

Monika Jaeckel/Marieke van Geldermalsen

GWIA as a Best Practice Transfer Methodology

The Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) is an international transfer mechanism created by grassroots women's international networks to upscale their good practices. GWIA provides a structure for peer learning to identify the success elements of grassroots practices around the globe and to enter them into mainstream channels.

The objective of GWIA is to transfer and replicate best practices both horizontally (peer learning) and vertically (assuring that other stakeholders and legislation get involved). Precondition to success of the transfer is the ownership by the grassroots group of the knowledge contained in their best practice. The strategy to reach this goal is a reflection and documentation process, generated by peer-teaching and peer-exchange. Another core strategy is the analysis during the GWIA of the partnerships needed for the up-scaling and sustainability of the best practice. These objectives and strategies have been formulated by the women who developed the format.

The resources mobilized drew on the federating and networking experience of women's groups and networks. Many years of work (or in other words investment of human resources) went on before the first GWIA took place. Networking at grassroots level resulted in the identification of inspiring best practices.

Financial resources were secured through a strategy of linking to major global events. When the German government organised the Expo 2000, they were interested in showcasing women's best practices through GWIA as a way to include the grassroots experience and knowledge in the learning and exchange happening at the Expo. Also in the case of the GWIA's held at the ICASA, UNGASS and WUF, the strategy to mobilise resources was to partner with organizers interested in including grassroots voices and a wider range of stakeholders.

Mobilisation and management of resources was done by women's international networks **mine**, GROOTS and Huairou Commission.

PROCESS

Finding genuinely good practices was a challenge met through a careful selection process. Participating groups are selected on recommendation after being scrutinised by local partners on criteria such as women's leadership, having a concrete practice that works, and being community based.

Every group prepared a day long free format training workshop to teach their best practice. At the end of these workshops participants need to be able to understand the practice and apply it to their own situation. Visuals need to be brought along to illustrate the process. One training day would have a session featuring a best practice specifically focussing on partnership strategies.

Towards the end of the GWIA, key time is spent on collectively harvesting the learnings. Important part of this is the definition of follow-up activities to enhance and consolidate transfers. This deepening was tailor made into exchange visits, or further training. (examples are the transfer of Indian saving and credit circles to Europe and the Leadership Support method to and within European countries).

• **The Nest! Foundation** has the objective of compiling grassroots knowledge on community building, stimulating the recognition of grassroots knowledge and making it transferable.

In order to realize this objective, the Nest! foundation organizes programs, projects and activities to make grassroots knowledge accessible, and to network with like minded organizations.

• The **Nest! Foundation** • Spijkerstraat 331 • NL - 6828 DK Arnhem • the Netherlands •
• T/F (+3126)3707961 • E: info@nest.cc • Bank: IBAN NL45 PSTB 0009 6994 13 BIC: PSTBNL21 •
• The Nest! Foundation is inscribed at the Chamber of Commerce in Arnhem under nr. 09138244 • 1

The last section of GWIA is dedicated to partner dialogues to enhance exchange and to upstream the learnings of the Academy.

A core team of organizers, the local logistics team and the group presenting the next training would meet daily to evaluate the process and plan the next steps. Other important elements of the process include a thorough documentation and evaluation.

The largest problem faced in the implementation of the GWIA's, was the difficulty to raise sufficient financial resources. In general this could be compensated by the remarkable capacity of the networks involved to contribute human resources. In some GWIA's limited funds resulted in insufficient translation equipment and process.

Issues that remain to be solved is to guarantee a better continuity between the different GWIA events and stronger recognition of GWIA learning by mainstream institutions.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

The experience of 10 GWIA's has resulted in the formulation of a sustainable mechanism for transfer of best practices for community based women's groups.

GWIA made clear through demonstration that specific formats are necessary for the transfer of grassroots practices, and has demonstrated as well how this can work.

The principle result is a profound learning, exchange and partnership building process, that in turn resulted in concrete improvements for the involved communities. GWIA contributes to the improvement of living conditions and policies not directly but indirectly. All changes are in the end owned and carried by the participating groups. What GWIA does is provide them with a mechanism to understand the innovations involved in their practices and why they succeed; a way to document and explain it; bring this to the attention of mainstream stake holders; and finally a possibility to understand, absorb and implement best practices from other groups and countries.

The impact of the GWIA's has been evaluated in a participatory process and questionnaire survey. Continued contact between the alumni has been facilitated (through a list serve) to assure a fine tuning of the implementations at home.

SUSTAINABILITY

Ten GWIA's over the years have managed to find sufficient financial resources thus proving that the concept is marketable and financially sustainable.

Assuring social and cultural sustainability was a continuous point of attention in shaping and evaluating the process. In order to transfer experiences in an international setting like the GWIA, a large range of local cultures need to be bridged. This was done by integrating a monitoring process in the GWIA process. "Temperature taking" is done on a daily basis. In these sessions a reflection and exchange on the wellbeing of all participants assures that possible issues are dealt with before problems can arise, or can become conflicts. Understanding and respecting the comfort zones of all people in physical, emotional, cultural and mental respect is of utmost importance for the sustainability of the transfer process.

To avoid cultural misunderstanding or conflict, counseling service was available to the participants throughout the GWIA in a separate room. People could also make use of a quiet space for meditation or religious practices.

