculable philanthropic collaborations across the UN system; the emergence of structures such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Philanthropy Platform; the leading role of philanthropic actors in global public–private partnerships such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria or Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance; and the increasing reporting of philanthropic aid flows within official development aid statistics by the OECD.

Contemporary philanthropic donor agencies exercise policy influence across international and national social policy structures and spaces. At the country level, their presence is particularly felt in SSA, which represents the primary region for international philanthropic aid flows (OECD, 2022). Alongside well-known American philanthropic foundations (e.g. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation [BMGF]; Open Society Foundations; Bloomberg Philanthropies) operates a broad range of corporate philanthropies (e.g. Orange Foundation, Mastercard Foundation), smaller European foundations (e.g. Bernard van Leer Foundation), and Southern foundations from outside and within Africa (e.g. Aliko Dangote Foundation, Jack Ma Foundation).

The diverse and growing group of philanthropic donors has become an increasingly important part of the contemporary "welfare mix" in the SSA region. "The welfare mix" or "mixed economies" of welfare (Ascoli and Ranci, 2002; Evers, 1995; Johnson, 1999, 2014; Powell, 2007) refers to the constellation of different public, private, and third-sector actors in the provision, finance, and decision making (and/or regulation) around welfare. Other related terms, such as the "care diamond" (Razavi, 2007), have also been introduced, with particular focus on the Global South. Although welfare provision has always been covered by diverse actors across societies, the concept of the "welfare mix" in social policy analysis gained traction in the 1980s in the context of the welfare state retrenchment in industrialised Western societies. Actor configurations behind welfare provision also came under scrutiny in comparative welfare regime study spurred by Esping-Anderson's pioneering work "Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The majority of social policy studies regarding the welfare mix have remained largely "statist" with a focus on characteristics of and changes in welfare provision by domestic actors in industrialised, high-income countries (without omitting the separate policy literature on the role of the third sector in social policy management and delivery; see e.g. Anheier & Toepler, 2023). Such analyses have paid much attention to shifting roles and responsibilities notably between the state and the market, as well as the increasing complexities of welfare provision under public–private partnerships, for instance. Gough et al. (2004) were among the first social policy scholars to develop a welfare regime analysis incorporating Global South contexts, drawing attention notably to the diversity of external actors in the welfare mixes. "Statist" interpretations of welfare pluralism were also challenged and extended by authors stressing the multileveled nature of social policy formation. Gough (2001) was also among the first to put forth the idea of an "extended welfare mix," which includes both domestic and global actors representing the state, market, intermediate (e.g. international non-governmental organisations [INGOs], consultancy companies, and private philanthropies), community, and household.

These theoretical perspectives are particularly pertinent in the SSA context, where complex constellations of domestic and international actors are involved in the financing and delivery of and negotiating over social policy interventions and priorities. As many countries in the region are resource-scarce and state institutions for welfare provision remain immature, formal welfare systems are continually evolving with the support and under the influence of external policy actors. The role of international organisations – such as UN institutions and bilateral development agencies – has now been widely recognised in shaping social policy processes and funding welfare interventions in SSA (Adesina, 2014; Gumede, 2018; Schmitt, 2020). Increasing attention has also been directed to both external and domestic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as policy advocates and service providers in the social policy landscape in SSA and the Global South more broadly (Clement, 2020; Grisolia, Dewachter, & Holvoet, 2023; Lewis, 2013).

However, the social policy roles and influence of philanthropic donor agencies, which constitute a distinctive group of actors described as "meta-NGOs" (Stubbs, 2005), have been less recognised and examined. Yet, philanthropic donor agencies provide significant policy inputs in complex multi-actor policy processes, expanding the "repertoire" of social policy instruments, shaping global social policy agendas, engaging in important policy discussions at global and domestic levels, and implementing development programmes and social interventions on the ground in SSA and beyond.

