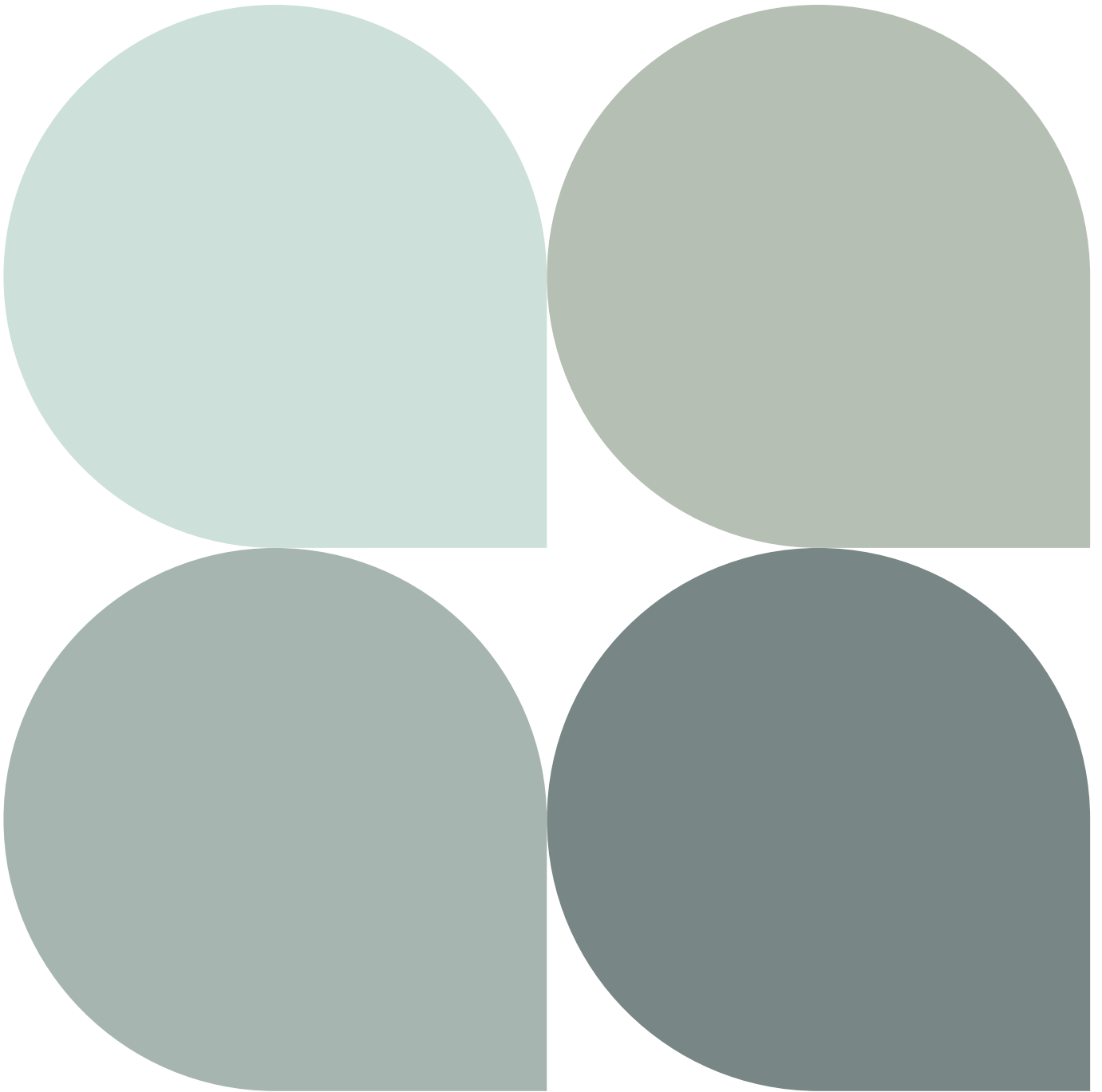


---

# A NEW PARADIGM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

---



## **Authors**

Julie Fry  
Judith Symonds, PCG Co-Founder

## **Advisor and Contributor**

Bruce Sievers, PCG Co-Founder

## **Contributors**

Authors who contributed to both this report and the *Alliance* Special Feature on Pursuing the Common Good are: Hafsat Abiola, Emilia Paz González Carmona, Ese Emerhi, Clara Miller, Delphine Moralis, Heba Abou Shnief, Shiv Someshwar and Nancy Yang

## **Editor**

Mary Bortin

## **Sciences Po Master Student Editorial Assistants**

Mathilda Diaz-Guilbaud  
Maki Katsube  
Minami Sakurai

## **Acknowledgements**

Deep appreciation goes to the 51 participants across the world who provided their time expertise, and insights into the question of the common good and its intersection with philanthropy and other sectors. They raised important questions and illuminated issues in their regions and globally for future consideration and debate. The list of survey participants may be found in Annex A.

The authors acknowledge the members of the *Pursuit of the Common Good* (PCG) initiative for their strategic contributions and thought partnership in developing the initiative and contributing to this report: Helmut Anheier, Diana Leat, Clara Miller, Sophie Lemouel, Bruce Sievers and Gregory Witkowski.

The PCG would like to express its gratitude to Charles Keiden, Executive Editor of *Alliance* magazine, for his decision to focus a special feature on the common good, and to Andrew Milner at *Alliance* for his guidance and expert editing of the feature.

The authors wish to acknowledge, in particular, the support of the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation in facilitating the survey. Both *Alliance* and the research team maintained full editorial independence. The initial encouragement and support of the PCG initiative by the Embassy of the United States in France, Dassault Systèmes, The Heron Foundation and the faculty and administration of Sciences Po Paris made major contributions to the initiative's development.

*Alliance* is the leading quarterly magazine for philanthropy and social investment worldwide. It provides news and analysis of what's happening in the philanthropy and social investment sectors across the world. Each issue has a special in-depth feature on some key aspects of philanthropy and social investment, with contributors from around the world and expert guest editors. Both the quarterly magazine and [alliancemagazine.org](http://alliancemagazine.org) act as a forum for exchange of ideas and experiences among practitioners. *Alliance* is a registered Charitable Trust in the UK and is published by Alliance Publishing Trust.

## **The Pursuit of the Common Good initiative**

The Pursuit of the Common Good project is an evolving international and multisector initiative that promotes the pursuit of the common good as an essential unifying factor for the resolution of critical contemporary challenges. The project seeks to accomplish this goal by operationalising the pursuit of the common good to address public attitudes, policy frameworks and institutional forms that shape the outcomes of critical societal issues. The PCG was established in 2017 with a core working group represented by Sciences Po Paris, Stanford University, Hertie School, the Heron Foundation, University of St Andrews and other organisations.

---

# CONTENTS

---

<b>4</b>	<b>Foreword</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>The Bureau of World Weather Control: A thought experiment, <i>by Bruce Sievers</i></b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Global challenges in an era of polycrisis</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Democracy, philanthropy and the problem of the leaky basket, <i>with Hafsat Abiola</i></b>
<b>16</b>	<b>The practice of common climate good, <i>by Shiv Someshwar</i></b>
<b>18</b>	<b>A Survey of Perceptions in Search of the Common Good</b>
21	Theme 1   Understanding and pursuing the common good
23	Theme 2   Factors eroding the common good
25	Theme 3   The role of philanthropy and the common good
29	Theme 4   Engaging youth
32	Theme 5   Shifting the paradigm to create a sustainable and just future
35	Theme 6   Regional convergence/divergence
<b>38</b>	<b>Shifting the paradigm of the common good</b>
<b>41</b>	<b>Annex A Participants in the perception survey</b>
<b>43</b>	<b>Annex B Questionnaire for the perception survey</b>
<b>44</b>	<b>Annex C Regional overviews</b>
<b>51</b>	<b>Annex D About the authors</b>

---

# FOREWORD

---

A number of researchers and scholars of civil society scattered throughout western Europe and the United States began informal discussions several years ago of some deeply disturbing trends they perceived in contemporary societies – the declining ability of the media to serve as an integrative force in the formation of public opinion, economic interests overwhelming efforts to develop rational climate policies, a weakening allegiance to democratic norms, technology that rapidly expands beyond the limits of human control, self-interests that overpower efforts to pursue equity and justice, and so on. As these discussions advanced, there was a growing realisation among the group that a common denominator in these disparate trends was a widespread sense of diminished commitment to **“the common good”**. This became the founding insight for more formal discussions and, ultimately, for an international convening at the Institut des Sciences Politiques in Paris in the autumn of 2021.

In the course of developing materials for that discussion, the convenors became increasingly aware of the need to expand the discussion beyond the perspectives of the original, mostly western European and American, participants. At the same time, the editors of the international philanthropy journal *Alliance* were pondering some of the same themes and questions. We all concluded that these issues were of international importance and should be defined by and shared with a worldwide audience. This included soliciting the views of those who work as leaders in civil society and philanthropy the world over. The June 2024 issue of *Alliance* and this report include a summary of the results of a survey on perceptions of the common good that we conducted with more than 50 civil society and philanthropy leaders in 21 countries. We are grateful for the time and effort of all those who participated, and we look forward to continued discussions of this vital topic.

---

**Bruce Sievers**, Haas Center for Public Service, Stanford University

---

# INTRODUCTION

---

We live in an era of polycrisis: many crises exist around the globe at the same time, and they are interconnected. Even though there is unprecedented wealth and technological advancement, the world is confronted with serious social and political dysfunction, with vast racial, social and economic inequities resulting in seemingly unsolvable global challenges. The current situation reflects a radically diminished sense of the common good. On the one hand, there has never been a period when there was a greater need for philanthropy. At the same time, the value, effectiveness and motivations of philanthropy and philanthropists have rarely been in greater dispute.

This dilemma raises a question: Does philanthropy indeed pursue the common good? In search of an answer, the Pursuit of the Common Good (PCG) initiative conducted a survey of more than 50 experts and thinkers from around the world on their perceptions of the common good and philanthropy. The survey, the first of its kind on this subject, was carried out in conjunction with the international philanthropy journal *Alliance*, which in June 2024 published a special feature on the subject.

*The Survey of Perceptions in Search of the Common Good* was conducted from February to April 2024. The participants – representatives of foundations, civil society organisations, business and academia from 21 countries – were presented with a list of open-ended guiding questions and then interviewed individually for deeper exploration. Topics ranged from the problematic question of how to define “the common good” (and how that definition differs across cultures and geographies) to the erosion of commitment to the common good in contemporary society and how philanthropy could catalyse a shift to revitalise the common good as a priority.

For the purposes of the survey, the interpretation of philanthropy was a broad one, including volunteering and in-kind donations as well as grantmaking and related support such as corporate social responsibility and impact investing. The questions and a list of participants may be found in the Annexes to this report.

The survey results are preceded by a range of essays relating to the current global challenges we face and their intersection with the pursuit of the common good. *Bruce Sievers* imagines a future Bureau of World Weather Control as a thought experiment on the complexities of efforts to pursue the common good. *Judith Symonds* and *Julie Fry* explore global challenges and the paradigm change needed to pursue the common good in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Hafsat Abiola* presents a view from Nigeria. *Shiv Someshwar* reflects on how to move forward towards a sustainable common climate good. The report concludes with an agenda for shifting the paradigm of the common good as we move forward.

## Key findings

Six broad themes emerged from responses to the survey and the interviews that followed.

***Understanding and pursuing the common good.*** The key theme of what is meant by “the common good” and how it should be pursued evoked major questions. Some participants queried the concept itself as a European and U.S. construct imposed upon other regions. Questions were raised about the extent to which the common good is, indeed, common. However, the participants consistently noted that the process of achieving the common good was more important than a universally accepted definition. Terms used to convey the essence of the common good included community, solidarity, well-being, social justice, peace, harmony, interconnectedness and mutual flourishing. The survey found that the greatest challenge related to understanding the common good was how to put it into practice. Privilege and power can interfere with establishing the understanding and trust needed to achieve a common good, both within communities and in the context of philanthropy.

***Factors eroding the common good.*** There was a shared sense across all regions that there has been an erosion of the common good in contemporary society. The reasons for this are numerous. Participants cited a global decline in democracy coupled with a rise in populism and autocracy; increasing polarisation of societies; ongoing wars and conflicts; and the effects of the technology transition, including the rise of social media and the proliferation of fake news. Neoliberalism is held responsible for growing inequality and for reducing the importance of community. Philanthropy itself is often seen as adopting short-term and transactional practices rather than thinking about future sustainability and providing more neutral spaces for civic dialogue. These issues have everyone on edge and considering how to return to a more interconnected approach to solving global issues.

***The role of philanthropy.*** Even if philanthropy’s intention is to pursue a common good, the way that it is carried out can interfere with equitable results. Issues include the power imbalance with grantees, inconsistent engagement with local communities and the organisational and individual agendas and ambitions of philanthropists. Nevertheless, survey participants agreed that philanthropy can play a vital role in promoting and catalysing the common good. It can help to scale up innovative thinking and problem solving, and can collaborate with business and government as part of an ecosystem for the common good. As a connector to local communities, philanthropy has the power to create neutral civic space and leverage assets for the common good.

***Engaging youth.*** Young people are crucial to reviving and reframing the common good. They represent a particular bright spot for survey participants, who appreciate their concern about local and global challenges and their involvement in finding solutions. The participants proposed many ways of engaging younger generations in civic life and the common good, from formal school programmes to community volunteering and social entrepreneurship. Philanthropy can play a role in providing support for these community-based efforts. A finding that aligned across regions was the importance of offering civic education early on and providing experiential learning and community involvement during school years, coupled with civic learning within the family. However, at a time of existential threats as well as great opportunity for young people, there was also a sense that we need to get out of the way and provide them with opportunities to make decisions and have agency as they face the issues ahead.

***Shifting the paradigm.*** Survey findings showed a growing understanding at all levels of society that there needs to be a broadening of the common good to embrace inclusivity and interdependence, both among humans and as part of a larger ecosystem with nature. A key point of consensus was that people should be able to see themselves represented in a reimagined future that centres on the common good. Philanthropy could have an important catalytic impact on changing the paradigm. One way to do this is to shift the narrative to positive themes of equity and shared values. It is

also necessary to build and connect stronger communities, bringing global challenges to the local level to accelerate collective action for their resolution. Many participants described the need for a grass-roots approach to build self-determination and sustainability in local communities. The new paradigm should also provide space for youth to explore what they see as a future of well-being and to be an integral part of the decision-making process.

