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INDIA

The Friendship Foundation

A Youth Run Environmental and Rights Organisation

The Friendship Foundation is a youth run environmental and rights organisation that works to promote greater friendship between humans and nature. The Foundation has been working in various areas of forest conservation such as community forest management, wildlife monitoring in sanctuary areas and wildlife and environmental extension education in conjunction with the forest department, environmental clean ups and plantation drives, and generating awareness on environmental issues.

The main issue that the Foundation has been working on in relation to environmental conservation for the past three years is promoting the utility of native species in community forest management in the Vikarabad Forest Range, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. This range is located in the dry and barren Deccan plateau region of the state and is spread over 14,496 hectares. It is oriented North-South, and consists of mostly scrub and mixed thorn forests and has been designated as a reserve forest, the lowest forest protection status of all protected forests in India. Participatory forest management involving specially constituted village level VSS – Vana Samrakshana Samithies (forest protection committees) is being carried out in the forests since 1995, under the Joint Forest Management (JFM – now CFM, Community Forest Management) programmes partially funded by the World Bank. The programme aims to involve forest dependent communities in scientific management and protection of forests, whilst allowing them to sustainably harvest forest produce as a means of monetary benefit. Management techniques include afforestation and reforestation of denuded forest lands with timber and non-timber yielding species. After being cut down and auctioned, the VSS may retain 75% of the income. Other means of income generation for the community include collection of tobacco leaves, which fetches 100% revenue for the VSS, and levying fines upon forest violators and timber smugglers, wherein the VSS may retain 50% of the revenue according to the stipulations of the JFM programme.

Key Challenges:

Community forest management seems to be adversely affecting the ecology of the forests of Vikarabad over the past years, as evidenced by the dwindling and ever depleting forest cover, increasing human-animal conflict (especially with wild boars during harvest time due to habitat loss) and loss of surface water. The main reason for this is the very stipulation of the JFM programme, which proposes introduction of alien hard wood species in the scrub forest areas, and advocates usage of mono-cultivation of these species, and semi mechanisation of plantations. In order to raise these plantations, VSS members are resorting to deforestation of native scrub vegetation under the pretext that scrub is not forest. This is leading to widespread loss of forest cover and biological diversity. Since hard wood species are not accustomed to growing in the harsh and water deficient Deccan these plantations quickly fail, rendering the whole programme a failure.



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The main challenges that have arisen and are arising in our work in environmental conservation are:

1. Diversity of forest and land types, requiring exploration of various methods of tackling the problems originating here.
2. Lack of protection status due to the absence of uniform legislations.
3. Lack of enforcement of wildlife protection law uniformly in all regions.
4. Lack of awareness of environmental issues and the implications of these issues on livelihoods both amongst the affected population and amongst the general public.
5. Generalised nature of forest and wildlife protection laws, making them defunct and redundant in local contexts where conditions differ considerably from those specified in the legislation.
6. Unavailability of interested, motivated and technically equipped individuals to undertake relevant field work.
7. Lack of local networking opportunities with other organisations working in similar areas.

The main contextual factors that have an impact on the issue in our work are:

1. Unscientific management of forest without due consideration to local geographical and ecological factors which is leading to large scale deforestation through the introduction of alien species. This is having a major impact on biological diversity through fragmentation of key floral populations and associated faunal populations.
2. Increasing human animal conflict in the Vikarabad range during harvest time results in damage to livelihood and food crops such as sorghum, maize, millets etc. This is also happening in other ranges, which sometimes results in retaliation by farmers and the large-scale killing of wild animals like wild boars.
3. Lack of proper awareness amongst stakeholder groups, most importantly the VSS committees of the importance of protecting the native biodiversity of the region.

Context of the story:

We have been working with the local VSS to encourage plantation of native MFP (Minor Forest Produce) and NTFP (Non timber forest produce) yielding species such as lac, sap, medicinal herbs and roots. Individual VSS committees in the Vikarabad range have embraced this as they are getting dividends from these species as opposed to hard wood alien species which were planted earlier. This is also aiding in a gradual restoration of local scrub forest ecology and rejuvenation. Apart from this, the planting methods adopted include random traditional planting of seeds and saplings collected from the forest, aiding in native forest restoration and soil moisture conservation.

Experience in community involvement:

A few months back I was in the Durgam Cheruvu forest in the Vikarabad range with two Chenchu tribals, looking for evidence of animals through pugmark sighting in the newly restored natural forest area. The idea was to try and conduct a comparative analysis of mammalian and bird diversity in the natural forest, restored forest and plantations. Towards evening we came across two mammoth teak trees which were over seventy years old and above 90 feet in height. It is highly unusual to find such large hard wood trees in a scrub forest. The tribals told us that they had been planted during the British colonisation of India as part of the freedom struggle and that they had been protecting and nurturing the trees as



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sacred groves ever since. They were able to easily distinguish male and female teak trees which is difficult even for specialists. This taught us opportunity to reflect on our approach to forestry. We realised that it was illogical to impose modern conservation techniques upon locals, as they already had a great deal of inherent traditional knowledge passed down through the generations. They also had the right attitude to conservation, which was a sense of ownership and stewardship of the forest. We realised that in order to succeed in any initiative, the participation of the community was most crucial, as was instilling a feeling of ownership amongst people.

We had always adopted a 100% community involvement process in our project, right from the baseline data collection, concept development, interventions and monitoring and evaluation. The story that has been highlighted demonstrates the full involvement of one stakeholder community, the Chenchus, who had themselves been subjected to marginalisation and had been living in isolation in their own village. The stakeholder groups that we had involved in the project, the VSS groups, forest department, youth clubs and tribals, had a positive attitude to the project most of the time. Since they were encouraged to share their feelings on the issue, they came up with useful contributions that eventually were incorporated into the planning of the project. Thus the project was essentially planned and implemented more by the community themselves than by us, and we played more of a facilitator's role. The above incident took place during the monitoring of the project. As always there was complete participation of the community representatives, and this helped us further comprehend and sensitise ourselves to our role as externals in the territory and the role of the community as permanent stakeholders and beneficiaries in the outcomes of the project.

We had encountered a few failures that were tied to challenges during the implementation of the project:

1. We had not been able to sustain youth participation in the project to the extent as was initially expected.
2. We were unable to spread the geographic and implementation scope of the project beyond the initial project area of Vikarabad to other forest ranges.
3. We have not been able to duplicate the project contextually in other parts of the state.
4. We have been unable to successfully disseminate the learnings from the project to other organisations.
5. We have been unable to network successfully during the course of the project.

Learning and Reflections:

We have gained a lot of knowledge about how to interact with different stakeholder groups. For example, farmers need to be spoken to from a different perspective for them to understand the connection between farm produce, availability of water and the existence of forest, than tribals who depend more directly on minor and non timber forest produce for their livelihood. We have learnt that government officials need to be spoken to in terms of output of the work and realisation of objectives. Also, we have had the opportunity to liaise with different NGOs working on environment during the project, from whom we learnt techniques of evaluation and information dissemination. We have also had many useful experiences in time management, financial management and project conceptualisation, proposal writing, project management, monitoring and evaluation. Our experience has also demonstrated to us the



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importance of community consultation prior to the conceptualisation or implementation of any project relevant to the community.

This will have strong implications in any of our future endeavours aimed at environmental conservation, especially those involving community participation. Any of our future projects will definitely have a component of community participation and consultation prior to the designing of the project, and maximum involvement of the community and relevant stakeholder groups in implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Further questions and reflections:

1. What is the level of significance of community consultation in a project, which sometime may not be directly related to the community, such as environmental conservation?
2. How does one deal with different stakeholder groups within the same community, often having varying and contradicting opinions of the same issue?

Case Study Contributed By: **Mr. Vikram Aditya**



CASE STUDY 2.

PHILIPPINES

Learning from the Community

Developing a Grassroots Environmental Education

Curriculum in the Philippines

The Centre for Environmental Concerns – Philippines (CEC-Philippines) is a non-governmental development organisation that was initially established in 1989 as a support and service institution for local community organisations in need of assistance in responding to environmental issues. Currently, CEC is engaged in Environmental Advocacy developing a grassroots environmental education curriculum to respond to the needs of local and communities and organisations.

This case study examines the first 10 years of CEC's experience of developing the capacities of local communities to respond to environmental issues through the conduct of education and training programmes. More specifically, the focus of this case study is how CEC as an organisation and its staff went through a steep (re)learning curve while engaging with the very local communities we wanted to 'teach'.

The Restoration Ecology Workshop (RENEW) was designed to develop the current environmental awareness of the participants through the introduction of basic ecological concepts towards the identification of concrete environmental actions. Formulated in 1990, RENEW was CEC's core education module that was adapted, revised and renewed in what we described as a process of progressive contextualization. Three aspects of contextualisation can be identified from the experience: the localisation of the education module with environment as an entry point for engagement, the examination of the environmental problem from a more holistic framework, and the importance of situating the identified environmental action within the context of organised collective responses.

The workshops were adjusted to suit the time available, the background, needs and capacities of the local learners (learner's culture, level of literacy, language, gender), the knowledge and skills required to address identified environmental problems, and the specific capacities and needs of the local host organisation (level of community organising). Localisation assisted in the identification of an entry point of engagement through a particular issue/ problem (actual environmental damage or potential damage due to a proposed development project – like a dam or geothermal plant) at the level that the community was able to comprehend and respond to.

We soon realised that localisation was not sufficient. It was as important to contextualise the educational content to the broader contexts, where the specific environmental problem was examined and responded to within the complex social, political, economic, cultural and historical factors that impinge on it. As such, it was important to move away from the predominantly scientific and technical perspective of analysing and responding to environmental problems, and instead examine these problems using a more holistic framework, often within a political ecology paradigm.



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Finally, we identified a need to respond to the environmental problem within the context of the broader social movement. As such it was prerequisite for the local community to be organised before we responded to a request for an educational workshop. This was identified to ensure that at the conclusion of the workshop the participants are able to transform the knowledge and skills gained into collective action, and more importantly situate these actions within the broader campaigns, specifically within the social movement for change in the Philippines.

Initially, we examined the practice of progressive contextualisation as a curriculum development process, with the aim of building the capacities of local communities to respond to environmental problems. However further examination and reflection on this educational practice highlighted an observation that it was not only the curriculum that was being contextualised, but the organisation; CEC and its staff, were equally being contextualised as they continued to engage with the different local communities and the wider social movement. Therefore the focus shifted from merely being a curriculum development process to an organisational development and community development process that was reciprocal in nature, where the curriculum became the means for both entities to engage with each other.

Our level of engagement with most communities was initially very short-term and very much focused around workshop/training timeframes. In some communities, these training programmes developed into more long-term projects, however, they continued to be dictated by timeframes of funding agencies rather than community time frames.

One attempt to sustain the links with the communities we worked with was through the organisation of the People's Faculty of Grassroots Environmental Education; a group of educators/trainers that all received the basic RENEW Trainer's Training Workshops and continued to adapt the workshop content and methods to their specific community or sectoral contexts. The faculty met annually to support the education and environmental action that resulted from the initial RENEW workshop to ensure that these were linked to the broader national campaigns. It was during one of these annual People's Faculty gathering that we all had to become more aware of the multiple roles we played. We summarised these roles in an acronym of – **Edu.C.A.T.O.R.** (**E**ducator, **C**ampaigner, **A**dvocate/**A**ctivist, **T**rainer, **O**rganiser and **R**esearcher) and as a result developed an EduCATORs Training Workshop instead of the traditional Trainer's Training Workshops.

Finally, aside from progressive contextualisation being both a curriculum and organisational development process, it was as much a personal development process. When I decided to work with CEC as an environmental educator, I had this idea of being the 'teacher' who would bring environmental science to the people. It didn't take long for me to realise that the environmental science concepts I studied at university, have their limits in terms of trying to explain the different ways communities perceive and relate to their environments. The basic concept of ecology that describes the environment as being made up of living and non-living things is one example of a concept that is questioned by the holistic and integrated way that indigenous communities view and relate to their environments.

These instances made me re-think my role from teacher to facilitator. They had all the knowledge they needed to understand and respond to specific environmental issues. However, I can recall an agricultural worker from Southern Philippines approaching me after a workshop to tell me how much they appreciated being able to understand the scientific



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explanation that often is used against them by large corporations, developers and the government. So while they may have inherently had a sense of the damage done to their environments, the science provided them additional tools they could use to explain their observations and demands for change.

I currently call myself an EduCATOR, because I feel that this role captures the complexity of the nature of capacity-building that we aim to develop with the local communities we work with. This complexity acknowledges that education and learning will need to be on-going and progressively contextualised, if we are to ensure that we and the communities we work with are able to respond to the rapidly changing contexts that will continue to face us in the future.

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UGANDA

A case of networking in the Rwenzori region

presented by Kabarole Research & Resource Centre

The Kabarole Research and Resource Centre plays a facilitator's role in development. For us capacity building is essential and understood to be much broader than just training and relates to the processes that build up grass-root structures and networks in which communities can actively engage in the development processes.

Our approach is built on the understanding that communities should not be seen as recipients of development but as active participants in the process. In order for this to happen, the people need the information, skills and knowledge. Learning and action therefore, become a life long fiber streamlining through all community development programmes.

While training is key, it is even more important that there is an appropriate material context to engage what is learned. Our programmes connect networks of people who are joined together by a common interest. In this way people's specific needs are met with much more precision and we are simultaneously more able to influence policies and frameworks at a broader level.

We found that fitting capacity building programmes into the practical realities of the communities often with diverse needs and levels of understanding is an extremely difficult job unless people are linked in a framework that addresses their core needs. The concept of networking as promoted by KRC has been a very valuable approach in synchronizing the unique capacity needs possessed by different sections of the population. It has provided room for targeting issues and sharing experiences. This has fostered the collective voice that is necessary to influence positive change in the development process.

