



Philanthropy

The Giving Chain

Joan Indiana Rigdon and Heidi Brown 11.16.09, 7:05 PM ET

This story begins with a woman and a mirror. It's 2006, and the woman, Sandra Lec Jacinto, is 27 years old. She has walked 45 minutes through the dusty, potholed streets of San Lucas Tolimán, a village on the southern shores of Guatemala's famed Lake Atitlán, to attend her first meeting of a women's empowerment circle. Jacinto is asked to look into the mirror and report what she sees. "I don't see anything. Just me," she says. In other words: just a woman.

A year later, after Jacinto and her fellow women have discussed business skills, domestic violence and women's rights, Jacinto looks into the mirror again. This time she brings new eyes to the task, a new recognition of her strengths and aspirations. "Now I see someone with a future. I see a woman with hope. I see a woman who can make a difference for herself and her family," she tells a visitor.

The visitor is Helene Gayle, chief executive of the international humanitarian organization CARE. Gayle, who took over CARE in 2006, has refocused the mission of the 64-year-old nonprofit. Once renowned for its eponymous aid packages and disaster assistance, CARE now focuses most of its work on fighting world poverty by improving the lives of women and girls around the globe.

Philanthropists call this the "Girl Effect." The idea is simple: If you can feed a girl, keep her healthy and get her through school without being attacked or sold--or raped or cajoled into pregnancy--she can raise her family's standard of living. And by helping younger and older women with aid such as microfinance loans, field workers have observed that women are more apt than men to put the money they earn to good use. Instead of wasting money on liquor or gambling, women start small businesses that enable them to feed their children and employ others.

It's not a new philosophy. Philanthropists have long noted that the old formula of pushing boatloads of food and money at the poorest nations brought few sustainable improvements. But it wasn't until recently, when women started gaining prominence in the nonprofit, political and corporate sectors, that the model for combating poverty and social injustice shifted. Today a growing cadre of female leaders, including CARE's Gayle, Ernst & Young's Beth Brooke and the State Department's Melanne Verveer are working to make sure that women around the world have the tools they need to gain equality.



Helene Gayle, CARE

CARE operates out of a squat concrete building in downtown Atlanta. Gayle, 54, has a modest office on the fifth floor. Hanging on her office door is a cartoon of a female boxer that admonishes visitors to "punch beyond your weight." The boxer's gloves are marked "knowledge" and "advocacy" to blacken the eyes of her foe, "poverty."

Inside, the walls are adorned with photographs of Gayle with Nelson Mandela and a photo of lilies signed by actor Richard Gere. Her spartan-for-a-chief-executive digs reflect her schedule and temperament. She spends less than half her time in the office and the rest on the road. If she isn't visiting one of the nearly 70 countries CARE operates in, you might find her in Washington, D.C., where she serves as the new chair of President Obama's advisory council on HIV/AIDS or in cities around the U.S. talking to corporate donors such as Wal-Mart, Cargill and General Mills. During one week, Gayle delivered speeches at the University of North Carolina and

Duke University, visited Tanzania--where she met with its president and led members of Congress on a three-day tour of the country's health clinics, hospitals and CARE maternal health projects--and then returned to Atlanta for a series of meetings with her staff.

Gayle is remarkable not only for her stamina but also for the ease with which she navigates between vastly different social worlds. She has a Rolodex full of names including Melinda Gates, Bono and model Christy Turlington Burns, the face of maternal health for CARE. Gayle can don a head scarf or a sari with the same aplomb as a designer dress. On at least one occasion, she changed into a ball gown in a bathroom on a day she shuttled between New York and D.C.

She's equally comfortable sitting on the ground talking to a group of impoverished Indian women as she is attending a gala event with heads of state and other dignitaries. "She has a great sense of humor and loves to have fun, even though she's a very serious worker," says former Surgeon General David Satcher, Gayle's former boss at the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Her indomitable spirit was forged in a childhood filled with love but rocked by adversity. The third of five children in an African-American family, Gayle grew up in a predominately white suburb in Buffalo, N.Y. Her mother had a master's degree in social work and her father owned a successful barber- and beauty-supply store. The young Gayles were surrounded by role models; their family friends included doctors, lawyers and other professionals.