***Regional convergences and divergences.*** The global focus of this survey reflects our increasingly connected world. Despite differences of culture, geography and language among the participants, there were more shared findings than divergent ones. Many participants stated that seeking the common good requires trust and a long time-frame, as well as putting society and the planet first while causing no harm. They agreed that youth will provide the pivot to a better-balanced future, and that the best path forward is an ecosystem approach of philanthropy, government and the private sector working together towards a common good. However, participants diverged on the topics of community-centred life, opportunity, equity and freedom of expression. There were also differences on issues of government involvement in the common good and trust in leadership. Participants across all regions recognised that multilateral cooperation is required to address certain global challenges, such as the climate crisis and migration, while other challenges, like poverty and education, differ across countries. All of these challenges affect the ability to achieve the common good, while at the same time underlining the need to try.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the crises we currently face, and even in the most troubled countries or regions, there emerged from the survey a sense that attitudes are changing. Awareness is growing that action is needed locally to impact shared global challenges. Philanthropy-supported reframing initiatives are gathering pace and supporting social innovators to reimagine our societies and connect communities to allow change for a better future. These models in pursuit of the common good need scaling and adapting, but they exist – and philanthropy has an important role to play. This is not a small agenda, but it is a hopeful one.

---

# THE BUREAU OF WORLD WEATHER CONTROL: A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

---

by **Bruce Sievers**

Imagine a future (presumably not too distant) when a Bureau of World Weather Control would be created. Aided by AI and supercomputers, the Bureau would have the capacity to set patterns of rain and snow, speed and amount of winds, heat and cold waves, avoidance of droughts, floods and hurricanes and to favour certain patterns of vegetation and animal (including human) populations and disfavour others. The central feature guiding the Bureau is an algorithm programmed to “pursue the common good”. One can imagine enormous positive benefits of such a Bureau – but, at the same time, highly problematic decisions emanating from it.

What goes into the algorithm? Who governs the Bureau? How are its goals to be realised? What principles will guide its operation? Which human populations will be programmed to remain where they are and which will have to move? What economic factors will have to be considered?

## **What then becomes of the norm of the common good?**

From this simple thought experiment flows a seemingly endless list of practical and ethical choices that will powerfully affect all life forms that inhabit the planet. These are the issues posed in this special report, in which *Alliance* magazine and the Pursuit of the Common Good initiative have joined forces to explore the concept of the common good and its role in philanthropy.

Many contemporary trends point to a world that is apparently unravelling: the seemingly unstoppable drive toward increased energy use resulting in climate change, political and cultural animosities that translate into violent conflicts, public health crises that pit those who seek to protect the public against proclaimed defenders of individual freedoms, forces that shape and distort the production and consumption of information through the media, technology that seems to resist all attempts at regulation and so on.

A human factor that lies at the root of all of these dilemmas is a diminished ability to understand and achieve what has been called in different times and cultures “the common good”. In its simplest form, the common good refers to that which is beneficial to the entire community. But beyond that seemingly simple idea, the complexities begin: How does one understand the common good across cultures and languages? Is pursuit of the common good primarily a moral or an empirical (interest-satisfying) activity? How are the costs and benefits of achieving the common good to be allocated? Is pursuing the common good essentially a matter of voluntary commitment or of legal enforcement?



## Definitional issues

These and other questions transform what initially appears to be a straightforward statement of human aspiration into a set of highly complex quandaries – into what the political philosopher Michael Walzer describes as a “thick” versus a “thin” moral term. For Walzer, thin concepts are those that easily generate broad initial assent, like freedom, solidarity or human rights, yet only when such slogans are translated into complicated local venues of action does the multiplicity of meanings emerge. A “thin” moral concept that generates wide agreement on an abstract level therefore gradually splinters into diverse interpretations as the concept becomes embedded into local (“thick”) cultural environments.

In its thin meaning, the common good can thus suggest widely accepted norms such as respect for human rights, truth in disseminating information, respect for democratic practice and so on. At the same time, it can become identified with thick meanings that become increasingly complex and difficult to translate as they become diversely embedded in local cultural communities. For example, in some settings “the common good” might convey a somewhat amorphous, undifferentiated view of communal cooperation, while in others it might be identified with very particular ideas of economic fairness, compassionate concern for one’s neighbours or shared interests in environmental survival that fundamentally differ from how those in other cultures or eras interpret the term.

## Empirical or moral?

A second major question that arises in defining the common good is whether it is seen as an *empirical* or a *moral* concept. A view that comes to us primarily from the European Enlightenment presumes that society is composed of autonomous individuals who compete for scarce resources. On this view, an optimal resolution of the competition is a utilitarian calculation of the maximum benefit for the most people, following the Benthamite maxim of “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” (the utilitarian optimum).

Alternatively, the logic of collective action can also lead to the opposite result, the “tragedy of the commons” in Garrett Hardin’s phrase, in which the unbridled pursuit of self-interest destroys shared resources. Much of the work of the Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom is devoted to documenting real-world solutions to these dilemmas that communities have worked out in practice.

A very different interpretation of collective action, however, flows from a contrasting tradition, grounded in the ancient Platonic idea of the state as a quasi-moral entity, and articulated in the early modern era by Benedict Spinoza. Spinoza’s vision of communal life also embraced what today has become known as civil society that – together with the state – generated the necessary conditions for the best realisation of human aspirations and freedom, achieved through communal cooperation, not just as a solution to the problem of the distribution of social benefits. On this view, the *beliefs and ethical commitments* of citizens play a significant role in advancing the quality of life in society, beyond a simple calculation of outcomes of particular distributional schemes.

An example of the difference between the empirical and moral views is provided by Robert Reich in his description of the actions of Martin Shkreli in the United States in the mid-2010s. Shkreli, a pharmaceutical industry *wunderkind*, devised schemes that he sought to justify in purely economic terms – as the most efficient arrangement for generating the highest profit – that, in turn, were supposed to yield benefits shared by everyone. Shkreli, however, was ultimately convicted by a court of hiding information that led to massive fraud and huge economic losses to his investors and clients. He had systematically hidden morally questionable activities that took advantage of the vulnerability of clients and undermined social trust.

A second example of practices justified on purely economic grounds at the expense of public trust (as well as of environmental limits) is exploitation of the world's oceans, chronicled by Ian Urbina in his book *Outlaw Ocean*. He describes the activities of ships that carry on their predation of the oceans – over-fishing, elimination of entire whale populations, destruction of coral reefs – in largely unregulated international waters. Those who operate these vessels usually do so from the shelter of countries that have minimal means of enforcing what few rules there are in the open seas. Urbina argues that past efforts to create more effective rules and enforcement have proved inadequate. What is needed for the preservation of the ocean commons is a dramatic transformation in attitudes of human beings towards each other and towards ocean life.

At the same time as these negative trends proliferate, there are also a vast number of bright spots of organisational action by people working on behalf of common good agendas on every continent. Most of these efforts originate in civil society, for reasons that will be described below. They are to be found in every field of social and natural need – healthcare, environment, education, journalism, preservation of public space, emergency response, housing, violence prevention, nutrition, sanitation, clean water preservation, defence of human rights, and on and on in every corner of the world. These organisations, while often internationally supported, focus their efforts locally. They draw upon and reinforce local reservoirs of social trust and further generate that trust in local communities worldwide. They seek to address local needs, respond to globally recognised problems and contribute to a shared sense of community.

Examples of these common good agenda organisations include Doctors Without Borders (provides medical care in areas of desperate need); Seacology (builds relationships with island communities all over the world who agree to contract to protect coral reefs or segments of local rain forests in exchange for schools or other needed public facilities); Living Goods (an entrepreneurial organisation that provides essential health and well-being products through an Avon-like system to women in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia and Myanmar); Agua Para La Vida (sponsors local clean water projects throughout Nicaragua); East Bay Sanctuary Covenant (provides legal assistance to Afghan and other refugees); and Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (works on all aspects of Sumatran orangutan conservation).

The universal element in these projects is that, in addition to addressing immediate local needs, they contribute to building a shared sense of community and the common good worldwide.

### **Allocating costs and benefits**

“Whose common good?” is a question often posed in discussions of the common good. Assuming a consensus on a particular social goal, such as the reduction of carbon fuels as a percentage of total energy production and consumption, questions immediately arise as to who should bear the primary burden of attaining that goal. The highest consumers of energy? Producers? Stockholders in energy corporations? Those who stand to benefit most from climate or environmental improvements? The wealthiest? Historic beneficiaries of the carbon-based energy system? Or should the burden just be spread evenly throughout the population?

The adjective “common” suggests a benefit shared evenly throughout the whole of society, potentially including future generations. Yet, by what criteria should those burdens, costs and benefits be allocated? Typically, legitimate governing bodies take on the responsibility of resolving the myriad ethical and political disputes that surface around such issues. A common good agenda would take into account principles of equality, effort, commitment, justice and fairness, along with utilitarian concerns of distribution as well as local histories and customs in determining the final outcomes.

## Voluntary versus legally enforced?

The concept of the common good also contains a suggestion that the impulse to pursue common goals should be voluntary rather than mandatory. From this viewpoint, *civil society* becomes the natural seedbed for the pursuit of the common good. While the achievement of effective collaborative outcomes (whether through governmental mandate or voluntary action) is a desirable goal in and of itself, the added element of an ethos of cooperation with other community members yields a significant further benefit. The fact that such cooperation springs from the goodwill of cooperating participants adds a moral dimension to collective action that it otherwise lacks.

This bottom-up nature of collaborative work in civil society also gives it a *democratic* character. In contrast to the top-down regulation imposed in authoritarian systems, civil society seeks consensus and builds goodwill in developing freely chosen solutions to difficult social problems.

The pursuit of the common good, thus understood as a moral aspiration that includes equal burden-sharing, voluntarism and democratic participation, therefore becomes a constitutive element of civil society. Civil society, with the support of philanthropy, in turn becomes an essential platform of modern liberal democracy.

---

**Bruce Sievers** is Visiting Scholar and Lecturer, Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, Haas Center for Public Service, Stanford University. Email: [bsievers03@gmail.com](mailto:bsievers03@gmail.com).

This essay first appeared in *Alliance*, June 2024, Vol. 29, No. 2, <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/magazine/issue/june-2024/>.

---

# GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN AN ERA OF POLYCRISIS

---

The fact that we are living in an era of polycrisis was top of mind for the participants in the *Survey of Perceptions in Search of the Common Good*. The survey thus evolved in a context of concern, dominated by two questions: Which challenge do you address first? And how do you deal with the complexity that each one of them poses?

**Climate change**

**Decline of democracy, rise of autocracy**

**Growing inequality**

**Conflict, violence, local and global insecurity**

**AI and digital transition**

**Inclusion and social justice**

Correlation of these challenges with a perceived decline in our societies of mutual flourishing was problematic because of the lack of a unified definition of “the common good”. There was general agreement, though, on the characteristics of the diminished or missing norms that would facilitate resolution of the current persistent, complex and growing local and global challenges.

The obvious and very present first concern is climate change and the innumerable ways it is impacting both marginal and mainstream societies. The threat is real, and demands were made for action such as mobilisation around the necessary transitions, burden sharing, accelerating the transitions and addressing the leadership gap at global and national levels on what is a borderless problem.

The next two articles in this report, Hafsat Abiola’s essay on democracy and philanthropy and Shiv Someshwar’s reflections on the common climate good, provide guidance on how to move forward now.

The second area of consensus among survey participants was that these critical challenges are all interconnected, which adds to the complexity of addressing them. Each of these challenges is so major and so globally prevalent that they are a shared preoccupation. Their resolution is severely hampered by the lack of neutral civic space, civic dialogue and leadership to change basic societal infrastructure, make trade-offs and share burdens to be able to negotiate and pursue the common good. These themes, and the role philanthropy could play to encourage the growth of norms that will favour bringing people together to make systemic changes, are discussed in the next section of the report.

Despite the survey participants’ dramatically different geographies and cultures, they found that certain issues, like neoliberalism or inequality, often shared the same origins. Beyond global challenges and their local manifestations are a group of problems that appear regionally in different forms, often as corollaries to a global challenge, such as unemployment, education decline, population growth and population decline.

The encouraging news that emerged from the survey is the number of dynamic and innovative initiatives taking place that, when connected and scaled, could produce the paradigm change and movement needed to pursue the common good in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“Why talk about concepts when the world is on fire? Because they form the conceptual frameworks which organise mutual benefit, which is what the common good is.”

**Clara Miller,**  
Fellow, Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Heron Foundation, United States

---

# DEMOCRACY, PHILANTHROPY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE LEAKY BASKET

---

with **Hafsat Abiola**

*Hafsat Abiola* of Women in Africa spoke with Judith Symonds and Julie Fry about her work with the democracy movement in Nigeria, about how the climate crisis is fundamentally a trust issue and about the central role of women in building the relationships necessary to achieve that trust. If we want to create collective good, we first have to create trust across difference, and philanthropy could play a key part in that.

**Judith Symonds:** Hafsat, could you start by telling us about your relationship to philanthropy, democracy and the common good?

**Hafsat Abiola:** My father was a philanthropist who funded scholarships at universities and high schools and who later decided to go into politics because he felt his philanthropy was like pouring water into a basket. He was giving aid to people who would later return, still in need. He decided that the problem was that our country needed to be better governed, so he ran for president and was elected but the military rejected the results and arrested him. My mum then decided to lead the movement for democracy. One result was the oil workers union went on strike. Nigeria is an oil-dependent economy and shutting the industry down nearly caused the government to collapse, so the military assassinated my mother. This was in 1996.

I joined the movement then, although I was in the US, because the leadership was forced into exile. We used the South African anti-apartheid movement as our template and worked with a lot of the same American organisations that helped in that struggle – the American Committee for Africa, the Africa Fund and global organisations like Amnesty International; and because of the oil link, Greenpeace and Earth Action and even oil companies through their shareholders. Finally, in 1999, the military decided to transfer the country to democratic rule and released all the political prisoners – but, unfortunately, not my dad. They said he died on the eve of his release.

The country has had a democratic system since, so in a way, my parents' sacrifice made a difference. That's how I got started.

**Julie Fry:** Did you make a conscious decision to take the democracy movement forward?

**Hafsat:** I always felt that my mother passed on a baton to me to carry forward the movement. I didn't want to let her down by dropping it.