The purpose of this article is to contribute towards a better understanding of the roles and risks of philanthropic social policy in the SSA context. The discussion focuses on professional, formalised philanthropic donor agencies, defined here following the structural organisational conceptualisation by Salamon and Anheier (1992) as largely asset-based, private, self-governing, nonprofit distributing, and public good-oriented organisations, self-identifying as philanthropic foundations. Crucially, the article argues that philanthropic donors have contributed towards the unique formation of the extended welfare mix in SSA since the Second World War and that philanthropies continue to hold a growing role in shaping social policies in the contemporary context. After shedding light on the historical evolution of philanthropic aid as part of the extended welfare mix in SSA, the article critically discusses the financing, service/intervention delivery, and policymaking functions of philanthropic donor agencies in the contemporary context. The analysis primarily draws on the existing literature, complemented by grey literature (journalistic articles, website information, statistics, and other relevant materials) on philanthropic donor agencies operating in the SSA region. The article also engages with theoretical discussions around the concept of "welfare mix" and its applicability for social policy analysis in the current political context in the Global South.

Philanthropic donor agencies in sub-Saharan Africa: Key actors in the extended welfare mix

SSA has a long history of transatlantic philanthropic influence, often deeply intertwined with US foreign policy and embedded in broader global dynamics. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Rockefeller Foundation was one of the most influential actors shaping global health governance (with a focus on biomedical solutions to health problems) (Martens & Seitz, 2015). It developed its international health programmes jointly with US agencies to propel the imperialist-capitalist agenda and introduce modern medicine to "backward" people in Africa (Levich, 2015). The Rockefeller Foundation's International Health Division (also known as the International Health Commission and the International Health Board, closed in 1951) was the world's first international health organisation, which functioned in more than 80 countries – including several African countries (Farley, 2004). In the first decades of the WHO, Rockefeller was an important collaborator for both its resources and policy expertise (the WHO adopted the Rockefeller Foundation's disease control model, for instance) – be it under a contentious relationship (Birn, 2014).

Other leading American philanthropies expanded their operations into Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. The Ford Foundation began international work from 1949 onwards, with the lead of Paul Hoffman who had previously acted as administrator of the Marshall Plan. Soon after him, his predecessor launched several missions to Africa to explore areas that the Ford Foundation could support (Sutton, 1987).

During the Cold War, most American foundations that funded in Africa did so with the understanding that by championing democracy, Africans would be deviated from taking up relations with communist Russia. The US State Department and Agency for International Development (USAID) collaborated particularly closely with the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations – the three "mega philanthropies" of the time – who offered political and ideological support for American policy views, bolstering the Western hegemony (Parmar, 2002, 2012). Actual philanthropic investments were made in areas such as education, training of the legal fraternity, health (especially tropical diseases), and economic planning.

Philanthropic development aid to SSA has increased and diversified in the 2000s. It has been estimated that US foundations' funding to Africa grew at more than twice the rate of overall international funding between 2002 and 2012 (Lawrence et al., 2015). Since the beginning of the new millennium, the growth of American philanthropic aid has been largely driven by the BMGF, focusing primarily on the health sector – Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya featuring among its top five recipients in 2021 (OECD.Stat portal). More recently, corporate philanthropies such as the Mastercard Foundation have held a big presence across Africa, with the ambition of providing decent employment to about thirty million young people by 2030. Based in Canada, the Mastercard Foundation represents the second most important philanthropic donor to the region after the Gates Foundation (see Table 1). Also, the British Children's Investment Fund Foundation and Wellcome Trust have become key donors to Africa, both operating in the health sector.

Today, SSA is the primary recipient region of international philanthropy (OECD, 2022). From the perspective of aid-receiving countries, philanthropic aid represents an additional source of finance in the context of shrinking bilateral aid to Africa (which is falling by 7.8 per cent in real terms between 2021 and

