



Strategic
Philanthropy
The Power
of Impact Giving

This paper summarizes the 'Strategic Philanthropy: The Power of Impact Giving' event from the Thought Leadership Series powered by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation.



The Arab region has a strong tradition of giving with philanthropy deeply ingrained in the social fabric. Significant quantities are donated by family businesses and individuals; nevertheless, much of this giving fall under charity, which is generally short-term, targeting immediate relief or responding to sudden crises and disasters. If effectively utilized and strategically channeled through targeted philanthropic efforts, these resources have the potential to create a substantial impact in tackling issues like reducing poverty, eliminating hunger, and enhancing educational accessibility.

With focus on wider outreach and deeper impact, strategic philanthropy is growing as a key tool in addressing the current challenges through a well-defined purpose, evidence-based methodologies, value-based collaborations, accountability, and long-term commitment.



On May 18th, 2023, the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation (AGF) organized a Thought Leadership Series event on The Power of Impact Giving, in collaboration with American University of Sharjah (AUS) and Capital Club Dubai, to reflect on unlocking the full potential of impact investing and its linkages to education. The fireside chat, the fourth event in the series, took place at the Capital Club Dubai with opening remarks by Sheikh Majid Al Qassimi, Founding Partner at Soma Mater and Government Committee Member at Capital Club Dubai.

During the event, **two philanthropic leaders, H.E. Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, President of American University of Sharjah and H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair, Chairman of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation**, shared their visions of strategic philanthropy and discussed the potential of impact giving, particularly in the context of the UAE.


The event was attended by high-level guests from a diversity of sectors, including government entities, embassies, the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and international donor agencies. It was concluded with closing remarks by Dr. Sonia Ben Jaafar, CEO of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation & Chairperson to the Global Councils on the SDGs.

Drawing from the perspectives shared by the speakers, this paper presents the key takeaways from the event and offers valuable recommendations for aspiring philanthropists.



Approach to Harness the Potential of Strategic Philanthropy



 "When we are talking about young people's lives, future, education and meaningful impact, we need committed partners who believe in this work. At AUS, whether it is for supporting our scholarship fund or online education programs, it goes further to being engaged and committed. That is why I want to mention that His Excellency, Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair is one of our most engaged donors at AUS. As someone who has worked very closely with the AUS team, we look at him as a partner rather than a donor."

H.E. Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi
President, American University of Sharjah

The discussion highlighted the significance of adapting to the changing landscape of philanthropy in the region. In the words of H.E. Sheikha Bodour, "*Philanthropy is where you bring private capital and use it for public good in a simple way.*" This underscores the essence of philanthropy, emphasizing the act of channelling private resources to address social challenges and needs.

The two leaders emphasized that strategic philanthropy holds the key to maximizing its impact, outlining the essential characteristics it should embody to achieve the desired outcomes:



Meaningful Partnerships

Collaboration with like-minded partners is essential for driving meaningful change in philanthropy. Joining forces with partners of similar values and goals can unlock a broader range of perspectives and insights to create innovative solutions for multifaceted challenges.



Data-driven Initiatives

In today's digital era, data assumes a pivotal role in the realm of philanthropy. By conducting meticulous analysis and research, philanthropists can acquire vital insights for identifying patterns, trends, and gaps within current initiatives, thereby enabling the efficient allocation of resources.



Proactive and Long-term Strategy

By understanding the complex dynamics and examining the root causes of societal issues, philanthropists can develop interventions that go beyond emergency relief. This can be accomplished by empowering communities' involvement and ownership of initiatives.



Aligned and Engaged Leadership

Strategic philanthropy recognises that making a meaningful impact requires more than financial resources. H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair underlines the personal contribution of knowledge, time, and effort to ensure funds are well-allocated and result in impact as some of the practices he personally adopts with both AGF and the Refugee Education Fund (REF).



Inclusive and Informed Decision-making

H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair calls on philanthropists to be active stakeholders rather than passive funders through interacting with the beneficiaries and partners. This will promote a deeper understanding of initiatives and foster a more collaborative approach to problem-solving and long-term social progress.