**Judith:** How did your understanding of the common good evolve within your family?

**Hafsat:** When I went back to Nigeria after the struggle for democracy, I realised that because there's a lack of strong institutions in the country, you can pretty much do what you want – in fact, you are meant to abuse your opportunities. If you're a politician, for example, and you get into the contract to supply schoolbooks, there's a kickback. It's not legal, but everybody does it.

**Julie:** So why did you not do that, too?

**Hafsat:** First, because both my parents gave their lives so that things would improve in Nigeria, the notion that I would betray their sacrifice for money was obscene. And it makes no sense. Playing on my father's metaphor about the leaky basket, let's assume that there is a container into which we pour water, which represents the collective wealth of a country. If one person makes a hole to create a pool for themselves, its impact will be small. But if everybody in the system is making holes, the container won't retain any water. I understood that we must start plugging all those holes if the collective wealth of the society is to grow. From what I have read about pre-colonial African societies, prioritising the collective was the norm. Maybe that was because people relied on one another to do things – to build their homes men would come together to build while women gathered materials and provided food; to develop a skill, those that knew how would teach those seeking to learn; to care for the vulnerable, farmers would set aside some of their yield into a common pool that was called God's granary and shared to those that needed it.

African societies now have more of a money economy where everything is bought and sold, yet in some African countries, only 10 per cent of the population has formal employment and the need for money is creating a state of scarcity. Where does the money come from? For many, the answer is that everyone must look out for themselves, and even those who oversee the commonwealth abuse their office by being corrupt.

**Judith:** How would you describe the common good and how do you think democracy and the common good interact?

**Hafsat:** In Africa, we have a clear sense of common good because we come from a tradition of doing things together with others, by using our connections to foster community. So, in pre-colonial society, when you're born, you're placed in an age and a gender group, so there's a male group in order of ages and then there's a female one. Each has its own leadership, and they take care of the group, and a council of decision makers oversees all of them. It's the job of that council, however it's constituted, to manage the collective well-being of the group and all the different age groups understand that they also have a role to play in that system and they're taught within their group how to do this, the skills that they need. As I said, if they want to build a house, they do it together; if there's a bereavement in the family, the group comes together.

As we started getting a Western education, we became more individualistic, but we have begun to realise that being individualistic is not a strong position, so groups are beginning to re-form. For example, groups that graduate together stay in touch through WhatsApp platforms and they raise a fund together. So if one of them is getting married for example, they'll designate two people from the group to attend on behalf of the rest, and from the fund, they allocate maybe five per cent towards helping the new couple build a marital home; and when another has a children or loses a parent, they contribute from the fund, and it helps.

So, I think the common good is us staying connected, which is why I want to talk also about Project Dandelion, the project that I'm working on now. It's a project of Connected Women Leaders, which was the brainchild of Pat Mitchell, the first woman to head a public broadcasting station in the US, and Ronda Carnegie, who was a member of the founding team of TED. They invited me to join them as a co-founder. At our inaugural meeting, Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, challenged us to centre climate in our work because the climate crisis trumps everything else. So, over the last two years, we have been working to see what it means for women leaders to centre climate.

We were given support from the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations to look at the climate ecosystem, to identify what is missing and what women leaders can contribute; and that's how Project Dandelion got started. We launched a campaign in the six weeks from International Women's Day to Earth Day on April 15, looking at the causes women work on and how it is

impacted by the climate crises. We are saying that all issues – whether it is education, whether it is food security, whether it is early child marriage – are climate issues, the crises will impact them all and women leaders need to engage.

It's going back to the vessel full of holes idea again. The more people we can connect with to block holes in their own reality, the closer we get to a stable, functional vessel. But there are a lot of holes. The gilets jaunes in France were angry because they had secured a little hole in the form of subsidised fuel and the government closed it. We can't say to people, "Sacrifice your whole livelihoods for the planet." We must block the hole and transition to a clean energy economy while looking after each other. Project Dandelion aims to reach two billion people.

**Judith:** Why is it important to focus on women?

**Hafsat:** Once a woman marries, she takes on a new identity, so women have been raised to be fluid about how we think about ourselves, and we've been socialised to be relationship oriented.

The climate crisis is a communications crisis where workers feel that they're being sold out by politicians and big companies, and the Global South feels that, although it has over 88 per cent of the world's people, much of the resources are being used by the Global North, but the poor are being told that their development aspirations may have to be put on hold. We must communicate the solutions that would allow the Global South to develop without harming the planet, solutions that are already proven but need to be scaled. Women are good at that, and we don't need accolades. The accolade is that our great-grandchildren will live on a climate-safe planet.

Leading up to the COP meeting, Mama Mary [Robinson] interviewed the COP president, Sultan Al Jaber. and asked him about fossil fuels. When he was hedging, she kept pushing on the need to commit to phase it out. As a grandmother looking out for her grandchildren, she was relentless. The video of that interview was a breakthrough. It has been viewed a billion times and contributed to the momentum that led to an agreement that fossil fuels would be phased down. This was the first time in the 30-year history of COPs that the fossil fuel question would be addressed in the final agreement. So, to the question of why focus on women, at Project Dandelion we say, it is because when women lead, action follows.

**Julie:** In achieving the common good, where can philanthropy be a barrier and where can it be a catalyst?

**Hafsat:** Aside from taxation, philanthropy enables those with resources to direct flows to those that they feel a connection to, which as philanthropy data shows us leaves out so many groups.

If philanthropy is to be a catalyst for achieving the common good, it would need to help foster connection across diverse groups, so that we see ourselves as one human family. A lot of philanthropy is not fulfilling its role of awakening in us this awareness of our connectedness. One way to do that is by investing in women who can nurture our sense of connection.

I have a godmother, Mama Lynne Twist, who is a philanthropist herself and has guided other philanthropists in raising hundreds of millions of dollars over decades for different causes, from ending poverty to supporting indigenous people. She always says that humanity is like a bird which has two wings. Unfortunately, it has been flying using the male wing for decades, if not centuries. No matter how energetically men may swing their wing, humanity will inevitably continue to go around in circles. Humanity needs women to be strong enough to lift our wing. I believe we are at the point where women can do that now so that, finally, humanity can fly forward together.

---

**Hafsat Abiola** is Co-Founder of Connected Women Leaders.

This essay first appeared in *Alliance*, June 2024, Vol. 29, No. 2, <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/magazine/issue/june-2024/>.

---

# THE PRACTICE OF COMMON CLIMATE GOOD

---

by Shiv Someshwar

The crisis of climate change transcends economies and ecosystems. Accelerated by the burning of fossil fuel, climate change is a “global bad”, posing dire consequences for all humankind in the present as well as in the future. Driven by economic self-interest and the woefully inadequate responses of industrially advanced countries, “fighting climate change as a common good” is a non-starter.

The causes as well as the consequences of climate change are not uniform over time and space. Beginning with the Industrial Revolution in England in the mid-eighteenth century, manufacturing activities in the United States and Western Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries led to impressive economic gains, as well as to large increases in greenhouse gases. Beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, other countries, such as Japan and China, rapidly industrialised; further, the flattening of the world through information and telecommunication networks resulted in the participation of several more in manufacturing, from Mexico to India, from Nigeria to Indonesia. The concomitant rise in greenhouse gases (GHGs), from around 278 parts per million (ppm) in 1750 to 427 ppm now, was the unintended result. While the countries responsible for a majority of the GHGs are in the Global North, the populations of all countries are directly impacted by the warming and attendant side effects brought about by climate change. However, those in the Global South, especially the poor and those vulnerable to impacts of sea-level rise, droughts, flooding and storms, are the most affected. The lack of socio-economic safety nets to buffer climate shocks further accentuates their vulnerability to climate risks.

In countries across the world, climate change has resulted in large-scale movement of people, initially within national borders, and increasingly to distant (and perceived to be more secure) places such as the United States and Europe. In the coming years, all countries would be directly impacted by climate change and climate policies, and increasingly by the movement of tens of millions seeking climate refuge. Despite their hundreds of billions, well-meaning but narrowly construed policies such as the US Inflation Reduction Act and the European Green Deal will only provide momentary respite. Fighting climate change should not be considered as a “common good” in a naïve manner – as the responsibility of all populations and societies. Some populations, those in the Global North, are far more responsible to mitigate and to help adapt to climate change. Hence the importance of realising “climate justice” in advancing “common climate good”.

The dynamic and global components of climate action are: the economic and trade policies of countries and the decisions of businesses (for energy and agriculture production, transportation, urbanisation and industrial manufacturing); climate diplomacy of countries in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol through the 2015 Paris Agreement to Baku later this year); and civil society movements, of youth and indigenous people, alarmed at the inability of countries and businesses for effective climate action. As noted in the report of the



International Task Force on Climate Action that I led, these components are not in sync, and are dangerously dissonant. Countries and companies are failing to meet their own green promises, and in response passionate civil society leaders (continue to) insist on altruistic behaviour of nations, companies and people as the basis for all climate action. Despite such calls, shareholders have censured companies for making climate promises, and voters have yet to reward political aspirants for their bold climate stance. Rejecting economic self-interest as the fundamental basis for climate action has failed in practice over the last 30 years.

Climate good for the few, by the few, will be fleeting, to be inundated by the ocean swell of climate misery. Climate neutrality driven by economic self-interest, without consideration of social equity, is a political time bomb. The common climate good can only be sustainable when countries and companies take climate action leavened by values of fairness and responsibility, and through innovations that are fuelled by economic and technological consideration. As the *Report of the Independent Task Force on Creative Climate Action* makes clear:

*“Material self-interest of people (and companies and countries) is inextricably entangled with the well-being of nature, as well as those of other people (and companies and countries). An enlightened climate understanding is the knowledge of impact entanglements from climate change. The impacts of climate change on others and on nature, as well as their responses to it, affect one’s material self-interest in both the short and long terms. Utilising that knowledge in the design of policies and investments responding to climate change is climate enlightened action. ...[E]nlightened self-interest is the only realistic pathway to a sustainable world in the face of the current and future impacts of climate change.”*

(Someshwar et al., 2022, page 8).

Climate action, to be effective in advancing the common good, requires us to not succumb to economic self-interest nor be seduced by the siren song of economic altruism. Only by realising that the pursuit of economic self-interest in climate action makes matters worse for one’s own social and environmental well-being, and that altruism leads to a dead end in terms of effective and equitable outcome, would we be able to engineer the practice of climate enlightened self-interest. The paradox of utilising self-interest to advance common climate good can be resolved by unshackling actions from consideration of immediate gain, and by holding accountable policy and decision makers on equity and ecological outcomes. The practice of **common climate good**, hence, requires:

- the consideration of climate as one amongst the complex of components of adaptive socio-economic-ecological policy making, rather than being an independent action arena;
- advancing social and economic equity to be an integral part of driving down GHG emissions and building climate resiliency;
- climate financing and technology transfers practiced with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities”;
- policies and decisions to simultaneously advance well-being of vulnerable populations and ecosystems, whether stranding fossil fuels, advancing deep decarbonisation energy transition or implementing “polluter pays” tax.

---

**Shiv Someshwar**, Ph.D., is the founder chairholder of the European Chair for Sustainable Development and Climate Transition at Sciences Po, Paris. He is a visiting professor at Sciences Po and Columbia University, New York.

This essay first appeared in *Alliance*, June 2024, Vol. 29, No. 2, <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/magazine/issue/june-2024/>.

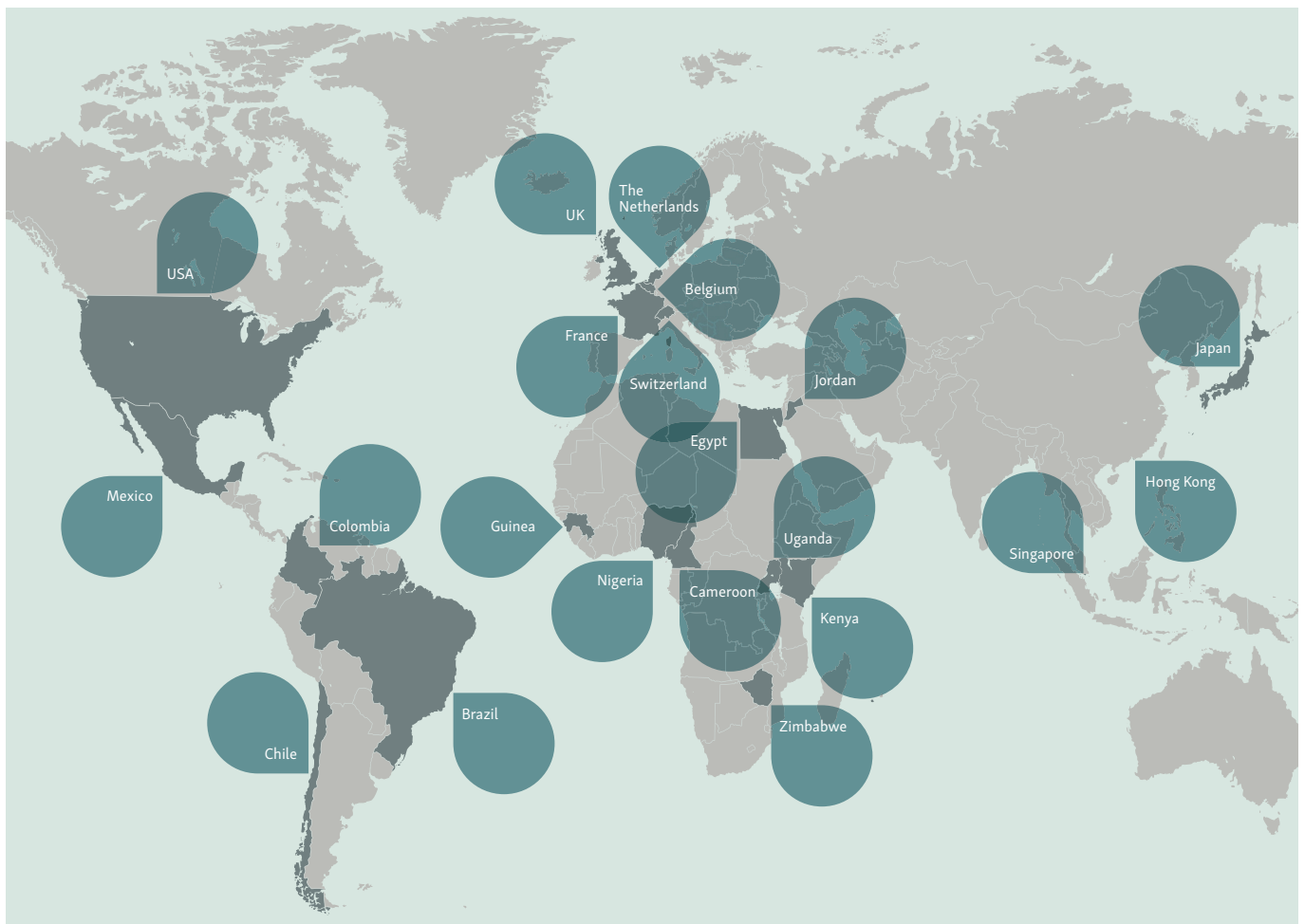
---

# A SURVEY OF PERCEPTIONS IN SEARCH OF THE COMMON GOOD

---

The survey conducted over the spring of 2024 by the Pursuit of the Common Good project resulted in a rich, varied and provocative selection of reflections and challenges, not only for the philanthropy sector but also for the socio-political and economic ecosystem in which philanthropy operates. This initiative, titled *A Survey of Perceptions in Search of the Common Good*, was undertaken to provide a complementary resource for the Special Feature on philanthropy and the common good in the June 2024 issue of *Alliance*. What emerged is a shared view that a revolution, not an evolution, is needed to reimagine the paradigm of the common good for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Survey locations



## Survey objectives

The philanthropy sector is at a critical crossroads. Even though we live in an era of unprecedented wealth and technological advancement, the world is confronted with serious trends of social and political dysfunction, resulting in seemingly unsolvable global challenges. This situation may result from a radically diminished sense of the common good. On the one hand, one could say that there has never been a period when there was a greater need for philanthropy. At the same time, the value, effectiveness and motivations of philanthropy and philanthropists have never been in greater dispute.

