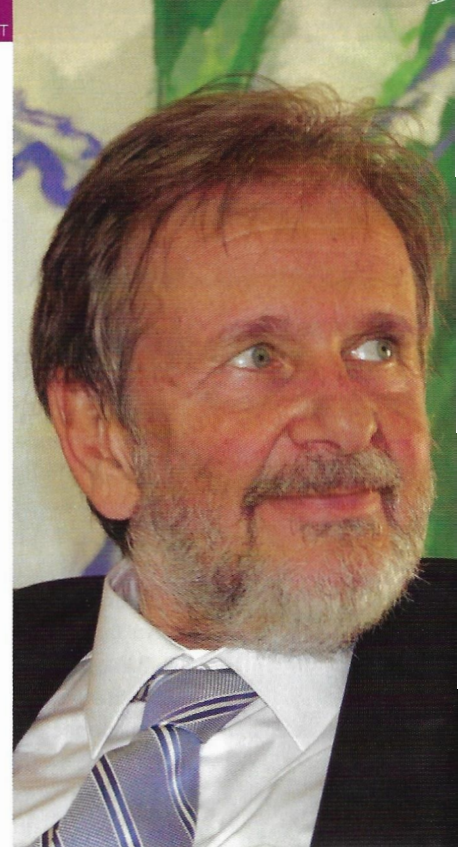


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In 2008, Diego Hidalgo Schnur was awarded the Raymond Georis Prize for his contribution to European philanthropy. He has set up a number of foundations, he is a standard bearer of democracy, he co-founded the newspaper *El País*, he is author of a number of books... 'It's quite difficult to summarize your career in a few words! How would you present yourself?' Noémie Wiroth and Elodie Vialle of Youphil.com asked him.

I got an unexpected inheritance of about \$10 million when I was in my twenties. What could I do with that money? Spend it with Hollywood actresses?

It's true that I have changed direction many times in my life. However, underlying all of my endeavours has been the desire to do good and help people, values I inherited from my parents. In Spain, the word has a rather pejorative connotation, but I suppose you could say that I am a philanthropist. I'm also the shame of the Harvard Business School where I studied: every time I tried to make money I lost it... and every time I made an altruistic investment, I made money! I also hope that I am a good father and grandfather. When you have children, you worry about their future – and the future of the world.

How did you become a philanthropist?

You're a philanthropist when you have a passion... and when you have the means! I got an unexpected inheritance of about \$10 million when I was in my twenties. What could I do with that money? Spend it with Hollywood actresses or buy luxury boats or houses? Invest it as I had learnt at the Harvard Business School and hope to be a rich man when I'm in my eighties? None of that appealed to me and I decided to do something socially responsible to improve the world.

I had seen tremendous poverty around the world while working for the World Bank, where I was the division chief responsible for 45 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Even if there was poverty in Brazil or India, I felt that my money would be better used in Africa and I created FRIDA, a project to which I gave almost my whole inheritance. FRIDA was designed to help the smallest and poorest African

countries by promoting profitable labour-intensive export-oriented activities and helping them to find markets. This was a project aiming to improve the world at the grassroots level, from the bottom upwards...

Thirty years after FRIDA, you set up FRIDE...

As you said, I was a co-founder of *El País*. When the group that published the newspaper went public, I became wealthy again... I thought then that rather than trying to change the world from bottom upwards, I wanted to do it from top down. I figured that changing the system had more potential impact. Poverty was still a major global issue, but I identified others I could fight against: a reversing trend in the consolidation of democracy, threats to peace and security from war and conflicts, terrorism, environmental problems and climate change, pandemics and threats to global health... I decided to focus on the '3 Ds' – democracy, development and dialogue – and created the think-tank FRIDE.

