

# KNOWLEDGECONNECT

Connecting you to **social impact thinking** worldwide



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Edition 6: AUTUMN 10

## FROM THE EDITOR

2010 has already witnessed social impact fallout on a large scale – from the failure of the UN Copenhagen Conference on climate change to the plight of those suffering from a devastating earthquake in Haiti. There is now a renewed call to engage stakeholders differently when it comes to the seemingly intractable challenges of environmental degradation and social inequity facing our planet. Last year, Knowledge Connect featured articles on measuring social impact. In this issue, we focus on stakeholder engagement. Article summaries highlight some of the values embedded in social impact work and how that may affect the way we engage.

The first two pieces cry out for policymakers to re-orient their response to natural disasters. Writer George Packer pleads for longer-term recovery rather than band-aid solutions for Haiti, while Alyssa Battistoni makes a case for prevention over relief. This requires voters to lobby for state funds to invest in, maintain, or fix vulnerable infrastructure before another disaster strikes.

Next, we find articles that showcase the engagement of new philanthropic stakeholders. *The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* features research showing the degree of women's empowerment in a society relates to the strength of its nonprofit sector. We also hear about the challenges of working at the grassroots. Sheela Patel, an advocate for slum dwellers in India, claims philanthropy has contracted a "log-frame virus" which cripples the type of latitude required to shake-up inequitable social systems.

Sandy Blackburn-Wright tells us how *'The Big Conversation'* asks Australians throughout the country to reflect on their values as a way to kick-start more inclusive discussions about the nation's future.

This issue's book review features the story of a 14 year-old boy in Malawi whose ingenuity captures international attention. In *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, William Kamkwamba tells his story of constructing a windmill from junkyard parts to power his family's need for light and crop irrigation. William is a powerful example of how talent exists across our globe – even if opportunity does not.

Links are provided to the full articles so that you can investigate those that interest you. You are invited to suggest ideas for future issues at:

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**Barbara J. Merz**  
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## 1. SUFFERING

by George Packer, *The New Yorker*, January 25, 2010.

When news of the earthquake that killed more than 200,000 Haitians hit the wires in mid January, humanitarian experts knew the final devastation toll would be grim. The extent of the damage of a natural disaster is always compounded by the weakness of existing infrastructure – both physical and political.

For years international development observers have reported that Haitians are the poorest people of the Western Hemisphere and their urban infrastructure is woefully inadequate. On that front, Haiti was a disaster waiting to happen. The scale of the damage is staggering.

Haiti's foundations crumbled under the pressures of the earthquake. The epicenter hit the capital where at least a third of Haitians live, flattening both the presidential palace and UN headquarters, and killing many political and religious leaders whose offices would have been instrumental in orchestrating a domestic response.

In *'Suffering'*, Packer argues that the burden of rescue work in Haiti is not just to provide blankets, food, and temporary shelter to victims of the quake. He writes that Haitian political culture has a "long history of insularity, corruption, and violence, which partly explains why Port-au-Prince lies in ruins." In order to heal from a devastation of this magnitude, the country and those that donate resources to its aid must channel those monies to the more ambitious and tedious project of working toward a functioning Haitian state.

Just as America's Hurricane Katrina revealed the poverty in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, the Haitian earthquake has drawn our attention to a neglected place. The natural catastrophe compounded the everyday suffering at work long before the disaster struck.

One positive sign that world leaders are listening was the G7's announcement to officially waive Haiti's debt obligations. Whether efforts such as this will help rebuild Haiti in the longer term remains to be seen.

For the full article and comments see: [www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2010/01/25/100125taco\\_talk\\_packer](http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2010/01/25/100125taco_talk_packer)

## 2. AN OUNCE OF ADVOCACY

by Alyssa Battistoni, *The Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2010.

Though it is painful to read an 'I told you so' article published in the face of mass suffering, Battistoni's piece was prepared in advance of the recent earthquake. Her article, in fact, presages many harsh truths rediscovered amidst early recovery efforts in Haiti. Namely, had there been more effort put into disaster preparedness, building code enforcement, or warning systems, the extent of the devastation would not have been nearly so terrifying.

*'An Ounce of Advocacy'* focuses on disaster prevention:

"When people think about dealing with disasters, they usually think about volunteers distributing hot meals and blankets, churches erecting cots in makeshift shelters, and helicopters airlifting people out of flooded areas. The word disaster seldom brings to mind legislators establishing building codes, land use policies, and drainage systems. In other words, people think about responding to disasters, rather than mitigating or even preventing their worst effects."

Disaster delineates roles between nonprofit, business, and government action. According to Battistoni, nonprofit and business efforts should supplement government roles, not supplant them. She urges nonprofit and business leaders to employ advocacy to push their political representatives to invest in disaster preparedness. Neither nonprofits nor business have as much leeway as states to help prepare and protect citizens in advance of a natural disaster, she says, but they can influence their government to focus on prevention.