Table 1. Top 20 philanthropic donors to sub-Saharan Africa according to donation amount (gross disbursements in million USD, 2017–2021)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	SUM 2017–2021
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	921.083	1,028.515	1,076.464	1,207.334	1,182.875	5,416.271
Mastercard Foundation	331.719	293.518	337.805	977.064	1,323.589	3,263.695
Children's Investment Fund Foundation	94.804	73.090	66.648	67.975	120.156	422.673
Wellcome Trust	77.651	41.521	59.973	115.355	59.043	353.543
Ford Foundation	57.043	38.117	40.073	46.027	50.608	231.868
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	36.329	39.168	37.608	38.733	77.936	229.773
IKEA Foundation	25.932	34.693	51.037	64.739	39.871	216.272
Postcode Lottery Group, Total	29.102	34.728	60.522	47.512	24.366	196.229
Charity Projects Ltd (Comic Relief)	53.229	36.049	44.346	14.521	17.610	165.755
William & Flora Hewlett Foundation	40.190	37.732	35.371	40.465	..	153.757
Open Society Foundations	27.179	33.100	59.212	19.070	14.381	152.942
Howard G. Buffett Foundation	54.725	87.639	9.566	..	..	151.930
John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	23.403	25.006	31.942	29.025	42.262	151.638
Bezos Earth Fund	..	..	..	12.748	120.630	133.378
LEGO Foundation	..	5.145	22.622	52.261	52.662	132.690
Rockefeller Foundation	..	33.972	35.188	28.714	34.024	131.899
MAVA Foundation	33.525	29.652	15.867	25.470	13.223	117.737
Fondation Botnar	5.338	41.664	15.192	17.380	22.387	101.961
Susan T. Buffett Foundation	2.179	6.293	19.421	70.059	..	97.952
UBS Optimus Foundation	..	..	23.518	37.421	35.542	96.482

Source: Author's production from data by OECD.Stat.

2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis in Ukraine[1]). Unlike general Official Development Assistance (ODA) which covers a broad range of development projects, most philanthropic aid is focused on traditional social policy sectors such as health, education, and job creation as well as agriculture (including diverse nutrition, livelihoods, and poverty reduction interventions), gender equality being another overlapping key area of investment (OECD, 2022).

Parallel to the growing importance of transnational philanthropic investments, the SSA region is witnessing the mushrooming of locally formed foundations, trusts, and other public benefit organisations. Countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, and Senegal have pioneered African philanthropy, which has formed in several distinctive ways. Firstly, there is a set of foundations established with the help of international funding organisations. In this category are foundations or organisations such as TrustAfrica, Kenya Community Development Foundation, African Women's Development Fund, Southern Africa Trust, and Finmark Trust, among others. The second category is

[1]See https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/ODA-2022-summary.pdf

that of community foundations established at the local level to serve local needs, comprising the Foundation for Community Development in Mozambique, Uluntu Foundation in Zimbabwe, Morogoro Community Foundation in Tanzania, and ACT Foundation in Nigeria. The third category consists of foundations established and run by high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) in Africa. The Africa Wealth Report (2023) estimates that there are 52 African-born billionaires (23 still residing on the continent) while projecting that Africa's millionaire population will grow by 42 per cent over the next ten years, which has spurred the emergence of philanthropists such as Theophilus Danjuma and Aliko Dangote from Nigeria, Patrice Motsepe and Cyril Ramaphosa from South Africa, and Strive and Tsitsi Masiyiwa, among others.

Health is a particularly attractive sector to support for both local and international philanthropies, given the critical health needs in SSA and their implications for the resolution of other social ills. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic for example, the Aliko Dangote Foundation in Nigeria built 39 isolation centres through the CACOVID coalition (Webb & Ogawa, 2020). Some evidence suggests that, as a consequence, HNWIs in Africa spent seven times more than they had ever done in a decade in response to the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and December 2020 (Bridgespan).

African philanthropies also forge partnerships, support governance mechanisms, and contribute to institutional building. Their contributions in the policy space have gained increasing recognition for their role in the region's developmental progress (e.g. Moyo, Qobo, & Ngwenya, 2023). Today, many governments (including Liberia, Rwanda, and South Africa) are seeking and forging collaborations with philanthropy. In several countries, SDG Philanthropy Platforms have been formed to support the UN–government–philanthropy collaboration in the implementation of the SDGs. The growth of network-based philanthropic institutions such as the Africa Philanthropy Network and the Africa Philanthropy Forum over the past few years also demonstrates the vitality of the sector.

Philanthropic donor agencies: Shaping policy directions under the contemporary welfare mix

The global welfare regime analysis conducted by Gough et al. (2004) depicted SSA as an "insecurity regime," partially due to the significant role of external development aid donors within examined the welfare mix. While this interpretation has been challenged by different alternative analyses (see Roumpakis, 2020), it made an important contribution to highlighting the key role of external actors in the welfare mix in SSA. Yet, the welfare mix literature has largely ignored the characteristics, comparative advantages, and challenges regarding philanthropic engagement. This section discusses philanthropic social policy in the SSA context through the lens of the welfare mix drawing on the existing literature. More specifically, it sheds light on the key characteristics and potential risks of philanthropic engagement across social policy financing, service delivery, and policymaking.