This raises the question of whether philanthropy does, indeed, as would be the assumption, pursue the common good. The survey, the first perception study to be conducted on philanthropy, civil society and the common good, is intended to serve as one resource for exploring this question.

### The survey's objectives included the following:

- **Clarify** the concept of the common good, its place in contemporary society and how it can be achieved in the future.
- **Highlight** perceptions of the degree of a relationship and/or intentionality between philanthropy and the common good, and whether this makes a difference.
- **Demonstrate** through examples how the common good is achieved, the process of negotiation and burden sharing, and the realisation that individual well-being depends on community well-being at all levels.
- **Understand** how the common good is perceived by communities involved in philanthropy and social investing.
- **Explore** how philanthropy actors believe the common good can be achieved: what are the obstacles and the incentives for achieving it, and who sets the global agenda?
- **Identify** case studies where the perception is that the common good was achieved.
- **Analyse** trends across sectors, geographies, and cultures.

## Methodology

The survey was carried out via confidential, one-on-one interviews conducted according to an open-ended interview guideline. The interviews took place on Zoom and were carried out between February and April 2024. The project was coordinated and carried out by PCG members Julie Fry and Judith Symonds. The questionnaire guideline and the list of target participants were developed by PCG with Bruce Sievers in cooperation with *Alliance*, along with the profile of target participants. (The list of interview participants and the survey questions may be found in Annexes A and B.)

For purposes of the survey, the definition of philanthropy was a broad one that covered volunteering and in-kind services, traditional grantmaking, corporate social responsibility and mission-related and impact investing.

The survey participants included key representatives from philanthropy and other actors in the philanthropy landscape: donors, foundation executives, investors, civil society organisations, business, academia and the public sector. Interviews were conducted with 51 representatives from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, Europe and the United States. It should be noted that the regional samples were fairly distributed but are only indicative. While they do not represent all sectors or regions equally, they nevertheless make up a reasonable qualitative sample.

## Observations

- Almost all of the participants reviewed the materials sent in advance, thought about the common good and came prepared with their responses to the survey questions. Interviews routinely lasted over an hour and often longer.
- The interviews were enlightening and full of regional and experiential narratives from the participants, who were all very eager to talk about the common good and spoke passionately and candidly about what is happening in their regions.
- The interviews indicated that, while there is general agreement about the importance of the common good, or the equivalent adaptation of the norms it represents, there were wide variations in the experience of the common good and diverse views on whether it served the participants' communities or not.
- Private philanthropy/foundation representatives tended to be pragmatic, recognising that changes need to be made in building relationships as partners to engage with local communities more deeply and with humility in order to support local needs more effectively in a rapidly evolving contemporary society.
- Civil society representatives, who are more closely connected with the work being done on the ground and local actors, seemed more optimistic about the ability to meet societal needs.
- There was general agreement as well that there was a need for a paradigm change in the basic infrastructure of society to address issues such as economic inequality and diminishing democracy and security.

Although the survey participants represent only a portion of the philanthropic and civil society community, their enthusiastic response has encouraged plans to continue and expand this global conversation. Highlights from the survey were first published in the *Alliance* Special Feature. In addition, the PCG will distribute the survey through partner networks.

---

*Alliance*, June 2024, Vol. 29, No. 2,

<https://www.alliancemagazine.org/magazine/issue/june-2024/>.

# UNDERSTANDING AND PURSUING THE COMMON GOOD

This key theme evoked major questions and probably the strongest emotional reactions and pushback of the entire survey. The sensitivity regarding understanding of the common good reflects cultural, historical, diversity and other issues that have evolved over time since the origins of the concept in the Aristotelian era and its development during the Enlightenment.

The principal issues covered by this theme include: describing the common good; the how of pursuing the common good; power dynamics and representation; and characteristics across cultures and geographies. What is clear is that the common good is often contested as a concept, process and norm, and that it is almost always negotiated.

## Describing the common good

A variety of terms were used to describe what is perceived as the common good, and these terms emphasised the communal aspect. Survey respondents also consistently noted that the process of achieving the common good was more important than a universally accepted definition. At the same time, some queried the concept itself as a European and U.S. construct imposed upon other regions, not just in the context of philanthropy and development assistance but also beyond. Questions were raised about the extent to which the common good is, indeed, common.

Relationships, trust and mutuality most often described the common good in different variations, situations and cultures. The success of relationships depends on mutual responsibilities and trust among all actors and networks of actors, and these actors include nature. The importance of being in balance, both among humans and between humans and nature, is expressed by the Native American/Navajo word *hózhó*, a mutuality of responsibilities of one to another across society.

As a description of the common good, one interviewee suggested “mutual flourishing,” an Anglican Church concept popularised by Robin Wall Kimmerer in her 2015 book *Braiding Sweet Grass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. The book emphasises through nature’s examples how flourishing cannot exist without mutuality.

Another issue that was raised frequently is that interpretations of the words “good” and “common” can distort the intended meaning of “the common good” in different situations. The meaning of the word “good” is seen as subjective and often of the least common benefit.

Temporality is also an important consideration, from several perspectives. Achieving a common good requires a long-term commitment from all participants, including philanthropy, with an understanding that the requirements will change along the way to accommodate the evolving trade-offs and incentives needed at different stages of systemic change. Another aspect of temporality is that, although the basic tenets of the common good generally remain the same

“You have to be willing to create the space for people to develop their own structures and their own framings, and to determine their own narratives of what these terms mean in practice.”

**Halima Mahomed,**  
*TrustAfrica, South Africa*

“The common good is negotiated, evolving and contested and has a temporal dimension, changing as time passes.”

**Diana Leat,**  
*Independent consultant on philanthropy, United Kingdom*

over time, they have to adapt as societal mores and conditions evolve. The question is: What adaptations need to be made in pursuing the common good to make it relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Additionally, there was often confusion among survey participants between the definitions of “public good” and “common good” – which is also the case in both academic and non-academic discussions. One of the simplest definitions of the distinction between the two concepts is from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which states: “Nonetheless, the facilities that make up the common good are conceptually different from public goods because these facilities may not be a net benefit for each member of the community. The facilities that make up the common good serve a special class of interest that all citizens have in common, i.e. the interests that are the object of the civic relationship.”

### Power dynamics and representation

“When the majority becomes the minority, then we start to see that the common good never worked for everyone.”

**Angie Kim,**  
*Center for Cultural Innovation,*  
*United States*

Privilege and power often interfere with establishing the understanding and trust needed to achieve a common good, both within communities and in the context of philanthropy. There is a lack of clarity on what the common good should be in specific situations: Who has the right to decide? Who has the power? There was a strong call to assure that all actors are represented in the “room” where decisions are made. Pushback came from marginalised communities in the Global North, like indigenous communities, as well as from communities in the Global South, that perceive “the common good” as a white, male, Christian idea of society. Many communities and citizens feel they are not reflected in a common good designed “by us for them”, and not by them for them. The global response to the COVID pandemic is seen as exemplifying the power issue, with significant differences in pandemic responses on community and local levels.

### Pursuing and achieving the common good

“A key question is: How do we embed common good values in the decision-making process of companies working in the current economy?”

**Sandro Cusi,**  
*Procuencia, Mexico*

The greatest challenge related to understanding the common good is how to put it into practice. As some interviewees noted, It is not enough as a philanthropist to choose a “good cause” to be assured of achieving the common good. What counts is rather the process within the community to agree on a solution to a problem, and then to negotiate equitable trade-offs of benefits and burdens to ensure a just and sustainable resolution. This requires relationships of trust and respect and shared values. The pursuit of the common good necessitates cross-sector collaboration at all levels, as well as democratic representation in decision making. One of the most famous global examples of a negotiated common good was the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe after World War II. It included most of these characteristics, and involved contested negotiations, trade-offs and burden sharing.

**Expressions that people around the world use to describe the common good include:**

<b>Buen vivir</b> (Latin America)	<b>Common bettering</b>
<b>Hózhó</b> (Native American/Navajo)	<b>Living in peace</b>
<b>Mutual flourishing</b>	<b>Mutual help</b>
<b>Social contract</b>	<b>Social Justice)</b>
<b>Ubuntu</b> (Africa)	<b>Solidarity</b>
	<b>Well-being</b>

---

# FACTORS ERODING THE COMMON GOOD

---

This theme explores the hypothesis that the pursuit of the common good has diminished in contemporary society, both as a norm and in practice. Interviewees who agreed with this hypothesis were asked for their thoughts on which factors had contributed to this situation.

There was general agreement across all regions except Asia that the common good is currently less present as a norm, albeit to varying degrees. The thematic factors that follow emerged spontaneously through the open-ended question process as contributing to the decline of the common good as a norm and in practice, in varying degrees according to region.

## **Diminution of democracy and a loss of faith in systems**

There were repeated references to the diminution of democracy and the replacement of democratic environments by populism and autocracy – with, as interviewees put it, “too little notice and reaction.” The idea that a more democratic government will foster more collectivism in society was seen as a myth, particularly with the persistent disappearance of public-interest media, as well as other related factors cited below.

Discussion of the barriers to democracy (geopolitical borders, the global increase of ethnonationalism, the rise of strongman leaders) brought to light a conundrum: What can be done by philanthropy, civil society, government and business to enable a sense of community and connection, as well as a contemporary sense of the common good and promotion of democracy?

In parallel, heightened awareness and increased understanding of the interconnectedness of some of the major issues of contemporary society have led to a loss of faith in systems and an extreme lack of trust in government and international institutions across much of the globe covered by the survey.

## **Neoliberalism and “short-termism”**

Neoliberalism is seen as the cause of the rampant inequality in society, and is “demolishing the role of the collective,” as one interviewee put it. Inequality as a result of neocapitalism is viewed as one of the biggest single causes of a diminished sense of solidarity or “mutual flourishing”. The rise of autocracy around the world, fuelled by political polarisation and racial and economic disparities, was also linked by interviewees to neoliberalism. In this view, life in today’s society is made up of short-term transactions based on short-term profit maximisation, and not a long-term construction of ideas and relationships. Philanthropy itself is often seen as adopting short-term and transactional practices when it should be long-term and transformational.

“If there is no equal chance, we are not going to encourage the most innovative people who can really bring a lot of change to society.”

**Florence Verzelen,**  
*Dassault Systèmes, France*

“The fight is tough because democracy has not seemed to work for poor people. They don’t see a better way of life, and they have to migrate somewhere.”

**Rodolfo Patron,**  
*Procuencia, Mexico*

“I think that we, the Global North, had tinted glasses when it came to the ‘common good’, and the damage caused by inequality, racism, colonialism would suggest that our perception of the common good was deeply biased.”

**Anonymous**

“Reactions to the civic space have meant that we lean more into communities, into our own ways of working, to advocate, to fight back.”

**Ese Emerhi,**  
*Global Fund for Community Foundations, Nigeria*

### **Individualism and polarisation**

Societal choices in many parts of the world trend towards prioritising individual gain over collective well-being. Interviewees say they are witnessing antipathy towards sharing and compromise, giving and taking, and building bridges across unlike communities. As one said, “We’re existing in hypersiloed spaces – political, economic, spiritual, geographic.” This heightened individualism, along with corruption, has contributed to the sharp reduction in trust in institutions, government and business.

### **Technology transition and isolation**

Despite the benefits that technology will bring, it is also perceived as threatening to make society more atomised than ever before. It was observed that, ironically, the more connected we are through technology, the more individualistic we have become. Related to this is the exponential rise of social media and the proliferation of fake news. Problems include a decline in access to verifiable information, increasing limitations on free speech and transparency, and the inability to establish a coherent international governance framework to help embed the common good in the technology transition.

### **Decline in neutral space and civic dialogue**

The list of factors that are eroding the common good culminates in the strong perception of a lack of neutral civic space (both physical and psychological). Neutral civic space fosters the civic dialogue that is essential for resolving issues at all scales and negotiating the common good. The causes for the shrinking of neutral civic space range from the fractionalisation and polarisation of society to the increasing presence of autocratic regimes worldwide.



---

# THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY AND THE COMMON GOOD

---

There are two major aspects to this theme: 1) the role that philanthropy has intentionally played in pursuing the common good, and 2) whether philanthropy can catalyse a new paradigm for the common good in contemporary and future society. The perceptions on the first part were mixed. Even if philanthropy's intention is to pursue a common good, the way that it is carried out can hinder equitable results due to factors such as the power imbalance with grantees, inconsistent engagement with local communities and the philanthropists' organisational and individual agendas and ambition.

On the second topic – philanthropy's ability to provoke and enable paradigm change and reframe the common good – the responses were clear and consistent across regions and sectors. The main areas where philanthropy could play a distinctive role are in making connections, supporting and helping to develop networks, taking risks, democratising data and providing neutral spaces (common ground) for civic dialogue. In addition, the philanthropy sector could conduct research, fund diversity of leaders and organisations, and develop collaborations for systems change. Last but not least, foundations and other philanthropic institutions could invest their more than \$1 trillion in assets in significant game-changing ways.