Governments have the authority to limit land development in vulnerable areas and update and enforce building codes. States have tax dollars for building and maintaining levees and drainage systems and hiring engineers to improve existing infrastructure to serve communities as demographics grow and shift. Government can fund researchers to test materials and construction techniques to make them as earthquake-resistant as the latest technologies reasonably allow.

State officials could even hire experts in the aftermath of Australian disasters like the Black Saturday bushfires to assess how to improve response and better inform citizens about future risks.

One hopes that the funding of disaster preparedness gains greater respectability before more natural disasters remind us of this important 'I told you so' piece.

To find out more read: [www.ssireview.org/articles/](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/)

## 3. GENDER AND THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

by Nuno S. Themudo, *The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 39; 2009.

Is there a relationship between women's empowerment and the efficacy of social impact work? This trailblazing article by Nuno Themudo says yes. His research shows that the more empowered a country's women are, the more vibrant its nonprofit sector is.

Themudo compares data from forty countries to study the relationship between women's empowerment, voluntary action, and the social impact sector. The data presents a strong and positive relationship between all three. In lay terms: high numbers of women employed in social impact work indicates a thriving sector where more people are employed, retained, and supported by larger numbers of volunteers.

Themudo maps the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Empowerment Measure against the percentage of the population employed in nonprofits for countries from Pakistan to Norway. He finds that the more empowered women are in a society, the stronger the nonprofit sector. What is not demonstrated by the data is causality. The research cannot pinpoint whether empowered women in society leads to a vital nonprofit sector or whether a strong nonprofit sector provides opportunities for greater recognition and empowerment of women in society.

Themudo finds that the nonprofit sector is not a "waste basket" for women who could not make it in other sectors. Instead, the more empowered women are, the more likely they are to work in the nonprofit sector.

To view the full article and check where Australia stands comparatively, see: [nvs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/38/4/663](http://nvs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/38/4/663)

## 4. STRENGTH THROUGH FLEXIBILITY

by Kim Jonker, *The Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2010.

This case study follows the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) as it seeks to change the culture of the classroom across a continent with several thousand distinct ethnic groups and cultural norms.

It's well known that educating girls is one of the most effective development interventions to lift whole communities out of poverty. In the early 1990s only half of Africa's school age girls were enrolled in school. In 1992 the Ministers of Education from five African nations got together to tackle the problem and FAWE was born. Over 17 years FAWE has facilitated schooling to over 12 million girls across 35 African countries.

FAWE operates across countries and cultures by maintaining enormous flexibility in its approach. An example of this is the recruitment of over 70 government ministers to help FAWE's campaign to get girls in school. The group then negotiated Memorandums of Understanding with 17 separate governments to agree to its focus on girls' education. These MOUs proved critical because as a small nonprofit FAWE could not monitor compliance across such vast geographies.

Additionally, FAWE sought to unleash local solutions to make classroom more welcoming to girls. Some barriers to girls remaining in school are consistent across countries – such as not having separate toilets for girls and boys – whereas others, like forced marriages or genital cutting, only arise in some contexts. FAWE has addressed both types of obstacles through its flexible/local structure.

On the downside, this case study seems to gloss over cultural divides between funders and fundees. International funders can fixate on efficiency and reporting requirements, while grassroots leaders may prioritise effectiveness and consistency. FAWE has had cause to push back on funders at least once. It returned grant money that would have stretched it away from its core mission.

According to this case, flexibility must be counterbalanced by focus. With too much flex nonprofits could get lost in the flux.

To read more about these and other lessons refer to: [www.ssireview.org/articles/](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/)

## 5. STRATEGY TOOLS FOR A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

by Michael G. Jacobides, *Harvard Business Review*; January-February 2010.

Engaging, or perhaps re-engaging, employees in strategy discussions is the focus of a recent piece in the *Harvard Business Review*. If you've ever sat through a tiresome PowerPoint loaded with graphs and spreadsheets meant to simulate strategic direction, you may identify with its main point: the way we discuss strategy needs to change.

The author asserts that we live in an environment of incessant change. Maps are for a static world; they are outdated for engaging others in developing and communicating strategy.

This article promotes narrative as a possible solution. Narratives are more potent than quantitative analysis because they allow employees to focus not just on the change but also on the causes of change. Plots, subplots and characters help companies develop their strategy and refine it both within and outside of the firm.

When losing the plot, a company needs to rewrite the play-script. For example, in the mid-1990's advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi reinvented its approach by partnering with their clients to create so-called 'lovemarks' or brands that command "loyalty beyond reason." This approach allowed them to get more automatic renewals from clients who wouldn't consider opening their account to outside bidders.

