

Philanthropy growing among Asia's rich

By Sameera Anand | 13 April 2011

Private banks in the region gear up to service the increased interest in philanthropy from their wealthy clients.



Warren Buffett and Bill Gates promoting philanthropy in China last September (AFP)

The World Bank estimates that around 900 million people will be living in extreme poverty, defined as average daily consumption of \$1.25 or less, by 2015. An additional 1.1 billion people will live on less than \$2 per day. Further, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening across the world.

"In the US it was as far back as the early 1900s when the gap between rich and poor was so wide," said [Hank Paulson at a talk in Hong Kong on Monday](#). "This gap is widening in China, Latin America and the Middle East too," he added.

Initiatives such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which is backed by the Microsoft founder and Warren Buffet, are an effort by some of the richest people in the world to ensure that their wealth is channelled into poverty and disease alleviation, and this gap narrows. And the giving back theme is spreading rapidly across Asia as well, with some of Asia's richest, such as Li Ka-shing, following suit with their own eponymous foundations.

"The interests of our ultra-high-net-worth clients fall in three main areas: business, investments and family," said [Amy Lo](#), who took over as head of the UHNW business for UBS in Asia-Pacific in January, during a seminar the Swiss bank hosted recently. "Family is close to the heart of our UHNW clients," she added, going on to say that one building block that helps families define their values very effectively is philanthropy, which ties families together beyond conflicts of how to invest.

Lo cited a specific case of a family she was working with where the tycoon parent was unaware that one of her daughters was passionate about the environment and the other about education. It was only when the family

attended a UBS roundtable that they articulated their goals with respect to setting up a family office.

"Increasingly philanthropy is becoming a part of the conversation clients want to have with us," said Aamir Rahim, Asia-Pacific chief executive officer of Citi private bank. "The majority of clients driving this are first-generation wealth creators who are nearing retirement and their children, who want to give back to society." Citi's UHNW clients mostly route their philanthropic activities through their family offices, though Rahim said he has also seen clients support specific causes that have special meaning to them.

Credit Suisse last week launched the SymAsia Foundation, a Singapore-registered charity that will support philanthropic projects with a focus on Asia. It said that SymAsia offers donors the infrastructure to support their preferred charitable causes in an efficient manner, as an alternative to setting up their own charitable foundations.

"Credit Suisse's philanthropy services go beyond offering advice to our clients: we want to engage our clients and do good together, by helping them put the advice into action and providing them with a platform to actually implement their philanthropic plans," said Tee Fong Seng, chief executive officer of SymAsia and vice-chairman, private banking, for Asia-Pacific at Credit Suisse.

The announcement was made at the Credit Suisse Philanthropists Forum 2011, which was held on a large scale for the first time in Singapore on Thursday and Friday last week. Singapore is a highly appropriate location for this global forum, given that it is not only a major financial centre in a region enjoying rapid wealth creation, but also a region that still has many human development needs, said Credit Suisse in a written statement announcing the forum.

[Print](#)[Close](#)

Copyright © 2011 Haymarket Media. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed in any form without prior authorisation.

Your use of this website constitutes acceptance of Haymarket Media's Privacy Policy and Terms & Conditions.