

Pat Mitchell Remarks at the Omega Institute Women and Power Conference:
Opening Night Dinner with faculty/moderators/special guests:
September 11-13, 2009

My top ten list of assets women have to save the world NOW:

#1: Us

Women in this room and around the world with wisdom and experience. We are the builders/architects/designers/ laborers/teachers/students/mentors and mentees/journalists/storytellers/activists and actors...all of us doing the work, on the ground and at the top levels across every sector of society. We are the change agents creating change and it's time to scale up our work with collective strategies and new coalitions.

#2: Next generation of Us:

That's what this conference is about...building bridges to the next generation and with them, we can surely build the bridge to the future. The next generation of feminists are an asset we need to know and nurture but as is clear at this conference, they are already a big asset...and ready to move forward.

#3 Men

In every generation there are men who believe in the power of women; who understand the value of investing and supporting women and girls and who know that they can't hold up their half of the sky without fully empowered women holding up theirs.

By the way, I moved this asset up to # 3 after reading the headlines from recent research that Maria Shriver did for her project, "A Woman's Nation". Preliminary findings indicate a significant shift among American men...especially married men...who in much larger numbers than previously documented, recognize the economic assets of women fully and fairly employed and compensated.

More than ¾ of men surveyed supported their wives working. And that's a good thing because women make up more than half the workforce in the US.

Maria's research indicated, however, that there is still a way to go towards equitable sharing of family responsibilities and still some differences in the measurements for best marriages.

Men who had the most sex in their marriage reported being the happiest. No surprise there and probably no surprise that the happiest married women were those women married to men who did their fair share of family and home duties. Enlightened men can bring better balance at home and to the world.

#4 Numbers:

Finally, the numbers are working for us: more than half the population; control more than half of all consumer spending and 85% of all high ticket purchases like houses and cars and control more than 40% of the wealth in the US! Those statistics are largely composed of what we call 'older women'. ..the demographic that media and advertisers ignore. How can they do that? We allow them to. We continue to buy their products when they pander and degrade us, when they have less than equitable gender representation among their senior executives and on their corporate boards. We can turn that inequitable situation around tomorrow by mobilizing the assets of numbers.

5: Education:

In every country, the value of investing in girl's education is recognized as a big fact in moving forward to a very different future, more so in some countries than others to be sure, but as the facts on the ground prove the value of educated girls, more girls get to go to school and stay in school. That alone will change everything as they will marry later, have fewer children, contribute to their family's health and financial sustainability and have positive impact on their communities, country and world. Educating girls is the best investment any family, country or global community can make in the future.

#6 More women leaders, leading companies and countries.

This is not so much a number's asset...although that helps...but what makes this a bigger asset with today's elected women and most of today's corporate CEO's is that so many of these women are providing more and more evidence of the unique assets of women as leaders, whether they lead a big company or a country. When women lead from our unique values, when we fully engage our unique female brains (we have a bigger frontal lobe, according to new scientific research and that is the part of the brain that controls empathy, judgment, wisdom.

Important attributes for a leader. And women with power to lead are putting policies in place that encourage sustainability, and budgets that divert some of the 1 trillion dollars being spent on weapons (more than half by the US) into programs that support negotiation and peace rather than conflict, that guarantee economic equity, education and healthcare.

#7 Money.

Women have more money in our hands than any women in history and American women more any other women anywhere because we live in a country where you can earn more, invest more, and inherit more. Women are moving millions of their money into good causes every year, and when they do, it makes a difference. It could make an even bigger difference if we set bold and audacious goals and put our money where our goals are and agreed on one or two big goals or outcomes. We could make it happen. No question. Leveraging millions in our hands is a big change waiting to happen.

#8 NGO's

There are so many worthy non profit organizations whose purpose is to improve the lives of women and to realize full potential in every country. This good work goes on because we have invested millions in support of the work of hundreds of these organizations, big and small and now we need to evaluate our investments, take some measurements of outcomes and perhaps redirect or better coordinate the funds we donate and push for greater cooperation and coordination of the work on the ground and in the policy arenas for greater impact.

#9 Media and Technology.

Here is real power! And instead of allowing women to continue to be victimized by media's stereotypes and underrepresented in all the global news, information, and stories...less than 12% of global media is about women and the percentage hasn't changed in spite of the fact that there are hundreds more channels, and thousands of other new media means of distributing information. Women are also underrepresented among the ranks of people who lead media and technology companies, and yet women are the single largest constituency of viewers for TV, listeners for news and information radio, and fast becoming the largest consumers of internet content and users of mobile phone. We should be the most well represented group in any media. But we are not and it's time to assess this asset in a new way altogether.

There are examples of media and technology's influence around the world that indicate what an asset this is just waiting for us to claim it and use it.

Mobile phones distributed to illiterate women in rural Afghanistan reduced maternal deaths by giving women life saving instructions on their phone.

Much the same thing happened in India where messages in local languages come on when the phone is turned on and there are phones in the most remote villages and provinces everywhere, most often the hands of a woman or women.

Television programs are credited with reducing Hiv/Aids infections in India and South Africa. A call-in radio show in Capetown is promoting condom use more effectively than any public service or government distribution campaign. Citizen journalists with flip cameras documenting brothels in Cambodia have freed sex slaves and then the video was used to convict the traffickers.

Technology gives us the tools to distribute information in ways not possible before and with well produced media content, we could create a woman's network of news and information, one that shares our stories, that provides lifesaving information in the most remote area that connects us to one another in a new community that belongs to us. This can be done, and this weekend, we are going to hear from young women who are creating new online portals where a real woman's voice is being heard and women's stories being told and shared. All of these efforts can be scaled now in a way that wasn't possible before. If we build it, they will find it and use it and we will change the world.

So what's # 10?

!10...Faith and Hope.

Yes, I have faith that women will connect with our assets and together, with the same kind of faith, hope and passions that we launched the abolition movement in the last century and freed the slaves, we will start a new movement and free ourselves and our sisters all over the world from all forms of enslavement.

Hope is a form of planning...so let's start with the hope that we will begin the planning this weekend to fully engage all our assets, individually and collectively, across generations and gender, to stop the rising waters of planet degradation, to end sexual violence, to eliminate the endemic poverty and the conditions that perpetuate it, to push for reforms that guarantee education for girls, economic opportunities for women of very culture and class, and to demand full human rights and full emancipation for all women so that we can aspire to leadership positions across all sectors and as leaders, change the nature of power with our unique woman power that brings all these assets and more together for a more sustainable, peaceful and prosperous future.

Thank you.