At that time, I had some rather powerful friends: the King of Spain, with whom I studied law; President Clinton; Mikhail Gorbachev, who asked me to be on the board of his foundation... Together with them and the Harvard Business School network, I figured that I could do something to change the system. The idea behind FRIDE is to bring together top experts to find solutions. This is how we came to organize the Summit on Democratic Transition and Consolidation in 2001, which resulted in the creation of the Club of Madrid. In 2005, we organized another

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conference on terrorism after the War on Terror was launched by President Bush, surprisingly without having consulted experts on each of the root causes of terrorism. Both conferences were resounding successes and resulted in the adoption of profound changes in policy.

And yet your father made you promise not to go into politics!

It's true; my father was a centre-left deputy before becoming minister of defence in 1934. After being the darling of the political world, in 1936 both the republicans and the Franco supporters wanted rid of him. He was traumatized by this experience and forbade me to go into politics! I understood that his ban only concerned Spanish politics, and not international politics. Actually, I have never been involved in the national political landscape in Spain...

Why come to this symposium? What message do you want to get across?

As well as sharing my experience of being a philanthropist, I also want to offer advice and pass on bits of advice I have received from various personalities. The King of Spain once told me that it is no good identifying problems if you don't have solutions to offer. The founder of the magazine *Jeune Afrique*, Bechir Ben Yahmed, told me that in order to get big results you have to think big and risk being a bit of a megalomaniac. These are just some examples of the advice in my 'ten commandments' that I share with young people interested in engaging in philanthropy and that I use to guide my own decisions when selecting projects I want to support.

Can you explain a little bit about these lessons?

There is first a list of questions to ask yourself: is the problem you are seeking to remedy a priority and who is going to benefit from it? Do you have to think small or can you think big? What are the possibilities that the project can be replicated? What is your methodology? Who is going to help you? Have you studied your environment?

I also want to say: follow your passion – it's your comparative advantage over any other person or institution dealing with the issue – and give yourself the education and background you need to optimize how you deal with it. From time to time, check if someone is following you! If no one is, maybe your project isn't the right one. Do not 'fill space in the photo': the more space you leave for others, the more the chances of getting support from people who do want to appear in the media. Avoid wishful thinking. Evaluate the impact before the project but make

careful plans for implementation and follow up. For example, FRIDE and the action tanks subsequently created at its initiative (Club of Madrid, Toledo International Centre for Peace) have been useful and successful. I was deeply involved in their operation but I appointed somebody with experience, objectivity and good judgement to represent me as donor, to encourage the institutions to diversify their sources of funds so as to become self-sufficient, and to decide how and when to gradually separate from me.

The theme of today's symposium has been the crisis. How have your various organizations got through this year?

The world has changed a lot in the past ten years and many things that we thought were impossible are now possible. We can also view the crisis from the point of view that it allows the possibilities of new scenarios. It has also made foundations – including my own – less bureaucratic and more efficient as a result. We have assessed salaries, learnt to make the most of our resources, and re-examined our priorities to focus on the most urgent needs. In order to be able to continue down this road, my aim now is to boost synergies between my various organizations to make them even more efficient.

What are your next battles?

My aim is to continue to help make the world a better place. My family is a powerful driver behind my desire to stay involved. In the next few years, I would like to focus on two projects I feel very strongly about. The first one is EFE, Education For Employment Foundation, which helps improve the futures of youth in the Middle East and North Africa. The second is a rural development project in Los Santos de Maimona, the village where my father was born. Thanks to a number of initiatives that range from a school for cooks to a biofuel factory, we have managed to revive this poverty-stricken village. The project can be replicated anywhere, especially in developing countries, and it's a model I'd like to develop.

When we listen to you, we have the feeling that philanthropy is a family affair...

In the 19th century, my grandmother opened a spa to help people with rheumatism. My parents passed on the desire to get involved with people and help them. I am really proud of my daughter, who is director of DARA, an agency that evaluates humanitarian action, in which I'm also involved; and of my son, who is supporting the development of car pooling in Spain. All my children have inherited this desire to help others. It's true: for me, philanthropy is really a family affair. ■