

CAN FACEBOOK'S BILLIONS STOP DISEASE?

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHAN-ZUCKERBERG BIOHUB

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INTRODUCTION

- The Chan-Zuckerberg initiative (CZI) was formed by Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan after they pledged to donate \$45B of their wealth to charity.
- The first leg of this initiative is the Biohub project, a research center in Silicon Valley that aims to "cure, prevent, or manage all diseases before the end of the century by accelerating basic science research".
- Philanthrocapitalism is defined as applying capitalist style objectives and criteria to directing philanthropic enterprises.
- **Research goal: Examine the popular discourse on the benefits of philanthrocapitalism, and inferring from these findings, perform a prospective analysis of the impacts of the Biohub.**

JUSTIFYING THE BIOHUB

State funded science

- Inefficient
- Underfunded
- Cannot take risks
- Influenced by politics
- Strict criteria and no room for innovation

Private funded science

- Business-like efficiency
- More funds and resources
- Unbiased
- Apolitical
- Open space for scientific creativity to thrive

A CLOSER LOOK

What does it take to cure all diseases?

CZI: More drug and technology development.

Fact: Public health measures, sociopolitical reforms, higher wages and more health services.

What is the role of the for-profit industry?

Fact: Biohub owns the IP rights on all patentable discoveries.

Fact: CZI's larger goal to 'connect the world' aligns perfectly with Facebook', and thus will serve to further Facebook's success.

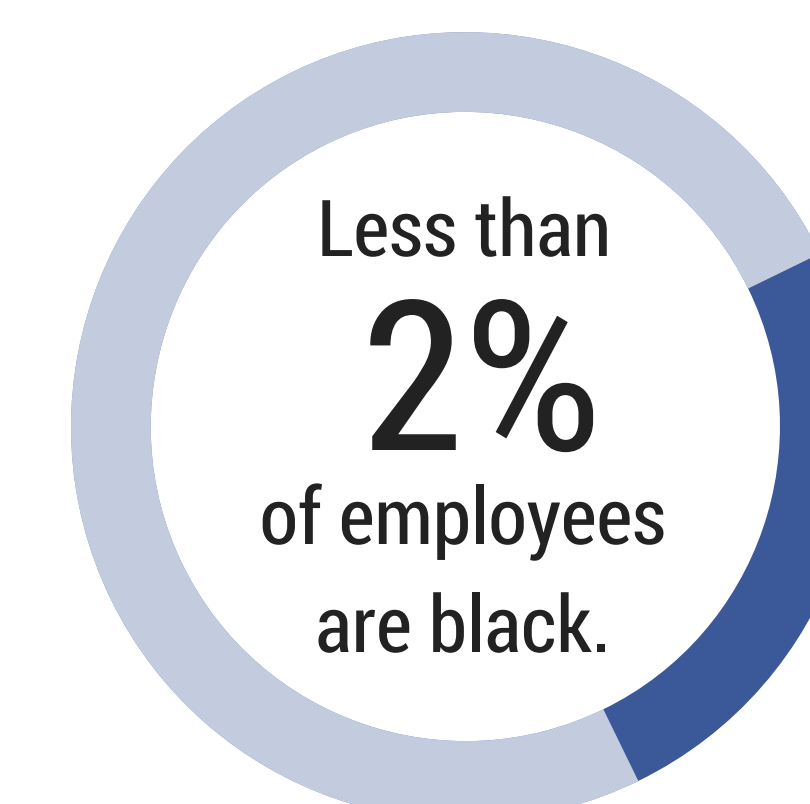
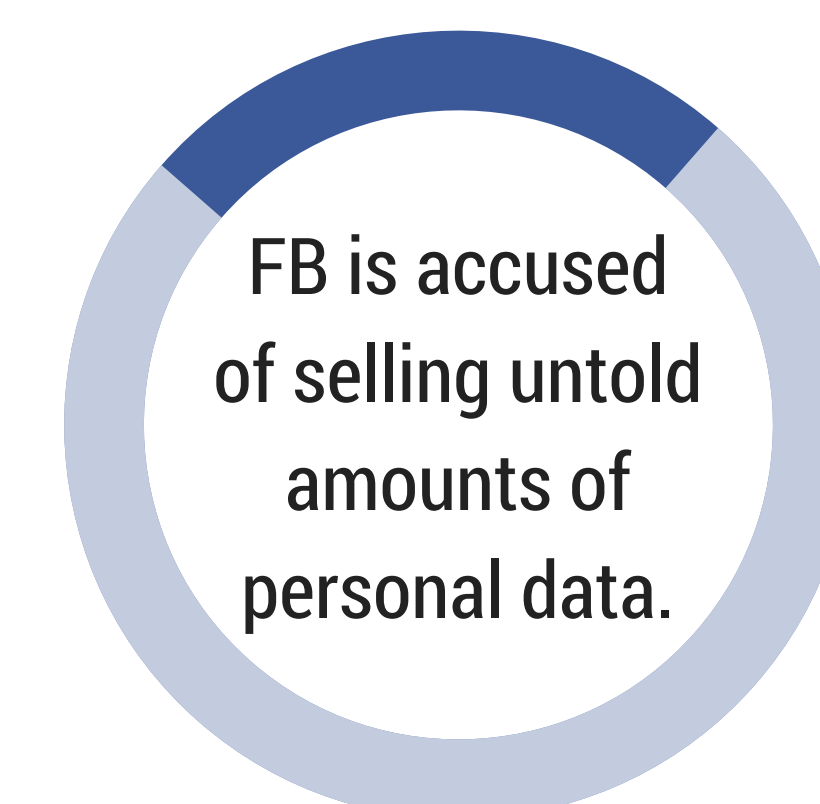
Who is the CZI accountable to?

CZI: The Limited Liability Company (LLC) model enables the creative and flexible use of capital over time.

Fact: LLC model exempts the CZI from rules for non-profits. The tax benefits for this donation may also be enormous.

How were these funds even accumulated?

Facebook reproduces the very inequalities it aims to fix with the CZI.



Are philanthrocapitalist initiatives really apolitical?

CZI: Apolitical, business-like operations allow us to get things done.

Fact: Furthers neoliberal ideologies through political or corporate lobbying, while simultaneously undermining state support for government funded research.

Consequences

- Science continues to be shaped more by the preferences of individuals with large amounts of money, and less by public need.
- Return of the aristocratic principle: the rich allocate for the poor.
- Furthering of the white-saviour industrial complex and imperialism.

FOR THE CRITICS

The most common criticism of this commentary may be that it paints the CZI as being created with malicious motives. However, even if we assume it was created with selfless intent, many points in this analysis still stand (ex. undermining state support for research).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

- The following are measures the CZI can take if they truly wish to create real social change and promote health equity.

- Change the Biohub's reductionist approach to tackling disease
- Revert the LLC model to a democratically governed non-profit, or simply donate money to already existing government programs.
- Wield your influence to tackle real global health problems, like wealth disparity, environmental degradation, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

- There is more to the CZI Biohub project than meets the eye.
- The fundamental principles of philanthropy and democracy are utterly incompatible with present-day capitalism, making the very word philanthrocapitalism an oxymoron.