## Inherent and systemic tensions

“Due to so many conflicting demands on money and the nature of the money that philanthropists hold, that makes collaboration extremely critical if you are serious about financing an agenda of positive change.

**Saba Albumaslat,**  
*Ford Foundation, Egypt*

The very genesis of philanthropy – the wealthy donor, flush with cash from inheritance or success – leads to an overarching imbalance of power, resulting in tensions. Philanthropy has historically been transactional and one-directional: one person or institution with money decides to pass that money to a person or nonprofit institution in need of those charitable funds. The donor provides the funds for any number of reasons, be it altruism, tax benefits, ego or business marketing and promotion. The ongoing need for those funds by the beneficiaries leads to systemic dependency, a cycle of give and take that can be difficult to break. When donors serve only their own best interests, either as a way to advance their businesses under the guise of charitable giving or to cater to niche problems rather than more global, far-reaching needs, a path towards the common good can be hindered and is often not the goal. While there is a general appreciation for the depth and breadth of foundation goals, the wide diversity in approaches means that funding is more diluted and less likely to create lasting positive change.

The philanthropic sector can also be risk averse, particularly in this day and age of the 24/7 news cycle. The possibility of reaping negative attention for controversial public views of grantees, board members or staff, whether based on facts or not, necessarily affects what philanthropy is willing to support and where. Other operational and strategic issues in the philanthropic sector came to the surface frequently: a lack of transparency and accountability, as well as the continuing practice of working in silos rather than across multiple sectors. For example, too many philanthropists consider social inequality as a separate problem rather than understanding it as

“Philanthropists need to be aware of the longer term and collateral consequences of what they are doing and participate in ways that are designed to productively rebuild the foundations of the system and not focus just on today's win, especially if winning today further erodes the foundations.”

**Larry Kramer,**  
*London School of Economics, UK*

“Philanthropic organisations should focus on systemic changes, but always listening to the stakeholders, the targeted audience, engaging people so that they don't deviate too much from what is the real need of the people they want to impact.”

**Paula Fabiani,**  
*Institute for the Development of Social Investment, Brazil*

“Philanthropy can play a crucial role in catalysing a shift in public thinking and policy development to prioritise a contemporary notion of the ‘common good’, by fostering partnerships and collaborations between diverse stakeholders and conducting research on underserved communities.”

**Naina Batra,**  
*Asian Venture Philanthropy Network, Singapore*

an underlying part of all global issues. One interviewee asked whether the end justifies the means of philanthropy that is narrow and focused but working in complex systems. Another asked what philanthropy can do to scale up local programmes without imposing restrictions or cultural pressures from the outside. The temporality of the sector also means that long-term strategies seldom have time to take root when philanthropic or nonprofit leaders change, issue areas evolve, global emergencies arise and finances ebb and flow.

### **Philanthropy as a natural catalyst**

On the other hand, most interviewees agreed that philanthropy can play a vital role in a variety of ways to promote and catalyse the common good. While the general consensus was that an ecosystem approach, with the public and private sectors working together, is the most effective way to support the common good, philanthropy has a number of unique features that make it well suited to the challenge. Many interviewees mentioned the neutral and legitimate voice that philanthropy holds in society. The ability to use this voice to lift up others who are not always heard can go a long way towards correcting the imbalance of power.

The need for collaboration across sectors in service of the common good was raised often. One way the philanthropy sector has been effective is through collective investments and strategies, and interviewees want this approach to thrive. The concepts of convening and cohort building – bringing together grantees or potential grantees to learn and work together – has been growing as a way to scale up innovative thinking and problem solving.

On the operational side, philanthropy has demonstrated its adaptability in the face of the polycrisis by taking specific actions to improve the reach and effectiveness of the support it provides. This takes different forms, including providing general operating rather than project-specific support, giving multiyear grants, practicing trust-based grantmaking and impact investments, and producing research and data to inform the sector and wider society. The pandemic showed that philanthropy can adapt rapidly if necessary to meet urgent needs and remove barriers to accessing necessary funds. This sort of agility is another feature of philanthropy not found in other parts of the ecosystem.

Philanthropy's ability to open up public space for civic dialogue was also pointed to as a way to increase the sense of collectivism, and to model solutions and build solidarity and community responsibility. Leveraging community assets – knowledge, expertise, relationships – for the common good can increase community voice and power and produce advocates for necessary policy changes at the local and global levels. In this way, philanthropy can help local communities to shape what the common good looks like for them.

## Tackling plastic pollution for the common good

### The #breakfreefromplastic movement and the Plastic Solutions Fund

In 2016, the Oak and Marisla Foundations convened a group of NGOs, funders, activists, researchers and charities concerned with the threat of burgeoning plastic pollution and its effect on the common good, particularly on marginalised communities around the world. Participants agreed on a shared global strategy to tackle plastic pollution, namely to eliminate all non-essential plastic packaging uses by 2025; to slow the use of plastics, particularly in countries vulnerable to pollution; and to embrace zero waste principles. The #breakfreefromplastic movement was born, and shortly afterwards the global Plastic Solutions Fund (PSF) was established to help support it. With current PSF membership standing at 24 primarily, but not exclusively, US and European funders, the collaboration is using strategic philanthropic investments to fuel and grow the movement. To keep the movement's goals on track, the PSF uses a three-pronged approach of policy grantmaking, leveraging additional funds and thought leadership. One PSF member is the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Global. According to C.R. Hibbs, its Senior Advisor and Director of Programmes, a small but mighty group of diverse grantees around the world is taking aim at the whole life cycle of plastics, from fossil fuel extraction all the way through to waste management, and thinking about just transitions and helping to shift the narrative to make it clear that plastic pollution is a climate and justice issue at both the global and local levels. In her view, grantees across the world are best positioned to effect change from where they sit, while being able to see and work across the entire system. "What's so interesting about the PSF," Hibbs said, is that "it can be hard for funders to work together, but it wasn't funders coming together and saying, you know, we're going to develop a strategy. It was from the beginning co-created with a whole network of organisations and local campaigners around the world. I think what philanthropy can do better than just about anyone is work across sectors, countries, communities and bring together people. Having all of these grantees come in that are working at different parts of this chain really starts to put it all together; it's coherent and powerful, what they're doing and the way that they're doing it."

## Addressing a lack of palliative care

### Fondation de France

The Fondation de France (FdF) is France's largest foundation, bringing together donors and foundations to support specific charitable causes. According to Axelle Davezac, CEO of FdF, French philanthropy is focused on experimenting with innovative approaches to problem solving, creating new models, testing them and passing them on to the government to implement at scale. The reason, she says, is "because we consider that the common good is the responsibility of the State." FdF's initiative on the introduction of palliative care in France is one example of this catalysing approach to meeting societal needs. The goal was to provide better quality end-of-life palliative care, the systemic lack of which was becoming more apparent in the 1980s with the exponential rise of AIDS cases. As a philanthropic leader, Fondation de France decided to take action. In 1988, it provided support for two palliative care units in hospitals in Lyon and Bordeaux, and it followed up in 1989 with the creation of the French Society for Support and Palliative Care, which continues to be involved in this issue. In the 1990s, the next steps were to provide respite to care-giving families and health workers, and then to focus on palliative care for children. Philanthropy's unique role as funder, convenor and collaborator, and FdF's understanding of the long-term nature of this exploration, led to major progress when a law was passed in 1999 to recognise palliative care in all government agencies (which translated to public funding). This was followed in 2005 by a law reinforcing patients' rights and prohibiting aggressive therapies for patients who preferred not to have them, allowing those who choose to spend the end of their lives more peacefully and pain free. FdF then continued to support social science research into end-of-life issues. The foundation's 30-year goal to make palliative care more societally and legally accepted and supported has had a major impact in France, with all hospitals now providing palliative care.

---

# ENGAGING YOUTH

---

Young people are crucial to reviving and reframing the common good. They are a particular bright spot for interviewees, who appreciate their concern about local and global challenges and their involvement in finding solutions. In general, young people are more value driven than profit driven, and they have different expectations of what their futures hold. A finding that was aligned across regions was the importance of offering civic education early on, and of providing experiential learning and community involvement during school years, coupled with civic learning within the family.

## Leading to a better future

“A key is to let young people lead instead of giving them programmes or organising programmes. That’s going to give them skill sets and leadership and it’s going to empower them. Plus, they will be far more creative than we would!”

**Barbara Ibrahim,**  
*American University of Cairo,  
Egypt*

Today’s youth have grown up during a global pandemic, face a rapidly warming climate, worry about purpose and having a secure future, and grapple with racial, social and economic inequalities. They also have access to exponentially more information than earlier generations via technology that allows them to learn online, stay constantly connected and create content to share across the world if they wish. Technology, while a distraction, also has the power to mobilise when used wisely. This is a time of existential threats as well as great opportunity, and across all regions there was concern about the influence of social media and technology in those critical early developmental years.

It was clear that young people are seen as the architects and leaders of the future common good. It is necessary to provide them with historical context on the imperative of strengthening democracy, and to help them understand that they are also responsible for helping to find solutions and cannot simply blame prior generations. While many are aware of the issues in contemporary society and often innovate and organise in their immediate communities around their version of the common good (Black Lives Matter, for example), it is necessary to provide all young people with access to more and better information. Most importantly, it is critical to instil a sense of hope that there is a better future for them.

“I think young people have to be at the centre, and the investments really have to be for the most part in our young people.”

**Briggs Bomba,**  
*TrustAfrica, Senegal*

## The need for youth agency: Making the common good relevant

Relevance and agency are the primary challenges in engaging young people in reframing the common good. In patriarchal societies, for example, young people and women feel that their voices are not heard. At the same time, some youths are only interested in themselves and not the common good, and this may not change. One interviewee asked whether we are really listening to youth, or just speaking a divisive language that enables adults to pontificate about preparing young people for the future rather than truly seeking to understand their needs. This suggests the need to rethink the framing of the benefits of the common good and to reimagine ways to

“Young people are doing the job we want them to do: infusing our accepted norms and behaviours with an idealism, optimism and a sense of long-term purpose. It helps break us out of unhelpful and obstructive inertias, reminding us that we can never take our eyes off a vision of the future in which we all thrive together. Sometimes the focus is on the narrow and practical. Sometimes it is on the broad and strategic. But it is always uplifting, provocative and absolutely necessary to our pursuit of the common good.”

**Rip Rapson,**  
*The Kresge Foundation,  
United States*

“For youth, the concept of active citizenship is definitely at schools and universities, we’ve seen all of that, but also instilling a sense of community and the Impact of people.”

**Aida Essaid,**  
*Former director of Taawon, Jordan*

engage the newer generations, such as ceding power to young decision makers to find a way to turn their apathy towards the issues they face into action.

### **Family, school and community**

Abundant ideas were shared on the “how” of engaging young people in the common good. Across regions, many focused on making civic education available and accessible to all students so that they understand their responsibilities and rights as citizens. Some spoke of learning at home through early family education.

Other ideas were extracurricular, such as national service or promoting youth service programmes that are embedded in institutions attended by young people, like universities. Volunteering was seen as a way for young people to become active in their communities, pivoting away from the theoretical and into real-world issues and learning about people and politics that are different from them. Engaging young people in issues they are concerned about – climate change and inequality – could inspire them to expand their thinking to the big-picture common good. Social entrepreneurship was suggested as a way of providing experience in becoming a leader.

Recognising that young people are often interested in being part of a collective, and not a top-down structure where they are always told what to do, there was general consensus that we need to help build their capacity, trust them and leave it to them to create a more effective way forward for the future of the common good.

# Building a graduate cohort for the common good

## Yousef Jameel Fellowship, Egypt

At the American University of Cairo, the Yousef Jameel Fellowship – named for the donor, who worked with the university’s School of Global Affairs and Public Policy (GAPP) – was created to build the capacity of Egyptian nationals to be future leaders with an understanding of public policy, public administration and law as a way of promoting a kinder and more just world. The fellowship fully supports students in earning a degree in one of eight related degree programmes, instilling in them an appreciation for and understanding of the common good. There is an expectation that students, upon completing their studies, will be ready to take on the responsibility of effecting change in Egyptian society. During the fellowship, graduate students not only go to classes but also visit each other’s provinces, and they meet and discuss issues of social justice that cannot be found in textbooks. Noha El-Mikawy, Dean of GAPP, says that the use of private funds, knowledge, data and analysis to bring young people together in a learning cohort is the connection with the importance of pursuing the common good. “This is a powerful investment of a private philanthropist in education that prepares students for a better future,” El-Mikawy said. “This education is not only giving the hard and soft skills in the technical fields, but it is also building a sense of solidarity, community and respect for diversity because these students come from very different places.”

## Case Study

---

# Educating young philanthropists

## Learning by Giving/From Me card game, Japan

Masataka Uo, CEO of the Japan Fundraising Association (JFRA) and advisor to the Asian Venture Philanthropy Network, spoke of the generational differences in philanthropy and the common good, noting that younger generations in Japan experience the world and economy differently than the generations before them. “We annually publish Giving Japan, annual statistics of philanthropy,” Uo said. “And according to our study, only 5% of respondents say that they got ‘giving education’ in their childhood and high school, junior high school days. 95% of them have no access to giving education. So education is a very important thing.” Uo mentioned the success of the Learning by Giving programme founded by Doris Buffett in the United States, the goal of which is to teach college students across 35 university campuses about effective giving by enabling them to distribute grants to high-impact nonprofits. Since the programme began, almost \$4 million has been distributed to more than 800 organisations. After meeting with the Buffett family, JFRA tried this programme, which was very popular with high school students but also very time and cost consuming. Last year, JFRA created a card game that helps young people, in an hour of game play, to better understand how the money they spend affects the economy, the environment and society. Called *From Me*, it simulates various ways of using money – saving, consuming, donating, investing – and illustrates the relationships between spending money and improving individual and community well-being. Designed for teams of ten people collaborating and communicating together for the common good, it espouses the power of joining hands so that the participants can experience the benefits to society of relying on and helping those around them. According to Uo, “It starts from your own well-being, *Me*. But in order to achieve your own well-being, you need to think about *We*. I believe that this will be the game-changer.”

