

GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S (GWIA) INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY

The Grassroots Women's Voice

The Magic of Reality

Report of the *Grassroots Women's International Academy*

during Istanbul plus 5 in New York, June 2001

At the United Nations, New York City

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Introduction

GWIA was initiated by the German Mother Centers and first conducted as contribution of grassroots women to the World Fair Expo 2000. To date seven Academies have been conducted in co-operation with the Huairou Commission and GROOTS including the GWIA held in New York in May/June 2001 as part of Istanbul plus 5.

GWIA is a strategy for grassroots groups to name and claim their Knowledge by being the ones teaching it. It is a tool to make grassroots women's solutions visible and accessible both on the level of peer learning to grassroots groups around the world as well as to mainstream partners and the young minds of students, the professionals of tomorrow. GWIA identifies and documents grassroots experience in a manner that it can transform policies.

Problems cannot be solved by the same thinking that created them. Centralised top down procedures are not managing to solve most of the issues we are facing in the 21st century. Communities are being kept together by the ingenious self organisation of the poor. The poor have cultural, spiritual and social resources, on which to build, they have created poverty eradication strategies with which they are already surviving. It has become increasingly visible that solutions to housing, post disaster reconstruction or neighbourhood cohesion are devised by the informal sector. What is needed is getting behind what already works in communities. What is needed are more formal educational settings to learn from this "informal" knowledge base. GWIA sets out to do this.

Over 50 grassroots groups from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America have presented their best practices and lessons learned at the Academies in the format of trainings, thus enabling groups from other continents and other regions to get the knowledge and information in an in depth way and concretely enough to be able to adapt it to their own work and own social and cultural settings, as well as informing planning and decision making in a hands on step by step way.

After the big success of the Grassroots Women's International Academies during the World's Fair Expo 2000 in Germany a further GWIA was held in conjunction with the United Nations' Habitat Conference: Istanbul plus 5 in New York City, organised by the Huairou Commission and GROOTS International around themes critical to the UN Habitat Agenda. It was sponsored by UNDP/CSO.

During this week women from community based organizations from around the world came together to present their best practices and engage in in-depth dialogue with partners from foundations, UN agencies, corporations, and non governmental and religious organizations. The grassroots organizations presenting their work were chosen because of their success in influencing policy and transferring their practices to other groups and countries.

GWIA resulted in formulating concrete policy recommendations which were presented to the Istanbul plus 5 country delegates.

Executive Summary

LEARNING FROM OUR BEST PRACTICES :

Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) at United Nations, New York

The member networks of the **Huairou Commission**, representing more than 1,000 women's groups in poor communities, held a **Grassroots Women's International Academy** five days prior to Istanbul +5 to examine the innovative practices of grassroots women's groups who have pioneered and transferred local approaches to:

Engendering Local Governance

Security of Tenure

Education from the Bottom-Up

Moving from Disaster and Conflict to Empowerment and Development

Safety in Cities

Shelter and basic services – housing, infrastructure, sanitation,

Livelihoods enhancement and poverty reduction.

These crosscutting themes enabled participants to generate and pinpoint core elements for program and policy reform.

The Academy--buttressed by data shared at regional prepcoms and related preparatory activities--reached the conclusion that the **Habitat Agenda's** commitments to pro-poor, gender equitable urban settlements will not be realized by 2006 unless dramatic actions are taken. Each of the successful grassroots initiatives showcased at the Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) underscore that sustainable, efficient outcomes are the result of investments in grassroots women's processes of capacity building and partnering with institutional actors. *The chief ways in which partners can support grassroots women's initiatives are*

- **resources**
- **visibility**
- **opportunities** to engage with mainstream institutions, and
- **policy support.**

Thus the **Huairou Commission** is calling upon member governments and their local authorities undertaking this mid decade review to apply the necessary political and institutional will to shift planning, implementation, evaluation and resource allocations in a manner that will support the following:

I. Support grassroots women's abilities to collect and disseminate information in their role as mediators between the state and impoverished communities by

1. Ensuring that grassroots women's organizations have **easy access to information** on state programmes and entitlements.
2. Ensuring that information and strategies generated by grassroots women's communities is validated and fed into decision-making processes that determine the **goals, implementation and evaluation of human settlements development programmes**.

II. Enable participation of those women's groups who have been excluded, by:

1. Providing grassroots women with **physical space** to expand and formalise their participation in local decision-making institutions.
2. Creating **support systems** in public decision making fora and institutions to enable grassroots women to fulfil their multiple roles as caregivers, community leaders and political actors. Such support systems would include: child-care facilities, safe transport, and community-based consultations.

III. Relate to grassroots women's groups as Problem-solvers and not as Clients or Beneficiaries by:

1. Soliciting grassroots women's participation in the **planning** of public interventions
2. Resourcing grassroots communities with **space, funds and opportunities** to participate in the decisions pertaining to the allocation, flow and monitoring of public resources and services.
3. Opening up opportunities for **long-term** engagement and negotiation rather than one-time consultations.
4. Incorporating grassroots women's participation in the **allocation, planning, delivery and monitoring of resources** in **post-disaster situations** as a way of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of relief and rehabilitation operations.

IV. Support grassroots groups abilities to consolidate their collective knowledge and expertise and provide formal advisement to achieve the full implementation of the Habitat Agenda, by:

1. Resourcing **knowledge transfers** and **peer exchanges** among grassroots women's groups involved in settlements solutions.
2. Recognising and resourcing **Community-led community Education** as a sector in its own right (separate and distinct from state and other institutional actors).
3. Creating an **endowment facility** to support grassroots groups to experiment, demonstrate, transfer and adapt local solutions to poverty and secure settlements.

V. Build Institutional Capacity

1. Establishing **Monitoring, Evaluation and Audit opportunities of public policy initiatives by grassroots women's organizations** to measure their responsiveness to community priorities.
2. Supporting initiatives by local governance institutions and grassroots women's organizations to develop mechanisms for **long-term partnerships**.

VI. Reformulate public policy by engaging the knowledge and skills of grassroots women and their communities through:

1. Creating mechanisms that establish lines of input and accountability with their grassroots constituency, thereby legitimating local women's leadership.
2. Crafting public policy from the information and strategies developed by grassroots women and their communities.

Grassroots Women's International Academy: Learning from Our Best Practices for Local Governance

Monika Jaeckel, founder of the Grassroots Women's International Academy, launched the New York meeting of the GWIA with a brief review of what the Huairou Commission and the GWIA were all about. As she put it, the Huairou Commission's mission is to make the work of grassroots women both **visible and influential** in public policy and practice. The GWIAs have thus far proved to be a powerful way in which to create visibility and provide opportunities for peer learning. They have enabled the creation and reproduction of a body of knowledge owned, nurtured and replenished by grassroots women.

The first GWIAs, at the Expo 2000 in Germany, sought to make visible this body of knowledge, showcasing the valuable work and knowledge of grassroots women at a world exhibition. This GWIA aimed to take the process further, moving towards influencing public policy. As Sandy Schilen (GROOTS International) pointed out, it was indeed a strategic move to get the UN to provide the space in which to hold the GWIA. For what was distinctive about this GWIA was that while it continued to be a peer learning forum it was also specifically geared towards influencing the policies and programs that were to be brokered in the following week at the UNGASS – the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the Habitat Agenda, i.e. Istanbul +5.

The **focus** of this GWIA was on extracting policy lessons from grassroots practices. Participants were invited to share their experiences in initiating and sustaining innovative policies in various spheres of human settlements' development – local governance, community education, disaster management and secure tenure. The **challenge** was to cull lessons and policy implications from the practices presented at this GWIA and thereby collectively develop a gendered analysis of human settlements development from the perspective of what works on the ground, what works for grassroots women.

Monika Jaeckel identified **three** orienting questions to keep in mind as we listened to and engaged with the array of experiences showcased at this GWIA meeting:

1. What, from the practices and strategies that are presented, can you confirm from your own experience?
2. Where does your experience differ?
3. What are ways of building sustainable partnerships?

Identifying and reflecting on the points of convergence and difference between the presentations and our own experiences would enable us to formulate a **globally informed grassroots women's standpoint** on the kinds of partnership opportunities and support needed in order for mainstream institutions to harvest the innovations, hard-won successes and valuable lessons emerging from grassroots women's work in human settlements everywhere.