In the past five years, KRC has spearheaded the strengthening of specialised networks¹ in the region, (networks which it also had a strong hand in establishing) and now, most of them are very firm and autonomous entities. It is important to note that for every specialised network that has come up, KRC interventions/programmes have in the first place directly worked and continue to work with the communities to raise a critical mass of groups and individuals who connect to particular aspects such as HIV/AIDS, sustainable agriculture, microfinance, rural information technology, corruption and human rights. These efforts later become the building blocks of the grassroots networks and structures.

These networks have been very strong on information sharing, capacity building and advocacy and this approach has helped other smaller organisations to identify, own and contribute to some of the pressing regional issues like corruption, domestic laws and agricultural policies. These issues spearheaded by networks have already born fruit. For example:

1. Sustainable Agriculture Trainers Network (SATNET) Association of Human Rights Organisations in the Rwenzori region (AHURIO), Rwenzori Forum for Peace and Justice (RFPJ), Rwenzori Youth Network to combat HIV/AIDS (RNYCA), Rwenzori Anti Corruption Coalition (RAC) Rwenzori Association of NGOs and Networks (RANNET), Rwenzori Association For Culture and Development (RAFOCUD), Rural Information and Communication Network (RIC-NET), Federation of Rwenzori Micro finance Associations (FORMA)



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SATNET spearheaded a campaign against the use of DDT in the region. They organised DDT symposiums in all the districts of the Rwenzori region, organised for petitions and brought out the concerns of the farmers in the region at the national level. As a result, by the close of 2005, the ministries of health and agriculture had co-opted some focal national agricultural civil society organisations for more consultations. In addition, the implementation of the DDT plan was withheld to understand the concerns from different view points. Although it's unpredictable whether the government will go ahead and use DDT, the intervention by the network from an advocacy point of view reaffirms the critical role of networks in the region. Other important examples are found in the advocacy work by AHURIO on the question of bride prize which often is the source of domestic violence against women. In the current Domestic Relations Bill (DRB) which is still being debated in the Ugandan Parliament, it is proposed that the bride prize be removed and in cases where an intending groom wishes to give something, then it is treated as a gift and can never be claimed back.

These institutional developments in the region have led to another super structure called RANNET² (Rwenzori Association of Networks and NGOs) whose mandate focuses on the collective voice of the people of the region on regional issues irrespective of the thematic interests. It is important to note that KRC in the past played a lead role in most of the functions the networks are holding now but continually ceded these roles as structures formed. RANNET is now in the process of organising the Rwenzori civil society fair which will be held in the first week of September 2006. KRC took the lead in organising the civil society fair of 2004 and it was a tremendous success with over 400 rural farmers spending three days learning from each other through exhibitions (mainly agricultural), puppets, drama and dance on a range of development issues, debate and presentations on issues relevant to peasant farmers.

In conclusion therefore, in so far as the networks are concerned, the Rwenzori region provides a unique case where different interventions feed into specific forums and a regional perspective is achieved through RANNET. For KRC, this is the one of the fundamental results of our work in the region and a means through which people have come together and are able to continually reflect on the development process.

Nevertheless, this manner of doing things is a process oriented approach and has no promise of immediate results as usually demanded by many funding organisations. This in itself presents a challenge especially in securing long term partnerships that allow such processes to grow. Someone has to be willing to invest time and resources to let processes grow logically. Unfortunately, there are not many such partners; the demand for results often overrides the ideal of action learning.

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2. RANNET is an association bringing together networks and NGOs in Rwenzori region for collective voicing on the regional issues and representation at the national and international levels



INDIA

Encouraging Women's Participation in the Rehabilitation of the Common Lands in the Aravalli Hills

Introduction

Women's Role in Sustainable Development: The Gap between Policy and Practice

This case study opens with an account of a recent incident which occurred on a visit by the author to a project village in Rewari district of Southern Haryana. The State has recently held panchayat (village council) elections, and as a result of the amendments to the Panchayat Act, under which 30% of elected posts are reserved for women, the new constituted panchayats have some women panchs (member of the village council) and a few women sarpanches (chairman of a village council).

A very pleasant drive from Rewari to the village, peacocks dancing in the rain, green beds of crops on both the sides of the road, not much traffic, no pollution – an idyllic situation. On arrival at the village around 5pm the project team were received by a small group of men who were waiting in the panchayat bhavan (community centre). A male villager, a leader by natural qualities, was introduced, as sarpanch. He started by listing all the work he had done This was very puzzling.

The author stopped the meeting to ask, “where was the elected woman Sarpanch?”

“Oh” they said. “We do all the work for her. She only puts her thumb impression on the register.”

This problem was not new, and as it was important to meet this woman, it was requested that she and the other mahila panchs be called for the meeting. The chivalrous men offered another alternative; “that we start the meeting and she will come”, but this was not accepted. After waiting for 45 minutes a group of four women arrived; all of the women except the sarpanch observed purdah (the practice of veiling when in the presence of men).

After some formal introductions and questioning the meeting began and it was a pleasure to see how well informed the woman sarpanch was about the Women In Development (WID) programme in the village. She asserted her authority and questioned the local Women Extension Worker (WEW) about not informing her about the difficulties in the programme. The sarpanch, a mature, balanced, commanding woman had been deprived of her rightful legal position by customary practice and social habits. Enlightened Government policies are an essential framework for women's development but their formal adoption does not necessarily ensure rapid change in established customary practices.



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It is necessary to work towards social change to promote women's full participation in development programmes. This is a difficult, long drawn out and continuous process but social change will come with education and improved economic opportunities. Through this particular case study, we will try to understand the process through the initiative of the Haryana Forestry Department. The project was funded by European Union and the author was a WID (Women In Development) and Gender consultant – all experiences are first hand.

The Aravalli Project:

The project area is the common land of 293 villages in the Haryana State, bordering the Aravalli Hills. The low Aravalli hills, the oldest mountain chain in India, reach from Rajasthan into the southern part of Haryana. The destruction of the vegetative cover of the communal land of these villages has caused accelerated erosion and led to poverty. The objectives of the project are to restore the environment and the productivity of communal land of selected villages and to improve the income and living conditions of the poorest, in many cases landless, members of the village communities who depend for their income on livestock and wage labour.

The village communities, particularly the landless and uneducated, presently depend on these common lands for fuelwood, fruits, fodder and grazing ground for their livestock. The resources created by the project will eventually increase the availability of these essential materials. The project has also initiated processes whereby the village people accept responsibility for the sustained management of the newly revegetated hills. To achieve this purpose the project had to develop management skills in the village communities that would enable them to manage the resources in a democratic and equitable way once the Forest Department relinquishes control. The project had envisaged components of community participation and community management in the overall plan but had not clearly defined the roles, responsibilities and participation of women and the impact of this project on their day-to-day life.

Role of women in the use of common lands

Women in the project area play a major role in natural resource management. In their traditional roles women have major responsibilities for the collection of fuel and fodder, and for the care of livestock. If the existing pattern of over-exploitation of village common lands is to change, women must be involved in implementation of project activities. Women's interests are more likely to be served by obtaining a continuous flow of intermediate products from common lands compared to men's general tendency to favour cash crops.

The degradation of the vegetation through deforestation is a common problem for women. The important economic buffer which the Common Property Resources (CPRs) have traditionally provided to the rural poor is being rapidly eroded. The poorer households depend mostly on the common lands and the smaller their land holdings, the more time the women spend in the "free collection" of fodder, fuel and other materials. The shortage of fodder is almost certainly more serious for women than the shortage of firewood. In order to overcome some of these problems, women must be targeted as key members of the Village Forest Committees (VFCs). They have an essential role to play in planning plantation management, choosing species, raising nursery stock, planting, protecting and using the new resources. This was a real challenge. In some cases it required considerable tact and persuasion to



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ensure that women play a really active role in decision making. The Aravalli project had accepted this challenge, using field strategies to enhance women's participation in the overall project activities.

Approaches adopted:

With the scenario described in the preceding paragraphs, with no systems and staff within the Aravalli Project to take on the task of women's programmes, and the total absence of NGOs in the region, achieving the objective was an uphill task. Viable and effective methodologies had to be tried quickly, as the physical work of vegetative rehabilitation in the Aravalli Hills had already been operational for about two years.

The consultant's experience with the community development programmes elsewhere in the country has provided some insights to working in such situations. The broad topologies in the processes of community development are as follows :

- An external activist works for communities
- An external activist works with communities
- Communities through their own leadership work for themselves

The first two options were not applicable or viable for the Aravalli project area. The last option appeared workable in the project area. Before commencing the work a situational analysis was undertaken of the project villages. No previous attempts had ever been made in the project villages to get the women together. "Organising" was a word unknown. To be able to identify leadership from this background was difficult. Several trips to villages and meetings with various groups, all of which were chaotic in nature, brought some rapport between the village communities and the consultant. All male staff from the Forest Department were deliberately excluded from these meetings.

During the initial interaction with the village women it was learnt that some of the women involved in nursery work had a good understanding of the project activities. Women were also concerned about the reduction in the common land available for grazing, as in some cases the land adjoining the village boundaries had been closed and they were required to take their animals to a distance of 3-4 kms for grazing. The fodder needs were met from agricultural lands of the better off in the villages. The poorer women however during the interaction disclosed that they continued grazing their cattle on closed lands. Availability of fuelwood is still a major problem for women. Two categories of women were affected – those who use fuel only for domestic consumption and those who also collect fuelwood for sale as livelihood.

A few meetings were held with a select group to discuss and assess the potential and willingness of women's groups to participate in the activities of the Aravalli project. The general response was positive and encouraging. Not only were the women anxious to participate but they had plenty to contribute especially in relation to uses of fodder and trees and the need to protect trees. The concept of identifying leadership from amongst themselves was also discussed in the second round of meetings. Participants to these meetings were from different socio-economic backgrounds with the majority from economically weaker sections and women headed households. There was a spirit of cohesiveness in these groups. A few who were articulate and had communication skills were willing to accept the responsibility to organise women's groups at the village level, to spread the necessary message and to solicit participation. This approach had the following advantages :



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- The initiators of this process were local village women who were in close contact with the target group and the development of a close and trust based relationship was possible
- No bureaucratic procedures were involved
- The leaders would be a link between the project authorities and village women
- Financial costs would be much less than having the project staff perform these functions.

With the help and support of the panchayat sarpanches and the project staff, a first batch of Women Extension Workers (WEWs) were identified and given training, mainly in the areas of organisation and communication skills. In several villages the consultant conducted meetings herself to provide a demonstration in conducting village level meetings to increase women's awareness about project activities. The WEWs were eager to learn folk-lore, and folk music and women's liberation songs were very helpful in this process.

For the first six months after the identification of the WEWs the consultant continued working with them in their villages so that the community understood what the programme was about. After this, Phase II began where more issue-based inputs were provided. The WEWs were invited to the project offices. To begin with they were accompanied with their family members, or transport had to be arranged to get them to the meeting. Slowly, this began to change and now this core team of 120-130 WEWs are so confident that they travel by themselves to all the meetings. A new "sense of comradeship" between the WEWs has developed. A small honorarium (Rs. 600/- per month) was budgeted, to be paid to these WEWs in recognition of their time spent on this work.

Once selected, further training had to be provided for this core team to increase their skills in understanding of the project activities and to improve their communication skills in their continuous interaction with the village women. The programme met with initial resistance from several sections, especially from the staff of the Aravalli project. Culturally the staff members were not used to working with women from the villages. The issue of gender sensitisation for staff was also addressed simultaneously, which was more difficult than organising women in the villages. The consultant undertook gender sensitisation sessions for all levels of staff. Phase III of the WID programme was directed towards addressing the specific needs of the women of the Aravalli villages, with the assistance of the WEWs.

The following activities have been undertaken especially to increase women's participation in the project related activities.

- Mahila (Women's Group) nurseries, in addition to government nurseries
- Fodder production
- Grass seed collection
- Savings programmes linked with government small savings schemes for women
- WEWs involvement in village forestry committees
- Selection of species for planting
- Increased employment for needy and deserving women in project areas
- Inclusion of women in technical training
- Opening of Women's Centres
- Mahila melas (women's savings and loans circles)

The thrust of the WID programme has been on two levels:



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- enhancing and upgrading the skills of WEWs in relation to these programme issues and
- staff training and sensitisation on gender issues

These strategies have contributed to the long term process of community development. They have been responsible for the present achievements. The programmes of the project received full support from all levels, especially from the Head of the Haryana Forest Department and from the Project Director.

Issues relating to the sustainability of the Project/programme

To be effective, a development programme has to be sustainable. Sustainable development means people-centred and people-oriented : people have to be the subjects not the objects of development. They must have a role in the decision-making process. Historically, women take care of the basic needs of society such as food, fodder, fuel, shelter and nurturing. Women are naturally people-centred and people oriented because of their traditional preoccupation with nurturing, nursing and sustenance. Hence any sustainable development has to have women's support and involvement.

The WID programme in the Aravalli project must be acceptable to all the members of the communities in the project villages, both men and women. As long as the women bring money into the family by their labour their efforts are welcome, but the moment they want a say in the control of that money, and how it will be spent, the battle of sexes begins. Hence during the introduction of the WID programme the empowerment of women through increasing their role in decision-making was delayed until after the confidence-building process. In the short span of two years the WEWs have made tremendous progress in the confidence-building process. Women now participate in the village meetings, talk of their work and needs, and openly seek recognition and visibility. The work has also drawn the attention of the visitors and the media. However, the success of the work with the women in the project has brought its own problems. Women who had hitherto lived secluded lives, largely untouched by mainstream development are excited about their new opportunities and want to make the most of them. Some men in villages, and some project staff, feel threatened by this development.