Pharmaceutical companies are rewriting their scripts, too. Novartis and AstraZeneca are slowly weaning themselves from patents. They are cementing their relationships with health care providers in a bid to learn more about patients, which enables them to be on the same playing field as competitors offering cheaper drugs.

To develop your company's play-script, start by setting the scene where your company operates. Identify the other characters, roles, motivations and the relationships among the actors. These steps will help to predict how the current narrative could play out.

Next, rewrite your role. Consider alliances that may help you transform your part into a central character. Finally, take steps to ensure that the new play-script is flexible enough to evolve with time.

To be certain that your company can actually implement this new play-script, the author of this piece issues an important caveat. Like all strategy discussions – no matter what the

medium – the play-script will only be as valuable as the ability of the company's employees to understand and act upon it.

You can order the full article at: [www.hbr.org](http://www.hbr.org)

## 6. WHAT WOMEN THINK

by Paula Curtis, *Fundraising and Philanthropy*; December 2009 / January 2010.

Paula Curtis's contribution to *Fundraising and Philanthropy* points out that women are increasingly important donors to the social impact sector. Curtis, who is President and CEO of Opportunity International of Canada, notes a number of important lessons from research on women and giving:

1. Women control household decisions pertaining to charitable giving and make 80% of the overall spending decisions
2. Single women are 37% more likely to be charitable donors than single men
3. Prime motivations for giving include engaging family and teaching children the importance of giving back, along with a strong need to make the connection with those whose lives are impacted by their gift
4. Relationship is essential
5. Their giving is in response to stories of transformed lives
6. They do not respond to emotional pleas or sad photos

Curtis encourages grant-seeking organisations to make room for women to be agents for change. She suggests that organisations ensure that women sense they belong at all levels. She also encourages nonprofits to offer opportunities for women philanthropists to be part of the community and engage in serious capacities such as serving on the Board.

Spotlighting women in their role as a positive new force for philanthropy, Women Moving Millions recently visited Australia. They shared their story of how they have raised over \$180M through personal commitments of \$1M or more by individual women.

It'll no doubt be worth watching how fundraisers will tap into this powerful philanthropic segment.

See: [www.fia.org.au](http://www.fia.org.au)



## 7. THE BIG CONVERSATION

a status report by **Sandy Blackburn-Wright, Emerging Leaders for Social Change; 2010.**

The Big Conversation – an initiative of the Emerging Leaders for Social Change – was established in response to a void in the 2009 discussions surrounding the Global Financial Crisis. Leaders were debating the efficacy of the stimulus package, regulatory reform and other measures seemingly without reference to the values that had led us to the situation in the first place. Many believe that questioning current underlying values and discussing how we would like to shape our society is an exercise worth undertaking.

The Big Conversation commissioned the first national values survey in Australia through the Barrett Values Centre. The Values Centre has been applying the Barrett tools for many years in companies all over the world and in the last few years has been looking at values at a country level. The US completed a Values Survey just as Obama was elected in order to benchmark the values at that time. Iceland conducted the survey just prior to its financial collapse in the Global Financial Crisis, with the results predicting the imminent implosion.

The Australian arm of the survey is now complete with fascinating results. We now have a national snapshot across gender, geographic (including rural versus urban), ethnic, age and workplace lines. Of particular interest are the workplace results that compared an individual's personal values, their workplace's current and desired values, and the nation's current and desired societal values. It has emerged that there is a much smaller gap between the current and the desired workplace values, as compared to the gap between the current and the desired societal values. So those who completed the survey felt there was more meaning and values alignment for them in the workplace than in Australian society. Our hypothesis is that workplaces have put much more effort into creating good places to work than our country has put into making this a great place to live.

There is a high level of 'entropy' – which describes the values that draw energy from people and leave them feeling disillusioned. Entropy has been used as an indicator of the desire for social change, changes in government, or even economic collapse in other country values assessments, so Australia's high levels are cause for concern.

Economists predict that we are only two or three years into a five-year Global Financial Crisis. Though it may feel in Australia that we are coming out of it, the

economists believe we are only in the middle of the cycle globally, so there is still time for Australia to have the values debate. We aren't back to "business as usual."

The Big Conversation will make a summary of the results available, along with a debriefing guide, to organisations who would like to include a values discussion in their next staff event, community meeting, or conference.

To get in touch, go to: [www.bigconversation.org.au](http://www.bigconversation.org.au)

## 8. THE WRONG RISKS

by **Sheela Patel, The Stanford Social Innovation Review; Winter 2010.**

Railing against the culture of measurement, Sheela Patel takes professional philanthropists to task for the "log-frame virus" which she describes as "an infection that drives funders to insist upon seeing the logical framework or business plan of an intervention, from inputs, to outputs, to outcomes."