When Gayle was in the seventh grade she was hit by a car while riding her bicycle and spent three months in traction. The following year, her parents separated and her mother took custody of the kids. The family moved from city to city as Gayle's mother struggled with mental illness. She was eventually hospitalized in a psychiatric facility.

Gayle attended Barnard College in New York and then earned an M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. "I always wanted to be a part of bringing about positive social change, and I felt that medicine was a tangible way to give back and make a positive impact on society," she says.

She set out to be a pediatrician, but her course changed dramatically when she heard famed epidemiologist D.A. Henderson speak at her younger brother's college graduation ceremony. Henderson had played a key role in eradicating smallpox, a disease that has killed 500 million people. "He talked about how it wasn't just taking care of sick patients that defeated the disease. It was the collective action of governments and organizations and individuals coming together that did it," she recalls. "It was an 'aha' moment for me."

Gayle went on to get a master's in public health from Johns Hopkins and then entered a training program in epidemiology with the CDC. She rose through the ranks and became the first director of the National Center for HIV, STD & TB Prevention. Fighting AIDS became one of her primary crusades. "It uncovered many of the fault lines in our society because it disproportionately impacted people both in this country and around the world who were poor, who were marginalized, who were discriminated against and who lacked control in their lives," she says.

Not only was Gayle a passionate director, but she was also savvy about workplace politics. At the CDC, "She was a consensus builder," says Satcher, who now heads the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at the Morehouse School of Medicine. "We had eight different AIDS programs, and it was very hard to get anyone to give up anything. I had Helene lead the effort to unite them. I knew she would be able to do it. It was a remarkable feat."

She spent 20 years at the CDC and left in 2001 to take a high-ranking job at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She spent five years there, working her way up to managing a \$1.5 billion grant portfolio aimed at combating HIV, reproductive diseases and tuberculosis.

Four years ago Gayle was offered the top job at CARE. The opportunity to move beyond epidemiology and tackle global poverty was an alluring challenge. "Her role [at CARE] represents something broader than health. It represents her commitment to the world and to social justice," says mentor James W. Curran, an epidemiologist and dean of Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health.

Just one year into the job Gayle shocked the philanthropic community by pulling out of U.S. "monetization" programs that ship subsidized, American-grown food to support CARE's programs. Gayle says that as a matter of policy, large-scale food aid often hurts farmers' ability to develop local agriculture. "It was undermining a lot of the work we were trying to do," she says simply. That move cost CARE \$45 million a year.

Today Gayle is commandeering CARE's \$700 million budget and 8,200-strong staff to work on the problem of global poverty. To that end she feels that one of the best ways to attack this confounding issue is by educating women and

helping them become economically self-sufficient. "If you're holding back 50% of the population, how can we, the human species, make the kind of progress we need?" she asks. "Not only is it the right thing to do, but it's the smart thing to do."

One of the women-related initiatives CARE launched is a campaign to improve maternal health by making sure women get prenatal care and have access to doctors and midwives. According to 2005 statistics, half a million women die each year from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. The nonprofit hopes to reduce maternal mortality for 30 million women in 10 of the poorest countries over the next decade. Another CARE program strives to give girls equal access to education by building schools, training teachers and developing programs to make school more appealing to girls. According to 2007 UNICEF research, of the 101 million children worldwide who don't attend school, more than half are girls.

But in order to achieve significant and sustainable progress, Gayle acknowledges that you can't focus on women only. "It doesn't help to change the way women think about themselves if you're sending them back into a society that isn't ready to accept the changed women." On the ground, CARE workers sponsor street-theater productions about domestic violence and bring men together to discuss whether beating their wives helps them achieve their goals.

In one community in Bangladesh, recalls Gayle, the men "started talking to each other about whether or not this produced the desired results. And they started to realize that violence doesn't produce positive results in the relationship or the home, and in fact it often produces the opposite result." After concluding that beatings were detrimental, the men set up a surveillance system to report suspected wife beaters to local authorities. "Within a period of six months this community that had a high rate of gender-based violence had men working with men in an incredibly powerful way to stop that violence," Gayle says.

