

'The Third Way' Column

Investing in women's wisdom

Catherine Ng

Feminist philanthropy sounds threatening. It is not; and both women and men should care about it. We should all practise the philosophy because it is about social changes that shape a better future for the next generation.

People often associate donation with charity, and philanthropic acts with lending a helping hand to only those in crisis. The HER (Her Empowering Resources) Fund is one of many women's funds in the world which shape a different culture of giving.

Feminist philanthropy asks donors to use their money not just for purchasing goods and services. Instead, it is also a tool for social change. Donors' money is an investment in women's wisdom and capability to make decisions for themselves, for their families and the communities they live in.

Women's ideas are wise and have a human touch because they are in tune with the everyday livelihood issues. They care about preserving the environment for the next generation.

Women can make decisions about their lives and broader social aspects. But for far too long, they have not had the opportunities to be heard and to exercise their human rights. Decision makers in the public services and politics are dominated by men and male perspectives. Feminist philanthropy advocates supporting human rights for women and encouraging them to be full citizens. Feminist philanthropists contribute to building a society where everyone enjoys esteem, free thoughts and self determination. Women's funds are needed because mainstream fund-raisers have not paid enough attention to this category. One fund has reportedly said it has 'done' gender and has moved on. Many women's groups are underfunded. Many building projects for women get no funds. Many governments are now talking about "gender mainstreaming". Yet, support for women remains low on their social and public

policies lists. Most low-income earners are women, but programmes that target this group are few and far between. Big projects continue to fail to consider women's status. For example, more lives could have been saved if women had the power and status to negotiate over sex. But there is little funding for public education programmes.

In feminist philanthropy, donors and recipients are equal partners. Women's funds believe that women know best their needs and aspirations. Grant recipients set the agendas for social change and donors actively bring these agendas to fruition.

Women's funds do more than raise money and make grants, though. Feminist philanthropy harnesses people power, creating a network committed to working towards a more equal world. Donating to a women's fund, makes you become a part of this civic movement.

Money, irrespective of the amount, gives donors decision-making power in the social changes they want. Donors feel powerful and in control when they are agents of positive change. Everyone, not just the rich, can own and contribute to the social changes they envision. Supporters, thus, have no gender, age, race and social status boundaries. They are building a peaceful, open, fair and just world where women and men are free from gender role expectations, and have more options. That is why everyone should support feminist philanthropy.

If you share our core ideology and vision, please take note of two important dates and act. December 10 is International Human Rights Day and March 8 is International Women's Day. To do something meaningful, save a dollar a day between these two dates and donate the total on March 8 to a women's fund. If commitment empowers you, donate annually.

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www.herfund.org