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PHILANTHROPISTS FORUM 2011; Charity should focus on outcomes, not output

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PHILANTHROPY must move from focusing on output - how much is given and how many received, to outcomes - the actual social change that results from that giving, speakers at a roundtable on strategic grant-making said yesterday.

Describing the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation's brand of strategic giving, deputy chairman Chew Gek Khim said it is driven by the goal of giving with maximum impact, 'which we define as giving that has a multiplier effect'. That has involved working with grant recipients to tighten processes or refine plans to 'make the money go further', while playing matchmaker between suitable non-profit groups and philanthropists for greater impact, she said.

'Money is fungible and available, but if you can match that money with brain power and commitment, a lot more can be done,' said fellow panelist Jeff Morgan, executive director of the Global Heritage Fund, which conserves cultural heritage sites in the developing world, using them to generate income and jobs for poor local communities.

In monitoring outcomes however, there is often the difficulty of reconciling donors to the idea that their money will be used to mine data and evaluate impact, one participant from the floor said.

'I don't think we're near that stage yet,' agreed National Kidney Foundation chairman Gerard Ee, adding that there first needs to be a shift in mindset from 'output to outcomes'. A feedback loop, providing donors with information on outcomes even when not expected, could help to earn 'buy-in' for impact evaluation, added Ms Chew.

For Mr Morgan, 'if you've got donors that don't want to fund evaluation, you need to find better donors.'

He spoke of how GHF does not approach the 'high society of San Francisco' but 'deep thinking people who spend time in the developing world' instead, as these are cognisant of the needs and want to be involved in planning and strategy.

Personal involvement and strong methodology is key to strategic giving, he said. 'Instead of just being another donor, you can take more risks but be the galvanising catalyst, put fragmented pieces of that social sector together and see greater growth and sustainability,' Mr Morgan said.

Breaking out of the norm: (from to left to right) Mr Morgan (above left); Ms Chew and Mr Ee all agree on evaluating the impact of donors' gifts

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