EN-GENDERING LOCAL GOVERNANCE

En-gendering local governance is about getting institutions, particularly the state to respond to the needs and priorities of grassroots women. Grassroots women's groups have found that constitutional amendments, and the quota systems they create (as in the case of India and Uganda), are not enough to insure that their concerns and strategies are incorporated into the structure and nature of governance. Poor communities, and women raising families in them, understand that their priorities are linked to the outcome of local planning, budgeting, and implementation decisions. They also know how the political arena operates to contain and marginalize their direct participation.

The presentations made by the Mother Centers in Germany, Czech Republic and Bosnia, by GROOTS-Kenya, and by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, USA provide us with a wide array of experiences, strategies and practices that grassroots women have created in their bid to make a difference to their lives and their communities. In order to put forward a grassroots perspective on governance we need to examine the practices presented at this session with a view to collectively identifying:

- What are the **enabling strategies and practices** that grassroots women have devised in order to become active in governance processes and institutions?
- What are the **obstacles** that grassroots women face in dealing with and participating in local governance?

Mother Centers

The German Mother Centers are a grassroots practice recognised by Habitat as one that enables women from low-income communities to make inroads into a predominantly male-dominated public culture. Mainstream decision making fora generally ignore women's work and concerns, operating in "oblivion to everyday life" according to Monika Jaeckel. Leaving 'everyday' needs—child rearing, household management, community building—and the work associated with them to others to privately manage (typically women), they alienate grassroots women. When women can't see how their crucial issues are seriously considered in government processes, they withdraw from, and avoid engaging with them, she explained.

Engendering Local Governance

German Mother Centres

Presenters: Monika Jaeckel, Andrea Laux and Ingrid Bregenzer.

Czech Mother Centres

Presenters: Rut Kolinska and Lucie Slaukova.

Bosnian Mother Centres

Presenter: Mirela Mulalic Handan.

GROOTS Kenya, Mathare Mother Center

Presenters: Pauline Kariuki and Rose Omia.

National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW)

Presenters: Lisel Burns, Habiba Soudan, Carol Judy and Ethel Velez.

Discussant:

Srilatha Battliwala, Hauser Center

Another aspect of alienation is how mainstream governance processes tend to isolate individuals – disconnecting the few grassroots women who have been able to make an entry into governance institutions from one another and from their constituencies. Unable to put forward their perspectives from a position of strength and influence, they get marginalized or co-opted.

Consequently, what the Mother Centers have sought to do is to create a public space wherein grassroots women can collectively find their voice and define how their issues and priorities can be expressed in community decision-making. Together, women build the self-esteem and leadership qualities necessary for engaging institutions and changing how they operate. The following selections from the presentations of the German, Czech, Bosnian and Kenyan experiences seek to provide both a sense of their practices and an understanding of what kinds of support are required for grassroots women to **enter and make a difference** in mainstream governance processes.

Monika Jaeckel's introduction to the Mother Centers movement underscores why public space is an essential ingredient for 'engendering' local governance. First, Mother Centers are **public living rooms** where women bring, not leave behind, their everyday concerns and needs. These public spaces -- organised and run by women--are places where women plan, contribute to, and decide what goes on. Since women don't come in to a Mother Center to get and consume a service, they don't behave or get treated like clients. In fact, Mother Centers exclude social workers and other professionals from leadership positions, **challenging the knowledge and choice monopoly such professionals** represent. By conscious design, Mother Centers create spaces where the knowledge and competencies women acquire from solving every day problems can thrive.

Germany

In conveying to us the personal and political significance of the Mother Centers practice, Andrea Laux's story began with her description of how personally isolated she felt in dealing with the welfare bureaucracy, "I was feeling like the only single mother on welfare...now I am not alone anymore." Being part of Mother Centers has given her confidence, enough to even participate at UN conferences. Elaborating on the 'public living room' analogy introduced by Monika, Andrea explains why the physical space provided by Mother Centers plays such a pivotal role in their governance strategy, "In this public living room, **in talking to friends, you learn about policy and politics...** Until then you never thought that City Hall is something that belongs to you, that (realization) is the first step...."

Grassroots women **have to demand to be heard, to be informed and to participate** when they enter City Hall and encounter professionals, a lack of transparency, and a spirit of exclusion. Recognising the strength grassroots women can draw from their group is fundamental to changing the engagement with decision makers. Andrea explained, "our strategy is **to never sit alone in front of City officials...** if you do, it can kill you".

Bureaucrats and officials often invite grassroots women only at the last stage of a decision making process, after an intervention is debated and prepared. Groups need strategies to combat this. Andrea described a time when the Mother Centers were told they couldn't attend a local planning meeting in Stuttgart because the meeting venue had limited space and provisions. Not to be stopped, she announced ***I'll bring my own chair and food!*** and effectively insisted on participating.

The collective formed through the organisation of the Mother Center is a source of learning and confidence to individual women, as well as **a support structure that enables grassroots women to maintain their distinctive perspective and voice** in the face of a powerful homogenising bureaucracy that seeks to continue to do things *their* way. This is an absolutely essential dimension to the process of ‘engendering’ governance, as Andrea explained- “It is important to maintain our integrity and the integrity of our experiences... to not give up ‘our language’ because one feels like one has to behave and talk like one of them. It is important to remember to be ourselves, or else you take the energy out...because it is not our lives anymore - remember that **we bring the magic of reality!**”

Ingrid Bregenzer, a member of the City Council in Salem, South Germany, followed Andrea by describing her personal experience of simultaneously coping with child-care and council member responsibilities. She provided a vivid example of how to infuse the “magic of reality” into political practices. Rejecting her Mayor’s prejudiced view that mothers should not assume public roles, Ingrid and her Mother Center colleagues persisted in bringing their children when they went to City Council meetings to participate. When Ingrid subsequently became one of 5 women and 30 men elected to the City Council, she made sure this practice became standard operating procedure. Today, she wryly observes, the Mayor usually keeps chocolates in his pocket to give to the children and when her own children don’t come to Council meetings, he asks, “Where are your children?”

Czech Republic

When Rut Kolinska first heard of Mother Centers she thought it was a good idea but that someone else should start it, not her. Subsequently she made a trip to Germany to visit the Mother Centers to see for herself what the practice was all about. Following her visit, a team from the German Mother Centers visited Prague. By the end of this exchange of visits, Rut admits she was “infected by the Mother Centers virus”. Ten years later, there now are 128 Mother Centers in the Czech Republic.

While democracy was officially ushered in 1989, people who were accustomed to centralised mega-bureaucracies needed to learn to operate within this new political paradigm, to lay claim to it, and make it their own. The Mother Centers’ movement in the Czech Republic has played an important role in this democratisation process. Just gaining the physical space for a Mother Center, is **an educational exercise in democracy for both state and citizens**, Lucie Slaukova remarked. Drawing on her own experience, she said: “Building a Mothers Center is also a process of learning what it is to be a free citizen, of defining civic society, of learning what the municipality is all about....” Across the Czech Republic, women from the Mother Centers help each other to understand how the municipality operates, and to learn ways to operate with it.

What the Mother Centers movement in the Czech Republic has done has been to educate and make visible to public institutions what it means to be a mother *and* a free citizen. **A 50/50 representation of men and women in public office, Rut and Lucie claimed, is not as important as changing the public culture.** For in the Czech Republic, as in Germany, women from the Mother Centers have had to contend with arrogant public officials who do not think much of mothers...seeing them as something less than normal people, as lacking intelligence. As Rut said, “We needed to show that **mothers also have a vision of the quality of life, of society and of the world**”.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Who am I? A mother, a wife, a professional and a political dealer... as most of you are. As you know, it is difficult juggling all these different hats”... and so started Mirela Mulalic Handan’s presentation on Centar Za Maske - the Mother Centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and how this initiative has helped women juggle the various 'hats' that they have to wear.

Recognising herself in the literature produced by the German Mother Centers, Mirela seized upon the practice, seeing in it a way to address the needs of women in the post-conflict period. Women and children were the most affected by the repatriation and refugee process, yet, as in other public policy arenas, they were underrepresented in the planning and decision making associated with them. With the decimation of the male population, large numbers of women were becoming heads of households – required to rear and provide for their families. As Mirela put it, "during the war in the bomb shelters we would meet and organise amongst ourselves, but when we came out of those shelters we lost our communities!" After the war, there was no place for women to meet and organise, the Mother Centers thus provided an essential space for community organisation and development to occur.