---

# SHIFTING THE PARADIGM TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE AND JUST FUTURE

---

Survey findings showed a growing understanding – at all levels of society, and in particular among youth – that there needs to be a broadening of the common good to embrace inclusivity and interdependence, both among humans and as part of a larger ecosystem with nature. In addition, the findings showed increased understanding of the interconnectedness of the major issues of our times, which is compelling some groups in intolerable situations to assemble to defend human rights and other values.

## Reframing the narrative of the common good

It became very clear across the interviews that the new narrative needs to be diversified to foster norms to enable and promote the practice of the common good. All stakeholders should be able to see themselves represented by the concerns and options for a reimagined future. Another consideration is the need to convert the narrative to positive themes like equity and shared values, rather than negative themes like poverty reduction. This new paradigm should also provide space for youth to express concerns and explore what they see as a future of well-being, and to be an integral part of the decision-making process for the reimagined future and how to make it happen.

## Building and connecting communities via networks across society, across the street, across the globe

One of the strongest themes from this survey, almost an imperative, is something that should be obvious concerning the common good but that seems to be singularly lacking in scale in this era of isolation and individualism. This theme is recognition of the importance of communities for individuals to succeed, and of connecting communities to be able to make change for a better future. Robert Putnam made this point clearly in his 2001 book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. His subsequent 2017 analysis, *Upswing*, portrayed the situation as improving, but then the pandemic struck, throwing progress off track.

The need to catalyse growth of community at all levels and, equally important, to connect communities across sectors, cultures and boundaries, is beginning to be addressed quite seriously by the philanthropy sector – including The Rockefeller Foundation’s support for Project Dandelion, a women-led global campaign for climate justice, as described by Hafsat Abiola earlier in this report. Philanthropists are creating neutral spaces and convening dynamic, issue-based networks and coalitions to address global challenges, from climate change to women’s issues and social justice. The importance of bringing global challenges into a local perspective to accelerate collective action for their resolution is another key element of these efforts.

“Individual well-being depends on the common good and vice versa. We need a new economic framework that reflects this basic truth to align government, the private sector and civil society in creating sustainable opportunity for everyone.”

**Zia Kahn,**  
*The Rockefeller Foundation,*  
*United States*

“If we identify a standard of creating value in the long term without promoting inequality, we could already make a big contribution.”

**André Hoffmann,**  
*Roche Holding Ltd., Switzerland*



Enabling community and network growth and connecting also requires the creation of neutral spaces and occasions for this connecting. This involves civic dialogue, listening, learning and finding common ground, as well as compromise to achieve the common good at different scales and with varied issues. Essential to providing neutral space for connecting and acting is transparency of information and access to truth. This requires support for public-interest media, local media and common good-embedded governance frameworks for social media, artificial intelligence and the digital transition.

### **Flipping the model of philanthropy and power dynamics**

With the polycrisis situation, some interviewees called for radical changes in philanthropy-sector behaviour to provide the societal infrastructure described in other sections of this report. In order to encourage and invest in innovation, philanthropy is called upon to take bigger bets – greater risks that cannot be taken by the traditional economy. Additionally, it is recognised that philanthropy needs more collective action to leverage its influence and independence in accelerating progress towards a sustainable and just planet.

Philanthropy is also called upon to flip the top-down model and recognise that success is best achieved by consulting and collaborating with local communities (in the broadest sense of the term) to achieve their common good, not one that is envisioned from the outside. Flipping the model can empower individuals, communities and their institutions and give them agency to allow self-determination and sustainability.

### **Fostering a powerful ecosystem of trust among civil society, business and government**

A major shift is the growing focus on collaboration among three sectors – civil society, business and government – both institutionally and across cultures and boundaries, without geopolitical identifiers. Philanthropy is too small to make this shift on its own, but it could have an important catalytic impact on changing the paradigm.

The key to making this happen is the cultivation of new leadership profiles to bridge the gap between sectors, communities and cultures. To achieve this, investments are needed in education to change the business model and to build leadership.

Business can make a major impact on society at large as long as it is managed not for short-term profit maximisation but for the common good, i.e. for maximising the societal benefit. In making decisions, business should focus on the “three capitals”: social capital, natural capital and human capital. Nature needs to be brought into the equation by putting a value on it.

In the transformation of business objectives for the common good, government needs to set standards of equity in practice for the business sector, and philanthropy and civil society in general need to play their watchdog role to ensure that public policy is developed and monitored to maximise the common good. This also involves restraining the unbridled role of capitalism for the 1%.

Philanthropy has another major contribution to make. Mobilising all of its assets and capital towards its mission of the common good could unleash nearly a trillion dollars in the United States alone. It is this coalition of forces, moving together according to norms that reflect contemporary society, that can make the shift to a just and sustainable planet.

“If the entire philanthropy sector changes from now, when probably only 2% of their funding is in real risk-taking and funded from 5%–20% of all support in risky initiatives, it would be a huge game changer. Instead, they are spending on what they perceive is the easy common good.”

**James Chen,**  
*The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation, Hong Kong*

“With just a little courage, philanthropy’s endowment investments in the status quo could become investments in the common good! If not now, when?”

**Clara Miller,**  
*Fellow, Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Heron Foundation, United States*

# Collaborative action in Asia on climate change

## Asian Venture Philanthropy Network and India Climate Cooperative

Nancy Yang, co-founder of Asian Charity Services, cites two examples of collaborative initiatives in Asia. The Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (AVPN) has been successful in catalysing collaborative action at the regional level. With more than 600 members across 33 markets, AVPN represents the largest network of social investors in Asia and facilitates collective funding for social and environmental causes across the region. Recently, AVPN successfully partnered with Google.org and the Asian Development Bank to launch the APAC Sustainability Seed Fund, with the objective of funding and scaling climate change initiatives across 11 countries in the region. Another successful Asian initiative is the India Climate Collaborative (ICC), a pioneering donors' collective that operates at a national level. More than ten major Indian philanthropic organisations have banded together to tackle the pressing issue of climate change in India. The ICC has set an ambitious goal of raising climate funding from approximately 7% to at least 20% of total philanthropic funding in India in the coming years.

# Closing the global vision gap

## Clearly, Hong Kong

James Chen, a Hong Kong-based global businessman and philanthropist, has spent nearly two decades focusing on how to bridge gaps in vision care and make eyecare affordable. His success is an example of an approach that incorporates essential elements in achieving the common good in philanthropy. In 2016, Chen launched Clearly, a campaign to enable access to glasses for everyone in the world. He says the pivotal decision came when he reframed the issue as an economic challenge and not a health one. This pivot helped policy and other leaders understand how eyecare is essential to tackling other goals, from educational success to job growth. The campaign helped make possible the first-ever United Nations resolution on vision in July 2021. As well as getting eye care on global agendas, Clearly funds research. For example, [The Lancet Global Health](#) reported on a study funded by Clearly of 750 mostly female tea pickers aged over 40 in Assam, India, which found that reading glasses provided a substantial increase in productivity. In addition to long-term and focused commitment by philanthropists, Chen believes strongly in what he calls a “moonshot” approach – taking financial and reputational risks that institutions and governments cannot, and “testing unconventional ideas to be able to change the paradigm”.

---

# REGIONAL CONVERGENCE/ DIVERGENCE

---

The global focus of this survey reflects our increasingly connected and, as cited in interviews, potentially borderless world. Despite different cultures, geographies and languages, there are more shared findings than divergent ones, with a constant theme that context matters in how shared values are expressed and understood. It is important to note that in this first iteration, the survey did not include any emerging countries, but only those where philanthropy is active. (Overviews from philanthropy experts in each region can be found in Annex C.)

A headline that emerged from across all regions is that it is the common good that unites us. However, there are clearly regional variations as well, often related to how community life is organised. The challenge of finding shared characteristics of the common good in different geographies and cultures, and even in the same country or region, is that different principles, such as opportunity or racial reconciliation, mean very different things in different places. The less democratic a country is, the more tension exists between civil society and government officials, and the less likely it is that citizens can get organised for the common good. This is also true for regions that are highly dependent upon foreign and philanthropic aid.

## **Regional convergences: The importance of trust**

“In the Global South, it’s a common good related to my freedom to choose because we have been suffering colonisation during five centuries, and it’s about how can we shift the power in our own decisions, and how can we create our own future with our own resources, with our own autonomy and identity.”

**Felipe Bogotá,**  
*TerritoriA, Colombia*

The survey uncovered certain regional convergences, including the importance of trust, relationships and leadership in identifying and negotiating a common good. There is a shared belief that everyone should have an equitable opportunity to achieve a good life, no matter how that is defined for individuals and communities. There was also a shared agreement that the common good requires putting society and the planet first, without causing harm. This ranged from meeting the basic needs of communities to engaging local members in maintaining and sustaining quality of life.

There was recognition that seeking the common good and systems change requires a long time-frame, and often needs special compensation during the short term to mediate the cost of transition for certain sectors on the way to achieving a more sustainably equitable and just society.

All regions believe that youth will provide the pivot to a better-balanced future, and that the ecosystem of philanthropy, government and the private sector, working in collaboration, should set the local and global agendas. For some interviewees, government bears the most responsibility for implementing common good practices.

## Regional divergences: Outlook and community

“One distinct difference I have seen in what is common good in Africa as compared to the West, or maybe to Europe, which I am more familiar with than the US, is that in the aspect of our own culture, we are more communal in nature, as compared to the individualistic nature in the global West.”

**Rotimi Olawale,**  
*YouthHubAfrica, Nigeria*

“Local knowledge, local know-how, local understanding of what the problems are and local solutions – these are what should be foremost. People on the ground who are experiencing injustice should be the ones determining their priorities. And we need to recognise the centrality of that everywhere – including in Palestine.”

**Gerry Salole,**  
*Drawing Conclusions and European Foundation Centre, Belgium*

“Everything is now connected with how we can improve well-being. Mutual help is the key driver for Japanese people. In the philanthropic sector and in the business sector, Japan is an outlier. It is slightly isolated in the area.”

**Masataka Uo,**  
*Japanese Fundraising Association, Japan*

Community-centred life is not identical across regions, nor is freedom to have agency in expressing and achieving one’s values. How the common good is perceived and achieved (or not) varies, as does the meaning of opportunity, even if basic principles are shared.

The role of government in promoting the common good also varies widely. In France, for example, the common good is understood to be the domain of government, while in Asia philanthropy tends to follow the priorities set by the government in pursuing the common good.

Political polarisation, wars and other conflicts vary across regions, but North America (particularly the United States) emerged as the most pessimistic about the future of the common good, with Asia and Latin America much more positive about the ability to grow the concept. The challenge is to harness and scale this positive momentum across regions and continents.

In Africa, philanthropy is baked into communal life. Older African communities were founded on the concept of the common good, a fundamental principle of societal existence. While infrastructure may not be strong, the community seeks to solve problems together, both on an individual and collective basis. There is a sense of community and family responsibility that is woven throughout society. Philanthropy, which often comes from outside the continent, is about excess and abundance, while that from inside Africa is based on survival, and there is sometimes a cognitive dissonance between what Africans actually need and what funders from the Global North want to provide.

In Asia, there is a wide diversity in cultures and needs. For example, more than 60% of the world’s youth live in Asia and the Pacific, and yet Japan’s population is aging. The perception of the common good is more firmly rooted in addressing large, cross-cutting, persistent issues across the region, such as alleviating poverty and addressing the climate crisis.

Across the Middle East, there is a strong sense of family, community and religion. Equally, there is an increasing lack of trust in leadership and a general perception that government narratives are undermining the collective good, restricting civic space and creating a sense of apathy among citizens. The aging leaders of this youthful region are seen as wanting to retain all the power, without interference.

There was recognition across all regions that certain global challenges require multilateral cooperation (the climate crisis, migration and threats to democracy, among others), and that other challenges appear in somewhat different forms across many countries (poverty, population shifts, education declines). All of these affect the ability to achieve the common good, while at the same time underlining the need to try.

## Heritage Days in Chile: The common good through culture

### Días del Patrimonio Cultural, Chile

Hans Rosenkranz, Executive Director of Organizaciones Solidarias in Chile, shared an example of how the concept of the common good through culture has resulted in community gatherings, appreciation of local history and art, and overall well-being. Marta Cruz-Coke, who held a variety of cultural and education positions in Chile and was appointed the first female director of its National Library, created the first Heritage Day in 1999. Now managed by the Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio, this public celebration of the country's cultural, historical, and architectural heritage makes accessible the places and practices that define the country. Over a two-day period each autumn, public buildings such as museums, cultural centres, and libraries, along with private buildings, open their doors for free visits and activities. From a modest start with two institutions 25 years ago, there are now hundreds of participating organizations, and more than 3,000 Heritage Day activities took place across the country during the May 2024 edition. This year, visitors could join a walking tour of architectural history in Arica in northern Chile, view female flamenco dancers in a public plaza in Valparaíso, or wander around ancient fossils at the Parque de estromatolitos in Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of the country. According to Rosenkranz, "It's something people really enjoy, it's something that makes us understand the importance of our cultural heritage in a way that we want to protect and preserve. And this is happened with one woman who wanted to create this important recognition of the heritage we have on the Pacific side, and it then, step by step, started to become a movement."

## Community + philanthropy = common good

### YouthHubAfrica, Nigeria

Rotimi Olawale, Executive Director of YouthHubAfrica (YHA), a Nigerian nonprofit focused on youth leadership, policy and advocacy, described an effective partnership among funders, the government and local communities that has led to everyone coming together in pursuit of the common good for young people. Armed with funds secured from a private-sector institution in Nigeria to renovate a computer lab in a public school, YHA decided that they needed strong buy-in from the community, the school and its alumni in order to co-design a process that would be sustainable. The goal was not only to provide young people with computer access and training, but also to enable the community to be involved as a strategy to preserve the lab over time. One issue of concern was keeping the computers safe once installed in the lab, and so part of the design was to have the alumni association hire a security guard. Another was to ask the Ministry of Education to provide computer teachers for the school. Two years on, the lab is still operational, the number of teachers has increased from one to four, and the security guard is in place, still paid by the alumni association. "We wanted to do it in a sustainable way that benefits the community but also allows the community to take ownership and contribute in their own way in small things to the project," Olawale says. "That way, they also see themselves as part of the project. With the little contributions they make, they are proud of the project. They visit the project. They are proud that their children who attend the school can now go to the computer lab and do computer practicals, which many of them didn't have such an opportunity before that. That gives me joy that it continues to be sustainable over time."