The programme needed institutional support and official recognition within the villages. Three innovations were proposed to achieve this :

- making WEWs members of VFCs
- using some of the incentive funds from the VFCs to start women's centres; and
- soliciting panchayat support by requesting them to provide a building or space for the centre.

The proposals were first discussed with the WEWs, then the sarpanchs and later with the VFCs – a lot of persuasion was required. Now it is encouraging to know that the above mentioned measures are welcomed and full support provided by all concerned. It is still to be tested how well the WEWs perform as members of the VFCs.

Conclusions, suggestions and hopes for the future :

The project authorities plan to undertake a study of the "Project Impact on Women", which hopefully will highlight in specific detail the socio-economic and political changes in the lives of the women. A periodic staff gender-sensitisation exercise should be carried out. Similar support should be provided to members of VFCs, which are people's organisations at village



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level, to accept, promote and encourage women's participation. Senior staff should give this their full attention by regularly attending VFC meetings; their diplomatic guidance is particularly needed in the more conservative project villages. Equally important is the need for the establishment of appropriate channels for the monitoring of the WID programme and its co-ordination at the project headquarters.

The project will enlist greater support from women and their families if their incomes can be increased and more of their immediate family needs can be satisfied. These include the provision of clean drinking water, literacy classes, children's crèches, sewing and handicraft classes, and health checks. Logistically such needs may seem outside the immediate purview of the project activities, but holistic action can go a long way to ensure achievement of the project's main objective – the sustained rehabilitation of the Aravalli Hills.

The project must consider the future of community development in terms of support for village level organisations. The greater the sensitivity of the project authorities on this issue the better the chances of success. For long term sustainability of the process, the project authorities need to facilitate the promotion of community-based structures - Mahila Mandals (women's groups) at village level, who can then form a federation, with its own organisation, which would be responsible for the programme. This will entail a lot of support and training but this strategy has been tried elsewhere and has worked effectively. This process could be extended with the federation taking up other issues, based on promotion and development work, leading to women's participation and empowerment throughout the region.

Secondly, and as a supplement to the above, since a small beginning has already been made in the project area, the project authorities, through the WEWs, could promote self-help groups starting with a savings and credit programme, and, over a period of time, these could be registered either as a credit co-operative union, as a federation, or as a rural women's bank.

Thus, from simple actions and natural inclinations and abilities, a truly emancipated group of rural women can play a vital part in national development.

Case Study Contributed by:

Mrs. Harvinder Bedi, Ms. Sunanda Bhalerao, Development Support Team, India



CASE STUDY 5.

INTERNATIONAL (Initiated in Australia)

Oxfam International Youth Partnerships

Action Learning with Young People

Oxfam International Youth Partnerships is a network of young people working for change within their own communities. OIYP's vision is 'young people creating a peaceful, equitable and sustainable world'. Since 2000, 600 young men and women in over 100 countries have contributed to OIYP's vision through two cycles of learning and action. Through the programmes of the OIYP these young women and men have exchanged their ideas and experiences, built their skills and knowledge and widened their perspectives of the world in order to make their work in their communities more effective.

Oxfam's role is to create spaces for their capacity development and for exchange. This is achieved through opportunities for skills development, the exchange of stories of success and learning, building knowledge and learning around areas such as gender or HIV/AIDS, or other support to action.

The potential and long term power of the OIYP network, as it continues to grow, is multiplied through the number of people who have an effective voice in decision-making and who then use their voices to challenge power structures which create inequity in their communities.

Challenges:

Oxfam's partnership with young people through OIYP is based on a long term vision for change – a vision for a peaceful, equitable and sustainable world through developing confidence, widening perspectives and enabling the sharing of skills and knowledge with, and between, young people. Action partners use these capacities to continue and deepen their work for change in their communities.

Oxfam, through OIYP recognises the importance of working with young people. In many developing countries, young people often demographically form the majority of the population, As a result, young people are highly affected but rarely considered in regards to the key issues in our world today. In many societies, the long-term success of youth-led interventions can depend on the support for young people.

An OIYP Story:

Gender has been a strong focus of OIYP's capacity building over the last year and this has translated into many forms of action for gender justice around the world. The approach OIYP has taken to learning around gender demonstrates the importance of developing knowledge for people to challenge structures and create change in contextually specific ways.

The Gender Learning Group is an independent, action partner led global peer-learning network. This continually expanding network of action partners around the globe enables practitioners who are dealing with gender issues in their communities and organisations to share experiences and resources with one another and to work collectively to overcome challenges.



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The first step in sharing experiences through the Gender Learning Group began in December with the distribution of the Gender Learning Group Resource Booklet – Edition #1, a collection of stories and resources compiled and shared by people in the group. Since this time there have been a number of discussions both online and face to face with members of the group. The impact of this learning is seen in both personal changes and attitudes to gender justice as well as evidence of change in communities.

“ *The discussions sprung from needs that we felt in our communities and issues we needed answers to in a way that we really deal with things that are important to us.* ”

“ *I can see that we do need different approaches to gender depending on our cultural setting... at the end of the day it does come down to power struggle, doesn't it?* ”

It has also translated directly into action and supported action partners to work on gender issues in their own contexts:

“ *I still remember the day when during one of our board meetings it was proposed that the organisation adopt a gender policy as this was a very important concern for Pacific Island leaders as well as donors. So the question was asked – so who is the policy division able to come up with a gender policy? I jumped up and said yes, because I had done some training on gender policy before... but that's when my nightmare started. I realised that attending training is not the same as writing up a policy for 13 Island countries to follow. That's when my prayers were answered and IYP held a gender online workshop. The discussions we had increased my confidence. The network we had carried on the discussion through e-mail even after the workshop had finished. I got to learn about other Pacific Island issues regarding gender – which helped me a lot. I had to think about deliverance of policy at the end of the day!* ”

With 300 action partners from over 90 countries, the OIYP network is incredibly diverse. But the diversity within the OIYP network is not just cultural, action partners have a range of strengths, skills and methods of community means in effecting change. While the diversity that they bring to the network is welcomed, it often poses challenges in terms of ensuring the relevance of resources and skills tools that are shared with action partners. It is important to have a multidimensional approach to learning, such as seen in the Gender Learning Group, with a variety of online and offline components to create an open space for all to share and participate in.

The discussions sprung from needs that we felt in our communities and issues we needed answer to in a way that we really deal with things that are important to us.

Throughout the journey of the Gender Learning Group there was evidence of increased consideration of gender in projects of some action partners. Over time gender will be increasingly incorporated into the projects and the knowledge of gender as not only as woman's issue is developed by more young people working for change around the world.

Learning and Reflections:

- Despite the ability of the OIYP network to facilitate capacity development, often it cannot carry this out to the same extent for all Action Partners, due to inequity of access to communications, information and resources across the network. In particular, those



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without access to the Internet have been marginalised from information and access to networking and skills building exercises.

OIYP has now refined its approach to capacity development and considerations of equitable access to information, resources and support for action partners are now at the heart of planning and implementation.

- The experience of the Gender Learning Group reaffirmed the importance of working with young people. Action partners themselves were able to identify the issues which faced them. They then addressed the need for more effective support and networking by developing appropriate communication structures to enable greater equity of access to information and sharing across the network. In the long term, these changes have increased Action Partner engagement from the region and more effective work for change in their communities.

Case Study Contributed by:

Anna Powell, Training and Development Coordinator, Oxfam International Youth Parliament, Oxfam Australia



SRI LANKA

A Centre for the Children of Migrant Workers

Sri Lanka has around one million female migrant workers. Mainly they serve in the Middle East. The majority of them are mothers of one or more children. SUNFO Southern Province Child Development Centre was established by the Sri Lanka-United Nations Friendship Organisation in 2000 as a residential protection Centre of school aged vulnerable female children of migrant mothers.

Key challenges

Financial Difficulties: This centre is run through the contribution of mothers or sponsors of the children. But in certain situations the mother neglects or is unable to pay the monthly payment and stops connections with her children. That severely effects the day to day running expenses of this Centre, and of course, the care of the children.

Psychological Problems: Many children experience loneliness and have difficulties in adjusting to the environment of the Centre at the beginning. But after a certain period they adjust themselves to the life of the Centre. Special attention has been given for the children to overcome this situation.

Social & Educational Institutional Problems: We send these children to three nearby schools. But the girls are being approached in indecent ways by area youths while they are walking to and from the schools. Further they face difficulties in their treatment by fellow students while they are in schools.

Contextual Factors that impact on the work

- Economics puts constraints on the work in meeting the needs present in the community.
- Finding trained, concerned and dedicated staff.
- Working towards an attitude change of the society as these children are discriminated against.

The life stories of many of the children are same. They are from broken families, fathers are often absent – some fathers have a drug addiction, some are in prison, some have died. The mothers are then compelled leave the country to find work to address the family's economic circumstances. We think giving hope, guidance with protection and care for a child's life is most important.

We started the home in a very low key way. But now it has become a well-known place. However it remains difficult to obtain sustainable support to develop the centre to meet the demands of an increasing number of young girls needing the services.

Learning and Reflections:

When children they lose protection of their own mother at home they are extremely vulnerable.



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It is not an easy task to fill that gap. Sometimes when a mother returns from overseas she discovers that her own family has been completely destroyed. Special attention, care, counselling and guidance are vital for children who are living without mother's protection. There is a need for preventative work - we should not encourage mothers to leave their family and go overseas to work. Is it worth the money earned for the family, children and loved ones at the risk of destroying family life.

SUNFO Southern Province Child Development Centre

Sri Lanka-United Nations Friendship Organisation

Dr.Deshapriya S. Wijetunge or **Ms.Manel Illapperuma** unfriends@sunfo.org



CASE STUDY 7.

INDIA

Mahila Umang Samiti

Establishing micro enterprise in the Kumaon Himalayas is a vision designed to set up a series of guilds/producer associations, which will be self managed and financially sustainable in the long term. This entire 'project' is implemented by Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation (Grassroots). The aim of the organisation is to promote several micro enterprises - micro concrete roofing tiles, carpentry, knits, stitch, food processing, beekeeping, natural honey, spices, candles and free range hens and eggs. It also promoted a local group of 1000 women under the banner of 'Umang' and registered it as a NGO. All the activities of micro enterprise development have been handed over to Umang, with Grassroots continuing to provide support.

The issue of livelihood has emerged out of several other related problems that have contributed or have an impact on the life style of the mountain people. In the Kumaon region there is ample evidence of a decrease in upland irrigation systems based on fragile primary water resources. This has resulted in reduced crop outputs and created a vicious cycle of impoverishment. This led to indiscriminate grazing of hill slopes by cattle and goats in search for fodder which in turn, led to ecological devastation of vast tracts of hill slopes adjoining village lands. Finally, this has led to increased run-off and soil erosion during monsoon and reduced re-charge of groundwater. Mountain farming systems are dependent on the support of forest areas with at least sixty percent canopy, preferably of broad-leaved tree species. Ideally, one unit of cropland requires seven units of forestland as support area. Over the last century, policies regarding natural resources have meant exploitation of forests to generate revenue for the state. This has led to the "tragedy of the commons". Whereby, natural broad-leaved forests have been systematically stripped and replaced with monoculture of pinus and other commercial timber species. The replacement of leaf litter from broad-leaved tree species by dry pine needles has created an immense problem of frequent forest fires in the dry months. This ecological degradation of forest areas has led to pine needles being used for composting material, which in turn has introduced several obnoxious pests and also changed the moisture regime of crop lands adversely.

Due to all the above mentioned factors the flow of springs and feeder tributaries of the streams in the five main catchment areas, as well as in the independent micro catchments, has reduced significantly. This has affected agriculture and live-stock management quite negatively and led to significant migration of able-bodied males to distant urban sweatshops in search of opportunities to supplement family incomes. This has led to severe strains on local societies where significant responsibilities have to be borne by women alone.

Considering all the above issues, Pan Himalayan Grassroots Development Foundation, a non-profit voluntary organisation set up in 1992, has been able to evolve a holistic intervention strategy which channels resources- managerial, technical and financial- directly to people and community associations.



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Since 2001, Umang has been spearheading the establishment of an effective network of hill women entrepreneurs in order to enable self- help groups to engage in sustainable livelihood improvement efforts and viable micro enterprises, which led to supplementing family incomes. This growing network of hill women are engaged in the production and marketing of:

- Fruit preserves and pickles
- Natural honey and spices
- Beeswax candles
- Hand- knitted woolen items
- Micro concrete roofing tiles
- Free range hens and eggs

Community members have actively participated in the implementation monitoring and evaluation of this entire livelihood programmes. They were not involved in the planning, which was done largely by Grassroots and Umang. Unemployment is a major problem in the Kumaon region. The land is not productive and mostly does not provide enough for the family. Any activity that augments incomes or provides full time employment to youth is useful. All the above mentioned activities that have been taken up are thus appropriate for the needs of the poor seeking additional or main incomes.

The challenges for Umang are varied and manifold, the greatest being the need to stabilise production in the market, and to ensure proper strategy for the marketing of its products. All items of Umang are sold under the common brand name of Kumaoni. Umang is in the process of establishing this brand in the larger market for further growth and sustainability. It is envisaged that Kumaoni would evolve as a leading brand for natural products from the Himalayas and thereby assist the process of providing sustainable incomes to local people and provide an alternative to urban sweatshops.

These livelihood-generating activities are very beneficial for the women involved and the current and future potential for increasing incomes is good. Currently the incomes through this activity are small, but these are significant for the women. Marketing of products continues to be a problem with large stocks of finished goods. However, the financial sustainability of all the activities is yet to be fully established. There is a possibility that streamlining operations would save costs and hence enhance the viability of the activity. Given the considerable social and economic impact of the activity, it needs further donor support, to reorganise and streamline operations for financial viability.