The economic context women faced as they struggled to make ends meet was harsh, and there was a very high unemployment rate. The constant movement of people – of refugees, of people returning home having fled war-torn areas - and their consequent transient status in the post-conflict period, compounded difficulties in accessing resources and engaging with the government. What the Mother Center initiative has done is to help women perform their multiple roles - it has enabled women to pursue income generating opportunities by lowering the child care expenses of individual families through the provision of a collective neighborhood child care facility.

Acquiring the spaces for the Mother Centers has been an education in the art of brokering partnerships... the local government is receptive to input from community based groups but is resource poor--almost wholly dependent on international aid. In time the women from the Mother Centers have developed tools to influence public officials - reaching out to the few women who occupy public office, helping public officials institute principles of good governance, and develop participatory planning exercises.

These efforts in turn benefit the Mother Centers when they approach donor agencies, for they are able to claim government support for their proposed initiatives. Further, women officials are empowered by their engagement with the women from the Mother Centers, and indeed the Mother Centers have enabled coalition building among women officials across party lines. For government officials and other actors in the post-conflict reconstruction period, Mirela states, "the Mother Centers provides an attractive alternative to professional-based organising which is so dependent on aid". Indeed, she continues, " as the democratisation process gets underway, programs want to achieve what the Mother Centers already are... community organisation, cross-entity co-operation, helping women organise, empowering women to participate in local decision making and in central government...."

Kenya

Rose and Pauline from GROOTS Kenya talked about the way in which the Mother Centers practice evolved in the Mathare slum in Nairobi. Until they established a Mother Center, women faced a problem in getting space to have their meetings. Establishing a Mother Center has not been easy – as Rose said, “**We fall and stand everyday**”. They first had to persuade the Mathare Project Management Group of the value of creating a Mother Center, then locate a space, and then figure out amongst themselves how they were going to pay the rent for the space that they had identified.

They devised a range of income generating activities to sustain the activities of the Center and to pay the rent. They have a feeding program for children that provides nutritional supplements, adult literacy classes – drawing on the skills of retired teachers and of course child care facilities. The Center brings together the 50 women’s groups that exist in the Mathare slum, providing a space that *they* control. Pauline pointed out that the Mother Center, by hosting Groots’ groups, is also a space for the GROOTS national network to come together and work across inter-tribal differences. In this sense it is helping them to build a national presence of grassroots women in Kenya.

National Congress of Neighborhood Women (NCNW)

Lisel Burns, Habiba Soudan, Carol Judy and Ethel Velez shared with us the elements comprising the Leadership Support Process (LSP) developed by the NCNW. As they explained, it is a process that enables women to get and stay involved in what they care about. It is derived from, and feeds back into grassroots women’s experience of “living and working and changing the world in the neighborhood”.

Leading us through the process of appreciating the kinds of reflective space that women need in order to carry their work forward, the presenters asked each of us to identify the caring element that is critical to the success of our efforts. Here are some of the responses:

Liza – no unsolicited advice

Andrea – ensuring that everyone is welcome

Theresa – listen to everyone with respect

Rose – patience with one another

Lily – being recognised

Sandra – Justice

Rut – taking personal responsibility

Monika – motherliness

Carol Judy – belief that people who live in a place have valid knowledge

Carolina – understanding who we are, where we are, and where we want to be

Mary - respecting the different levels individual women are at

The discussion revealed that women’s leadership starts from the heart –and at the point when each of us *cares* about something enough to work for it. Recognizing that grassroots women’s leadership is the inspiration that is born from necessity, LSP is a set of methods to keep vision and values at the forefront and affirmed across difference. It aims to support what women do and aspire for and to keep people working together over the long process of improving a community. The methods create a safe way to communicate, build trust, and tackle tough issues. Once there is a strong value based foundation to the relationships we develop, conflict in a group or neighborhood is easier to handle.

Habiba described her story of organising in Camden (New Jersey), one of the poorest cities in the US, attesting to the ability of the leadership support process to sustain and spawn leadership. Ethel gave us her account of bringing the leadership support process into tenant organizing in East Harlem (New York City) public housing where she had to contend with a bunch of men who did not want to hear ‘How are you doing today?’ and wanted to “get straight to the agenda”. She persevered though, bringing into public housing meetings a value based process of partnering where people had to respect each other – starting with go-arounds where everyone has a chance to speak for an equal amount of time.

Carol, who has helped establish a Land Trust and Community Learning Center in an unincorporated rural community with no local governmental representative, asked us to describe what governance means, as a way of demonstrating LSP methods.

Participants said, that **governance is:**

the ability to create a framework that enables a community to live by the values it cares about,
creating an environment that I can be a part of,
running a society with everyone involved,
a structure with discipline and rules that start with me,
demanding accountability of women in positions of authority, because it is not enough to get women into these institutions and public offices
a culture of rules that enables participatory decision making
to exercise our rights to fulfil participation
to exercise our political freedom.

LSP, in contrast to the kinds of participation encouraged by Robert’s Rules of Order” or trade union hall speakouts, is a way grassroots women can gain confidence in organizing or leading collaborative processes. If “good governance” requires equal partnerships, it is a new way of working—one where values, operating agreements, and opportunities to collectively take decisions must be connected. It is a way to foster maximum participation that groups can learn, practice, and institutionalize.

Insights

The session on ‘Local Governance’ was a bountiful one. Srilatha Batliwala, the discussant for the day, helped us harvest the lessons by indicating what she thought were some of the key points emerging from the presentations and participant’s comments. “*Engendering governance*”, she asserted, *is about women transforming power by:*

- Helping yourself and so helping others,
- Transforming survival strategies into public negotiations,
- Changing the world from the neighborhood in which you live,
- Bringing mothers, who have thus far been confined into the private sphere, into the public sphere as citizens and public actors,
- Making alliances across deeply divisive categories and traditions,
- Practising power differently by enabling value-based engagement, and
- Deepening democratic values and practice.

The policy implication of the practices shared on engendering local governance were:

SPACE, SPACE, and SPACE!

Srilatha noted that each of the practices emphasized the critical importance of physical and reflective spaces in enabling grassroots women to enter and transform existing local governance institutions and practice. Space enables women to meet collectively, to interact, reflect, and learn as a group, and to formalize and sustain their involvement in local development. Self-help efforts, too often discounted as short-term volunteerism, can appear permanent and lasting by virtue of women having a location and an articulated plan.

RESOURCES

- Acknowledging the resources that we bring to the process but also accessing, demanding and leveraging resources from the outside.

MULTIPLE HATS, ONE WOMAN

- Women function from within multiple identities and need public life to be reorganized to bridge, not compartmentalise them.

CHANGING THE CULTURE AND PRACTICE OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

- This is fundamental to changing the practice of power. A key part of this transformation is acknowledging women's priorities and ways of doing things and creating new private and public linkages to support and value them.

Srilatha also noted how the presentations emphasized persistent institutional barriers, which present us with the following,

Challenges:

How can we better adapt and transfer strategy across cultural, institutional and political contexts?

How do we keep control over our knowledge and practices and still insure that it has a big impact?

- How do we apply these insights into the ways we have impacted local governance to actions and institutions at the *global* level?

FROM DISASTER TO EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Disasters breakdown already fragile service delivery systems and information flows between the government and people. Vast resources, which pour into disaster areas, are administered chaotically, in a manner Prema Gopalan describes as “highway charity”. The ‘big business’—character of disaster attracts many people with different agendas and different ethics. The politics of engagement among these actors, in turn, are further distorted by time constraints that drive relief and reconstruction efforts.

The three GWIA examples focus on how women’s capacities and communities can be rebuilt in the wake of devastating hurricane and earthquake damage. Representing different opportunities and constraints, they provide valuable insights into how grassroots women’s groups can function effectively at the center of information, relief, and reconstruction activities.

From Disaster to Empowerment and Development

Comite de Emergencia Garifuna

Presenter: Carolina David Gil.

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)

Presenter: Prema Gopalan.

Foundation for the Support of Women’s Work (FSWW)

Presenters: Sengul Akcar and Nurdane Caglar.

