

Women in Philanthropy #1: Gender-Lens Investing

This three-part series on Women in Philanthropy is brought to you by Taos Community Foundation.

“Gender lens investing” is an increasingly popular concept in the philanthropy world, based on mounting evidence that investments in women and by women have a profound impact on social change and result in enormous returns. This is not just a lesson from the developing world; it’s one that we here in Taos can learn, leverage, and benefit from. Women are critical assets to community building, family health, and civil society, and it’s time we started investing in that promise.

So what exactly does “gender lens investing” mean? At its most basic, it means taking into account how gender norms affect women and girls, as well as men and boys, when assessing funding opportunities. For example, when considering investing in an organization, gender-lens investors ask what percentage of senior management or owners at the organization are women. They place emphasize on making investments that specifically target women. And they work to ensure that their own boards and staffs have at least an equal ratio of women to men, if not more women.

It’s easy, in 2015, to think that we’ve evolved beyond needing to place gender equity at the forefront of our business and investment concerns. But put on that gender lens and you’ll see a stark contrast between how men and women are still treated in workplaces, capital markets, and by companies selling products and services. There are startlingly few vehicles offering financial or entrepreneurial assistance to women – but they’re growing, and growing fast, with great results for the world.

Applying the gender lens doesn’t mean you can’t still have other impact goals, too. As gender issues typically affect tangential social problems, you can use a gender lens on top of your other funding focuses to achieve even greater impacts on problems like poverty, education, environmental degradation, and human rights.

And gender lens doesn’t mean you immediately have to only think about or work with women; men play a key role in gender lens investing, especially younger men who are being raised to be as invested in diverse workplaces as their female counterparts. Gender lens investing is, ultimately, about gender equality, and you need both men and women to achieve that.

With all this in mind, the Taos Community Foundation is asking our community to come together in 2015 through the Women in Philanthropy initiative. This three-part series will introduce the Initiative, explain why it matters, and teach you how to get involved. 2015 is the

year we'll make a real difference in the lives of women and children in our community – which will make a real difference in the lives of everyone in our community.

For more information please call Elizabeth Crittenden Palacios, 575 737 9300.