

A Journey of 1,000 Miles....Our Steps to AGAG

Right from its inception, CivSource Africa sought to be a learning organization. We were fairly new in the field of philanthropy advising as a stand-alone entity and when we incorporated CivFund, we also felt like we were new in the grant making space.

Thus, as has been our practice, we have reached out to and become members of networks where we could learn, grow, and get to know others in our field. That is what led us to the Africa Grant Makers Affinity Group (AGAG).

I first met the Executive Director of AGAG, Ms Niamani Mutima, in 2018 in Mauritius, at a meeting of the Africa Philanthropy Network (APN). Mr. Maurice Makolo, then head of Ford Foundation East Africa, is the one who introduced me to Niamani. As happens to me in most encounters with new people, I am sure I fumbled my way through explaining what CivSource Africa was about. In 2018, we were not quite eligible to join AGAG, and so I left it at that.

I then reached out to Niamani again in February of 2020. We signed up to attend the AGAG @20 conference that was slated to take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, later that year. At this point, CivFund was up and running and we had 2 active funds at the time - Zishaye Grassroots Fund and Kuonyesha Art Fund. However, 2020 was the year COVID-19 upended the world. The AGAG meeting had to be cancelled. We lost touch.

I picked up the conversation with Niamani yet again, in May of 2022. This is part of the email I sent her, as I sought an appointment with her:

“When we first met, CivSource Africa was young. Our grant making arm - CivFund, was literally taking baby steps. But we have grown and are still growing. I would love to share our story with you but also, would love to sign CivFund up to be a member of AGAG, since we now have almost 3 years of grant making under our belt.

Please let me know if and when we can speak.”

Niamani and I jumped onto a zoom call, and I shared about CivSource Africa and CivFund. She shared what AGAG had been doing during the COVID years and we revived the conversation of becoming members of AGAG.



As an organization working in the area of philanthropy in Africa, as a young organization wanting to grow its knowledge and influence on and of philanthropy in Africa, AGAG remained a critical space for us.

It was thus with great pleasure that our head of CivFund, Lillian Tamale, and I attended the most recent convening of AGAG in New York on 8th and 9th May 2023.

This had been a long time coming for us. We did not give up. We truly wanted to be in the same room as our peers, to learn from them and to grow with them. AGAG has a 23-year history and during that time, it has helped bring together philanthropists who fund in Africa.

Over the 23 years, the globe and certainly Africa, have experienced great shifts. The funding landscape has changed. African philanthropy is now acknowledged as a partner alongside other philanthropies. The people and conversations have also changed and AGAG has been here all along, documenting the practices and necessary changes to enable philanthropy to advance social justice in Africa.

During this AGAG convening, we were able to share our role and work as a philanthropy advisory organization. Lillian also spoke about how CivFund is doing grant making differently, and what that 'different' looks like. She spoke to the CivFund ethos of F.A.R. - being a flexible, accessible and responsive fund, and the lengths we go to support civil society from the grassroots up.

The AGAG convening also provided us with key lessons in climate smart grant making and I left with the question of how we can do this better through CivFund and through our advisory services. We had a featured speaker who addressed us on the topic of 'Shifting the Frame on Equitable Inclusion'. Dr. Honwana, Director of Anti-Racism at the UN Secretariat, shared her understanding of, and the work being done by the UN to address racism in its ranks. She challenged us to think about what that means and looks like in and for philanthropy and how we can be truly committed change agents working towards a more just world.

We appreciate AGAG for being a space to reconnect with old friends while meeting new ones. We left with a clear sense of the work still to be done in order for philanthropy to advance justice on our continent.

As the Kings Collage Budo Motto goes, 'Gakyali Mabaga' (So little done, so much more to do).



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