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Where is the money for women's rights... and how can we tap it?

Individual Giving and Small Private Foundations

PROFILE

There is considerable potential for women's rights organizations and movements to build resources from individuals. Small donations from individuals or membership fees contribute to greater sustainability and independence, and help to leverage funding from institutional donors.

Warren Buffet's 31-billion-dollar gift to Bill Gates' work in 2006 (the largest single transaction to charity in history) and initiatives such as Oprah's school in South Africa make headlines, but individual donors of all economic status are on the rise in all parts of the world. With more wealth in the North and a deeper culture of philanthropy, these resources are more accessible to groups based in the Global North, but opportunities are increasing in the South. Individual donations are growing in emerging economies as well as in rich countries.

	Top 15 Countries in terms of individual giving ¹	Giving (% of GDP ²)
1	United States	1.85%
2	Israel	1.34%
3	Canada	1.17%
4	Argentina	1.09%
5	Spain (religious groups not included)	0.87%
6	Ireland	0.85%
7	United Kingdom	0.84%
8	Uganda	0.65%
9	Hungary	0.63%
10	Tanzania	0.61%
11	Kenya	0.57%
12	Portugal	0.53%
13	Australia	0.51%
14	The Netherlands	0.49%
15	South Africa	0.47%

In 2005, individual giving was mentioned by 28% of AWID survey respondents³ as a source of revenue (up from 26% in 2000). Individual giving accounted for 10% of combined revenue (similar to 2000). Global philanthropy and private giving from the US amounts to at least USD 71 billion per year – over 3.5 times more than US government official development assistance.⁴ International development NGOs (INGOs) in the US mobilise 71% of their revenue (almost USD 16 billion in 2003) from private donations.

Building a base of wealthy or small multiple individual donors, however, is no easy task, especially in parts of the world where cultures of philanthropy are still nascent. While strategies to tap these sources do exist, donors are more often moved to address an emergency or someone's direct personal needs than to support movement building or the long-term agenda of women's rights.

1 Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. This overview covers cash and other property gifts and excludes government development assistance and other forms of government subsidies. See <http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp/>

2 Gross Domestic Product represents the total value of goods and services produced by a nation. Percentage includes donations to religious worship groups.

3 AWID surveyed almost 1,000 women's organizations worldwide; reviewed the literature; interviewed donors; and drew insights and recommendations from 300 women's rights leaders and funding allies from 94 countries at the AWID and Semillas Money and Movements meeting in Querétaro, Mexico, at the end of 2006.

4 According to the Hudson Institute's 2006 Index of Global Philanthropy.

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Large gifts

Twenty-one Americans gave at least USD 100 million to charitable causes in 2006, a new record in philanthropic giving. In the coming years, literally trillions of dollars will be transferred between generations, as the aging population in Europe and North America leaves estates behind. In this wealth transfer, more women than ever before will inherit.

In India, the newly rich, such as the CEOs behind Infosys, Wipro and Dr Reddy, are joining other major philanthropists such as the Tata, Birla and Bajas families. Similarly, in Latin America and Asia, a new generation of wealthy people is increasingly inclined to consider giving. Mohamed Ibrahim, a Sudan-born telecommunications billionaire, recently established an annual USD 5-million prize for African leaders who demonstrate good governance.

Despite the opportunities in this sector, individual donors of wealth can be challenging to contact and cultivate, while individual fundraising campaigns require big investments of time and money.

Multiple small donations

More and more individuals are giving to social justice and human rights work locally and globally, through mail-in requests, pledges, online donations, membership fees or fundraising events. In addition to cash donations, businesses provide valuable in-kind contributions for smaller organizations (computers, financial and legal expertise, meeting venues or free media space).

Membership fees still represent a very small percentage of the total revenue of women's organizations, but have the possibility to grow through creative efforts. After all, human rights groups (such as Amnesty International) and environmental groups (such as Greenpeace) bring in millions of dollars through fees from members of whom the majority are women. An initiative called Women Moving Millions: Women's Funds Making History, for example, is an enterprise to raise USD 1 million and more for women and girls.⁵

The vast majority of individual donations go to charities or religious groups (62% of total donations in the US). A portion of this does go to progressive faith-based work, (via the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the American Friends Service Committee and United Methodist Women, for example), but some supports anti-feminist agendas. Many faith-based or charitable financial flows are directed at service delivery, emergency relief or direct personal needs, rather than long-term change, empowerment and movement building for women's rights.

INGOs are much better positioned to tap revenues from small donations, so here too they compete directly with women's rights organizations for resources. For example, CARE

International, one of the largest INGOs in the world, is currently targeting women donors in the US, with great success.

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Family foundations

During the industrial revolution, a handful of individuals acquired enormous amounts of wealth and set up the first family foundations, many of them still in existence as endowed foundations, operated by professional staff independent from the founding family. Many others have been around for less than a decade: in 2004, new family foundations in the US had assets of more than USD 63.87 billion and grant allocations of more than USD 4.17 billion.

A family or individual may also use the services of a philanthropic organization or advisor. Donor advisors play an increasingly important role as brokers between groups who need the funds and the wealthy who have money to give.

Family foundations and donor-advised funds pose challenges of access for women's rights organizations. How can a group in Kenya, for example, approach wealthy donors in the US or Europe if they won't accept proposals, only use advisors or keep themselves anonymous? Undoubtedly, this money is much more easily accessible for groups based in the Global North than those based in the Global South and East. This raises questions of responsibility for groups in the Global North to make these connections, and to democratize access to wealthy individuals.

Diaspora philanthropy

Women constitute half of the estimated 190 million international migrants worldwide and are responsible for the largest amount of remittances (at least USD 232 billion in 2005).⁶ For many countries such as Sri Lanka, the Philippines or Bangladesh, this is among the main sources of economic development. For example, Bangladeshi women working in Middle Eastern countries sent home 72% of total remittances in their country, of which 52% were earmarked for families' daily needs, health care and education. Similarly, many Mexican migrants in the US organize themselves into home-town associations to raise money for their communities in Mexico.

Mama Cash's major report "She Gives Back: Migrant women's philanthropic practices from the diaspora" found educated refugee women to be very active in diasporic philanthropy. However, most women migrants are financially and emotionally stretched. They should not be burdened with responsibility for supporting women's rights agendas back home, but recognized and supported as important contributors.

⁵ Started by Helen LaKelly Hunt (philanthropist, academic and founder of The Sister Fund)
⁶ According to The UNFPA's State of the World Population Report 2006.