Comite de Emergencia Garifuna

Carolina David Gil opened her presentation with a question: *Who do the resources flow to in post-disaster rehabilitation efforts and who gets left out?* When Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras in October 1998, the Garifuna people began a journey that would reshape their sense of themselves and of their opportunities. An Afro-Honduran people, living on an isolated part of the Honduran coast, the Garifuna make their living off the land and by fishing. The nature of their livelihood activities, coupled with their coastal location, meant the Garifuna suffered severe loss of life and property when Mitch hit their villages and homes.

“There were many who tried to take advantage of the natural disaster, grabbing land from the Garifuna for example, and turning the disaster into an even bigger disaster,” Carolina explained. The Comite de Emergencia Garifuna formed after Mitch struck, to safeguard the interests of the Garifuna. Quickly, it became more than a post-disaster relief and advocacy group.

The solidarity among the Garifuna community, triggered by their relief efforts, has led to long-term community organising. As Carolina pointed out, “we want to create income but without destroying our culture and our land”. What Hurricane Mitch did was to “create an opportunity for us to organise ourselves, it united us with one another.” Not only are they initiating development efforts within their community but they are also asserting themselves politically on the larger national stage, deriving strength from their organizing.

They have:

created agricultural tool “banks” to enable more communities to effectively work the land.
organized themselves to rebuilding housing and village infrastructure,
promoted sustainable agriculture and, in the process of reviving traditional foods and diets, are reviving their culture,
lobbied against commercial fishing that uses dynamite and in favour of traditional fishing,
demanded bilingual education in order to protect their own culture as well as engage with the greater Honduran society and economy.
resisted being turned into objects of tourism and have instead devised novel ways of engaging with the tourist industry.

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)

In September 1993, a massive earthquake devastated Latur and Osmanabad districts in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. Eight years later, the neighbouring state of Gujarat experienced an earthquake so severe that 700,000 families were impacted and 20,000 killed. Swayam Shikshan Prayog played a pivotal role in the post-disaster efforts in both instances. Each time they entered into partnerships with the government to insure that women and grassroots communities were not left out of the planning, implementation and monitoring processes. Although the government’s post-disaster policy had some space for NGO involvement, community based grassroots groups did not receive a mention, Prema Gopalan explained.

Since the earthquake struck in Gujarat, 50 women from grassroots collectives in Latur and Osmanabad visit Gujarat every fortnight. Purposefully, they share their experiences of grief, reconstruction and development, with Gujarat women struggling to re-build their confidence, their lives, their communities and their houses. Prema described some of the lessons that SSP and the grassroots women’s groups from Maharashtra took with them when they initiated work with earthquake-affected communities in Gujarat. The scope of their work provides important insights on how to mainstream women’s participation and transforming disaster situations into opportunities for community-driven development.

After a disaster takes place, local communities, NGOS, and the state face urgent challenges to act on multiple fronts. Prema described how there is a need to:

Resume basic services on an emergency footing.

Rebuild shelter that is disaster-proof, region specific and appropriate to the survival needs of the poor.

Restore livelihoods by use local resources and skills.

Re-establish public infrastructure.

Restructure administration and reinstall local governance practices.

Recognize and empower women’s groups and other grassroots institutions.

Revive people’s involvement by engaging them in relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

After the 1993 earthquake in Latur and Osmanabad, SSP entered into a partnership with the Government of Maharashtra, as consultants to the government rehabilitation program, facilitating a community-driven reconstruction of 200,000 houses in 1300 villages –indicating that community

based strategies can, and have, operated on a *large* scale. SSP established a community assistance and monitoring system by training 500 grassroots women's groups in earthquake resistant construction principles, in organising collective reconstruction efforts, and providing them information on government procedures and policies. They also enhanced the local skill base by providing training on earthquake resistant construction to 4000 local masons and 500 government engineers and officials.

Engendering the reconstruction program, Prema explained, was SSP's biggest challenge because typically women are not the ones to receive funds or compensation, land or house titles, training and information. Lacking formal recognition, women's participation must be formalized in the initial relief phase when they are actively organizing replacement shelter, clothing, food and basic services. **Involving affected communities in the relief operations is crucial, she said, because the nature of the relief phase in terms of community participation sets the tone for the subsequent rehabilitation and reconstruction phases.** Community participation is also a way of helping survivors deal with the grief and trauma wrought by the disaster. Unfortunately, most agencies consider this a 'luxury' they can ill afford (given the level of need and limited time), Prema acknowledged. Thus, much work must be done to change this thinking.

Community Resource Centers (CRCs) constitute a vital dimension of SSP's strategy to transform a crisis situation into an opportunity for long-term development for women and their communities. Constructing the center is an opportunity to demonstrate, demystify and give on-site training on earthquake resistant construction techniques to women. Once up and running, it becomes a community asset that is built and managed by women – a 'concrete' symbol of their organising and technical prowess, visible to all long after the clamour of post-disaster efforts have died down. As Prema noted, "*disasters can (also) be an opportunity to push women back into their homes...however once women are supported to assume public roles in the reconstruction process then they cannot be pushed back...*" By supporting the creation of a Community Resource Center - with bricks and mortar *and* capabilities and skills – SSP is investing in the capacity and development of not one but a cluster of neighbouring villages who use them to plan and implement activities together.

While the Gujarat effort is still in the throes of making the transition from relief to rehabilitation and reconstruction, the Maharashtra post-disaster experience attests to the fact **that investing in women in disaster-affected communities pays off, for today the women from Latur and Osmanabad are a force to reckon with in the long-term development of the region** – today women's collectives in 300 villages are supported by the UNDP and the government in monitor basic services. Over 600 women's groups have together initiated a micro-credit program, 32 community resource centers have been constructed and are now managed by grassroots women's groups, and over 5000 Panchayat (local governance council) members and grassroots women's leaders have been provided training and information on local governance through a peer-based methodology.

Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW)

On August 17th and November 12th, 1999 two violent earthquakes hit the Marmara region, the most industrialised and densely urbanised part of Turkey, leaving in their wake high death and injury tolls, massive destruction of property and livelihood resources. As in Honduras and India, people lost their relatives, friends and neighbours, their homes and their livelihoods. Their community ties and support networks were disrupted as a result of the relocation after the earthquake. Despite trauma

and severe material losses, the crisis also challenged grassroots women to take on more active roles – socially, economically and politically – for the safety and survival of their families.

Recognising the leadership potential of grassroots women in rebuilding their communities, the Foundation for the Support of Women’s Work initiated a long-term approach to typically short-term relief efforts. They started by **providing safe spaces for women and children**, eight **Women and Children Centers**– first in the makeshift tent cities and subsequently in the temporary prefabricated settlements built in three provinces. Women gained community spaces where they could bring their children for mutual comfort and to collectively cope with post-disaster trauma. Initially they organised childcare to explore new and existing livelihood activities (aware that men seemed immobilized), and compared information on housing and food entitlements. Over time, women began organizing themselves around housing and resettlement issues and meeting with local authorities to press for information and monitor progress. Today, while other local and international service providers are having a hard time finding local groups to take over the service centers they built, grassroots women at the Women and Children Centers feel empowered and capable of continuing to managing theirs.

Sengul Akcar crystallized the presentations of the day by confirming: “**all disaster related issues are very concrete issues of local governance...** and disasters require partnerships between all actors at all levels.” Disasters create a climate that opens up opportunities for women to get involved in local governance and provide **socially acceptable and legitimate reasons for women to participate in the public arena**. Decision-makers, responsible for meeting desperate and massive needs, find they must work in new ways to craft effective responses. Suddenly things that normally wouldn’t be possible can become so in this environment, she explained.

Information is the most valuable currency in post-disaster situations - for affected communities, governments and aid agencies alike. What FSWW and grassroots women came to realise was that women are exceptionally talented in collecting and disseminating information – especially in a situation where existing channels of communication have broken down... they know who lives where and who needs special care. They are also pivotal actors in raising the concerns of renters and squatters (since typically reconstruction efforts focus on home-owners) etc. In the Marmara region, the talents of women in collecting and sharing information created a valuable asset that they used to start to engage with officials.

Women organised information gathering and monitoring systems, and visits to officials, and turned the Women and Children Centers into clearinghouses of valuable information. Officials, impressed by the quality of information provided by women, began to visit the Centers. Through this interaction:

Women managed to get supplies and food for children from public resources.

Women began to take on contracts to supply food for construction workers, officials, and even the governor’s office.

Women insured that lands were properly allocated in the municipalities into which they moved.