Social and development policy financing

The social/development policy financing role of philanthropic actors is likely to increase further in SSA as the philanthropic sector grows in a landscape of diverse and pressing social needs. Additionally, philanthropic aid resources are characterised by several unique features bearing several comparative advantages. Firstly, philanthropic investments are not tied to an obligation or pressures to yield profits like private sector financing and can therefore be utilised as risk capital for social innovation and experimental projects which may fail or be "transitionary" in longer policy learning processes. Philanthropic actors are also able to direct funding to needs and causes that market actors are not interested in (defined as the "risk absorber" and "social entrepreneurship" aspects by Anheier & Leat, 2006; Hammack & Anheier, 2013).

Secondly, contrary to public sector resources, philanthropic money is also void of lengthy democratic debates and processes. The independent nature of endowments by philanthropic organisations allows resources to be mobilised with significant flexibility. This "nimbleness" enables quick adaptability to change on the ground and in public emergencies, as evidenced by the rapid mobilisation of philanthropic funds during the Ebola and COVID-19 outbreaks. At the same time, philanthropic foundations established by HNWIs typically hold deep roots in the private sector, and the policy financing approaches often reflect market mechanisms. As highlighted by Hovarth and Powell (2020), "philanthropists have transposed the practices they used to earn their great fortunes into the organizational routines." In practice, this means that philanthropic donors are utilising diverse financing alternatives to traditional grant making, including *profitable investments* through development impact bonds or limited liability corporations (e.g. Omidyar Network, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative).

Moreover, leading global philanthropies often partner with multinational corporations (such as big pharmaceutical companies), increasing their access to markets in the Global South (see e.g. Curtis, 2016; McGoey, 2015). Simultaneously, foundations may accrue their endowments through investments in such companies. The Gates Foundation, for instance, spent around 2 billion USD of tax-exempt resources as charitable grants to private businesses (for scientific discovery, product development, project delivery, and others) by 2020. This included 250 million USD worth of grants directed to companies in which the Gates Foundation holds bonds and stocks, consequently enhancing its own financial resources.[2]

Western philanthropies have also sought to boost welfare service provision by private sector actors. For instance, in 2020, the Rockefeller Foundation granted 750 000 USD to the Health Finance Coalition "to unlock working capital for private SME healthcare providers in Africa in response to COVID-19." The Rockefeller Foundation also supports the "Open Doors African Private Healthcare Initiative" – a loan facility launched in 2021 to support private sector provision of malaria-related and essential health services.[3]

Unlike state welfare and social policy delivery by civil society actors, profitability constitutes a natural policy goal alongside social aims for philanthropic social policy interventions, and private sector collaboration belongs to the usual toolbox of philanthropic donor agencies. This is exemplified in a recent statement by Halima Dangote – a trustee of the Aliko Dangote Foundation and daughter of Aliko Dangote, the figurehead of African philanthropy – regarding The African Business Coalition for Health (ABCHealth)[4] co-founded by the Aliko Dangote Foundation aiming to transform healthcare in Africa:

> With the launch of ABCHealth, business leaders can now make commitments and contribute directly to a healthy and prosperous Africa, enabled by collaboration and business partnerships. Not only will this be a social good, but there is a profit potential (…) (African Business, 2019).

The business practices of philanthropic donors in social policy and development financing raise a number of thorny issues, despite their potential to speed up the delivery of new services and products in SSA. To begin with, market-based financing mechanisms may erode and set a trend away from core funding for essential services and welfare that are desperately needed in many emergent formal welfare systems in SSA. This is particularly the case for NGOs subject to pressures for a re-invention of their functions as policy incubators and start-ups with ambitious plans for impact and scale-up when seeking funding from philanthropic sources for their social policy implementation and delivery (Horvath & Powell, 2020). This reflects the role of philanthropic donors as "meta-NGOs," with significant power to shape recipient behaviours through their funding criteria (Stubbs, 2005).