Efforts over the past few years have led to the creation of a network of over 1000 women who are involved with various viable business activities, with an annual turnover of close to Rs.3.00 million, which provide small yet significant incomes on a sustainable basis:

- Fruit growers are involved with adding value to local soft fruits like apricots and plums through production and marketing of natural fruit preserves.
- Beekeepers are involved with the processing and sale of seasonal natural honey and beeswax candles.
- Farm women are involved with the production and sale of hand-knitted woolen and cotton garments.
- An SHG earns regular incomes through production and sale of eco- friendly roofing tiles.
- Free range backyard poultry business enhances family nutrition levels as well as incomes.



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Self-help groups (SHGs):

However, the most significant aspect of these local efforts in promoting the spirit of enterprise is a concern of the institutional framework at grassroots. Each and every business activity is directly controlled by the producer-groups. The idea of forming SHGs of producers came in the last two years.

All the groups have bank accounts and make loans for several purposes including micro enterprises, house repair, children's education and toilet construction.

These groups meet once a month, in the presence of facilitators from Umang. Savings are collected from the members and office bearers are given on-the-job training. Women from the older groups have now become adept in the operation of bank accounts, while the younger groups still need assistance. SHGs play a significant role in consolidating the social base of the women along with the strengthening of their economic development. For example, many women from these SHGs have emerged as leaders in the form of Panchayat Pradhands and are now heading for further challenges.

These activities are very beneficial and empowering for the women involved. For example, Geeta, a widow, who began a career in stitching with Grassroots 12 years back, is now running a stitching Centre herself. She now trains other women from different villages and enables them to earn a living of their own.

There are many women like Geeta who have benefited out of this activity and are now running independently without any aid or support from Grassroots or Umang. Additionally, these activities provide forums for bringing the women together, to share, to lighten their burdens, and to support each other.

Knitting and stitching are traditionally women's activities. Through Umang they have made a strong impact on economic empowerment. Although the amount of money that they are carrying home is only supplementary income, their confidence on their abilities to meet crises in the area of health and education have increased significantly. Within Umang, the leadership of spirited young women is emerging. The individual members are very active in the field and are in control of the operations of the enterprises. They are emerging as positive role models for women in the region. However, they need to gain strength in institutional and managerial aspects; some systematic efforts are needed to develop the capacity of the individual staff to groom leaders for the future.

Case Study Contributed By:

Mrs Anita and Mr Kalyan Paul, Grassroots, India

Key Worker: **Smt Sunita Kashyap**



CASE STUDY 8.

UGANDA

KRC: Microfinance as a Channel for Participatory Governance

The case study is from the Rwenzori Region, Western Uganda.

Micro Finance Associations (MFAs) and Micro finance business:

A Micro Finance Association is an organisation whose membership is normally made up of groups of people from a defined geographical area, involved in their own savings and credit activities. These people come together with the prime purpose of pooling their savings that will enable them to obtain better credit facilities to provide the necessary capital to run their farms and households more productively.

The groups are encouraged to buy as many shares and deposit as much of their savings as they can with the MFA. The money raised is used to provide credit to the Groups, and some for administration and support. The groups use the credit to provide loans to their members. As the association develops it uses some of its capital to build a small local bank and start to provide full banking and later insurance services to its members. The association will be legally registered first under the Local Government but later at national level as a cooperative.

The Micro Finance Associations Programme at KRC is pre-occupied with building the capacities of the poor farmers to mobilise and harness their financial resources through their own Micro Finance Associations (MFAs). It is promoting the establishment of sustainable organisations that help poor women and men farmers to create wealth, provide sustainable financial services, challenge gender inequality and reverse environmental degradation. The programme promotes gender equity by strategically advocating for majority women membership both at organisational and leadership levels and expression of this intent in the organisation's policies and regulations.

In the context of KRC's wider mandate of civil society development, the MFAs are seen as a channel through which community participatory governance mechanisms, organisational skills and linkages with other networks can be tapped, shared and/or developed for a people led development.

The Agricultural sector has been neglected or underserved:

The Rwenzori region is a heavily populated part of the country with the majority living in rural areas. The inhabitants of the region derive their livelihoods predominantly from agricultural activities. The majority of the people who practice agriculture are women who also dominate in population numbers. In spite of the fact that agriculture dominates other economic activities in the region, it is a sector that has attracted less attention in terms of financial support both by Government and the traditional financial service providers. Any efforts by government, banks and the MFIs to improve the sector through financial services extension have yielded less or, in some cases, no impact at all. This has largely been due to methodological and technical problems. These include:



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- The banks regard the rural poor as 'unbankable'. This is because they lack collateral and are costly to serve. They are illiterate and live in remote areas. The poor infrastructure in the region de-motivates most financial service providers to serve the area.
- The government's effort to reach the rural farmers in 1980s through the Agricultural Rural Farmers Scheme (ARFS) under the Uganda Commercial Bank failed.
- The MFI' end up serving the peri- urban dwellers at unfavourable terms. They soon abandon their social cause for the poor as they are forced to become sustainable especially as donor funds phase out.
- Government's efforts have been retarded by the government officials' inexperience, ill thought out procedures and corrupt tendencies, as experienced in the Government Entadikwa credit scheme of the 90s. As a result, only a negligible amount of funds are able to reach the unfortunate rural farmers.

Given this background, and the fact that these poor people have either been neglected by the financial sector, it becomes very crucial that they are provided with an alternative financial service mechanism appropriate to their needs and conditions. The MFA programme area at KRC is striving to fill this gap with its mission.

The Regulatory policies:

One of the challenges facing the micro finance industry is the legal status of various MFIs. Micro Finance Institutions are registered under differing laws and as such it is not possible to harmonise their operations. Some institutions are registered as NGOs under Non-Governmental Organisation Act or as companies limited by guarantee under the Ugandan Companies Act. Others are registered as savings and credit cooperative societies under Co-Operative Act. Institutions registered under the first two categories are not allowed to take savings from the public. Ironically, MFIs' emphasis on credit often exclude risk-averse poorest, who would rather save in order to meet future needs and crises than to incur debt through getting a loan. Although over the past few years there has been a growing recognition of the demand for voluntary savings services, the legal framework in Uganda has prohibited MFIs from offering them³. The MFAs are there to promote and encourage a savings culture.

On 1st July 2005, the Government reinforced the law prohibiting MFIs from taking deposits and therefore, savings. The Government made it clear that if an MFI is not registered as either MDI (Micro-Deposit Taking Institution) or under the Ugandan Cooperatives Act is found taking deposit, it will be closed immediately. Stakeholders in the industry lobbied for the MDI Act to enable MFIs receive deposits from the public. However, much as the MDI Act 2003 has been passed, most MFIs have not qualified for MDI license and only three MFIs namely FINCA , Uganda Microfinance Union and PRIDE Micro finance Ltd. have been transformed into MDIs since then.

Nonetheless, for commercial banks and most MFIs it has been and still remains challenging for them to reach and serve the rural areas as it is very costly and risky. This has caused the rural farmers to be starved of financial services. This is why KRC is putting its effort in mobilising and supporting the MFAs to perform this role in the rural areas. It is a well known fact that member-owned savings and credit cooperative organisations, like MFAs, are in a better position to act

3. The Micro Deposit-Taking Institutions bill



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as viable sources of financial service for thousands of rural and farm households.

The GOU through the MFPECD has embarked on a three year (2005/6-2007/8) Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisation (SACCOs) Plan. In this plan, the government is aiming at the establishment of model SACCOs in sub counties where there are currently no SACCOs. (The New Vision News Paper: Monday, January 23, 2006, page 18) The Government is thus trying to implement what KRC initiated 3 years back. If this programme is effectively implemented, it will be a great service to the rural populace to be able to access financial services. Fear, however, lies in the government's capacity to handle the programme.

Agencies like the Micro Finance Support Centre currently operating in the region have never proved their worthiness to deliver effectively and efficiently.

The importance of the micro finance industry was applauded in the 2005/6 National Budget. It recognises the tremendous work done by this young and vibrant industry in the fight against poverty. The importance of savings and credit in improving household income and ultimately the standard of living was paramount in this. The budget also hinted at the apparently prohibitive lending interest rates levied by the MFIs. It also underlined the route to investment in agricultural micro credit. It proposes tax exemption on profits accrued from lending to the agricultural sector which may act as an incentive for MFIs to begin exploring the opportunity to maximise their profits from this risk prone and financially starved sector. If the MFIs come down to the rural areas in pursuit of this profit maximisation, it may increase competition among the service providers and have an effect on the current interest rates in favour of the farmers. The MFA model allows for the members to determine their interest rates in accordance with the prevailing conditions.

Micro Insurance: Insurance in the Micro Finance Sector is very limited in Uganda. In spite of the agricultural sector being susceptible to numerous hazards, no much effort has been put into crop insurance. Health insurance is being tried but it is limited to a few Micro finance Institutions like FINCA. There are few Health Insurance Providers like Micro Care Insurance that are trying to experiment in the Micro Finance industry. KRC is, however, trying to incorporate a health insurance product into our MFA programmes. This is because out of experience and the lessons learnt from the conference in Ethiopia on 'Micro Insurance and HIV/AIDS on the Micro Finance Sector in Africa: 25th-27th April 2005', it was clear that ill-health greatly impacts on the MFAs performance and livelihoods in general.

What the issue means for the organisation:

The creation and establishment of peoples own initiated sustainable savings and credit organisations (MFAs) give rural farmers the opportunity to easily access financial services and is a way of stimulating local community development. By the nature of their institutional framework, they are enhance development in the following ways:

- **Women's Empowerment:** In most African culture and particularly in the region, women are considered as a weaker sex and have been subjected to inferior position. They have not been able to own assets such as land. This has put the women at great disadvantage and made it very difficult for them to acquire financial services such as loans from formal financial institutions since most of them need collateral in form of assets. This is why the programme was deliberately designed to target the rural women and men farmers where



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the former would be the majority both at organisational and leadership levels. With this affirmative action, the programme has generated a lot of potential to transform society through trying to address the inherent gender inequalities by setting targets that prioritise women as a disadvantaged group in the communities. As a result, a great number of women have been able to rise from their former places of inferiority to some status of recognition by men in society. Consequently, there has been improved public perception and self image for women in the communities where MFAs have been formed.

- **Acquisition of business entrepreneurship and competencies:** Women are the main farm producers. In spite of this, they have always been denied formal education. This has subjected them to high levels of illiteracy with inadequate skills to do anything from an informed point of view. As a result of MFA intervention, women can, and some have actually been able to, run businesses that have enabled them to earn a stable household income. Consequently, their families are now able to afford to pay school fees, and meet other basic needs like health, shelter and clothing. This has been partly due to the opportunity for them to access loans for business but also due to the fact that they have been exposed to business skills training in their MFAs.
- **Asset ownership and acquisition especially by women:** The MFA intervention affords them an opportunity to acquired assets like land, animals and other property. This is because they are able to access (bigger amounts of) loans to start and expand their enterprises. Also, the women have acquired knowledge of improved/sustainable agriculture practices for improved food security. They are able to contribute to household income, consequently leading to improved relations in the homes. This instils in them a spirit of confidence and hope.
- **Good governance and leadership skills among communities, especially for women:** There are women who have gained positions of leadership in their groups. Unlike in the past where women could not talk and be respected, now they are able to make and influence decisions in their families and groups. This exposure to leadership positions and roles has made them more responsible to their communities and led to improvement of their families' livelihoods. They have been exposed to and do exercise their civic rights among the communities where they live.

Key challenges:

High level of illiteracy in the communities: The MFA members are not exceptional. In most of the groups forming the MFAs there are very few people who can read and write. As a result it is not easy to keep up to date records in some groups because when the literate member fails to turn up for a meeting, the rest are not able to record transactions which take place that day and it takes time to update the records. This is why the programme has been preoccupied with training activities involving the use of Participatory Action Learning Sustainable System (PALS) tools.

Low level of women participation: Much as the Programme has a particular focus on women's empowerment, most women still have low level of participation in the MFAs. This is mainly because most women are illiterate and traditionally women are not supposed to talk in public especially on issues which might lead to arguments. The leaders of the MFAs and especially women in leadership positions who have gained confidence are being advised to encourage their colleagues to follow their footsteps and the trend is positive.



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Low loan capital: The demand for loans in almost all the MFAs is higher than the MFAs can handle. As a result some members fail to get loans when they need them most. However, the trend of loan capital increases through members savings, buying of shares and accumulated retained earnings over time reveals that it is a question of time when this will be no more. As an example, with only around three million shillings loan capital in 2003, Kyarusenzi now has a loan capital of around 30 million. If this trend is maintained, one can confidently say that the poor farmers in Kyarusenzi will be able to meet their financial service needs in the long run. All other MFAs are taking the same course.