The Public Works officials allocated transport facilities for women’s groups so that they could monitor the construction of houses more systematically.

Women organised housing co-operatives.

Women generated information about housing shortages and the needs of tenants... their reports were recognised officially and were made available to all levels of government.

FSWW and the Women and Children Centers also struck up partnerships with the national NGO community with the setting up of an NGO Co-ordination Center, signed Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with governmental agencies – social services, tourism (to market products) - and with international donor agencies. Sengul shared two valuable insights into the **nature of partnerships between community-based groups and governments:**

1. In partnering with governmental agencies in the context of historically strong state control, one should have modest expectation and assume **progress will be slow and gradual**. Even if you have signed a MOU with senior levels of government, the local officers will be initially resistant to the partnership. Training takes times unless it is a crisis situation like an earthquake, which quickens action. **They have the opportunity to monitor your strategy, compare your work with theirs, and see how your way makes a difference.** They always compare your way with theirs, and sometimes compete with you. Fortunately they will not be the only ones to judge and when other officials, the community itself, and the media accept your success they will be forced to recognise you.
2. Partnering with governmental agencies should not be seen as a way of achieving something practical...but as **a way of gaining visibility and recognition of your work and your strategies...**for in the long run that will help to mainstream your initiative. So even in the official MOUs, **your distinctive vision and approach should be made explicit.** You have to consistently protect your position even during the implementation process. Otherwise, they tend to accept you as a token and see your work as an auxiliary to their work. And in this case, you have to forsake your recognition as an equal partner, albeit a partner with a different vision and approach.

International donor agencies play a major role in post-disaster efforts. These are some of the lessons about post-disaster efforts that FSWW shared with us:

- Resources are easily wasted when there is no disaster management plan and thus no co-ordination among the key actors in post-disaster situations. This has consequences for the long-term development of the disaster-affected area once the humanitarian concerns driving the initial relief effort and initial outpouring of resources fade away. **Therefore from the beginning the allocation and use of resources should be driven by a long-term perspective.**

Funding criteria need to be flexible and donors need to be attuned to allocating resources not only for the relief phase but also for the more long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. (Otherwise, the opportunities and gains made by the initial flush of resources will be lost very quickly and local agencies and the communities that they work with will become disappointed and humiliated.)

Resources should flow to local agencies as a way of investing in the disaster-affected area by building local capacities and creating local employment opportunities.

- When international professionals are brought in not only are resources squandered on large administrative costs but they are also deployed mainly to “teach” rather than used to “learn from others” or partner with local organisations. Since expertise mostly lies in *how you do* things (i.e. the means) – which relates to local cultural and social conditions – rather than *what you do* (i.e. the outcome alone), opportunities are lost.

Disaster situations always create a potential for change in the leadership organisation of communities for they open up opportunities for those who are marginalised in society – like the poor, women, and civil society in general – to make themselves and their survival strategies more visible.

- Partnering with local NGOs makes international resources flows more accountable. Not only are local NGOs legally required to be audited, but also they are also more sensitive to community monitoring of how resources that have come for *their* betterment are spent.

When finding local partners, implementing agencies tend to approach the partnership as if they were choosing a sub-contractor. “Here is the money – who will do it on my terms?” This approach results in (1) ethical deterioration of local civil society, (2) waste of resources because there is no investment in sustainability as the projects are inadequately designed on account of poor needs assessment. The sub-contract method of looking for an agency who will do what you say instigates an unhealthy spurt in NGO formation – as local actors try to capture some of these resources even if they do not have the appropriate skills or experience.

International agencies need to revisit their policies on transparency and accountability - on how to respect people’s rights to information and to participate in the planning and implementation of resources assigned to rebuilding their homes and communities.

Insights

Capturing the most fundamental lessons emerging from these pioneering practices, Srilatha Batliwala asserted that women’s participation in post-disaster situations in Honduras, Turkey and India countered three myths about grassroots women’s interventions:

Myth 1: Grassroots efforts are small scale.

Grassroots efforts have insured that information, ideas, skills and solutions are rapidly transferred so as to create a critical mass of actors who can contribute to the planning, implementation and monitoring of state programmes whether disaster or development related.

Myth 2: Grassroots women’s initiatives are necessarily low-tech.

Our experiences demonstrate that women are able to acquire information and skills that enable them to become masons, supervisors, and designers -- usually considered male or professional jobs. Women have also shown that their intervention in these activities has enhanced the quality of output.

Myth 3: Grassroots women are learners rather than teachers.

In fact, grassroots women have played a crucial role in training, disseminating information, nurturing local leadership and informing policy.

Governments are usually biased in favour of specialist organisations, professional experts and specialised NGO relief agencies. Consequently, grassroots women and marginalised communities like the Garifuna in the Honduras are left out of the process and perceived as passive victims or beneficiaries.

Women’s collectives in disaster-struck areas have demonstrated that they can be effective mediators between the government and the people. Women have swiftly mobilised their communities, skills and resources to transform post-disaster situations into opportunities for development of their communities. Their interventions have insured that resources are directed to those who need them.

Their interventions in post-disaster programs have shown that they educate communities on state resources available, articulate community needs and enable access to resources. In their role as mediators between community and state they also provide quality information to the state, thus ensuring that women are not seen as passive victims but leaders of change in the eyes of both their communities and their governments.

In order to support such work, governments and multi/bi-lateral institutions should acknowledge that **women's participation in post-disaster processes is not a luxury but a necessity**. That is, they must

Create opportunities to support grassroots participation in decision making processes, implementation and monitoring and evaluation around post-disaster programs by creating fora for ongoing dialogue, negotiations and feedback.

Insure that women collectives are seen as important, legitimate stakeholders in a situation where professionals, NGOs, consultants and are vying for political mileage.

Unlike the dominant perspective that views post-disaster needs in terms of brick and mortar, the grassroots' perspective is that the most important thing that needs to be built is people's capacities to cope with the aftermath of the disaster in such a way as to transform the disaster into an opportunity for development.

It was proposed that the Huairou Commission set up a **Task Force around issues related to post-disaster situations** to better harvest and articulate the lessons emerging from our experiences.

SAFETY IN CITIES

Comite d'Action Femmes et Securite Urbaine (CAFSU)

Enabling women to feel safe in cities is a pre-requisite to citizenship, because safety determines women's ability to move around within the city and use its resources to the fullest extent possible. Mobility enhances participation. Further, making cities safe for women makes cities safe for everybody.

Anne Michaud presented how CAFSU has brought issues concerning women's sense of safety into public debate and successfully formulated new public policy and practice in response. They started their presentation with an exercise that asked participants to gauge their own sense of safety, and that of other women, by completing the following sentence:

“When I walk alone at night on the street, I feel safe when...”

Responses included, when:

... there are lights

... there are lots of people around

... I am in a familiar neighborhood

... there are severe penalties for those who attack women

... men everywhere respect my sexuality and don't see me as an easy target or a sexual object.

Anne and Leona summarized participant reactions by highlighting that women feel fear when walking alone at night on a street and this fear is typically accepted as 'normal'. But in fact, it is anything but normal, for **when women cannot use the city in the way that they want to, as men do, women are not able to exercise their citizenship fully**. What counts is women's subjective feeling of safety (not a professional analysis of urban safety that assesses when women have objective reasons to feel safe or unsafe). Ann explained that if women's perceptions don't determine the standard, governments adopt a paternalistic, expert and 'protector' driven approach. The protectionist approach makes women dependent and can blame victims for being attacked.

However, an approach to urban safety that takes seriously women's subjective experience of safety, what Anne termed an "Autonomous or Empowerment Approach" is one where women are acknowledged as having the solutions while public institutions are required to take on a support role. Anne conceded that it was very difficult, though not impossible as the CAFSU experience attests, to get a policeman to accept this kind of approach.

CAFSU was formed in the public outcry that followed the 1989 massacre of women at the Ecole Polytech when women's groups mobilised to make violence against women an issue of public, rather than individual concern. In seeking to address issues concerning women's feeling of safety, CAFSU has successfully brokered partnerships between the federal government, the local government and women's groups. CAFSU's initiatives around safety have insured that women's safety concerns are

Safety in Cities

**Comite d'Action Femmes et
Securite Urbaine (CAFSU)**

Presenter: Anne Michaud

made visible, and that multiple actors, ranging from women's groups to state institutions, are informed and take *collective* responsibility for safety.