Furthermore, in a context with weak state provision of basic services, bolstering private sector provision risks setting a path for two-tiered service provision, whereby upper income classes in urban areas resort to better-quality services accessible through the private sector against a high cost, while

[2]The Nation, 2020; see https://www.thenation.com/article/society/bill-gates-foundation-philanthropy/

[3]See https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/news/new-loan-guarantee-facility-unlocks-over-30m-to-shore-up-private-sector-health-care-in-five-african-countries-during-covid-19/.

[4]A partnership between the Nigerian Aliko Dangote Foundation and the Global Business Coalition on Health (GBCHealth) based in the USA; see https://abchealth.com/.

lower income and rural populations remain dependent on low-quality public services if accessible. Even the Universal health coverage (UHC) agenda driven by the Rockefeller Foundation disregards broader system shortfalls that undermine the development of national health systems and universally accessible health service infrastructure in the long term (Evans & Pablos-Méndez, 2020). These priorities and ways of working go against what seminal social policy scholars from the continent have stressed as key elements for the building of African welfare states – solidarity, risk pooling, right to welfare based on citizenship, and holistic social policy planning (e.g. Adesina, 2011, 2014; Mkandawire, 2004).

Finally, collaboration with leading global industry actors may lead to situations where philanthropic aid to SSA is "tied" to the purchase of specific products produced by multinational corporations (such as Sayana Press by Pfizer, aggressively promoted by the Gates Foundation), which has been interpreted as a modern form of colonisation of the policy sphere in the SSA context (see Lambin & Surender, 2021). As many have stressed, prioritisation of such business-minded approaches benefitting the world's capitalist elite maintains the "status quo" in economic systems (which have enabled wealth accumulation by industrialist-turned-philanthropists in the first place) that continue to deepen income gaps and cause multifaceted destitution. It has therefore been argued that rather than contributing towards social justice, philanthropic activity propagates economically, socially, and politically unequal global structures (see e.g. Edwards, 2011; Moran, 2014; Morvaridi, 2015; Kim, 2021). While this critique has evolved largely in the context of Western – and predominantly American – philanthropy, many Southern philanthropies are also guided by a moral and operational compass deeply embedded in the business world, raising questions about the extent and conditions under which these may represent a radically different power dynamic.

Service delivery and programme implementation

Philanthropic donors provide services and interventions on the ground through their programmatic work. Anheier (2018) helpfully posits a four-way classification of the potential roles held by philanthropies, which allows us to better understand philanthropic social policy delivery and its different forms in the SSA region.

The first role to be unpacked – *innovation* – is related to the ability of philanthropic donor agencies that have remained beyond the scope of state delivery (cf. "discovery argument"; Reich, 2016). In fact, leading Western philanthropies have emerged as leading development actors partially thanks to their ability to offer innovative solutions with up-to-date scientific knowledge and private sector expertise. From providing new global public goods (vaccines, "super-toilets," drought-resistant seeds) and innovative services (telehealth and tele-education, user-centred provision) to new approaches to data use (disease surveillance and testing, health data systems), philanthropic development actors have contributed towards a mentality shift prioritising "aid effectiveness" and tangible results over "charitable donations." However, there is limited evidence of the actual impacts of these innovative approaches on beneficiary populations, as extant evaluations are seldom made public and typically focus on programme design rather than the impact of grants and programmes (OECD, 2022).

In contrast, African philanthropies appear to invest more in basic service delivery and infrastructure in the SSA region than their Western counterparts – fulfilling the *complementarity* role "whereby foundations serve otherwise undersupplied groups and their needs" as defined by Anheier (2018, p. 1595). The broader literature typically views this as the "ideal situation," where philanthropic social policy delivery complements state provision to fill gaps and respond to unmet social needs (see e.g. "contributory argument"; Horvath & Powell, 2016). In the context of African philanthropies, "complementary" investments are partially overlapping with the *building-out* role of philanthropies, referring to the physical extension or "building-out" of the existing facilities with new functions, while enhancing original institutions.