Low adoption and implementation rates: The programme had targeted to sign contract with at least 24 MFAs by close of 2005. The actual result was 15 MFAs. This has been caused by a number of factors:

- **New Concept:** The concept of MFAs is a new innovation. Normally, people need time to learn and understand new concepts. This slowed down implementation.
- **Bad experience with micro finance in the region:** The general failure of the cooperative movement in the country was a bad experience that led people to believe that anything cooperative was a failure. The closure of the cooperative bank in the 90s was still fresh in people's minds. This was further aggravated by quite a number of self styled micro finance providers who used to cheat people by promising to serve but instead ended up stealing people's money. The MFA concept was received with a lot of sceptism. This perception is changing tremendously.
- **Few staff to implement a new idea:** Initially, the programme employed only three staff to cover a wide area. Given the high levels of illiteracy, it meant a lot of training especially in the area of record keeping and good governance for smooth running of the business. Today, a good number of community process facilitators, initially known as community trainers have been trained to take on the role of mobilisation and training communities in the relevant skills to enable them do the business properly. Although the first half of the second phase of implementation has been consolidation, the number of applications from communities is amazing; indicating that the communities have began appreciating the idea.
- **Strictness of the programme on bottom line indicators:** There are a number of indicators, which the programme considered during appraisal, and selection of MFAs, as well as for giving the programme capacity building support. This is directly related to the MFAs' ability to follow their rules especially for good governance. In a corrupt society like Uganda, it has not been easy for the programme to get people to begin thinking and reflecting on the proper performance indicators. Today, a good number of people have begun realizing the need for transparency and accountability by not only having, but also following and observing, proper systems and structures in their MFAs.

The contextual factors impacting on the programme:

- **High poverty levels:** In spite of the relatively better performance in terms of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to government figures (The Poverty Eradication Action Plan 2004/5-2007/8) poverty levels have been on the rise among the rural farmers in the population. By 2002, the population living below the poverty line was 34% this



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figure rose to 38% 2003. 96% of the people living below poverty line are in rural areas, where the KRC target group falls. Apparently, poverty levels are continuing to rise and the situation is aggravated by the fact that most poor people lack information and ability to identify viable business opportunities, their systems of production are too rudimentary to meet the modern market standards and the situation is made worse by price fluctuation of agricultural products. The middlemen further exploit these farmers by giving them poor prices. The farmers end up getting low returns. Consequently, this cripples the capacity of the MFA members to save and buy shares in the MFAs. As a result, the MFAs capacity to generate loanable funds and reasonable retained earnings/reserves is curtailed, accounting for their slow progress.

- **Regulatory policies:** Much as these policies are well meaning, they are sometimes insensitive to the poor farmers' real needs. The MFAs which have been registered have joined into a federation called the Federation of Rwenzori Micro Finance Associations (FORMA). However, the law will not permit them to gain a legal status as a tertiary cooperative since it calls for large amounts of money at that level. In view of the above phenomena, it will take time before the poor farmers of these MFAs can be allowed to register as a tertiary cooperative. This will affect their progress as it impacts on their capacity to lobby and get access to external support. To counteract this, the farmers are now planning to register their organisation as a company limited by shares. In the meantime, they will not be allowed to on lend members' savings, contrary to their philosophy.

A story of our experience:

Deep in the country of the Rwenzoris in Uganda lies a rural sub county known as Kyarusozzi, inhabited by mainly the Tooro and Kiga tribes. The main source of livelihood for the inhabitants is subsistence agriculture. Poverty stricken, with inadequate sources of capital, most of the people organised themselves into rudimentary savings and credit groups. The major purpose for these groups was to enable members to acquire household utensils, meet medical expenses, and afford funeral and festivities' expenses. What is amazing is that the members would get credit to spend on illnesses, festivities or funerals instead of credit for investing into business. The loan capital was generated from the once off (usually at the beginning of the year) small registration fee contributed by the members and nothing like buying of shares. There was no idea of loan periods. Once one acquired a loan, s/he could be required to keep paying interest until they paid off the principal. However, it was a requirement to pay the principal off at the end of the year. Whosoever defaulted, which sometimes happened, would not be allowed to join the group again. Savings were being contributed periodically towards one member acquiring the prescribed household utensils like plates, sauce pans, and mattresses. These groups would usually comprise of twelve members as the cycle was annual. Each member knew when their turn was to come during the year. At the end of each year, the group would be dissolved. Then members would re apply for membership. The small interest generated from the small but usually expensive loans would be spent on their annual get together, and in some cases, used to buy a bull to slaughter at Christmas. These groups were organised on social and not on business/economic lines. In this sub county, just like in others where KRC has worked, these groups were sensitised to join together into what is now called a Micro Finance Association (MFA). Once they are organised, they are supported to get a legal certification from the commissioner of cooperatives. They sign a memorandum of understanding with KRC and begin to access financial but mostly technical support from the programme for their capacity building. They are advised to buy shares and save regularly



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to generate a loan portfolio. This is very important because there are some institutions which had begun lending to these groups which ended up squeezing some money from these poor folks in form of an interest rate. These groups are now doing their own micro finance business amongst themselves, generating profits through interest and are now safeguarded from losing money to the external micro finance business entrepreneurs. For Kyarusenzi, like other MFAs, the trend of growth is very encouraging.

The members have been able to afford to build their own office and have a full time paid manager. They have now joined with other MFAs to form the federation of Rwenzori Micro Finance Associations (FORMA) which is expected to be the regional Farmers Bank following the Rabobank example in the Netherlands. So far, there is a marked change in the levels of empowerment of the members of the MFA in terms of leadership skills, record keeping, gender roles and business acumen. The members' self esteem and confidence in their micro finance business is very high. The programme's mission is to see this happen everywhere in the region and beyond.

Learning and reflections:

- The need for decentralised training and exchange visits as opposed to centralised workshops. It is not easy for trainings/information given through the leaders of MFAs (at centralized workshops) to trickle down to the members at group's level. This is partly because some of the leaders are not confident enough to facilitate trainings. This renders the centralized workshops not only expensive but also ineffective. The programme has trained and encourages community trainers to conduct trainings at group level.
- The non-literate poor farmers are able to learn and work to improve if properly guided. The idea of savings mobilisation and credit management seemed too complex to the communities but now they have realised that they are able to improve their livelihoods with limited external support.
- It is possible to change peoples' perceptions and attitudes. Initially it was not easy to convince men to be in dialogue with women. As a result of gender- focused training, most male members of the MFAs have developed a positive attitude towards the role of women in the development of their families and communities. For rural women, it was also hard to believe that they could take on leadership roles. However, this attitude is slowly changing and women are quite often seen as better leaders. All this depends on the levels and effectiveness of training. That is why KRC is committed to supporting communities especially in the field of training. KRC is also refocusing its training to attain high level efficiency and effectiveness.
- Micro finance cannot cause development in isolation of other sectors: There is also need to integrate other training like business management, sustainable agriculture, and gender into micro finance training.
- There are high levels of poverty among the rural farmers. This is seen in the desire for the people to save but only small amounts as deposits. Sometimes they have nothing to spare at all. As a result some people fear to joining a group because they think they will not be able to cope with the levels of compulsory savings. However, those who try have managed to keep up the pace and are learning that more savings means assured security



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and provides social and economic confidence. It is surprising how the levels of voluntary savings have become increasingly higher than the compulsory savings among the MFAs. This shows that members have begun to consider savings as something very important. This can be seen in the general levels of savings by MFAs over successive years.

- It is not advisable to mix up members of different economic levels in one group. In most cases where there is problem of poor loan repayment is when “the better off members” take a loan and do not pay it on time. The economic status of the poorer members makes it difficult for them to put pressure on the rich loan defaulters. The rich members have tended to misuse the service. The programme is continuing to sensitise the members to be more conscious when choosing the members of solidarity groups.
- The need for patience while working with non literates and the poor: It pays to be patient while dealing with poor communities especially those with very low level of education. At the beginning, it was not easy for most MFAs to translate what they learnt into practice and this increased the workload of the programme staff. However, after regular training and technical support, most MFOs especially from contracted MFAs are able to prepare monthly reports and manage the MFAs with more ease. The programme will continue giving all the necessary support to the MFOs and the executive members of the MFAs to enable them manage their MFAs effectively and efficiently.
- The issue of ownership is very important to the members of MFAs. There are a few MFIs providing financial services in the region. At the beginning, some members wanted to withdraw their membership and seek loans from those institutions because of the higher loan amount offered by the institutions. However, after understanding the MFAs’ concept and the methodology used by the MFAs vis-à-vis that of MFIs, they decided to stick to their MFAs. Even the members who left and received financial services from other MFAs are now begging to come back to the MFAs. This is because of the numerous advantages accruing from ownership.
- Health issues affects the growth and success of the MFAs. In a number of cases members who fail to turn up for training, or to deposit savings or repay their loan on time, do so because of health problems which may be affecting the members directly or their family members. This has affected the performance of some MFAs to some extent. The programme is going to commission research on health and it is hoped that the findings from the research will help both the MFAP and the MFAs develop plans to address the challenge. The programme is also planning to train community trainers who will be able to sensitise and train the MFAs on some health related prevention measures.

Recommendations:

In a world of inequality where the rural poor farmers have long failed to cope with the economic gymnastics especially in the low developed countries, a realisation that farmers have to learn creative ways for their survival should not require much emphasis. The innovation of the rural communities in the Rwenzori region to realize the need to locally mobilise financial resources from amongst themselves to be able to boost their economic activities in a bid to improve their livelihoods should be held in high esteem and given utmost support. The development and progress of the MFA model has already had impressive results, the adoption of which may cause a change in the poor farmers’ livelihoods. Therefore, as a recommendation;



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- Rural farmers should be encouraged to mobilise their own financial services through creation of their own Micro Finance Associations. This gives them confidence and hope.
- Appropriate training all other relevant forms of capacity building should be given to rural farmers to enable them run their micro finance business properly.
- It is vital to integrate and incorporate other skills like sustainable agriculture, business management, and health into micro finance.

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CASE STUDY 9.

AUSTRALIA

Sweet Freedom and the Scattered People

Sweet Freedom Inc is a production and promotion organisation comprised of music producers, filmmakers and community development practitioners. The organisation works creatively with people from varying circumstances; particularly those who seek solidarity in their quest for social justice and respect for their human rights – absorbing their stories and perceptions, alert to their themes of significance. Sweet Freedom crafts songs, music videos and documentaries, and records them to broadcast quality in collaboration with the project participants (and a little help from ‘kindred-spirit’ friends). These products are then promoted and distributed throughout like-minded national and international networks to both educate and entertain. Sweet Freedom shares the profits of sales with the participants and their communities.

This is the story of one of their productions, an album called *The Scattered People* (which was actually made before the organisation was formed, but has informed much of the subsequent work of Sweet Freedom).

From various countries they came – El Salvador, Chile and Colombia – some escaped from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Russia – they arrived from Bosnia, Iran, Sri Lanka, East Timor and elsewhere. They had in common their experience of believing in and standing up for human rights in their countries only to encounter intimidation and often torture at the hands of oppressive regimes. After much struggle they arrived at what they perceived to be a safe country – seeking asylum for themselves and their children. They gathered at the Asylum Seekers Centre in West End (Brisbane, Australia) which offered counselling, resource information, emergency relief and general support. Their situation was desperate – while they waited for their applications for a protection visa to be processed (often longer than two years) they were not eligible for government financial support, government supported healthcare, work permission, English classes or other services. Their dream of finding security and a future was already beginning to crumble.

From somewhere within the midst of this turmoil, singing emerged as a form of self-expression, comfort and solidarity. The idea began to take shape with the coordinator of the centre the her management committee... “what if this gathering of people could express their own thoughts and feelings in their own music – one of the very few mediums in which they felt comfortable – and have it heard across the airwaves? Maybe then the general public would understand that the asylum seekers were flesh and blood people, not abstract statistics to be demonised and cast aside”.

Workshops were conducted with asylum seekers, Centre volunteers and the Lifeline Chermside community development team. Potential ‘lyrics’ began to fill the whiteboards – lyrics which spoke of their nostalgia, their fears and need to escape – frustrated hopes and resilience. Overwhelmingly, solidarity with those who believed in them was identified as a



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sustaining force. Contact with 'kindred-spirited' musicians and songwriters was facilitated, funding was secured and a producer/recording engineer was located. The project gathered momentum. Twelve songs were composed reflecting the themes identified by the asylum seekers (now known as 'refugee claimants'). The choir was gaining confidence and people were crafting songs. These songs resonated with the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the refugee claimants and their families.

They spoke of their distress and their nostalgia at having to leave their homes, their families and their familiar culture. Their shared thoughts became the song 'HOMETOWN'. When invited to speak of the crisis point where leaving became the only safe option, there was silence...it was too difficult, too painful to put into words. The instrumental track 'ALANGKOLAM' (meaning chaos in Sri Lankan) was composed to represent these disturbing memories.

The terrors associated with escaping were cushioned in their desperation for a safe and free future. Their collective thoughts became the song 'SWEET FREEDOM' (after which the organisation was named). Once out of the environment of fear, it was inevitable that many looked back and began to count the costs – the loss of the innocent, especially the children who were tragically caught up in the conflict, became the theme of 'LABARIK SIRA HOTU' (all the children) sung in Tetum, an East Timorese language.

All were depressed – all have numerous 'triggers' which remind them of what they had been through. Ironically it was this torment that brought them together – there is comfort in the feeling of connectedness that comes from all of this. 'RAIN' was an attempt to represent their struggles musically. The Bosnian Community Choir were invited to contribute to the album. Their own refugee journey from danger to a place of safety was featured in 'PUT U NEPOZNATO' (a place unknown) sung in Bosnian. 'FORSAKEN CHILD', – a poem composed by a group of Brisbane asylum seekers, reflecting their sense of helplessness within their desire to contribute positively to this new world. Language problems and lack of employment opportunities take away their capacity to be 'bread-winners' for their families, making them dependent on others for sustenance. They feel 'like a child again'.

Dependence on the broader community was the uncomfortable reality for all of the participants. The positives associated with this however were explored in 'NEED ONE ANOTHER'. Holding on to their hopes for life to get better while still recovering from traumas associated with their past has meant the development of their capacity for 'RESILIENCE' – in their case, a survival skill. Disillusionment with the long processing of their applications for protection, the hostility of what appears to be the majority of Australians towards them, political and media-fuelled demonising together with their lack of access to the Social Security system, the health system, the education system and their denial of work permission was expressed in 'SENZENI' (What have I done?) from Zimbabwe. Finally, a plea for compassion together with a salute to those who have been in support became the theme of 'STAND WITH US'.