CAFSU has played a pivotal role in orchestrating a partnership between women's groups, public transport authorities, municipality and the police. Some of the outcomes of this partnership include:

- A system for women to disembark from buses near their destination, even when it is between stops. (Given that two-third of the women in Montreal feel fear in going out at night alone, and that 60% of public transport users were women, CAFSU's proposal to enhance women's mobility made good business sense. Initial resistance by the bus drivers lead to CAFSU initiating an advocacy campaign which lead to the implementation of the proposal and also increased the awareness of the service and the visibility of the issue of women's safety.)
- Developing and implementing a Women's Safety Audit of the public transport system and built environment.
- A Planner's Guide that sets criteria for addressing women's safety concerns. Anne shared the example of how it was used in the Subway Exit Redesign Program to incorporate women's safety concerns. Today, everyone, especially professionals, acknowledges the improvements in the subway exits. The redesigned exits and their subsequent public approval are testimonies to the benefits of soliciting women's inputs into design and planning. Some elements of this Guide include:
 - i. You feel safe if you know where you are and where you are going.
 - ii. To see and be seen – visibility and visual control over one's environment relates to women's sense of safety.
 - iii. To hear and be heard.
 - iv. Can we escape, and can we obtain help?

With the changes in government every four years, ensuring the continuation of its programs has been a perpetual challenge that CAFSU has had to contend with. Despite this challenge and the occasional bumps in the road, the partnership between CAFSU and the City of Montreal has been one that CAFSU has learned and benefited from. Anne and Leona listed the benefits that have accrued as a result of their partnership efforts:

- More power to effect change
- Access to knowledge that you would not normally have, because, as a community group you run the risk of being isolated when you engage only with other community groups.
- Increased visibility in different arenas, including your own community.
- Facilitated media access
- Increased credibility from their relationship with public institutions.

Safety, by its nature is a collective project that requires consensus and responsibility among several actors. Not one street or house but an entire settlement city must be safe to enable a sense of safety and mobility. And a city in which women feel safe, is a city in which everyone feels safe.

SECURITY OF TENURE

If you know where you can sleep tonight then you can think about other things
Carmen Griffith

Women's initiatives to gain security of tenure demonstrate that without it vulnerable groups are unlikely to secure employment, acquire and use land, or access other resources. Recognising the importance of tenure security in the lives and livelihoods of poor communities, Habitat recently initiated a Campaign on Secure Tenure. In listening to the experiences of four grassroots initiatives on housing, land, and grassroots women's ability to secure housing, we, as a grassroots women's collective, need to figure out how we can relate to that campaign and what our voice in that campaign is going to be.

Security of Tenure

**James Weldon Johnson
Tenant Association, NYC**
Presenter: Ethel Velez

**Construction Resource
and Develop. Collective,
Jamaica**
Presenter: Carmen Griffith

Fundacion de Guatemala
Presenters; Rosa Mendez and
Maitei Rodriguez

SPARC, India
Presenter: Celine D'Cruz

**Woodland Community
Landtrust, Tennessee**
Presenter: Carol Judy

James Weldon Johnson Tenant Association

"There is always a need for low income housing" asserted Ethel Velez from the James Weldon Johnson Tenant Association in New York City in the course of her powerful presentation on issues related to public housing. As Velez pointed out, the depletion of public housing for the poor is not an issue specific to the US but is a global phenomenon. For everywhere, low-income public housing is on the decrease – both because no new public housing units are being built and because existing units are being demolished - while privatisation is increasingly being seen as the solution to housing deficits. In the US, demolished public housing is no longer replaced by new housing units on a 1 to 1 ratio. Further, with the passing of the ESCLAR Bill, the government has put into place draconian rules that serve to evict tenants from public housing on the flimsiest of reasons. This trend is pushing people into unsustainable private home ownership or homelessness. What is appalling about this trend, Velez pointed out, is that "while there is a decrease in public housing" – a tendency that is usually justified in terms of shrinking resources and stringent budgets – "the government is building prisons galore!"

East Harlem, which is where the JWJ Tenant Association is located, constitutes the largest proportion of public housing in the US. Velez related to us the struggles she and fellow tenants have had to make in order to improve their neighborhood – that is, to make it a safe place for families to live and to bring up their children. What her presentation clearly brought out is that governments get threatened when poor communities get well organised and will attempt to destroy and divide such organization in order to maintain the status quo.

To install a grill around their housing complex, or to change the seating in the public areas adjoining the buildings, Velez told us, were simple modifications that brought a significant improvement in the living area but which had a long history of lobbying, organization and negotiation behind them. The tenants and the government had different understandings of 'tenant involvement' and these understandings often came head to head with each other when the government felt that the tenants

were threatening the status quo. For example, when the tenants' association organised to change the placement of the benches in the public areas around their housing development so that the benches would always be visible to residents, the consequent reduction in crime in the area gained the tenants legitimacy in the eyes of the government. When subsequently, the JWJ tenants' association enabled similar changes in 5 other developments in the area, the government saw the association as a politically threatening actor. The response of the tenants' association was not to back down but to mobilise other tenants associations in public housing developments. As Velez put it, "They were worried about us organizing in East Harlem, well then we were going to organise the entire city!" Today the James Weldon Johnson Tenant Association is lined to citywide and national public housing networks. And it is mostly women who are getting involved, mobilised and mobilizers.

Construction Resource and Development Collective (CRDC, Jamaica)

From the Construction Resource and Development Collective, Carmen Griffith spoke of the issues concerning squatter settlements in Jamaica, particularly of efforts to legalize these settlements. As she pointed out, the term 'squatting' belies the considerable investments in housing that the poor make when they settle on lands that do not belong to them.

Issues Carmen raised included:

Can governments be initiators of change?

Can we talk about housing without talking about governance?

Problems do not get resolved by building houses

- Secure tenure is not necessarily private ownership

Fundacion de Guatemala

Rosa Mendez and Maitei Rodriguez presented the work of the Fundacion de Guatemala and the Committee for United Rural Women in enabling women to rebuild their communities decimated by the decade-long violence in Guatemala and to demand good governance and secure tenure as well as finding ways for women to own land. Their presentation clearly brought out the challenges and risks that conflict-torn societies face as they enter into a phase of reconstruction after the formal cessation of violence and begin to confront the issues related to the restoration of land, resources, civil liberties and rights.

"Good governance and secure tenure have to work together – they are two dimensions of the relationship between a person and a territory."

Organizing communities in the face of violence to access land starts a process where women experience themselves not as victims, but as contributors to a future for their families and future generations.

An important part of their work involves nurturing indigenous culture and traditions.

"Protecting indigenous culture is not just what you find in museums".

SPARC – Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers

Celine D’Cruz presented the work of the alliance between SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers’ Federation in India in devising strategies by which pavement and slum dwellers could successfully demand accountability and services from the government and in the process created opportunities to gain secure tenure. Her presentation enabled us to understand the “homework” on land, money and technology that poor communities need to embark on before they can engage with mainstream institutions from a position of knowledge and strength. Daily savings and credit operations enable communities to do this homework because it is essentially a tool by which poor communities learn how to mobilise and organise people and resources. An important element of Sparc’s organizing is to retain the community-based systems- even when you develop partnerships and institutional arrangements with mainstream actors.

“Pavement dwellers are the poorest of the poor and we have found that solutions that work for them will work for the rest of the urban poor and what works for women, works for men... those who are the most insecure are the ones who find the most innovative solutions... it does not work the other way around, the poorest just get left out.”

In the case of land tenure, it is essential that grassroots women are supported by institutional actors such as the state in order to protect grassroots women’s access to land, which is both essential to their housing needs as well as their income and livelihoods needs.

Women’s initiatives to gain security of tenure demonstrate that without the security of tenure it is difficult for vulnerable groups to acquire and use land resources.

Women’s collective work around gaining security of tenure for housing demonstrates that it is not just a question of bricks and mortar but also a question of building communities. Women’s collectives have demonstrated their ability to:

Collect information in such a way as to make visible the concerns of vulnerable groups who are generally rendered invisible in government statistics

Build a resource base through savings and credit programmes

Acquire the skills required for them to leverage resources and support from mainstream institutions.

Scale up their efforts through community-to-community transfers of skills and strategies.