---

# SHIFTING THE PARADIGM OF THE COMMON GOOD

---

The most important overall finding from the *Survey of Perceptions in Search of the Common Good* is that the paradigm for pursuing the common good should be changed and that this change should be accelerated to make the systemic adaptations essential to addressing our era of polycrisis.

The most encouraging findings from the survey are that there is a sense of movement towards a tipping point and shift in the societal ecosystem in the regions surveyed that could produce the necessary change in the paradigm of the common good. There are encouraging and innovative examples in response to societal and planetary dysfunction. The next step is to harness and scale them.

## **Findings and emerging themes**

Our principal findings that indicate signs of change come from the interviews of the survey participants and from case study examples they provided. Granted that this is a small sample, but it reflects a widespread phenomenon and determination to create a new social infrastructure and a social contract that enables well-being, mutual flourishing and the pursuit of the common good. Emerging themes that point the way to a shift in the paradigm are presented below.

### *Reframing the narrative and power dynamics of the common good*

As mentioned earlier in the report, finding a common good for the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a complete reframing of the narrative, adapted to regions and cultures around the globe. Key themes for the reframing embrace inclusiveness, social justice, decolonialising social power dynamics and giving agency to diversity in the broadest sense so that the common good reflects the population it is serving and so that inclusiveness includes nature.

### *Building and connecting communities and networks*

To overcome the isolation and individualism that has overtaken 21<sup>st</sup> century society, specific and strategic efforts are needed so that the individuals are connected in constructive communities and so that communities are connected in theme-based networks to assume the power to make systemic change. We found strong examples of philanthropic encouragement and support of these innovative initiatives, such as Project Dandelion, a women-led global campaign for climate justice, as recounted by Hafsat Abiola.

### *Enabling youth to lead the way*

Participants in all regions covered by the survey found that youth represent a reason for optimism about the future. The values of young people are changing and they are aware of the global challenges and already engaging actively for their resolution. The recommendations are to include them in decision making for the future and to give them agency to be able to lead the way towards the shifting framework for the common good.

### *Flipping the philanthropy model and power dynamics*

The survey reflects opportunities for philanthropy to leverage change that is commensurate with the unique set of assets it has available – finances, independence, policy, collaborative peer influence and the ability to take risks. The philanthropy sector is encouraged to be more inclusive, guided by local and representative voices; to take a consultative, more grass-roots approach; to fund change in societal infrastructure by reimagining the economy and funding basic elements of democracy such as public-interest media and neutral space for civic dialogue; to take an exchange-among-equals approach in designing support initiatives; to connect communities and networks; and to use its assets in collaborative platforms to consolidate the power of these platforms and accelerate systemic change.

### *Enabling the practice of “common climate good”*

In his essay on the common climate good, Shiv Someshwar stresses the importance of advancing social and economic equity as an integral part of building climate resiliency. The practice of common climate good, he writes, requires climate to be considered not as an independent area for action but rather as one of the components of adaptive socio-economic-ecological policy making. He advocates engineering “climate enlightened self-interest” and says that this may be achieved by “unshackling actions from consideration of immediate gain” and by holding policy and decision makers accountable on equity and ecological outcomes.

## **Shifting the paradigm of the common good: Moving forward**

Both the recent perception survey and previous research and consultations carried out by the PCG initiative have revealed key elements that will help to shape the future agenda:

- The common good is often a contended concept, process and norm, and is almost always negotiated.
- The pursuit of the common good is continually evolving depending on context – temporal, geographic and cultural – while circling around a common theme of overcoming barriers to collective action.
- Pursuit of the common good at all levels, from local to global, requires cross-sector collaboration, equitable burden sharing and democratic representation in decision making.
- Pursuit of the common good in our interconnected era will depend on a campaign to develop heightened public understanding that individual well-being depends on common well-being, restoring civic dialogue and an empathetic approach to decision making.

Stage One of the PCG initiative launched the process of creating an agenda for future action. It began by commissioning studies around the theme of the common good in specific arenas of modern social life: democratic governance, digital technology, civic media, civil society institutions, income inequality, race and xenophobia, and climate change. Archival research generated illuminating insights into major issues addressed by philanthropy. Stage One concluded with the consultation held in October 2021, as mentioned in the Foreword of this report.

Stage Two of the initiative seeks to establish a broad network of institutions and organisations to undertake further regional perception and sector research focusing on the other sectors in the ecosystem: the public sector and business. The output of this research would include collection of case studies of contemporary innovations in pursuit of the common good. It would also include the formation of theme-based networks to carry out awareness building and advocacy campaigns in order to shift public attitudes and policy frameworks that address the resolution of critical global challenges through the perspective of the common good.

The goal of this work is to produce a fundamental shift in public consciousness and the development of public policies to shift to a new paradigm for the common good. An ambitious undertaking is needed to meet the scale and complexity of the problem.

---

The PCG's initial report, *Toward an Agenda for Pursuit of the Common Good: An Exploration*, was published in 2022 and may be viewed online at: <https://online.ucpress.edu/gp/article-abstract/3/1/38554/194048/Toward-an-Agenda-for-Pursuit-of-the-Common-Good-An?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.



# PARTICIPANTS IN THE PERCEPTION SURVEY

NAME	TITLE/ROLE	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
Abiola, Hafsat	Co-Founder	Connected Women Leaders	Nigeria
Abou Shnief, Heba	Senior Researcher and Data Director	Arab Foundations Forum	Egypt
Almubaslat, Saba	Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa	Ford Foundation	Egypt
Arango, Manuel	Founder	Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía (CEMEFI)	Mexico
Batra, Naina	CEO	Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (AVPN)	Singapore
Bogotá, Felipe	Executive Director	TerritoriA	Colombia
Bomba, Briggs	Director of Programmes	TrustAfrica	Senegal
Bucio, Ricardo	Executive President	Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía (CEMEFI)	Mexico
Chan, Dorothy	Head of Philanthropy Services and Advisory, Asia Pacific	HSBC Global Private Banking	Hong Kong
Chen, James	Chair	The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation	Hong Kong
Cusi, Sandro	Director General	Procuencia (Fondo Pro-Cuenca Valle de Bravo, AC)	Mexico
Davezac, Axelle	CEO	Fondation de France	France
Del Valle Perochena, Blanca	President	ENLACE, Fondo de Inversion Social Kaluz	Mexico
Deychakiwsky, Nick	Senior Programme Officer	Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	USA
El-Mikawy, Noha	Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy and Professor of Practice, Public Policy and Administration	American University in Cairo	Egypt
Emerhi, Ese	Global Network Weaver	Global Fund for Community Foundations	Nigeria
Errazuriz, Domingo	Chief Executive Officer	Fundación Gabriel & Mary Mustakis	Chile
Essaid, Aida	Former Director General	Taawon (Welfare Association)	Jordan
Fabiani, Paula	CEO	Institute for the Development of Social Investment (IDIS)	Brazil
Fernández, Francisco	CEO	Conscious Enterprise Center	Mexico
Fomunjong, Jimm Chick	Head, Knowledge Management and Communication Unit	West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI)	Cameroon

NAME	TITLE/ROLE	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
Hayling, Crystal	Executive Director	The Libra Foundation	USA
Hibbs, C.R.	Senior Advisor and Director of Programmes	The Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Global	Mexico
Hoffmann, André	Vice Chairman	Roche Holding Ltd.	Switzerland
Ibrahim, Barbara	Founding Director (retired) Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement	American University in Cairo	Egypt
Isooba, Moses (Dr.)	Executive Director	Uganda National NGO Forum	Uganda
Kahn, Zia	Senior Vice President, Innovation	The Rockefeller Foundation	USA
Kim, Angie	President and CEO	Center for Cultural Innovation	USA
Kramer, Larry	President and Vice Chancellor	London School of Economics and Political Science	UK
Larrain, Guillermo	Associate Professor	University of Chile and Sciences Po Paris	Chile
Leat, Diana	Author, Lecturer	Independent	UK
Levine, Ruth	Vice President and Chief Learning Officer	David and Lucile Packard Foundation	USA
López, María	Founder and Executive Director	Detonante	Colombia
Mahomed, Halima	Senior Philanthropy Consultant	TrustAfrica	South Africa
Miller, Clara	Visiting Scholar; President Emerita	Federal Reserve Bank of New York; Heron Foundation	USA
Moralis, Delphine	CEO	Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea)	Belgium
Nathenson, Pamela	Executive Director	World Connect	USA
Okinyi, Evans	CEO	East Africa Philanthropy Network (EAPN)	Kenya
Olawale, Rotimi	Executive Director	YouthHubAfrica	Nigeria
Parker, Kristian	Trustee	Oak Foundation	Switzerland
Patron, Rodolfo	Chairman of the Board	Procuena (Fondo Pro-Cuenca Valle de Bravo, AC)	Mexico
Paz González Carmona, Emilia	Director	Centro de Filantropía e Inversiones Sociales, Escuela de Gobierno, Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez	Chile
Ragin, Ron	Director of Programmes	MAP Fund	USA
Rapson, Rip	President and CEO	The Kresge Foundation	USA
Rosenkranz, Hans	Executive Director	Comunidad Organizaciones Solidarias	Chile
Salole, Gerry	Founder and Former CEO	Drawing Conclusions and European Foundation Centre	Belgium
Shapiro, Ruth Ph.D.	Co-Founder and Chief Executive	Centre for Asian Philanthropy and Society (CAPS)	Hong Kong
Spears, endawnis	Co-founder	Akomawt Educational Initiative	USA
Suárez, Carolina	CEO	Latimpacto	Colombia
Uo, Masataka	CEO; Advisor	Japan Fundraising Association (JFRA); Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (AVPN)	Japan
Verzelen, Florence	Executive Vice President	Dassault Systemes	France

# QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PERCEPTION SURVEY

---

1. How would you describe the “common good”?
2. Do you think there are shared characteristics of the norm of the “common good” across cultures and geographies?
3. How does the contemporary situation represent, or not, “a diminution of commitment to the norm of the ‘common good’”?
4. To the degree that you believe there has been such a diminution, how do you see this trend relating to the inability to address contemporary and future global and local challenges?
5. How would an increased level of societal understanding of the “common good” and sense of civic responsibility help to achieve community well-being?
6. Is pursuing the common good even a reasonable goal for philanthropic effort, or is it more appropriately addressed by other sectors such as government, business or market forces?
7. How could youth become engaged in pursuing the common good as future leaders and citizens?
8. Do you intentionally seek to serve the “common good” through your philanthropy, work, or other activity?
9. What could philanthropy do to catalyse a shift in public thinking and development of policies needed to prioritise a contemporary idea of the “common good”?

---

# REGIONAL OVERVIEWS

---

As this report makes clear, not only do concepts of the common good differ across regions, but the way in which philanthropy is engaged in furthering the common good also varies geographically. We asked a number of observers and practitioners from different countries around the world to pick out the trends and describe the relationship between philanthropy and the common good in their part of the world.

## Latin America

### Emilia Paz González Carmona, Centre for Philanthropy and Social Investments, Chile

It is difficult for me to separate the idea of common good, loosely understood as something that is beneficial for a community as a whole, from the work of philanthropy in Latin America. With high levels of inequality and big challenges in human development, most philanthropic institutions have been created to advance some common good (primary education, health and social services for the underprivileged, environmental care, etc.).

Over the past decades, there has been a strong trend towards the professionalisation of the third sector across the region, moving from a view of charitable work done by low-profile organisations to a more strategic approach to advance social and environmental common good. Philanthropic organisations have been key in supporting these efforts and building capacity in the sector. As in other regions of the world, the generational shift has driven the focus towards impact measurement and the inclusion of different forms of investment, such as blended finance, impact investment and social impact bonds. Although an evidence-based approach could help increase the common good, helping to drive investments and giving towards effective solutions, the challenge is to not forget certain aspects of the common good that may be difficult to measure, such as the arts, social cohesion or a shared narrative and hope for the future.

An area of concern, which has been illustrated recently by events in Mexico and Chile, is the public's perception of philanthropy. Its legitimacy to act in the realm of the common good and the transparency of its means and motivations have been called into question. The erosion of their image, combined with democratic erosion around the globe, presents a big challenge to the ability of philanthropic institutions to contribute to the common good. Although we see a stronger attempt to collaborate closely with governments to share knowledge and scale up effective solutions that have been developed by philanthropy, foundations may be wary of assuming the risks that come with embracing their public role in a polarised and sometimes antagonistic society, as agents that can convene actors from different sectors, shine a light on difficult issues and become part of the solution to a shrinking public space. The cost of inaction, though, may be even higher.

## The Arab Region

---

### Heba Abou Shnief, Arab Foundations Forum and Alliance, Egypt

The work of numerous foundations and philanthropic organisations in the Arab region contributes to furthering public policy goals and the common good, like social protection, creating jobs, providing access to basic healthcare, expanding educational enrolment, etc. There is also a subset of GONGOs, or semi-linked governmental foundations, that are set up by a governmental body and are directly engaged in the execution of public policy agenda. The latter is a growing phenomenon in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, where the robust nexus of growing wealth, political power and philanthropic action presents unique opportunities for high philanthropic impact.

While generosity is always the primary driver of such work, there are other factors that serve to influence the motivations and approaches of giving. As in other contexts, interest-driven and thematic-driven philanthropy exist side by side. While producing a vibrant landscape of giving, these two can either converge with the common good or can result in diversion and tensions. The role of culture, tribal and communal affiliations, geopolitics, economic interests and ideological dispositions can come into play here, affecting the extent to which Arab philanthropic giving furthers the common good. ‘Identity dynamics’ is a central concept to understanding intergroup conflict and collective action. In the Arab region, the family, municipality/region, sect/ethnicity, nation, pan-national (Arab/Islamic), and self only (distinction from social groups) dimensions are most prominent. In Lebanon, for instance, the confessional nature of Lebanese society has the way private philanthropic is practised with clientele and religious community affiliations playing a strong role in mediating giving. Other observers would also point to the role of external factors, such as foreign funding, in diverting investments and undermining the common good.

Nonetheless, “Takaful” – the religiously inspired practice and principles encompassing social solidarity and mutuality in Islam – stresses that the welfare of society supersedes that of the individual and, if practised more strategically, it can be a potent force for the achievement of the common good in communities and geographies regardless of their race, beliefs and gender. The role of crisis in bridging communities and organisations as evidenced in the Covid pandemic is another considerable driver of civic action.