Patel has worked for grassroots organisations in India for over three decades and is the founding director of the Society for the Promotion of Area Research Centers (SPARC) and the chair of Shack/Slum Dwellers International. She argues that funders have begun elevating their needs for accountability above the needs of the people on the ground. With personal experiences backing her claims, Patel digs into the pressurised landscape dividing funders and fundees. She accuses international funders of losing perspective:

"By paying so much attention to managing their own risks, philanthropists are no longer attending to the marginalized people who risk so much to make change happen..."

With their new strategies and new staff, foundations today are increasingly treating organizations like ours not as innovators, but as contractors who are hired to deliver their visions. We feel that our space – the development and evolution of community-driven strategies – is completely closing down."

This article may be a healthy conversation-starter for those wishing to engage in an honest dialogue about social impact measurement. Rather than thoughtlessly embracing a framework, funders and fundees can seek to better understand the costs and benefits of the culture of measurement.

To read Patel's piece in full, see: [www.ssireview.org/articles/](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/)

## 9. BOOK REVIEW: *THE BOY WHO HARNESSSED THE WIND*

by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer, HarperCollins, 2009.

This book was my companion while delayed at an airport recently. Right beside the Starbucks café at LAX airport waiting for my flight to Sydney I noticed an advert with a small Afghani girl with bright eyes and a determined face. It read 'Role Model.'

Fellow travelers were stopping by, perhaps jarred by the message. The poster was part of a broader campaign by an international humanitarian organisation to highlight the inspiring stories of young people from the developing world who overcome barriers they face. These barriers include lack of adequate food, security, or education. They highlight young people who are finding ways to overcome poverty and depravity of opportunity. The campaign's message aims to engage Western donors respectfully with those who face lives of hardship.

William Kamkwamba's story in *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* is a testament to that message in action. Kamkwamba built a windmill in his village from scraps of metal and an old bicycle. By doing so, he brought electricity and running water to his community.

The beginning of the book paints a picture of growing up in Malawi in the midst of drought, famine and corruption. This is not the Africa of a distant past; the latest drought gripped Malawi in 2002. Without a social safety net one season of drought tipped small farming families into starvation.

Kamkwamba's family could not afford to send him to school. He began a small business in fixing radios, allowing him to experiment with the electrical components. While his friends were at school he began reading trade magazines and textbooks at the local library about power generation. In one such book he recounts the words which changed his life: "Energy is all around you every day...sometimes energy needs to be converted to another form before it is useful to us."

He knew that wind was a consistent but untapped energy source in Malawi. We learn that only 2% of Malawians have electricity. The few who do have access to power have it supplied by the government. Obtaining a connection requires long applications, approvals, and

tolerating frequent blackouts. Lack of electricity for the majority of Malawians has led to massive deforestation as wood is gathered to stoke cooking fires. Bald landscapes have no protection against heavy rains, which then wash away topsoil and its minerals. This in turn leads to lower crop yields. Runoff also clogs river dams, shutting down the turbine which fuels central power production.

Kamkwamba recounts how he slowly assembled his materials to test his idea for turning the wind into electricity. He then built a sixteen-foot bamboo platform to attach a mass of blades, scrap metal, tractor parts, a bike chain, and rubber wheel. His experiment worked. He powered four lights to his family's home and another windmill pumped water to his family's fields.

This book can be criticised as a romanticisation of poverty. The author is a poster boy for grassroots ingenuity. However, without support, those roots could not grow into systemic change. What the book does not address is the important but tedious work to bring local solutions to scale. Without a social safety net, Malawi remains vulnerable to bad weather which forces many of its people into widespread suffering.

It was an African journalist who uncovered Kamkwamba's story and began spreading it through newspapers and blogs. Eventually, the co-author of this book, Bryan Mealer, translated the story into a perfectly paced airport hardcover. Meanwhile, Kamkwamba was invited to meet other African entrepreneurs. He was introduced to computers and the Internet for the first time and was then invited to share his story overseas. Kamkwamba is a role model. Stories like his need telling to reengage stakeholders creatively on ways to reduce poverty in Africa.

To watch a short video of Kamkwamba telling his own story see: [www.ted.com/talks/william\\_kamkwamba\\_how\\_i\\_harnessed\\_the\\_wind.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/william_kamkwamba_how_i_harnessed_the_wind.html)

To get your copy of the book visit: [williamkamkwamba.typepad.com/williamkamkwamba/2009/04/my-book-the-boy-who-harnessed-the-wind.html](http://williamkamkwamba.typepad.com/williamkamkwamba/2009/04/my-book-the-boy-who-harnessed-the-wind.html)