Woodland Community Land Trust, Tennessee

Carol Judy shared with us the experience of setting up a land trust and associated community institute in rural Tennessee. The community land trust as Carol Judy pointed out are basics for community organising in Tennessee for “We’re rural...we can’t do anything until we own the land”. Once land ownership is gained other options become available. What the establishment of the Land Trust and Community Institute have been able to do is to arrest the rate of out-migration from the area by providing land-poor families with the opportunity to access affordable housing, livelihood and learning prospects.

The first 17 acres to be held in trust by the Woodland Community Land Trust and Clearfork Community Institute was donated by Vanderbilt University. Subsequently the acreage has increased as the number of partnerships that the Institute has been able to strike up has increased. In order to maintain community ownership of the land, the trust comprises of community lease holders (each lease holder owns a lease to at least 1 acre of land). The overriding concern in the development of this initiative has been to enable individuals and their families to access secure and affordable housing *without* creating new dependencies. Determining what is affordable housing therefore has been a community-negotiated process, for as Carol Judy pointed out, “\$25 per month as monthly payment for land leased sounds affordable, but if you cannot make the payment then it is not affordable.”

Insights

The work of SPARC (India), CDRC (Jamaica), Fundacion de Guatemala, JWJ Tenant Association, NYC, and Woodland Community Trust, Tennessee demonstrates that when support is provided to grassroots communities to

- develop their information base
- mobilize resources and skills
- create a robust organisational structure

then grassroots communities are powerfully poised to capitalise on opportunities to secure housing and tenure.

Legislation may exist to help women access land and housing but women have to overcome social and economic barriers to actually access and control an asset such as land and homes.

In both issues of urban safety and land tenure vulnerable groups have to first

- Become visible and articulate the issue from their perspective
- Build capacities to negotiate with public institutions
- Form alliances with other groups

- Find allies within the state and public institutions and support them to promote grassroots women and poor people’s agendas within their institutional framework.

It is essential to work with public institutions on these issues.

EDUCATION FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Community education processes are based upon knowledge and knowledge generation methods gained by grassroots women and their communities. In order to better appreciate what is distinctive and pioneering about them, Sandy Schilen and Monika Jaeckel asked us to keep the following questions in mind during the presentations by the Cork Women's Education Initiative and by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women:

What is our definition of community education?

What is it trying to accomplish?

Who are we partnering with?

Where do we want to go?

What would it take to support community education processes, to nourish them, and to lead from them?

Cork Women's Education Initiative

Maire Dorgan, Deirdre Byrne, Mary O'Sullivan and Sandra Condow from the Cork Women's Education Initiative in Ireland kicked off the session on community education with a wonderfully rich presentation of their work in addressing the failure of the mainstream education system to address the needs of working class women. They have devised a number of ways by which to meet the learning needs of working class women, many of whom leave school early.

Some of CWEI's initiatives involve partnerships with mainstream educational institutions so community women who participate can graduate with the vital pieces of paper that employers want to see. It has been a process of brokering partnerships with institutions such that the learning arising from experience or life is recognised and gains accreditation within the formal system of education. It has also been a process of creating institutional arrangements that insure community control over these partnerships. Underlying their various initiatives is a practice and an approach that CWEI has come to define as community education.

As the presenters pointed out, community education is often mistaken for adult education programs that are implemented in community locations, therefore CWEI has worked hard to make explicit the difference between community education and adult education and subsequently secure funding from institutionalised funding channels for education for community education in its own right. Maire contended "...community education differs substantially from the more structured taught courses, which characterise other, and more generally implemented forms of Adult Education. Community Education explores personal experiences and links this to social, community and political issues. It is greatly influenced by the women's movement, and by the belief that the personal is political. Community Education is a definite and distinct entity within the Adult Education sector."

EDUCATION FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Community Women's Education Initiative , (CWEI), Ireland

Presenters: Maire Dorgan, Deirdre Byrne, Mary, O'Sullivan, Sandra Condow

National Congress of Neighborhood Women

Presenters: Jan Peterson, Ethel Vellez, Lisel Burns, Sandy Schilen

One of the ways in which CWEI has been able to get the mainstream educational system to recognise CWEI's definition of community education (as a distinct sector and approach within Adult Education) was to use the opportunity created by the circulation of the Government's Green Paper on Adult Education to put forward their perspectives and make visible their practice. The response that CWEI generated to the Green Paper was so effective that when the White Paper was released many of CWEI's ideas and insights were incorporated into government policy. The highlight being that community education was recognised and resourced as a sector of adult education in its own right.

Based on their practice of community education, CWEI has generated a list of questions that enable us to determine if a particular initiative is community education or not:

- Is it located within and under the control of the community?
- Is it based on the principles of participatory democracy and on equal partnerships?
- Is the particular initiative designed to enable community groups to make the links between local problems and injustices in the social, political and economic structures of society, and to move from awareness to action?
- Does the initiative acknowledge and structure its programmes around the 'learning by doing' approach and the relevance of the lived experiences of a community (either geographic, or group or issue based), and does it have a 'reflect, act, evaluate, move-to-new-action' spiral approach to adult learning?
- Is it community/adult learner-centered?
- Is the community/adult learner involved in the design of the programme, its implementation and its evaluation?
- Will the community/local people eventually be trained to run the programmes themselves, and get paid for this in the same way as professionals?
- Is the particular programme or initiative focussed on the group or community, as distinct from adult learning or advancement or accreditation?
- Are those working with the Community Education initiatives linked to networks so that policy can be influenced and lessons passed on?

Two of the many partnership initiatives that CWEI has pioneered include:

The development of a two year diploma course called 'Women in Community' that is run in conjunction with the University College Cork. The course targets women who are or aspire to be organisers in their communities, and is, as Deirdre explained to us, "designed specifically for women who have worked in their own communities, largely without the aid of conventional education."

A partnership between CWEI and the Cork Institute of Technology that led to the development of a degree course on 'Community Education and Development'. As Deirdre and others pointed out, the course is the result of much deliberation both within CWEI and with mainstream institutional actors around recognising and accrediting the experientially derived knowledge of grassroots women.

Enabling grassroots women to avail of these accreditation opportunities is an entire support structure developed by CWEI, and subsequently mainstreamed, that includes the provision of community-based tutorials and mentors, the development of course content and format by community women

and through consultation with prospective participants, and ensuring equal representation on the Course Management Board.

In terms of resourcing and funding community education, CWEI's advocacy efforts have resulted in the establishment of:

A separate funding line in the Department of Education and Science, specifically to fund the development and nurturing of community education practice.

Direct funding down from the Department to projects – not through intermediate agencies/national umbrella groups.

Comprehensive funding support to enable community people to undergo full training as Community Education Resource Workers, without loss of income to the household.

Direct resourcing by the Department of the community sector where partnerships are established with 3rd level colleges (to provide accreditation routes) so as to enable partnerships to be equal and non-exploitative of the community side.

Policy recommendations that CWEI advocate, include:

A re-definition of what is seen as 'mainstream', to include equally valid learning and educational processes evolving from, named by and delivered by from those 'outside the walls'.

Partnerships where the civic/community sector is directly resourced by the state, in its own right (and not through intermediaries), so that equality is present in fact as well as theory.

The development and acknowledgement by the state of formal principled partnerships between the Institutional and Community Education sectors, acknowledged through the mechanism of independent and direct funding.

1. A set of indicators whereby the increasing empowerment of the community sector/group will be *the measure of a successful partnership.*

A process of accreditation that places the collective empowerment of the community/group as one of the learning outcomes and as the core criteria for success – a kind of question mark for assessing groups/communities as agents of a community process toward social change

Direct grant aid to marginalised early school leaving women (and men) which allows them an allowance for the duration of any study period undertaken to obtain certified accreditation, to enable them to work in their chosen sector/field of interest.

Rounding up the presentation, Maire remarked that the touchstone of a grassroots perspective on partnerships with mainstream actors should be the following question: "Have partnership arrangements at any level led to more effective and increasing participation of marginalised groups or working class communities in mainstream decision making, and to a significant increase in their share of resources?" The answer, she indicated, "will tell us whether we are talking about a process of empowerment of whole groups or the co-option of a few token individuals. The answer will also suggest the appropriate approach and response from the community education sector towards 'partnerships'."

Living Learning Centers

The National Congress of Neighborhood Women (USA) presented their work on developing Living Learning Centers, in New York City. Living Learning Centers are a repository of a community's history, a public space of interaction for the community across generations and race, and a place to envision the future. They constitute a formalisation of a long-standing NCNW practice, i.e. use of the neighborhood as an educational 'campus'.