Leveraging Partnerships for Scalable Impact



Under the leadership of H.E. Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, Kalimat Foundation's ['Pledge a Library'](#) initiative seeks to provide libraries, each containing 100 books, to promote the values of Arabic language and culture among under-resourced and forcibly displaced children. To date, the initiative has reached more than 23 countries, distributed 146 libraries, and reached more than 100,000 Arab children around the world. The initiative cultivates and leverages robust partnerships with entities like Majid Al Futtaim and individuals such as Artist Mohamed Al Mansoori to maximise impact and promote literacy among disadvantaged, refugee, and visually impaired children.

Strategic Philanthropy for Impact



"The UAE is full of charitable organisations, and I hope to see these organisations shift gears and work for impact. They have the resources, the donors, and the goodwill; if we can have influence and encourage them to share their stories, ideas, and concepts, I strongly believe that it will make a difference; it will make a very big impact."

H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair
Chairman, the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation
Founder, the Abdul Aziz Refugee Education Fund



In 2018 the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund was launched to support refugees and vulnerable youth to access secondary, vocational, and tertiary levels of education. Since its creation, H.E. Abul Aziz has personally committed over 44 million USD. In 2020, he enabled others to fully dedicate match funding to effective programs increasing the funds by 130% overall. To date, over 62,000 refugees and vulnerable youth in Jordan, and Lebanon, as well as youth from conflict-affected countries who are residing in the UAE have benefited from this good giving. The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund aims to provide hope amidst the disruption by empowering youth with relevant knowledge and skills through offering pathways to education and livelihoods, thus enabling them to positively contribute to the host countries.

Recommendations for Next Generation of Philanthropists

During their conversation, the two leaders recognized the trailblazing visionaries who established the foundations of philanthropy in the UAE, fostering a spirit of generosity and societal accountability. H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair emphatically underscored the profound giving practice inherent in both Islam and the Arab Culture; a practice that was cultivated and elevated as part of the living legacy of the UAE's Founding Father, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

Additionally, they underscored the significance of the forthcoming generation of philanthropists, as they will wield a crucial influence in shaping the future of philanthropy. The two philanthropists shared the following recommendations that could serve as building blocks to navigate the path to sustainable social impact:

- **Leverage Strategic Partnerships:** Philanthropists can cultivate successful partnerships by (1) understanding the collective goals and aligning on those goals and (2) identifying areas of synergy that both partners are passionate about.
- **Use the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a Framework:** The SDGs can effectively serve as a framework to create a shared understanding, enabling philanthropists to guide their efforts, identify gaps, and prioritize underfunded areas that require urgent attention.
- **Take Responsible Risks:** Embracing a risk-taking mindset can result in groundbreaking shifts in philanthropy as it can facilitate exploration of underdeveloped areas, and unmet needs. However, it will require careful evaluation to develop mitigation plans for unanticipated obstacles.
- **Start Early:** Initiating philanthropic endeavors early in life, even with limited resources, can have a significant impact. H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair advised aspiring philanthropists to *"start small scale at your community, at your workplace, or a charity organization where you work for impact, and gradually you will start learning how you can improve and plan better initiatives."*

Call to Action

Both H.E. Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi and H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair agreed that impact investing has helped addressing challenges in the region from education, gender inequalities to empowering youth for better livelihood and sustainable economic growth. They jointly emphasized and called for embracing and adopting the following points:

The Need for Data-driven Philanthropy and increased investment in understanding the region's gaps and challenges. H.E. Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi called for *"increased investment in gathering more data, statistics, and information about the region's challenges, underfunded areas, and areas where philanthropists can have the greatest impact."*

The Power of Partnerships and Collaborations as H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair invited Arab philanthropists to come together and pool their resources and knowledge to unleash the transformative power that results from collaboration. Their cumulative influence creates a powerful platform for *"engaging in collaborative brainstorming, jointly pursuing impactful ideas, and aligning efforts towards common initiatives and goals."*

The Significance of Impact Reporting, which encourages transparency and accountability and allows stakeholders to effectively convey how they implement their goals. By openly exchanging experiences, challenges, and accomplishments, further learning and knowledge sharing become a strength within the philanthropic sector.