The 'Scattered People' album was completed in 2000, and a follow-up album is currently being finalised. The albums are a celebration of diversity and the 'common ground' accessible via music. The refugee claimants are now able to share their message of hope and struggle across the airwaves. Perhaps in their music their voices will be heard.

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CASE STUDY 10.

CANADA

Sharing Strengths

Case Study

Our definition of capacity building is:

Community capacity building is a process that aims to increase a community's ability to work together to meet its goals and needs. Capacity building works to enhance the strengths a community already has. Capacity is built from:

- Commitment – the will to act;
- Resources – including both financial and other resources; and
- Skills, talents and expertise

(Adapted from the Community Foundation of Canada, 1999.)

In practical terms, capacity building means helping communities build their knowledge and skills, therefore increasing their ability to take their community in the direction they want to go.

Key challenges:

- One of the main challenges we experienced when we started Sharing Strengths was that it took communities a while to get their heads around what we were proposing. Instead of approaching communities and saying “Let’s determine what the problems are in your community”, or “We know that there is a problem with X in your community”, we approached communities saying “We are willing to work with you to identify the strengths in your community, and help you figure out what you want to do with them to make and keep children and youth healthy.” We also said we knew that each of the 11 communities we were working with would be different, that their strengths would be different, and that what they wanted to do would be different.

Communities often organise in response to something that is happening in the community, so to take this open-ended capacity building approach took a bit of getting used to. We found that it took time to build relationships with communities so that we could start to have these kinds of conversations, and ultimately work together to improve child and youth health.

- Our mandate was to build capacity in communities, yet we had no way of knowing whether that would actually happen. Many organisations talk about using a capacity building approach, but it hasn’t been easy to assess whether capacity in a community has changed as a result of an intervention. In this case we worked with several communities to develop a research-based way for communities to assess their own capacity, and assess whether it changes over time. (See <http://www.horizonscda.ca/resources.html>)
- We also faced a huge challenge in terms of the political context in our province – the government changed, and the new government abolished the Regional Health Board, where the initiative was housed as a national pilot project. Stakeholders regrouped, and re-organised



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Sharing Strengths as a non government organisation. Without the sense of ownership by the health system, ongoing funding for the initiative became a challenge. Much of the time needed to focus on the work was used seeking and obtaining funding for the organisation.

Our story:

First a bit of an overview of Sharing Strengths: The goal of Sharing Strengths was to build on community strengths to promote the health of children and youth in Western Nova Scotia.

There were four principal components to our work, all of which were encompassed in the context of research and evaluation:

- 1. Community Facilitation:** We worked with Community Health Boards (CHBs) and local child and youth health organisations to develop community-based strategic child and youth health plans. The plans include: measurable goals; identification of community strengths; priority issues; local strategies and actions; implementation strategies; evaluation strategies; and resources required for implementation. The plans are based on data, evidence, and community input (the definition of 'research' developed by the health promotion community in Nova Scotia – see <http://www.hpclearinghouse.ca/downloads/framework.pdf>).
- 2. Continuing Education:** In addition to organising several regional and local educational events to build the skills of CHB members, service providers, and community members for implementing their child and youth health plans, we provided resource materials on community capacity building, resiliency, asset-based community development, and child and youth health promotion. We also provided child and youth health working groups with research information to use in their planning processes.
- 3. Information Sharing and Dissemination:** Through a partnership with the Population Health Research Unit (PHRU) at Dalhousie University, we developed the Western Nova Scotia Child and Youth Health Integrated Database. The Database allowed us to establish a baseline measurement of child and youth health for each CHB area in the region, and allowed us to monitor changes to child and youth health indicators over time. We also developed profiles of child and youth health indicators for counties in Western Nova Scotia. The profiles include both traditional health indicators, and broader determinants of health indicators.
- 4. Intersectoral Collaboration:** We supported the development of the Child and Youth Intersectoral Working Group (CYIWG), a group of regional decision makers whose purpose is to collaboratively identify, discuss, and take action on mutual child and youth objectives. Members represent regional School Boards, Nova Scotia Departments of Housing, Justice, Community Services, Public Health Services, Mental Health Services, Addictions Services, the NS Sport and Recreation Commission, and Human Resources Development Canada. In its first year, CYIWG received funding from HRDC to hire a coordinator. In February 2001, a Memorandum of Understanding between Departments was signed, linking CYIWG with the provincial Child and Youth Action Committee (CAYAC), and establishing CYIWG as a formal conduit for federal/provincial child and youth health initiatives, such as the provincial Early Identification and Intervention Strategy (EIIIS). Research and Evaluation: All components of our work were grounded in research and evaluation. Additional research and evaluation activities included developing and testing methodologies for monitoring changes to community capacity, and to resilience in children and youth.



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Our learnings (based on a comprehensive evaluation) that could be helpful for other communities include:

Context

- Roles and responsibilities for Community Health Boards (or other legislated voluntary health bodies) need to be clarified to ensure consistent participation in legislated community health planning processes.
- Core funding for community development strategies like Sharing Strengths must be provided for organisations to sustain their work of building community capacity.

Infrastructure

- Financial supports and subsidies for community members facilitate their participation in community health planning processes (e.g., funds for transportation, child care, elder care, accommodation, lost wages).
- Funding for research and evaluation activities have to be flexible to meet the needs of communities.

Networking/Educational Opportunities

- Regular opportunities for networking and sharing information need to be provided for CHB members, service providers, and community members, as these opportunities are essential for deepening individual and collective understandings of community health planning.
- Educational resource materials must be developed in user-friendly formats and provided and built upon at ongoing learning events.
- Community members need supports for working with research information, and making it relevant for their work.
- Systemic supports for applying new knowledge and skills are needed in communities.

We worked in eleven communities in our region (for us that in itself was a success!) Our ability to respect and appreciate the uniqueness of each community, and our ability to channel resources appropriately according to that uniqueness, was one of the things that made the initiative successful.

We also helped initiate several systemic supports, that are now in place for communities and the health system to use (e.g., the Child and Youth Intersectoral Working Group, the Integrated Database for Children and Youth, the Measuring Community Capacity Resource Kit, and the Youth Resiliency Measure).

Most importantly, we supported people of all ages coming together to identify the strengths in their communities, and think about how to mobilise these strengths to accomplish their goals.

Due to our funding challenges the support put in place for communities to build child and youth health was not sustained in a continuous form. The need for ongoing supports is part of the discourse in community development circles in Nova Scotia.

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CASE STUDY 11.

INDIA

The Need for Organising

Self Help Groups As Local Governance Bodies

On a bright sunny day I happened to be walking with a couple of friends to a fish auctioning centre on the eastern coast of India, a small town name Vishakapatnam. This town which is known for its natural harbours is also a fast growing industrial town.

The market place like all other market places all over the world was very busy and everyone around was deeply engrossed in their businesses, totally unaware that the Prime Minister of the country had resigned and in an hour's time from the time of our visit, the highest people's representative body of India will be discussing all possible combinations/possibilities of who rules the country.

A factor very striking to this market place was the number of women in comparison to the men, a ratio of nearly 8:2. This is an everyday scene at the Vizag coast where small country boats, some mechanised boats and also trawlers land with the fish catch.

A walk through the market place indicated some aspects of the market operations. Women who had bought fish at the auction were busy packing their buy in bamboo baskets with layers of crushed ice. A couple of women were busy sorting the fish they had purchased. A third was busy cleaning their fish, mixing it with salt and piling it in baskets, getting ready for drying the fish that was not really high quality fish which would attract the fish traders.

Whilst women were busy with their chores, the men (very few to be seen around), were waiting and watching to transport the fish baskets either on their bicycles or trolleys. Walking through this busy place I was attracted by a woman sitting in a corner and cleaning the fish. She must be around 50 years but looked much older with loose shrunken skin, sore eyes, sore hands clothed in a tattered saree. Her appearance was enough to indicate that she had no time for luxuries like a bath or combing her hair. She wore no bodice which in this part is a forbidden act for widowed women.

I stopped beside this woman and with the help of a local friend was able to communicate with her. Whilst talking to me she did not stop working with her hands.

She has been doing this job ever since she can remember. A mother of three, 2 boys and a girl, she lost her husband about 3 years ago. He died whilst fishing at the sea.

"Where do you live?"

"Here"

"Where"

"Here"

She had a small 3' x 6' covered place not 2 feet away from where she was working, which



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was her house.

“Where do you cook?”

“My daughter brings food for me”

“What are your sons doing?”

“They transport fish to the city”

“What is your daughter doing?”

“She also does the same work – buying fish and drying it”

“Can you read and write?”

“No”

“Does your daughter read and write?”

“No”

“For what price have you bought this fish?”

“2 pounds“ (About 60-65 Kgs)

“What will you do with the fish?”

“I will send it to the market after drying it for 2 days!”

“What money will you get?”

“2.5 pounds“

“Do you know what it costs to buy the salt, the basket and transport the fish to the market?”

“No”

Whilst talking to this woman her daughter aged about 30 years walked along. One could see the marked difference in health status, clothing and general appearances of the two women – mother and daughter. The younger woman has a thatched hut on a piece of land allotted to the members of the fishing community who were moved away from their abode jetty/wharf areas. The State Government provided 2 bags of cement and some number of bricks to build the huts – the rest of the material needed had to be self arranged through individual contribution.

The younger woman said that about 200 families live on a piece of land which is 12-18 kilometres away from their place of work. Those who can afford to use the public bus costing Rs. 3/- two ways. In the residential colony the State Government has provided bore wells for drinking water, one primary school and there is a private medical practitioner.

Conversation with the daughter:

“Why do you prefer drying fish versus selling fresh fish?”

“I need a license to sit in the market place to sell fish – if I go fish vending from door to door the fish is sold on credit, so I prefer to sell dried fish. Also the fish I buy is of low quality which after drying is used for poultry feed”

“Which fish fetches a better price – dried or fresh?”

“Fresh fish”

“Where did you get the finance to buy the fish?”

“I raised a loan from a private money lender – I wanted to get to get a loan from the bank but I do not know how to write to the proper persons”

“What terms did the money lender give you the loan?”

“I had to pawn my jewellery and I pay Rs. 5/- per 100 per month as interest” (the source of jewellery is not known).

“Have you repaid any amount?”



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“Yes, Rs. 500/- and I pay the interest regularly every month.”

“What is your son (aged about 10 years) doing?”

“He helps me in the work.”

“What do you feel is the biggest problem felt by you in your life at home and with work?”

“At work – it is the uncertainty in fish availability and the price variation and money to buy fish, at home – my husband.”

“What is the husband’s problem – does he drink?”

“Yes and he has deserted me.”

From mother and daughter some changes are seen – more obvious in the basic need areas of health and housing. The scale of trading operations is also 1:5 – the level of general awareness about availability of resources and need to have access to the resources is apparently clearer in the younger woman’s dialogue.

There is no change in the area of personal and social problems. Both the women are heads of their families.

On an average a woman from the fishing community spends about 10 hours each day for the fish trade and about 6 to 7 hours for household work like cooking, fetching drinking water and other household chores. This routine goes right around seven days of a week. As a whole, trade is based on a day to day economy and a day’s break in work which may be due to ill-health or other reasons, lands the family into difficult situations. This break, more so in women headed households, often means that loans have to be raised for domestic and consumption purposes.

Traditional fisher folk live in houses with mud walls and roofs thatched with leaves from Palminar trees. The walls and roofs are sometimes reinforced with lime and cement. Some families have built stone houses on sites allotted by the government. Most of the permanent houses for the fishing community are provided by the government under various schemes. Drinking water is seen as a major problem by women as bore wells does not have good quality drinking water and tap water has not reached the residential areas. Many a times women have to walk 1-2 Kms to reach public taps and where public taps are absent small open wells are dug to get some water. Firewood is the common means of cooking but some women use kerosene stoves and firewood. On an average per month one pound is spent on firewood and kerosene, the latter is used for lighting.

The food consumption of the average family consists of three meals comprising of rice, fish, and some vegetables. Vegetables do not form a part of their daily diet and are consumed 1-2 times a week.

In the coastal villages of Andhra the fish trade is carried by the traditional fishing communities comprising three sub-castes:

1. Vadabalija
2. Jalari
3. Pallilu

Within these three sub-castes there is no social interaction, no intercaste marriages, and members of one community will not accept food and water from members of other



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communities. These three castes are classified as Backward classes under the schedule prepared by the Indian Government and being members of the backward classes these communities are eligible for special benefits, welfare and economic assistance.

The fishing community in Andhra Pradesh is not very different from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in areas of their trade. The fishermen when they return from the sea hand-over the responsibility of the retail trade to the women. The level of consumption of alcohol by the male members of the community is very high. In a sample of 10 women interviewed all complained that their husbands, brothers, and fathers – consumed alcohol whenever they have cash in hand. Savings of any sort are unknown to this community.

The social status of the fishing community causes a barrier in their intermingling with the non-fishing communities. There is a lack of water for washing, bathing and also cleaning of fish. The hygienic standards in comparison to the other sectors of the Indian population are considered a bit low. It is this stigma that is attached to the trade of women in particular and they are shy and hesitant to explore alternatives. Another trade need/practice has also become a characteristic peculiar to the fisher women – whilst dealing with fish trade the women tend to become argumentative and at times quarrelsome. The women are also not accustomed to working in a group. Some of these characteristics are a result of their occupation.

Using the indicators of social development (health status, education, basic amenities and economic level) some conclusions of the existing situation of the fishing community in general and of women in the community can be drawn.