The creation of Living Learning Centers has entailed partnerships between a wide variety of actors – the community, financiers and architects to name a few. Living Learning Centers have, however, been a difficult concept to explain to donors and mainstream institutional actors. To this end, NCNW has struck up partnerships with local universities to enlist their assistance in translating their vision into terms that mainstream institutions like bankers and real estate firms can understand, i.e. to demonstrate that Living Learning Centers constitute a low-risk investment opportunity.

Fittingly, the panel of presenters at GWIA comprising the partners from the New York City Living Learning Center included representatives from NCNW, from the school of Architecture at City College of New York and the Milano Graduate School at the New School University. Students from these two schools led us through the extremely slick presentation that they had used when they had approached bankers to raise funds for the project. Amid the shouts of glee when we recognised NCNW's Williamsburg office, and familiar faces in the various slides that the students presented us with, we came to see, in a very tangible way, that the kind of initiative that makes sense to us also makes sense on a different calculus, a calculus in which returns to investment is calculated in dollars and cents.

In New York City, what the NCNW proposes to do is to transform the building that currently houses their office, and that they own, into an inter-generational, inter-racial Living Learning Center for grassroots women leaders world-wide. NCNW's vision is that "The LLC will be a permanent home for the mentoring, network building, and capacity sharing activities that are already the essence of NCNW. The LLC will provide a permanent living space for mentors, occasional guests and visitors, and shared meeting and work spaces for local and international programs."¹

Insights

The focus of development from a grassroots women's perspective is the creation of community. Therefore information, education and development efforts need to go beyond individual and personal development and be geared towards enhancing the development of community, team learning and collective and cooperative achievement. This requires education systems to involve both collective analysis as well as collective action. This perspective involves a reevaluation of mainstream knowledge base systems on the basis of the underlying goals and values of education and education

¹ Milano Graduate School and City College School of Architecture (2001). Living Learning Center: A non-traditional setting for capacity building and sharing. Project proposal submitted to Chase Community Development Program on behalf of the National Congress of Neighbourhood Women, p.II.1.

systems. Is education an 'up and out of the community' process for individuals or a process of empowerment of groups who are grounded in communities and neighborhoods that have been marginalised by the mainstream development paradigm?

A redefinition and reshaping of information transfer and education systems from a grassroots women's perspective involves the following aspects:

- The main objective of education is the collective empowerment and advancement to enable individuals as part of their communities to influence and change the social conditions in which they live. Education can be defined as a planned and organized approach to help people in a structured way to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge they need in order to solve the problems in their community and to assist the whole community as well as the individuals in it to reach their full and creative potential.
- Learning in such a context engages citizens in participatory democracy and involves building the awareness and the capacity to make links between local problems and injustices in the social, political and economic structures of society and to move this awareness into collective action.
- Learning and education is linked to and based in the community, not to institutions outside of the community, learning involves learning from the experience of life as well as learning by addressing the issues at hand: "making the path while walking it". Learning does not leave the community but benefits and goes back into the community.

This implies the following policy recommendations:

- A redefinition of what is seen as "mainstream" to include equally valid learning and educational processes evolving from, named by and delivered by those "outside the walls".
- Partnerships where grassroots women's groups are directly resourced by the state in their own right (and not through intermediaries), so that equality is present in the shaping and defining of education practices and systems.
- The development and acknowledgement by the state of formal principled partnerships between the institutional and grassroots education sectors, acknowledged through the mechanism of independent and direct funding.
- A set of indicators, whereby the increasing empowerment of community groups will be the measure of successful education.
- Changes in internal departmental structures and funding mechanisms to enable the state apparatus to respond quickly and appropriately to the more dynamic progressive community sector needs.
- A process of involving the grassroots community in the designing of education and accreditation procedures that places the collective empowerment of the community as the core criteria for success.

Schedule GWIA 2001

May 29 – June 4 2001

DAY 1 Tuesday May 29, 2001

Engendering Local Governance

German Mother Centers
Czech Mother Centers
Bosnian Mother Centers
GROOTS Kenya / Mother Center Mathare
National Congress of Neighborhood Women, USA
Partner Dialogue on Engendering Local Governance

DAY 2 Wednesday May 30, 2001

From Disaster and Conflict to Empowerment and Development

Comite de Emergencia Garifuna, Honduras
Swayam Shikshan Prayog, (SSP) India
Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (FSWW) Turkey
Partner Dialogue on Disaster and Conflict

DAY 3 Thursday, May 31, 2001

Safety in Cities

Comite d'Action Femmes et Securite Urbaine (CAFSU), Canada
Partner Dialogue on Safety in Cities

Security of Tenure

James Weldon Johnson Tenant Association, USA
Construction Resource and Development Collective, Centre, (CRDC), Jamaica
Fundacion de Guatemala/Women for Peace Network
Society for the Promotion of Area Resources (SPARC), India
Clearfork Landtrust, USA
Partner Dialogue on Security of Tenure

Day 4 Friday, June 1, 2001

Education from the Bottom up

Community Women's Education Initiative (CWEL), Cork, Ireland
Living Learning Center Initiative Brooklyn, USA
Partner Dialogue on Education

DAY 5 Monday, June 4, 2001

Lessons Learned from GWIA

Policy Recommendations
Action Planning with the Huairou Commission
Local-to-Local Campaign
Land Campaign
AIDS Campaign
50/50 WEDO Campaign
Action Planning for Campaigns in working groups

GWIA Organisers

GROOTS (Grassroots Organisations Organising Together in Sisterhood)

Grassroots women's groups are often not adequately represented in public policy making. In 1985 grassroots women from the Cameroon, India, Kenya, the Philippines and the United States, aware of this exclusion envisioned a global network where grassroots women's organisations would form partnerships across national and regional boundaries, sharing resources, information and experience to forward a grassroots women's perspective at national and international venues. That vision became GROOTS.

GROOTS international vision is to develop a movement giving voice and power for policy change and the development of partnerships to grassroots women's initiatives. Since its founding GROOTS has had a significant impact on national and international policymakers and has become a vital resource for low income grassroots women who were either unorganised or not connected to influential networks. Grassroots women's issues and experiences, formerly marginalised, now have a stage and a platform from which to speak out.

GROOTS International operates in over 40 countries in nine regions: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe, North America, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. Over 80 autonomous organisations are linked with GROOTS.

GROOTS focuses on the needs and problems facing grassroots women globally by encouraging partnering and networking.

GROOTS carries out exchange programs on grassroots women's issues and encourages a higher participation of women in local leadership and decision making.

GROOTS opens the way for grassroots women's organisations to participate in major global conferences and to include grassroots perspectives on agenda items.

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Huairou Commission

The lack of a gender perspective in settlement issues inspired the creation of the Huairou Commission. It is an advocacy partnership group formed by a network of grassroots women's international organisations to forge strategic partnerships to advance the capacity of grassroots women world-wide to strengthen and create sustainable communities.

The Huairou Commission promotes the work of women in developing strategies to sustain and create communities within the principles adopted by the UN Habitat Agenda for low income women in housing: sustainability, equity, human dignity, and social justice.

Grassroots women create homes and communities. They do so intimately, through all the familiar, endless tasks – cooking, cleaning, building, repairing, planting, buying, selling, caring for the sick, the old and the young. Their work gives them an incomparable perspective on how their community works and what it needs.

The Huairou Commission is about:

- ✓ Building on, broadening, strengthening and sharing grassroots knowledge.
- ✓ Strengthening grassroots leadership to influence the decision making processes which shape their communities
- ✓ Transforming policies and institutions y working with partners on engendering community development

Networks that make up the core of the Huairou Commission include:

Asian Women and Shelter Network (AWAS), GROOTS, Habitat International Coalition, International Council of Women, WEDO, Women & Cities Network, Women and Peace Network..

Partners that work together with and have supported the Huairou Commission include UNCHS, UNIFEM, UNDP-MDGD, WACLAC, IULA, CERFE as well as faith based organisations like the Methodist Church.

The Huairou Commission seeks to empower grassroots women, reeducate policy makers, channel resources to the level of the community and change the culture of public policy making and public events to be more inclusive of grassroots groups and perspectives. Creating partnerships and a new way of partnering is essential to the Huairou Commission's strategy for change.

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