She saw similar improvements in Afghanistan, where, thanks to CARE's Village Savings and Loan program, women learned to pool their own funds and start businesses. "I asked them if earning money causes problems in their relationships, but the women said, 'No, it helps us to be seen as something of value because we can send our kids to school and buy household necessities. Our husbands see us with new respect,'" she recalls.

Beth Brooke, Ernst & Young

The campaign to improve the lives of women is also catching on with corporations. In late 2008 the Nike Foundation and the Warren Buffett-backed NoVo Foundation announced that they would jointly invest \$100 million in programs for empowering adolescent girls. Goldman Sachs has jumped in, too, and last year launched 10,000 Women. The program brings together U.S. business schools like Wharton and Stanford and pairs them with local universities to give women in the developing world tuition-free basic business training. Goldman has committed to spending \$100 million on the effort over the next five years. And at accounting giant Ernst & Young, Global Vice Chair Beth Brooke is spearheading the firm's efforts to support female entrepreneurs.

Like Gayle, Brooke faced a debilitating physical condition when she was a young girl. She was diagnosed with a degenerative hip disease, and doctors warned her that she might never walk again. Although she wasn't an athlete at the time, she went into surgery determined not only to walk but to also become the best athlete anyone had ever seen. She excelled in sports and went on to play college basketball at Purdue University in Indiana. Being an athlete, says Brooke, taught her discipline and focus, and showed her how to work as part of a team.



She joined Ernst & Young as an auditor in its Indianapolis office in 1981, undaunted by the fact that she was one of the first women there. Over the next 10 years, she rose to the rank of partner and was tapped to run E&Y's national insurance tax practice in Washington, D.C. In 1993 Brooke was approached by the Clinton administration to lead a team tasked with Superfund reform. She and her team crafted new legislation to assign liability for companies that created toxic waste and re-energized cleanup efforts.

Brooke's time in government taught her that the public and private sectors don't understand each other. "The public sector comes to a consensus even if everyone is not happy, while the private sector is trying to win. I saw endless opportunities for collaboration."

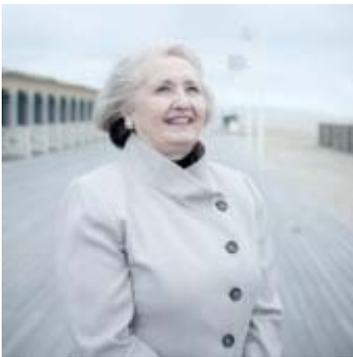
When Brooke returned to E&Y, her transformational experience on Capitol Hill laid the foundation for her new, policy-centered career at her old job. In 2004 she created the Corporate Responsibility Fellows Program, which teams staffers

with microentrepreneurs in Central and South America. Brooke was proud of the program and was a bit taken aback when her best friend told her that she wasn't doing enough to help women. She thought she'd been doing her part. After all, she mentored other women, advised them to speak up at work and encouraged them to move ahead in her organization.

She had also spent years volunteering for TechnoServe, a nonprofit that aids entrepreneurs around the world. "I was defensive," she recalls, "but my friend said, 'You're not using the platform you have to really help.'" Her friend helped her realize that her work gave her regular access to a higher level of influence: government leaders--140 of them, actually, since E&Y has business in that many countries.

After their discussion, Brooke began raising the issue of women's empowerment with local U.S. embassy staff and government leaders she encountered in her travels. She also pressed E&Y's regional CEOs to form women's networking groups in their countries so the company's local female executives would have more opportunity to advance. And this year Brooke, 50, helped her firm launch Winning Women, a program that aims to give female entrepreneurs around the world access to professional networks and to E&Y executives in their countries.

Brooke is proud of E&Y's efforts and is thrilled to see how other leaders are adopting the "Girl Effect" idea. "It feels like a movement," she says. "We are people who know passionately that this is critical and necessary. It's not a day job. It's our passion."



Melanne Verveer, U.S. State Department

Hillary Clinton has redefined the role of Secretary of State by advocating for women's rights worldwide. She visited 11 African countries in late summer, discussing women's rights at each stop. As chair of the United Nations Security Council, Clinton is also pushing the United Nations to name a special envoy dedicated to protecting women and children from sexual violence during wartime.

At Clinton's side: Melanne Verveer, a presidential appointee and America's first-ever ambassador at large for global women's issues. Verveer served as her chief of staff in the Clinton White House. Today her job is to make sure that State Department initiatives address women's economic concerns.