- a) Women form almost 90% of the work force in the fish retailing trade
- b) The poorest quality of fish which is not marketable via fish traders is sold to the women
- c) Women in the trade are unaware of the total economics of the trade
- d) The trade in the present form at this level has high risk of ‘uncertainties’ – lack of finance is a major constraint
- e) Health, status and education of the women is very low
- f) Basic amenities of house, water and clothing are also inadequate
- g) There is a total absence of any mechanism of support in times of unforeseen eventualities and lack of savings
- h) Self employment rate is very high in fisherwomen
- i) There is no organised effort to resolve these problems, either from within the community or by external agencies.

Development issues in India are being addressed by national government and state governments. Governments alone can enact good legislations – implementing the policies and linking those affected with the programmes is a big gap. Apart from the Government, the NGOs are equally effective partners in reaching out to address the need of the community.

In the story narrated above an NGO name ShantiDan took up the work with women head loaders of the fishing community. The fisherwoman head loaders are the most vulnerable group. When ShantiDan (all local, several from similar socio-economic background) contacted the women head loaders, there was a strong reluctance to ‘come together’ to discuss their problems. Coming together meant having TRUST in the process and finding time to do so.



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A lot of persuasion went into convincing them of the benefits of coming together to discuss their problems and share their experiences with others. An attitudinal change occurred when they were convinced about the benefits of coming together (several training programmes and exposure trips were planned to reach that level).

The priority issue for the women was their dependency on the money lenders for providing working capital – the interest rates were very high and interest was deducted from the loan amount.

After identifying the problems of the fisherwomen head loaders, ShantiDan identified women animators (community organisers from the same community). These women had qualities of organising and motivating the women. ShantiDan was able to identify a few women who had some level of education willing to take up this task. The animators were provided with short duration training in basics of community organisation – the animators spent about two months understanding the local situation after which they conducted the weekly meetings with women head loaders. Through the meetings the issue of dependency on money lenders and the need for working capital got further highlighted. This led to the setting up of SHGs and Microfinance programme. Later on the SHGs discussed issues relating to health, sanitation, drinking water, street lights and transport facilities.

The process of women's development was facilitated by the animator who is selected and accountable to the SHG members, seeking a feedback from the animators and SHG members they suggested that resolving economic issues was not easy but social issues were harder still as they were deeply rooted in religion, history, and culture. The SHG members have an awareness of the social constraints and are also willing to cross barriers but are 'afraid', 'unsure' of social acceptability. The very feature of the success of this initiative was that there was very little external influence, very little financial dependency on external resources. What ShantiDan and women animators needed was inputs in enhancing their capacities. The attempt was effective as the work involved a homogeneous community group and had local leadership.

Case Study Contributed by: **Mrs Harvinder Bedi**, DST, India



CASE STUDY 12.

SLOVAKIA

An Independent Citizen's Commission

Background

This case study presents citizens' efforts to address a systemic problem in the city of Banska Bystrica in Slovakia. For several years, residents had experienced a process of projects being prepared for their neighbourhoods without any consultation. They were given little opportunity to even learn about the proposed plans much less a chance to influence the final decision.

Banska Bystrica is a relatively large town (in the Slovak context) of approximately 85,000 people. It is considered the most significant city in the Centre of the country. Considerable changes have occurred in Slovakia to better ensure more democratic processes. But the city of Banska Bystrica continues to operate in a closed manner, not providing information to citizens and utilising practices that are not transparent, particularly in the development field.

A pattern of closed and probably corrupt practices of preparing development projects has been the repeated practice in virtually every neighbourhood in the city. Citizens from the Radvan neighbourhood approached the Centre for Community Organising in 2001 regarding their desire to prevent the construction of a gas station in the pedestrian Centre of their neighbourhood. A two and a half year fight ensued when residents continued to protest the proposed project. Ultimately Shell Oil Company agreed to drop plans to construct the station. A similar process occurred in the Sasova neighbourhood when the city proposed building a grocery store on one of the few open green spaces. Residents learned about it at the last minute and were able to stop it as well.

When citizens opposed projects, the city complained that they were being negative and opposing development. Citizens were frustrated as they were never consulted about proposed developments and were only left to complain at the end of the process.

Following two more cases of this same process in other neighbourhoods, leaders from several civic initiatives agreed to attempt a different approach to change the process of how development projects are prepared. They proposed setting up a special commission to examine the current process and to seek solutions on how to improve the process for all involved. The Centre for Community Organising was successful in getting a grant from the SC Ministry Foundation in the US to support the creation of the special commission including the opportunity to travel to another European Union country.

About the organisation

The Centre for Community Organising (CCO) is an organisation with a ten year history in Slovakia. Their primary work is to assist citizens to become more active in their communities. For detailed information about the Centre for Community Organising, Slovakia, please visit www.cko.sk.



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Concept

The concept was to form a special commission of independent citizens from Banska Bystrica. The intent was to bring together a group which would represent a cross section of interests including neighbourhoods, investors and independent concerns. The project was delayed in implementation nearly a year when the Centre for Community Organising underwent a painful internal fight about the direction of the organisation. After resolving the internal situation, a group of eight people were recruited and agreed to serve on the commission. They took the name Independent Citizens Commission (which in Slovak is Nezavisla Obcianska Komisia or in short form - NOK).

This Commission was launched during Citizen Participation Week on the end of September, 2005. (For details about CPW, visit <http://www.ceecn.net/cpw>).

Objective

The specific objective of NOK was to look at the current process regarding how development projects are prepared for neighbourhoods in Banska Bystrica and to suggest possible changes.

Methodology

The methodology which the members of NOK agreed to follow had three parts. The first was to meet separately with each of the main actors in the development process (city officials, neighbourhood leaders and investors) to explore with them how the process is working from their point of view. Each group was asked three basic questions:

1. What is working well in the current situation?
2. What is not working well in the current situation?
3. What would they recommend be changed/improved to make things better?

The second aspect of the commission's work was to read some information about how this process could work or has worked in our countries and situations. Several articles and small books were translated into Slovak for the members of the commission. The final part of the work of the commission was to arrange a site visit to another European Union country to explore first hand, some alternative ways in which development plans are prepared for neighbourhoods. The country of England was selected based on several contacts there with organisations active in related work including a sister city of Banska Bystrica (Durham County). The site visit was conducted near the end of the process in order to allow the members of the commission to gather considerable experience with the process and best utilise the time visiting. A final draft of the results of the work of the commission and their recommendations was then prepared and a press conference was prepared in which NOK introduced their report and final recommendations.

Implementation

In the summer of 2005, eight members from Banska Bystrica were recruited to serve on NOK and the first meeting of the Commission was held during Citizen Participation Week. Approximately eight representatives from the city attended the meeting with NOK members. The discussion was productive although there were not many problems noted from the side of city officials about how the current process operates.

Following this, a second session was scheduled in late November with neighbourhood



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leaders at the CCO offices. Again approximately eight representatives attended. This session was much livelier than was anticipated. Neighbourhood leaders had considerably more suggestions for how the process could be improved. Fundamentally neighbourhood leaders wished to be included much earlier in the process and wished to have greater influence in determining what projects were approved for their neighbourhoods.

The third and final session for the first round was scheduled in January with investors. It was not certain whether any representatives from this group would attend as there had been little contact with them beforehand. But again approximately eight representatives showed up for the meeting. This session ended up being the most surprising as the investors were quite open and critical of the current process.

There was some expectation that investors would be critical of neighbourhood activists but the opposite was true. Several of them reported how they no longer even attempt to do business with the city as their process is not transparent and fair. They were quite skeptical whether any changes could be made to improve the situation although they were very clear about the need for changes.

During this time, several different materials were being translated and presented to the Commission members as additional background on how various cities are utilising other practices to prepare planning and development projects. In February, a group of four members from the Commission and two staff from CCO traveled for one week to England to learn more about how practices are carried out in another European Union country. Arrangements were made to visit London, Durham County and Newcastle. A very busy schedule was prepared with a variety of contacts ranging from national officials utilizing e-planning to local officials, municipal staff as well as neighbourhood activists and staff from middle and low income neighbourhoods.

The delegation found this trip to be extremely valuable and inspirational. They returned with a better understanding of how development projects could be prepared in a more effective manner for the whole community. Throughout the remainder of winter and early spring, drafts were prepared summarising all the meetings, conversations, translated materials and site visit to England. A draft and then final report was prepared with conclusions and with main recommendations highlighted. The group agreed to hold a press conference to publicise the results. All parties who had participated in the process were invited to the press event. The press event went quite well with the exception of the lack of the city's presence. Those who attended strongly urged the Commission to continue its work and to attempt to ensure the implementation of their recommendations.

Results/Analysis

The work of the Commission has been an excellent start and gives us hope for some changes in the process. Many people acknowledged that while there was nothing particularly surprising in the final report, it was the first time that it had been actually documented and made public. Fundamental to the whole process was an effort to be pro-active in addressing the problem. Instead of continuing to simply complain and to fight, leaders attempted to utilise a more systemic approach in looking at the whole process. It was also very helpful to consider experience outside of Banska Bystrica.

The ultimate effects of the report are uncertain as the recommendations are yet to be



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implemented. One factor that was taken into account was that local elections would be held within approximately six months from the release of the final report. It is intended that this could be used by citizens and others as a tool by which to hold potential candidates accountable.

Ironically, as NOK was completing its work on the draft document, the city launched yet another large development project in a neighbourhood just east of the downtown area. The proposed project was very controversial and many people were opposed to the designs proposed. The city attempted to utilise a minimal approach to involving citizens including no public hearing. NOK officially objected to the project and helped to support an effort to involve citizens. City Council approved a motion to extend the time for comments and required that a public hearing be held. Over 400 people came to the hearing and loudly protested the approval of the project. NOK intends to continue to push for implementation of their recommendations. One other immediate effect of the work of the Commission was that they were invited by the city to send a representative to help prepare the “Programme for Economic and Social Development”. Very few organisations were invited to participate which demonstrates some immediate respect shown for the Commission and its work.

Success Factors/Risks/Recommendations

Key factors, which contributed to our success, were:

1. Talented and good people were recruited to serve on the Commission. They dedicated a considerable amount of time to the project. In the end, two of the eight members of the Commission were unable to attend a sufficient number of meetings and were then not listed in the final report. But the remaining six made invaluable contributions.
2. If you wish to have the participation of investors, it will likely help to have at least one member of the commission from that sector. We are convinced that their participation significantly enhanced the weight of the report.
3. An open and transparent process was undertaken by talking with all parties involved to secure their perspective on the current situation.
4. It was critical that an organisation like CCO was there to guide the process including having the facility for meetings, working with leaders to prepare agendas, raise needed funds (including money for the site visit to England) and for translations and printing.

The primary risk involved is that the recommendations will not be enacted. If there is not additional pressure placed on officials and candidates for local office, nothing will happen. The work of the Commission was a start, not an end to the work.

Our recommendation is that this process can be very useful but would be much more difficult without the presence of an organisation that can assist in the overall management of the process. It is also important to consider the remaining task of helping to ensure that some changes will result from the effort.

Contacts Information

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CASE STUDY 13.

SOUTH AFRICA

Woza Moya (Come the Spirit)

Woza Moya – ‘come the spirit’ – works in a stunning but struggling valley community in KwaZuluNatal, South Africa. The community organisation started life in a very small, but organic way, five years ago, when young people in the valleys were dying and child headed households were evident.

A Zulu speaking white woman, Sue Hedden, started working with a local African woman, Jane Nxasana, by visiting families in nearby villages, and responding to the needs that they found. HIV/AIDS was claiming the lives of the young and middle aged, poverty and hunger was widespread and many households were caring for sick and dying people. The situation now is worsening year on year. Funerals take place every Saturday. Recently released figures in KwaZuluNatal report that in 2003, 47% of pregnant women presenting at clinics were infected with the HIV virus.

The valley used to be a successful farming area. Drought, political warfare and the devastation of HIV/AIDS has left the people economically severely challenged. This is exacerbated by the mounting death rate, the exorbitant cost of funerals, and increased demands for water, firewood and food for those who are ill. Every family is affected. New graves stand forlorn near rondavel homes. Grandmothers head up large households of grandchildren and great grandchildren. In some families a whole generation is missing. The men mostly leave for the city in search of work. Of those who are left, many abuse the young vulnerable children in their care, misguidedly believing the cruel myth that having sex with a virgin will cure AIDS. The role and dignity of the rural African man has been dismally eroded by apartheid, unemployment, and HIV/AIDS.

It is a desperate situation and yet the work of Woza Moya, through their responsive and participatory community process, offers hope, support and a chance of greater self reliance to local valley people.

Woza Moya is clearly enhancing the lives of people, through a multi-faceted programme that is responsive, flexible, community based, carefully recorded and entirely delivered by people within their own communities. Woza Moya is managed by a board entirely made up of local representatives. A constant challenge is to source funding. Up to now, funding has largely come through the efforts of individuals, Buddhist communities and their teachers. The AIDS Foundation of South Africa and Elton John Foundation have now also provided vital backing.

The Woza Moya programme includes:-

- **Care of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.** This includes the distribution of simple medicines, condoms, and clothing; counselling and emotional support; health/access advice; and general family support and guidance



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- **Support of orphans, vulnerable children and child headed households.** This includes child minder work, play and educare therapy, school sponsorship, general advice and supervision, identifying foster parents within the extended family network, and counselling
- **Addressing issues of poverty and unemployment.** This includes self help projects such as door sized gardens, food parcels and clean water education and facilitating relevant NGO programmes
- **Facilitating access of official documentation.** This includes birth certificates, memory boxes, medical certificates that enable child grants, disability grants, and old age pensions to be claimed, vitally boosting low or non existent family income
- **Family literacy work**
- **Development of permaculture food growing and nutrition projects.** Working with Heifer programmes, offering goats and chickens to trained farmers, who give the offspring goats and chickens to the next farmers in the community on the list.