Elements of environmental sustainability are more applicable to the content of the best practices taught at GWIA, than to the transfer-mechanism itself. In general the groups showcasing their work at the GWIA have reached high levels of sustainability.

LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons below, were learned from the numerous groups participating in the GWIA's. Core elements of the practices of groups from different parts of the world, dealing with issues as diverse as disaster, basic services, safety and AIDS, were very similar. The elements of success, that made the difference between good and best practices, proved universal.

Because of the universal nature of these principles, the transfer of the different practices could take place across large cultural and geographical differences. In order to guarantee an optimal spread and impact on mainstreaming of the practices, future GWIA's will invite groups whose practices show proof of these elements.

- * What women know and have to contribute to facing the challenges of the 21st century is that solutions lie in people, not in technology.
- * Only when there are equitable partnerships with the grassroots level, can the quality of decision and policy making be improved and only in that case can there be innovation.
- * Development is sustainable when rooted locally in community networks.
- * When women take leadership roles, corruption is reduced and solutions are developed that are in harmony with the whole community as well as with the natural environment.
- * After wars and disasters, the reweaving of the social fabric of societies is needed just as much as rebuilding houses and the physical infrastructure. Women are at the core of this process.
- * Claiming ownership and recognition of everyday life expertise, is an important condition for equitable partnerships.
- * Progress lies in developing communities. This often involves reconnecting to local traditions and traditional practices.

TRANSFERS

The GWIA demonstrates two different levels of transferred best practices.

In the first place the practices of the participating groups got transferred to the other groups as a result of the GWIA process. Below are four of the most striking examples.

In the second place the GWIA as a transfer methodology is a best practice in itself that got replicated successfully in very different settings. The ten GWIA's have been held on three different continents in different contexts, having different focuses.

- * The first GWIA's were primarily events to highlight and exchange best practices.
- * The GWIA held in New York in 2001 served as a tool to impact on the UNGASS meeting as well as, as a capacity building strategy.
- * The GWIA in Barcelona at the WUF, had a special focus on partnership building. Participating groups came together with their local authorities and prepared their presentation together. This provided strong horizontal and vertical learning.
- * The two thematic GWIA's that have been held on AIDS, combined preparing the advocacy work at the ICASA conferences, with peer exchange and networking activities amongst the African groups.

To facilitate replication, the Nest! Foundation has published "The GWIA Handbook" that gives practical insights in background and application of the GWIA methodology.

To enhance impact of future GWIA's, the following points of improvement were distilled from the evaluations so far. In order to mainstream the results it is important to involve more high level partners. The GWIA would benefit from institutionalization as well as from a larger continuity resulting from continuous funding and core staff. Thus follow-up and deepening of the transfers happening during the GWIA's could be secured and training materials for further replication could be developed.

Presently possibilities are explored to deepen collaboration with the University of Ngozi, Burundi, especially on the thematic area of peace and reconstruction. With a South based institutionalized academic partner recognition would be facilitated and the lessons learned from GWIA could be processed into curricula.

Examples of successful transfers of grassroots best practices as follow up of GWIA's

1) SAVINGS AND CREDIT GROUPS a Grassroots Women's Best Practice from the South

The presentations of Sparc and SSP at GWIA resulted in powerful peer learning and an example of successful transfer of grassroots women's best practices from South to North. Mother Centers in Germany and Bosnia have applied the Indian model to their local conditions. They use savings and credit groups as a key strategy for strengthening financial literacy, self-confidence, social bonding in the group, start up businesses and to respond to emergencies.

2) THE MOTHER CENTER MODEL Creating Strong Neighborhoods

The Grassroots Women's International Academies have hosted peer learning exchanges between Mother Center initiatives from Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, The Czech Republic, Bosnia, Kenya, USA, Canada and The Philippines.

3) COMMUNITY MAPPING AND INFORMATION GATHERING AS A GOVERNANCE TOOL

GROOTS International organized exchanges as follow-up to the GWIA between groups from two earthquake hit regions, SSP in India and the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work in Turkey. The Turkish women learned how to organize community women and how to be at the forefront of reconstruction after natural disasters. The method of gathering information and conducting community surveys as a governance and partnership building tool, was piloted by GWIA participants Sparc and SSP in India and successfully transferred to Turkish communities.

4) LEADERSHIP SUPPORT PROCESS a Grassroots Approach to Collective Leadership

The Leadership Support Process was developed by the National Congress of Neighborhood Women in USA and presented at the GWIA. The method encourages women to reflect on and create visibility for leadership qualities they demonstrate in community initiatives. Following the Expo 2000 GWIAs, a series of teacher trainings were conducted by GROOTS and mine. The trainers graduating from these courses, further replicated the methodology to the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic and Bosnia.

References

Theo Schilderman and Otto Ruskulis: Building Bruidges with the grassroots, ITDG 2005, p 87-97

Monika Jaeckel: Global grassroots strategies for women's community leadership in: Global Urban Development, Volume 1, 2005, www.globalurbandevelopment.org

Monika Jaeckel: Advancing Governance through Peer Learning and Networking - Lessons learned from Grassroots Women, A Huairou Commission /UNDP Publication Bangalore 2003

Monika Jaeckel: Practicing Solutions Instead of Debating Theories - The Grassroots Women's International Academy (GWIA) at Expo 2000 in: Fair Play, Gender and Development Magazine of KARAT Coalition, 2/2000, Sofia 2002