Yet, superimposed structural challenges and inherent disablers in the sector itself serve to constrain the sector from furthering the common good. On the macro level, geopolitical tensions, rising inequality, regulatory barriers in the civic legal framework and low levels of interpersonal trust are pervasive structural challenges impeding collective action and collaborative approaches.

## Europe

---

### Delphine Moralis, Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea), Brussels

Over the past two years and resulting from key societal developments, philanthropy in Europe has gone through a transformation. These societal developments included the Covid-19 pandemic, concerns around backsliding of democracy, challenges posed by the cost-of-living crises and questions around the limitations of traditional philanthropy. Technological evolutions and the emergence of new actors on the philanthropic scene further accelerate the self-reflection in the sector.

Against this background of social and technological change, philanthropy is rethinking how it uses its *private resources for public good*, which is how at Philea philanthropy is most broadly defined. In a changing context, understanding what public good means is subject to debate. Current legal frameworks provide limited elucidation, with “public benefit” being defined differently across European member states. The concept of common good is hence a matter open to interpretation.

In his 2019 book, *The Common Good*, Robert Reich explains that “a concern for the common good – keeping the common good in mind – is a moral attitude. It recognises that we’re all in it together.” This approach to common good aligns with the increased understanding that preserving “global public goods” – climate, global health, stability – requires every sector and every country to work together. Foundations in Europe are increasingly embracing this approach, for instance by recognising the importance of applying a climate lens to their work, irrespective of their size, scope or focus.

While perceptions of common good differ and evolve over time, it refers at the core to universal, self-evident ethical principles that benefit not only individuals but also their communities. We bring these principles to life in the form of values and rights. In a context that is, however, increasingly polarised, the values and rights promoted by many foundations on one side of the spectrum can at times go against the values and rights held by others.

We need to recognise that in these sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes highly divisive times, diversity also means diversity of opinion and outlook. For better or worse, common good is increasingly interpreted in different ways. Philea’s unwavering vision for philanthropy contributing to the common good, however, remains one where it co-shapes and supports pluralistic, just and resilient societies that centre people and planet. In a world grappling such complex conflicts, crises and challenges, philanthropy can celebrate both diversity and things we all have in common, without losing sight of the value of shared humanity that unites us.

## **Sub-Saharan Africa**

---

### **Ese Emerhi, Global Fund for Community Foundations, Nigeria**

If we were to take a simple Western definition of philanthropy to be the “love of mankind” and connect that to the traditional African philosophy of ubuntu, which speaks of “humanity to others” and the interconnectedness of all (I am what I am because of who we all are), then the concept of the common good should be easily understood and accepted, and more importantly, “active” in our daily lives.

What the Covid-19 pandemic did for philanthropy, and in particular in communities across Africa, was that it showed that our togetherness has never been more important. For example, when Western governments began hoarding diagnostics and personal protective equipment (PPE), it forced many African governments, philanthropists and business leaders to seize the opportunity to look inward for system building and support. According to research by the Bridgespan Group, African philanthropists gave seven times their annual average number of major gifts to help the continent respond to the pandemic.

It forced innovation and new practices in how we give (longer-term grants, easing of donor reporting restrictions, funders streamlining internal processes to make funds more readily available, etc.), but it remains to be seen if the positive changes will last.

Colonialism and the introduction of modern forms of philanthropy in Africa have made African giving invisible and created an image of dependency while perpetuating societal inequalities and social problems. Considering the many ongoing systemic challenges and crises right now globally, a new philanthropic paradigm for Africa is needed to allow for the need to fund in complexity and tackle root causes.

### **Nancy Yang, Asian Charity Services, Hong Kong**

The notion of the common good in Asia has long been grounded in shared cultural values of community harmony and social cohesion. A traditional approach to caring for family, clan and community has deeply influenced long-standing Asian philanthropic practices. Driven by a surge in wealth creation, a new generation of socially ambitious donors is emerging across the region. The [Milken Institute](#) projects that Asia will become the world's second largest wealth hub by 2026, with Asian millennials managing 35 per cent of global wealth. Against this background, the traditional model of affiliation and community-based giving is not being discarded, but expanded. Today's Asian philanthropists are more willing to engage in strategic, multi-sectoral partnerships and utilise digital platforms to scale their efforts for the common good.

Across Asia, philanthropists are increasingly driving systemic change in their local communities through strategic partnerships with the government and through regional and national donor collectives.

A recent [Bridgespan](#) analysis on giving trends by the wealthiest families in Southeast Asia notes that “forty percent explicitly cite government collaboration as a critical lever in their (philanthropic) work”. These complementary efforts are pragmatic. Private or corporate philanthropy often brings technical expertise, an entrepreneurial approach and risk capital, while the government has the reach and resources to implement solutions at scale.

As one example, the [Tanoto Foundation](#) has developed a long-term collaboration with the Indonesian government through the PINTAR programme, successfully strengthening access and quality in the country's education sector. Early on, PINTAR found that strong ownership at the district-level education offices was key to successful student outcomes. PINTAR's programmatic strengths are creating local and regional centres of excellence. It trains principals and teachers to improve classroom practices, make lessons more engaging, and better manage their schools.

Most importantly, PINTAR is designed to be sustainable and scalable. The foundation signed agreements to strengthen cooperation with various ministries and local governments and ensure the programme's long-term impact. As of 2022, PINTAR has impacted 20,000 educators across 35 provinces in Indonesia. By leveraging complementary strengths and building collaborative partnerships at different levels of government, the Tanoto Foundation has developed a successful partnership model that will ultimately improve educational outcomes for millions of Indonesian children.

The legacy of state-led social welfare across Asia fuels this trend of strategic philanthropic partnerships with governments in many other countries, such as Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea and, of course, China. Developing the multi-stakeholder relationships and evidence-based programme models needed to serve common interests at the national level compels private philanthropy to forgo the agility and individualism they are often used to. Achieving the common good through these longer-term government partnerships calls for patient capital.

The collectivist nature of Asian philanthropy has also influenced a growing practice of national and regional collaboration among donors. Asia's new generation of wealth holders recognises that the region's most pressing social issues are of such scale and complexity that individualistic, project-based grantmaking is ineffective.

Massive economic inequality remains. The World Bank estimates that over 400 million people in the region continue to live below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day. Rapid urbanisation across the region has led to environmental degradation and a lack of basic access to healthcare and education for hundreds of millions. Aging populations in many Asian countries

are straining existing social welfare systems. By pooling resources and coordinating efforts, Asian funder collaboratives have greater capacity to tackle these massive social issues and reach more beneficiaries across the region.

As Asian philanthropists are seeking more structural, population-level social change, the trend towards government partnerships and funder collaboratives will only continue to increase.

Widespread adoption of digital technologies and a growing internet user base are creating a vibrant, more inclusive generation of givers. Mobile internet penetration in Asia is expected to reach 61 per cent by 2030, which could potentially result in the opportunity to engage over 1.8 billion citizens across the region. Digital philanthropic platforms across Asia are tapping into these massive online communities and transforming how the public thinks about and participates in serving their local communities.

Countries across Asia are galvanising the public to greater charitable contributions and acts of service through digital crowdfunding platforms, such as Milaap and GiveIndia in India, and massive messaging communities, such as Happy Bean and KakaoTalk in South Korea. As digital technologies continue to shape social interactions and community giving behaviours across Asia, they will be an increasingly powerful tool for mobilising mass civic engagement in service to the common good.

Strategic donor partnerships and the innovative use of digital technologies reflect an evolution of Asian philanthropy capacity that remains rooted in traditional, collectivist values. As the region's wealth and technological capabilities continue to grow, these trends bear even greater promise for a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

## **North America**

---

### **Clara Miller, Fellow, Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Heron Foundation, US**

In North America, social ideals encompassing the “common good” have existed from the earliest times of human habitation. First Nations tribes, groups of European settlers landing from England, France and Spain, enslaved Africans arriving under coercion, and continual waves of immigrants over the years followed practices that respected a “commons”. These practices contributed to a set of customs to maintain the “common good”, at least with respect to their own communities.

Whatever their provenance, these concepts universally rested on the perception that humans are interdependent, rely on nature, and require cooperation with both to assure their survival and success. In the absence of centralized government, individual North American tribes and a steady stream of kinship groups among European settlers developed their own serviceable folkways and customs for maintaining the “common good”. The practices were simultaneously diverse – distinct from each other with respect to time and place, yet similar with respect to application and intent. The “commons” and the universal view of “good” – in the form of livelihood, health and ease – was honored within each group, and sometimes beyond as treaties and compacts.

The concept of the “common good” that today guides diverse missions in the continent’s nonprofit sector (including philanthropy) and the pursuit of the public good in government originates from this pluralistic, divergent, fluctuating stew of practices.

The history of land use by these peoples is a rich source of insight into the roots of the “commons” and the “common good” in North America today. The Canadian scholar Allan Greer notes the universality of three aspects of land use in his description of these: individual ownership (homes and farms); an “inner commons” (common areas in a village, for example, for livestock and sometimes farmland) and the “outer commons” (the areas of land outside the village and related farmlands). All were found in Indian communities as well as traditional European villages.



The “outer commons” was the wild land which was needed but unassigned for specific ownership, where villagers might hunt, cut wood, gather herbs, let domesticated animals graze and forage, collect natural foods such as nuts, mushrooms, and similar. The latter was at first used cooperatively, with natives and settlers sharing this uncultivated, unenclosed land and respecting, in most cases, the needs of neighbors for access to the resources it provided.

While seemingly informal, the understandings surrounding use of the outer commons were as valid in that time and place as were those pertaining to the villages and agricultural lands of the “inner commons”. For years, the rules, informal and formal, regarding the commons were universal.

There was a hitch, however. This widely used “outer commons” was the scene of the strongest conflicts among parties. Among natives, hunting or fishing rights, for example, might be contested. As Europeans arrived, those not respecting the outer commons might let their animals roam this land at will, undermining neighbors’ needs:

*“The effects on Indian subsistence could range from the merely annoying to the utterly devastating. Cattle sometimes ate standing crops; hogs stole stored food or dug up clam beds ... trampling hooves and excessive grazing could bring about environmental changes that affected deer ... populations, spreading weeds and contributing to soil erosion...”*

Unlike their forebears, who maintained the stability of the “outer commons” of Europe, most North American settlers from England, France and Spain were driven into the “outer commons” by their “relentlessly expansionist dynamic.” Here was the main scene of conflict as the Europeans expanded, and the concept – that everyone is entitled to a commonly held, non-proprietary resource base for the necessities of life – remains the scene of conflict today.

One result is that a widely-shared, cohesive understanding of the importance of the commons has been long in retreat. North Americans have evolved away from an early tradition of sharing to today’s environment of continually contested values.

The “outer commons” is analogous to the undefined yet vital human and natural systems that comprise globally-shared basics required for maintenance of the “common good.” Today’s “outer commons” now encompasses economic access, civil rights, education, and access to health care, to name some that embrace and reach beyond universal, eternal basics such as food, water, air and shelter.

These conditions are the complex environment surrounding philanthropy’s and government’s efforts to define – let alone uphold – the “common good”. Both negotiate a complex pastiche of good intentions, conflicting values and the fracturing and reorganizing of past coalitions and communities. Even the past civility and pathways to consensus that marked differing points of view are obscured at best.

One aspect that is highly relevant to philanthropy is the privatisation of “public goods,” i.e. resources and services once publicly owned (such as water, the use of public lands, the air waves, hospitals and schools). This is coupled with commercial models that accelerate fast scaling and privilege extensive private wealth building.

While public/private projects have long been a feature of the U.S. economy, these have grown in size, number and scope, upending the balance of public and private interests with highly extractive business models. The failure of the United States failure to move ahead with climate change targets and the abandonment of unwritten rules that guided political consensus and behaviour in past years are additional examples of a violation of our “outer commons”.

It is fair to say that privatisation of the survival-relevant resources in North America is driven by the same “relentlessly expansionist dynamic” that characterised appropriation of the “outer commons” in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century North America. To a large degree, the outer commons

represents the unspoken agreement on values and behaviour that all civilisation requires. In North America, and particularly in the United States, it is being upended yet again, and the long-time roles and pathways to success that represented a certain equilibrium (such as collaboration with government) are now unreliable and even politically contested.

Thus, North American philanthropy is up against it when it comes to the care and feeding of the “common good”! It operates in an environment marked by the following:

- **The erosion of consensus**, the rise of entrepreneur worship, accompanied by a starry-eyed embrace of extremes and impatience with the process or benefits of maintaining an “outer commons” at all.
- As individual philanthropy becomes more important (and institutional philanthropy declines, to some estimates), **a self-actualising bent**, where philanthropy is more likely to serve the special interests of a wealthy individual rather than the shared interests of a larger community.
- **The persistence of the idea that the nonprofit sector and philanthropy can be privatised**, and that social services can be funded privately, via user fees and philanthropy.

Many of North American philanthropy’s current innovations – such as impact investing, “all-in” foundations, “trust-based philanthropy”, “regenerative investing” and more – are efforts to be pragmatic in the current environment, restore the “outer commons” by making private enterprise more universally beneficial, and refitting philanthropic institutions such as foundations for a more muscular role an environment where privatisation of the commons is not universally serving the common good.

---

**Reference:**

**Greer, Allan**, “*Commons and Enclosure in the Colonization of North America*,” *The American Historical Review*, April 2012, Vol. 117, No. 2, pp. 365-386, Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Historical Society.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

---

**Julie Fry** is CEO of Dot to Dot Consulting, a Paris-based consulting firm with a focus on global projects in philanthropy, arts, and international cultural exchanges. She co-teaches a Master's course on *Philanthropy and Equity: New Business Models* at Sciences Po Paris. Previously she was President and CEO of California Humanities, performing arts programme officer at The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the first director of arts grantmaking at the San Diego Foundation.

**Bruce Sievers** has spent most of his professional career practicing, studying or teaching philanthropy. He holds a Ph.D. in political theory from Stanford University, where he taught for 20 years as Visiting Scholar at the university's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. He helped to establish the Center in 2006, after retiring as CEO of the Walter and Elise Haas Foundation in San Francisco. He is a co-founder of the Pursuit of the Common Good initiative.

**Judith Symonds** is a co-founder of the Pursuit of the Common Good initiative and a former Adjunct Faculty Member at Sciences Po Paris, where she created the first course on philanthropy in France. As an advisor in international public affairs, she held positions that include: Senior Advisor to the World Food Programme; representative of the German Marshall Fund in France; President of Ruder Finn Europe; and President of The Future Harvest Foundation.

