

**SNV Guest column:
An Idea Whose Time Has Come**

*By Kristi Mansfield**

“When we give in the world what we want the most, we heal the broken part inside each of us.” Eve Ensler, creator of The Vagina Monologues

Australia is currently re-shaping her philanthropic voice. The global rise of the “new golden age” in philanthropy has reached us, illustrated by a new style of donor who is socially conscious, engaged and entrepreneurial. Our new donors are joining together with the non profit sector in partnership to grow an infrastructure for social change. Many of these new donors are women or are strongly influenced by women.

Even though the philanthropic movement is growing in Australia, recent statistics still show Australians give five times less than the average person in the US, and three times less than those in the UK and Canada. In 2006, over one third of our high earners (\$1+ million) did not claim a tax deduction for any charitable giving.

Despite this, our involvement in social investment has steadily increased, with over 600 new foundations established since 2001 (containing more than \$1 billion in assets), recent ground breaking large multi-million dollar investments from individuals around the country, and the emergence of philanthropy as a profession.

In Australia, we’re more accustomed to a traditionally conservative and uninvolved “charitable cheque-writing” approach to giving but now women are leading the way towards an embracing, thoughtful, engaged and planned approach to giving.

Today’s global movement of women’s philanthropy started with early pioneers who cut a pathway for today’s remarkable changes and opportunities.

In the 1950s, when the United States government, medical institutions and the pharmaceutical industry ignored contraceptive research, funding for the development of the Pill came from a very unlikely source - a single benefactor. Katharine McCormick provided almost every single dollar necessary to develop the oral contraceptive.

Today, the movement has gathered significant momentum. For the first time in history, women have the power and means to donate their own money or influence their families and partners on where, how much and why money should be invested in social issues that bring about change.

An inspirational example of this is the global community of women who have formed the [Women Moving Millions](#) campaign. Their goal is to raise \$150 million for women and girls funds around the world. After 12 months, \$105 million has been reached, and **three anonymous Australian women have given \$1 million each** to Australian women’s funds as part of the campaign. In February 2009, Helen La Kelly Hunt founder of Women Moving Millions will visit Australia to spark major giving from women to woman’s trusts that fund women and girls.

Women Moving Millions is asking women in communities - and their donors - to be bold. The question being asked is: *are you contemplating your first million dollar gift?*

In Melbourne, a group of women spearheaded by businesswoman Eve Mahlab has formed the Women Donors Network which aims to build better lives for men, women, children, families and communities by channelling a greater proportion of philanthropic funds to or through women and girls. The Network will launch in Sydney in October at a major gathering of emerging women donors and established philanthropists. The energy around this group and the potential is palpable.

In local communities around Australia, women are beginning to join forces to make a greater impact with their philanthropic dollars. The concept of Giving Circles and Impact Groups are well established in the United States but are yet to gather momentum in Australia, although the signs show that these forms of organised giving are imminent.

It is an idea whose time has come.

Applying a Gender Lens to Giving

A great deal of work is being done by the Women Donors Network and Greenstone Group to help educate women donors on how to apply a gender lens to social change, where women (and men) with financial resources and influence, give to women and girls. We know that when women and girls prosper, communities prosper. Women funding women is a way of shifting economic power into the hands of women, and in the hands of women lies an opportunity for enormous change. Philanthropy helps us bring this change into being.

However, there is a gender difference to giving. With less than 10% of philanthropic funds going directly to the aid of women and girls around the world, it is time to embrace a change. As women take an active and intelligent role as social investors and come into their power as philanthropists, they are enabling enormous change. This creates a new feeling that women are reshaping the values of global philanthropy.

Learning to Give

There are many resources available to guide women of all means to a more effective involvement in philanthropy. With the Women Donors Network, Greenstone Group is running workshops on applying a gender lens to philanthropy later in the year. Register your interest, learn more and get involved at www.socialinvestmentguide.com from July 19 and read my blog at www.greenstone.com.au.

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