For example, a closer look at the TY Danjuma Foundation's health sector investments in Nigeria during 2016–2020 shows that it has sought to bolster basic healthcare provision by NGOs through building and administering maternity, child, and eye hospitals. Similarly, the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation has invested in school infrastructure and the expansion and introduction of basic service delivery (including health check-ups) in the school setting under its "Adopt a School" model in South Africa, while the Aliko Dangote Foundation has provided significant funding for the building and equipping of universities and student housing in Nigeria. In Kenya, the Amrit Foundation and Zarina and Naushad Merali Foundation have sponsored several projects to develop infrastructure and provide equipment for health centres, schools, and old-age homes, while administering different schemes to offer funding for tuition fees and apprenticeship programmes for the underprivileged, among other.

Nevertheless, the existing evidence shows that service delivery and implementation of welfare interventions by both Western and African philanthropies are typically realised through temporary project aid, operationalised by non-state actors (OECD, 2022). For instance, the TY Danjuma Foundation invested nearly 25 million USD in year-long projects between 2009 and 2022, although it has started giving five-year grants since 2023. Short-term project funding remains central for debates around localisation of aid and its decolonisation (e.g. Moyo & Imafidon, 2021). Such funding approaches provide implementing organisations with limited time for policy-oriented work, which traditionally is a long-term intervention and process and "locks" recipients into ongoing fundraising activities, which may cause mission drift. The lack of core funding, in turn, represents a considerable limitation to policy-related advocacy by local civil society.

Moreover, in contrast to African philanthropies funding mainly local NGOs, most of the funding by Western philanthropies ends up with institutions outside Africa. International organisations such as the WHO, the International Development Association, and the UNICEF represent just a few typical recipients, alongside a broad range of large INGOs. This causes further challenges for bolstering local ownership of social interventions and their sustainability.

Crucially, the service delivery features of philanthropic donors bear several negative implications for welfare system in SSA. Firstly, as stressed by Salamon (1987), "the number of agencies can increase well beyond what economies of scale might suggest, reducing the overall efficiency of the system and increasing its costs" (1987, p. 41). In fact, institutional fragmentation with multiple parallel structures and programmes running alongside state services remains a longstanding efficiency issue while also undermining state capacity, as highlighted under the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the subsequent 2008 Accra Action Plan. Both of these international statements of guiding principles to strengthen the impact of development aid drew attention to the importance of domestic coordination, harmonisation, and alignment of development efforts the and use of domestic systems and structures by external development actors to avoid duplication, overlapping, and inefficiencies.

Furthermore, the significant investments that local philanthropies may direct at basic welfare service provision in the context of emerging welfare systems beg the question of whether they operate in a *substituting* rather than complementary role with respect to the state. Although Anheier (2018) defines this as a situation whereby a foundation overtakes the delivery of a service or programme previously run by the state in the face of public sector cutbacks, philanthropies in SSA may act in a role substituting expected, future public sector investment, thereby preventing the expansion of state provision in different policy sectors. Either way, the potential substituting role held by philanthropic donors causes concern from the perspective of the realisation of social rights. Actors within the welfare mix are not functionally equivalent, as only the state can guarantee rights-based access to welfare and provide services and financial welfare universally to all citizens/residents (see Powell, 2019). There is no "right to charity," and despite the significant contributions that non-state actors can make to reduce vulnerability, they cannot act as "substitutes for public action by the state" (UNRISD, 2010, p. 139).

Policymaking engagement and internal agenda-setting

The welfare mix literature has widely examined the state regulation of welfare provision. While philanthropic organisations do not have such a mandate, they are deeply involved in processes of social policymaking across the *different levels of governance.*

At the global level, leading philanthropic donors typically perceive themselves to hold the position of an ideal *convenor* between different development actors, introducing notably private sector partners into shared development efforts (see Lambin, 2020). Also known as the "bridge-builder" aspect of philanthropy, this characteristic is partially enabled by the foundation's positioning as "apolitical" or independent brokers (Anheier, 2018). Consequently, philanthropic donors frequently fund and run various conferences, workshops, and events gathering stakeholders for shared discussions – such as the Goalkeepers event run annually by the Gates Foundation alongside the UN General Assembly meetings. At the regional level, the Aliko Dangote Foundation has taken a key role in mustering philanthropic actors and investments for collaborative social policy investments.[5] The Dangote Foundation has partnered with the African Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), among others, while also regional bodies like the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are increasingly collaborating with a range of philanthropic donors (see e.g. Yeates & Surender, 2021).