Verveer, 65, has worked under two Administrations and traveled all over the world. But her success can be measured in the changed lives of women like Rebecca Lolosoli from Kenya. Lolosoli spent years suffering beatings from her husband but finally ignored her village's cultural taboos and left him to live on her own. Along the way she received training and grants from Vital Voices, a nonprofit Verveer founded, and from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to start a small beading business. Other domestic violence victims followed her. The upshot: Once a victim, this woman has now founded her own village.

Verveer didn't begin her career aiming to help women. She started out in politics, working her way up the D.C. political food chain in various nonprofits and in legislative roles in Congress. In the mid-1990s she went to work as chief of staff for First Lady Hillary Clinton, who she'd met through Bill Clinton, one of her classmates at Georgetown University. In that role Verveer found herself leading programs to help bring together folks from various spheres of influence. In 1999 she organized an unprecedented meeting on AIDS at the White House. Among the disparate groups represented were the Global AIDS Action Network, Bristol-Myers Squibb, the Gates Foundation, the World Bank and the Treasury Department. Verveer recalls Hillary Clinton saying at the meeting: "Imagine what we could accomplish if, over the next few years, we could bring to this table every business and government leader, foundation and NGO."

In 2000, Verveer, with some funding from the private sector, founded Vital Voices. The nonprofit--which sprang from an initiative Clinton started when she was First Lady, along with former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright--works to end violence against women, enables women leaders to become agents of change and helps train female entrepreneurs to expand their businesses so they can better support their families. Now back in the State Department, Verveer spends a lot of her time testifying to the benefits that will come from empowering girls and women.

Meanwhile, Vital Voices is continuing to make strides, one woman at a time. At last count, 30 other former domestic violence victims have joined Rebecca Lolosoli's village. They live in mud huts and produce beadwork so exquisite that it was featured in a recent Diane von Furstenberg show at New York's Fashion Week. The group has also started a small tourism business by building campsites along a nearby river, complete with solar-powered electricity and toilets. And, Vital Voices says, they're turning a profit.

New Face In the Mirror

In Guatemala, Jacinto, the woman who once said she didn't see anything when she looked at herself in the mirror, is now president of her CARE empowerment circle and runs her own business, selling handicrafts and clothes, much like the other newly minted women entrepreneurs in her group. And there have been gains for women in other parts of the world as well. Maternal mortality is down by half in rural Ayacucho, Peru, thanks to a CARE program that provided equipment, training, transportation and translators for indigenous pregnant women there. Seeing that success, the Peruvian government has replicated aspects of the program countrywide.

Rwanda has emerged as the first government on the planet with a majority of women lawmakers--the result of women taking a more active role in politics following the genocide that included hundreds of thousands of the country's men in 1994.

Meanwhile, many groups are seeding the world with female entrepreneurs. CARE organized more than 75,000 Village Savings and Loan groups from Afghanistan to Sri Lanka, with a total of more than 1.6 million members. Each member (70% are women) contributes as little as 10 cents to the pot each week, and the combined funds are then lent to fellow members to start businesses. Between 1991 and 2008 these Village Savings and Loans from 21 countries in sub-Saharan Africa lent \$84 million, at an average of \$25 per loan.

There is, of course, the danger that too many groups with too many good intentions will trip over themselves as they work on empowering the same women at the same time. Just last fall, for example, more than 300 groups promised to work together to form a new gender equality entity under the United Nations. Hillary Clinton acknowledges the challenge. "When we take on global challenges like hunger and poverty, we often work in separate silos, duplicating some efforts while others fall through the gaps," she said in closing comments at the recent Clinton Global Initiative conference, which made women's empowerment a focus.

Still, a lot of interest makes for a lot of momentum. "The ball is rolling now," says Gayle, in large part because women in developing nations are "grasping the power they have and [understand] what they can do, and they're going to stand up." She adds, "I think we have a momentum that just can't be turned back."

Joan Indiana Rigdon writes the weekly column, "Family Matters," for ForbesWoman.com, and also writes for Washington Lawyer and other publications.

Heidi Brown is a freelance journalist and former staff writer for ForbesWoman.