

US Initiative Calls for Million-Dollar Gifts to Women's Foundations

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Researchers in the United States estimate women will control 60 percent of the country's wealth by 2010. Now two leading female philanthropists are trying to inspire women to use their growing wealth for social change. VOA's Alex Villarreal reports from Washington.

The initiative, called Women Moving Millions, is the brainchild of two sisters, Helen LaKelly Hunt and Swanee Hunt, who served as the U.S. Ambassador to Austria in the mid-1990s.

The Hunt sisters are urging women to make donations of \$1 million or more to address a range of women's issues, including women's rights, violence against women and women's access to healthcare and education.

The Hunts, who came into wealth through an oil inheritance, have pledged \$10 million of their own money to the initiative, which they are leading in partnership with the Women's Funding Network, made up of 125 women's foundations from around the globe.

Helen LaKelly Hunt said she hopes Women Moving Millions will inspire female donors to put their money where it is really needed.

"In the philanthropic flow, only seven percent of the funding goes to women and girls and yet women are shouldering a disproportionate amount of the burden of poverty," she said. "Women and their children, obviously, make up the largest amount of those in poverty, and there has not been a response to that. People are instead funding the cultural centers of their cities, and it makes no sense."

What does make sense, says President and CEO of the Women's Funding Network, Chris Grumm, is recognizing women worldwide as solution-builders and supporting them to bring about change.

"It became very clear to me that women were critical if we wanted to solve problems at the local level, that we wanted to be sustainably solved, that it was a lasting effect, that we really needed to bring women to the table, and they were a critical part of the leadership that needed to be in place in order to make the kind of change that I think will bring the kind of health that villages and countries around the world need," she said.

Women Moving Millions has already raised \$70 million. The goal is to increase that amount to \$150 million by April 2009, which would boost the combined earnings of all women's funds past the \$1 billion mark.

Kavita Ramdas is President and CEO of The Global Fund for Women, a non-profit foundation belonging to the Women's Funding Network.

Ramdas says the Women Moving Millions initiative has the potential for broad impact, not only at the community level but at the international level as well.

"It is very inspiring for women in the rest of the world at a time when the United States reputation is not always the best in most parts of the world," she explained. "An initiative like this that is focused on investing in women and the families that they lead really gives a very different, sends a very different message internationally, sends a message that talks about the willingness of Americans to truly put their own resources behind one of the most critical issues facing the world today, and that is gender inequality."

Women Moving Millions and its \$1 million requirement set the bar high, but supporters hope the message reaches beyond the wealthy to inspire people from all walks of life to invest in women.

The Women's Funding Network says more than 80 percent of grants made by women's funds go to women and girls with low or no income.

Foundations included in this particular initiative range from local, to domestic, to global. Donors can choose which organizations they want their money to support.

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