The influence of philanthropic donors on global and regional policy agendas is of direct relevance to SSA countries, where supranational social policy objectives such as the SDGs or the UHC are deeply integrated into national policy plans. The particular role of the Rockefeller Foundation in the context of the UHC is a tangible example of philanthropic influence on social policy on the ground. As emphasised by Smithers and Waitzkin (2022) "UHC has become hegemonic within global health policy, to the exclusion of discussions about other approaches to the transformation of health systems that are not predominately based on insurance coverage." As a co-designer and promoter of the UHC agenda together with the WHO and the World Bank Group (Evans & Pablos-Méndez, 2020), the Rockefeller Foundation has furthered insurance-driven social policy expansion contrarily to publicly (tax and social contributions) funded universal health systems aimed at providing health services on the basis of citizenship (or residence) (Giovanella et al., 2018). Consequently, during 2020–2023 alone, several SSA countries have introduced and expanded government-provided health insurance schemes (e.g. Rwanda, Kenya, Zambia, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Togo, among others).

The general policy engagement of philanthropic agencies has been the subject of wide and ongoing debate and is closely connected to the "private" nature of philanthropic foundations. On the one hand, philanthropic agencies may be seen to expand civil society participation in public policymaking (contributing towards the democratic process) (Reich, 2016; see also Zunz, 2012). This happens through their own involvement in public policy processes alongside public sector actors and other stakeholders and that of civil society organisations funded by philanthropies. This "pluralism argument" may be seen as particularly relevant in SSA contexts where state legitimacy is questioned, and philanthropies effectively contribute towards broader societal political participation.

The emerging empirical evidence from the country level – albeit still limited – shows that large Western philanthropies, in particular, are indeed increasingly investing in advocacy missions mobilising local organisations. However, this is often done while disguising their role as originators behind such work to benefit from the legitimacy the advocacy mission gains when perceived as a homegrown grassroots initiative – an approach termed "astroturfing" (see Lambin & Surender, 2021). Influential Western and African philanthropists are also directly engaging with the heads of governments behind

[5]See e.g. https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-Documents/Banking_on_Nutrition_Action Plan_A4_V1d_single__Final_short_form_Action_Plan__2_.pdf; https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20180921005210/en/Aliko-Dangote-Foundation%C2%A0Africa%E2%80%99s-Health-Challenges-Investment-Opportunities.

closed doors for political sway.[6] These insights show that rather than engaging in transparent development partner dialogues and working groups as is common for OECD-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors, philanthropic donors optimise policy influence through diverse intermediaries. These aspects lead to pivotal questions related to the democratising "effects" of philanthropic social policy.

The broader literature has widely disputed the democratic contribution of philanthropic engagement in public policy (Edwards 2011; Moran, 2014; Morvaridi 2014; Villanueva, 2018), due to their internal agenda-setting processes. These have been described as top-down, idiosyncratic, and interest-based (see Ajzen, 1985), whereby philanthropies promote their own interest areas and approaches within the global development community and in recipient countries – without democratic deliberations of public engagement ("disruptive philanthropy"; Horvath & Powell, 2020). One of the earliest works on the risks of philanthropic social policy presented by Salamon (1987) describes two distinctive, related issues regarding such processes. Firstly, philanthropic *particularism* leads to a situation where different population groups may be disproportionately favoured based solely on the preferences of the philanthropist/philanthropy. Secondly, philanthropic *paternalism* replaces knowledge and judgement of beneficiary populations or project participants by those of the philanthropist/philanthropy.

Crucially, Salomon goes on to underscore that such processes increase the dependence of recipient populations on the elite who have the power to define their needs without any solicitation of the former. In fact, philanthropies operate without any requirement for public deliberation of their public policy interventions and accountability towards recipient countries and populations. In contrast, they are characterised by upward accountability whereby NGOs and staff contracted by philanthropic foundations are solely accountable to individual philanthropists or boards (see Lambin & Surender, 2021).

