

03.08

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

Corporate Philanthropy

PROFILE

Corporations remain the most controversial source of funds, with a reputation as "the sleaziest corner of philanthropy".¹ Only 2% of AWID survey respondents² mentioned the private sector as a source of revenue (up from 1% in 2000), and funding from business or corporations accounts for less than 1% of combined revenue of respondents.

SUSPICIONS

Is it possible to reconcile corporate interests alongside women's rights? Women's organizations are wary because:

- some businesses are involved in exploitative labour practices or environmentally unsound production, and seek partnerships with NGOs in an effort to clean up their reputation
- a growing number of corporations look to increase their market share and bottom line by associating themselves with 'good' causes, recognising the value this holds for consumers
- most programs of corporate giving are still add-ons, not linked to broader corporate social accountability.
- "corporate foundations in practice are often treated as a sort of slush fund into which the chief executive can dip to help a pet cause, enhance his status in the community or even cement a business relationship with a donation to a cause close to a business partner's heart."³
- the largest corporate foundations – from Wal-Mart and Pfizer to Shell and Exxon – have tainted reputations for their employment, community and environmental practices and yet want to give to women's causes.

OPPORTUNITIES

Where is the money in this globalizing world? Quite simply, it is concentrated in corporations. An ever-increasing number of women's rights activists ask, "How can we engage with corporations and business and still maintain our legitimacy?" Of course, corporations, like women's groups, are not homogeneous. Also, nationally or locally-owned enterprises are potential sources of financial resources and in-kind contributions.

With more corporations and businesses entering the field of philanthropy, many women's organizations adopt ethical guidelines and refuse funds from businesses that produce tobacco or weapons, use child labour or exploit workers, or whose consumerist and charity-oriented model fits nicely into a neo-liberal approach. Engagement with the private sector creates opportunities to push for more ethical behaviour and respect for labour and environmental standards. For example, the Calvert Women's Principles, demanding substantive corporate accountability in relation to gender equality, have been adopted by Dell and Starbucks.

1 The Economist, February 25th, 2006, A survey of wealth and philanthropy, pg 7
2 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.

3 The Economist, op cit.

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In-kind contributions

Computers, paper and photocopiers; pro-bono financial and legal expertise; meeting venues, and free media space from local and national businesses all equal valuable support to smaller organizations and could be tapped more effectively. Businesses or stores keep collection boxes next to cash registers to collect change for local NGOs. An IT company might donate software, computers, or someone to design a website or database program. Restaurants or hotels will provide meals or meeting spaces for NGO meetings and events. National companies may sponsor local events to ensure their product gets visibility amongst a female audience. Airtime on national television networks mean important visibility and voice.

Grants

A growing number of global corporations make large cash grants. Enlightened companies see the interests of both shareholders and employees in pursuing a triple bottom-line, often part of their overall core corporate strategy. While some corporations (such as Nestle) would make untenable partners for many women's groups, others might provoke a mixed response. The Playboy Foundation, for example, associated with the girly magazine empire, actually supports organizations working for abortion rights in the US. A number of corporate donors that provide considerable levels of support to women's issues worldwide include:

- The Levi Strauss Foundation supports many women's rights organizations to alleviate poverty among women and youth by building assets, preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and supporting workers' rights through the labour movement.
- The Nike Foundation, a relatively new corporate grant-maker, is willing to discuss the criticism of workers' rights in Nike factories in developing countries. The Nike Foundation made nearly USD 5 million in grants in 2005, its first year of operations, has a particular focus on adolescent girls, and wants to fund initiatives for sustainable long-term change.
- The Avon Foundation raised and awarded USD 500 million worldwide in 2006, giving extensively to women's issues including domestic violence and breast cancer (primarily in the US).
- In 2005, Cisco Systems gave USD 65 million in cash and in-kind donations for women and girls in science, technology and computers, reflecting a vested interest in avoiding a predicted shortage

of skilled workers.

- The Japan-based Toyota Foundation funds individuals, not organizations, for research (including gender-specific studies), conferences or public seminars, publications, etc., with grant sizes up to USD 150,000.
- The Alcoa Foundation has awarded over USD 26 million in grants around the world in 215 communities and focuses on the environment, health education, people with disabilities and violence against women.
- JP Morgan Chase, a financial institution with USD 1.4 trillion in assets, gives money in the 51 countries where it works for issues including affordable housing, quality jobs and business opportunities. (However, many of its investments would not pass an ethical screen.)

Social entrepreneurship

Numerous companies are integrating social change, ethics and sustainability directly into their business model.

- A co-operative of women cocoa farmers in Ghana owns shares in the company that makes Divine, the first fair-trade chocolate bar aimed at the UK mass market.
- Anita Roddick's Body Shop has pumped millions into violence against women while creating products through environmental, cruelty-free, and often fairly-traded means.
- Mohammed Yunus' Grameen Bank has provided over USD 4 billion in micro-finance to three million mostly Bangladeshi women since it began. Because of the extremely high repayment rates, the Bank became totally self-financing as of ten years ago.

These models – social enterprises, donations, co-branding initiatives – may invest financial, technical and human resources in women's rights and can contribute to strengthening women's movements. However, most corporations take a mainstream or conservative approach to the advancement of women. While one arm of a corporation like Nike might be doing good through their support for adolescent girls, the other arms of the business come under fire from human rights groups for their labour practices. On balance, funding opportunities do exist for women's rights organizations through corporations and private business, but collaboration is a complicated business.