While the existing literature has focused mainly on American, "big money" philanthropy, it is also important to interrogate the power dynamics and policymaking processes regarding philanthropic donors closer to home. The TY Danjuma Foundation, for instance, directs grants to areas matching with pressing health needs in Nigeria, as well as its leader's personal experiences and interests. It gives grants for river blindness, from which its leader suffered in his childhood. At the same time, the bulk of its grants are in Taraba State – the home place of Danjuma himself – where neglected tropical diseases are prevalent, while the second highest proportion of grants are in Edo State – where Danjuma's wife comes from. This suggests that the dismissal of participatory and public engagement processes in agenda-setting may represent a critical pitfall for philanthropies regardless of their origins, from the vantage point of democracy and decolonisation of aid.

Discussion and conclusions

This article was set to examine the roles, risks, and comparative advantages of philanthropic donor foundations through the lens of the "welfare mix." It argues that philanthropic organisations have constituted an important component of the extended mixed economy of welfare in SSA since the Second World War, notably through international operations. The article also highlights the pertinence of philanthropic social policy engagement in the contemporary context, with an increasing number of African philanthropists steering policy directions and implementing social interventions.

Furthermore, the literature and evidence presented in this article "complicates" the concept of the welfare mix. While the participation of philanthropy in the welfare mix is well evidenced, further development of analytical tools is necessitated for the study of welfare pluralism in SSA, where the "national" is highly entangled with the "global," with a complex set of functions carried out by philanthropic actors. At the same time, philanthropic engagement in social policy on the ground (particularly by external foundations) is often *temporary*. Interest-driven investments and project aid

[6] See also https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/605504-tinubu-meets-bill-gates-dangote-promises-to-prioritise-healthcare-in-nigeria.html.

modalities "insulate" philanthropic aid from social policy direction and coordination by the state. These perspectives challenge the view of a welfare mix as a more permanent and somewhat coordinated division of roles and responsibilities in social policy between different actors.

Moreover, philanthropies see themselves largely as *incubators* injecting new ideas into welfare systems, willing to make risky investments to catalyse new development approaches, solutions, and results. Additionally, contemporary philanthropies typically perceive themselves to hold the position of an ideal *convenor* between different development actors, introducing notably private sector partners into shared development efforts (see Lambin, 2020; see also Anheier, 2018). While these roles have important implications for social policy trajectories on the ground in SSA, they are not easily captured by the current focus on financing, service delivery, and policymaking/regulating functions.

In the context of SSA, social policy models are continually evolving and are yet to mature into an institutionalised regime, while several welfare mix "arrangements" often coexist (between rural and urban populations, and informal and formal sector workers, for instance) (Kpessa, 2012; see also Lambin & Nyyssölä, 2023). This means that welfare mix analysis should not happen only by the policy sector (given that different areas of social policy are dealt with by different actor constellations) but by regions and beneficiary groups. This would generate new insights also regarding the reach of philanthropic social policy in different contexts and its broader implications for universal access to welfare.

The relative roles, influence, and magnitude of philanthropic donors in the welfare mix are relevant to the future development of socially just and equitable welfare systems in SSA. In 1889, Andrew Carnegie's publication *The Gospel of Wealth* described philanthropic giving as a necessary redistributive mechanism between the rich and the poor, leading to significantly greater impacts on wellbeing than what public welfare provision may achieve (Carnegie, 1889). These views were equally cherished and shared by the first mega philanthropies in the twentieth century (the Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford Foundations) who believed "that they had the answers – based on their experiences of the first 30 to 40 years of the century – to the world's problems and a duty (alongside their government) to mobilize knowledge to solve those problems" (Parmar, 2002, p. 16).

Despite the many transformations and innovations within the sector, the seemingly intact ideological foundations embedded in the principles of "intense individualism" fiercely defended by Andrew Carnegie are noteworthy. As highlighted by Giridharadas (2020), contemporary philanthropy perpetuates the ideas of the elite rightfully amassing extreme wealth and utilising it for "doing good" while dampening conversations around redistributive taxation, unions, and social justice.

While African philanthropy may be perceived as an alternative to Western philanthropic organisations associated with colonial legacies and external policy interference, more evidence is needed to prove their contributions towards altering imbalanced power relations and underlying causes of inequality in Africa, and the building of redistributive public welfare systems. Moreover, as collaborations between leading philanthropies across the Atlantic are emerging, as exemplified by the Gates and the Aliko Dangote Foundations, future research is warranted to better understand the points of divergence and convergence within and outside of the African philanthropic sector.

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