These are only the headlines. The most profound support often comes from the one to one work around a rondavel fire. Here Woza Moya carers offer support through listening, befriending, making a plan with the family member and then taking appropriate action to follow through. As one of the carers recently explained 'We do what we promise we are going to do – and that means a lot'.

Important work is also done in small but growing HIV support groups. They meet with a staff member in secret for fear of stigma due to their status. The 'gogos' or grannies group meet to be trained in ways of supporting their orphaned grandchildren through the process of bereavement. Another gogo support group has recently formed to share and publish personal histories, provide support to one another and to develop interpersonal skills.

Increasingly Woza Moya is prioritising the children, seen as the most vulnerable members of the community. A trained staff member works one to one with abused children, finding them safe shelter when necessary and supporting the family to take legal action. A school uniform sponsorship programme enables them to attend school. A play therapy/educare centre is planned in the near future.

More is always needed – but as Woza Moya grows and develops as an organisation, it continues to prioritise the capacity building of its team and the people they work with. Increasingly relying on local management, its focus on responsive participatory community process stays strong. Working with incredibly complex issues including death, rape, hunger, and poverty, they offer support to every aspect of human experience and in ways that embody empowerment and dignity. May Woza Moya continue to balance sensitivity and urgency in their practice in the community in ways that promote heart and life.

Case Study Contributed by: **Trish Bartley**, www.wozamoya.org.za
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CASE STUDY 14.

INDIA

CECOEDECON

People's Initiative for Food Security in Rajasthan

CECOEDECON's mission is to facilitate the processes of empowerment of partner communities – dalits, indigenous people, the landless, small and marginal farmers, deprived women and children – through both direct and indirect interventions, so that they are able to take action independently and effectively to secure their long-term well being.

CECOEDECON's direct interventions include the capacity building initiatives with its partner communities/groups to develop their organisational and technical potentialities to address their most pressing developmental issues.

Based on the understanding of the issue and its experience through intensive work at the community level, CECOEDECON feels that there is an urgent need to reduce barriers so that women can exercise their rights and participate in decision-making, both within the family and the community. To open up avenues of productive work for women, extension activities in rural communities must make a greater effort to involve women in areas other than child welfare and nutrition. There is also a need to increase non-traditional components in women's work, through, for example, income generation, which can provide greater occupational diversification, higher remuneration and greater access to new and productive technologies.

The purpose behind any action of CECOEDECON has been minimizing the islands of deprivations in which our partner communities live. The struggle for bringing the deprived into the mainstream of development and self-reliance could be termed as the activities, whereas poverty, vulnerability and caste-based violence.

Key challenges

- Illiteracy is the major hampering factor and the basic challenge
- Lack of awareness.
- Alcoholism creates family problems and ultimately affect food security
- Migration of tribal community affects their social stability
- Marginalised communities don't have courage to raise their voice in front of dominant sections of the society
- Presence of dacoits in this remote area has been a hampering factor for working both for the community and the project staff

Contextual factors that impact on the work

- Poor infrastructure and non-accessibility in remote villages especially in rainy season
- Drought occurrences
- Traditional sources of income have been reduced
- Poor implementation of government scheme and services
- Vigilance committees are not very active in the area



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- Developmental issues are not addressed at grass root level due to a lack of awareness and illiteracy

Where there is a will, there is a way...

Food–clothes–shelter, these are the prime needs for human being right from the outset of human life. Which is most essential among these? Obviously it is food.

What factors make an illiterate poor tribal woman break a typical Indian traditional attitude towards women and tackle these prime issues and create a new path not only for her family but also for whole community?

It is quite essential to take a brief overview of food sovereignty before starting the story. Food Sovereignty is the people's and communities' fundamental right to determine their food and agricultural policies, to access and control of their means of production and to safe, culturally appropriate foods and sustainable food production. But the control of transnational corporations over not only global but even national food and agriculture policies and production is eroding people's access to nutritious and safe food. Farmers are rapidly losing control over seeds and other genetic resources while the corporations are increasingly consolidating their hold over these resources through patenting, biopiracy and genetic engineering. An estimated 20 million people are being affected by this process which Vandana Shiva, author and activist calls the "ethnic cleansing" of the poor, the marginalised and the hungry.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), everyone is guaranteed the right to food, shelter, livelihood and adequate health care, which means that hunger and homelessness is a violation of human rights. But in a critical analysis it is very clear that Government has not been able to support the food needs of the poor and victims of disaster. Therefore there is need to struggle to retain and reclaim these rights. The current story shows how the community was motivated to ensure its rights and shows that nothing is impossible if there is a true zeal to achieve something.

Kotha Bai is a forty five year old active tribal woman leader and a well-respected name in the tribal community (Bheel) of Shahbad block of Baran district. When her family was also among the victims whose land was submerged in Mahi Dam, scarcity of food and resources for livelihood forced her family to migrate from Madhya Pradesh to the Shahbad block of the Baran district of Rajasthan.

The government allotted them 13 bigha of land but the land was eroded, rocky and un-irrigated, in brief, not suitable for cultivation. Non-availability of the primary requirement - food, made them move to the nearby villages for labour work and to borrow money at interest of Rs.2.5 per 100/- by mortgaging their jewellery, which was the matter of great concern in their society. The insufficient produce from the land was not enough to meet their own needs and also to pay back the loan. This worsened their financial status. In such critical circumstances CECOEDCON's interventions for securing their right to food through Food Sovereignty emerged as a ray of hope for the villagers of Purampur village.

CECOEDCON's interventions started in Purampur village with social assessment and Participatory Rural Appraisal exercise in the year 1996-97. Thereafter a village development



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committee was formed. Regular chaupal (village) meetings were conducted to mobilise the community and to ensure equal participation of women in decision-making and development related issues. The major problems faced by the villagers were water crisis and employment. The situation was aggravated by frequent droughts. The quantity and quality of water was deteriorating. Due to the rain-fed nature of irrigation coupled with degraded agricultural lands, low agricultural productivity was prevalent and this adversely affected both humans and cattle. In such an adverse situation Kotha Bai along with the other villagers submitted a proposal to CECOEDECON for the village pond digging and farm field bunding. Taking the prevailing conditions into consideration both the works were started. During the pond-digging work Kotha Bai took the responsibility of mate (local supervisor who directs and monitor the physical construction work) on her shoulder. Although these works resulted in the increase in the moisture content of land and improvement in the fertility and productivity of land to some extent it was still not enough to have a food secure life. Therefore she convinced the community members to pay some cash contribution for lift irrigation. After preparing the background in the village. She submitted a proposal to CECOEDECON for lifting water from the nearby river to generate irrigation source with cash contribution from community. The true spirit of villagers, their interest and the expected result of lift irrigation made CECOEDECON to implement the work, which resulted in change of Kotha Bai's social status in the society.

Regular participation of Kotha Bai in chaupal meetings and various skill developing trainings empowered her and built her capacity for leadership. In her village women were still dependent on men for financial work, they did not have cash in their own hands. Therefore, so that she and others could become more self-dependent Kotha Bai took the initiative to form a self help group with the other women of the village. Regular saving has resulted in a total group fund of Rs. 9000/- to date.

Intensive cropping by the water retention through the Anicut, or village pond, and farm field bunding improved her financial standard so that her family was able to construct a pacca house instead of earlier kaccha house.

CECOEDECON also focused on generating awareness on need for children's education, especially for girls. Being aware of the importance of education Kotha Bai sent all her six children to school. She not only sent her own children to school but also motivated other children of the village to get educated.

Kotha Bai has advocated for many essential needs of the community.

Positive changes in the agricultural condition and produce by irrigation facilities changed the cropping pattern of the community. They have started cultivating cash crop of soybean instead of Bajra (Pearl millet). Even though the productivity increased, most farmers consumed all their grain and did not keep seed for sowing. In the next growing season they bought seed from other farmers or from the market. During the sowing season the price of seed rises.

The quality of seed is also questionable as it shows low germination. In many cases enough seed is not available at the right time, so that farmers sow the seeds late resulting in a lower harvest. To address this issue of seed availability CECOEDECON discussed the concept of seed banks with the women's group. The result of the discussion was a unanimous decision to store the seeds at local level. Therefore through the efforts of SHG members a seed bank was



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formed in the village to collect locally available seeds suitable to the agro climatic condition so that dependency for seeds could be minimised. The indigenous seed storage practices still undertaken by some tribals at family level were studied. The different types of storage tanks, the materials used for their construction, and methods used for preservation of seeds were documented. To make it socially acceptable, economically viable, and environmentally sound only traditional methods were propagated for the construction of tanks and protection of seeds. The materials used to store seeds, such as Neem leaves, Bamboo, Ash etc. are locally available.

For the sustainability of the seed bank the women have decided to contribute one and half times the seeds they have taken for sowing from the produce of the crop. A system of documentation of seed transactions has been developed and the groups have been trained on recording the transactions.

This idea of storing seeds for food sovereignty through seed banks at local level has worked and has been shared in 50 villages on a pilot basis. In these seed banks community has collected locally available seeds suitable to the agro climatic condition like Maize, Rice, Sesame, Rapeseed & Mustard, Black gram, Green gram Soyabean, Koda, Rali, Taramera, Gram etc. All the members of seed bank have sown the collected seeds for the first time in rabi season in all the 50 villages. The result of the production will further help in deciding the future strategy.

Further securing their right to food with the facilitation of the project “People initiatives for food sovereignty in Baran district” Kotha Bai not only participated in the State level convention on food sovereignty organised for presenting the aspirations of the people’s movements and a rights based framework for food and agriculture policies but also motivated other farmers and paved the path of social workers working on the same track by presenting and explaining their efforts in this direction. This experience has shown that peasants and women can themselves lead their community for securing their rights and long lasting food security thereby eradicating hunger at local level.

There are few Government schemes working in the area to provide food rations at affordable prices, so that vulnerable communities can secure their livelihoods. A satarkata samiti (vigilance committee) has been formed by the Government to monitor the system. But designated members are at times not aware of their role, and while most of them sign on papers without monitoring the distribution process. Corruption is prevalent. Dealers have government linkages and apart from this they are weighing a lesser quantity of grain than has been agreed. Kotha Bai keeps an eye on all this and to avail their right she motivated the people of her village and near by villages to unite and to raise their voice against the existing corruption in the system. This motivation and awareness took the shape of open hearing, in which villagers from various different villages put their problems in front of Additional District Magistrate (ADM). A total of 252 cases were registered in the public hearing. These were the efforts made by Kotha Bai, which changed life of her family and earned her more respect and reputation in the community than she could ever have imagined.

There are still many challenges to address for long term sustainable development of the community, which require concrete and holistic strategic efforts. Some of these challenges that have been observed by CECOEDECON during the last few year in the project area



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include:

- Illiteracy is the major hampering factor and the basic challenge. This affects essential record keeping
- Globalisation, patenting
- Proper implementation of government schemes
- Change in the dietary habits of community. People have started consuming non-traditional grains like wheat in place of millets
- Collaboration of dealers and government officials
- Cheating through less measurement of wheat

Great efforts towards upliftment are still required to create awareness in this community and to increase the numbers of leaders such as Kotha Bai. But this particular effort gives us hope.

Learnings: Individual members of communities can be highly effective as social animators. Indigenous technical knowledge is a strong medium towards ensuring sustainable community development and food security.

Case Study Contributed By: **Mr Sharad Joshi**, Director, CECOEDECON

Key Workers: **Dr. Manoj Kr. Tiwari/ Mr. Chittarmal Jat**



CASE STUDY 15.

EAST TIMOR

Revolving Loan Fund in East Timor

HAFOTI (Hamahon Feto Timor – “Shade for Timorese Women”) Revolving Fund

Introduction

East Timor is still struggling to recover from the devastation of the Indonesian occupation and the destruction wreaked by militias in the aftermath of the August 1999 independence vote. The country's infrastructure remains undeveloped, and the people are deeply traumatised by their experience.

The international humanitarian response, whilst strong, has caused a new set of problems for the population, which now faces the challenge of negotiating its own self-reliance in relation to the new Government and the UN administration as well as the wave of experts that arrived with the goal of building their capacity to do so. This is especially true of women, who have been marginalised by men in their own political and decision-making structures. Having coped and learned new skills throughout the Indonesian occupation, they now want to claim their own rights in an independent East Timor. Many East Timorese Community Based Organisations, and in particular women's groups, lack the capacity, in terms of skills, resources, training and awareness to promote a sustainable, gender fair, development which will benefit their own communities and by extension the country as a whole.

East Timor faces many challenges :

- More than two in five East Timorese are poor and do not have enough resources to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, education and housing.
- Low human resource capacities typify the government, private sector and the civil society.
- Productivity in every sector is low, generally relying on traditional low-input and low-output technologies and practices.
- Women continue to suffer from inadequate access to essential services (neo-natal and post natal health care) as well as other disadvantages, and are frequently victims of domestic violence.

Geographical Profile

East Timor used to be one of the twenty-seven provinces of the Republic of Indonesia. It is located in the eastern part of Timor Island. It lies between Indonesia and Australia. The area is 144,609.38 square kilometers, which comprises of the main portion of twelve districts and the Ambeno enclave of 814.66 square kilometers.

East Timor is mountainous with many high peaks, deep valleys and fast flowing streams. It is situated on the very edge of two continental plates, Asia and Australia. The island has a tropical monsoon climate with two fairly well-defined seasons. The current population is approximately 800,000. There are 12 ethnic groups, each with their own language.



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Historical Background

Portuguese Occupation. Part of the Timor island (which is East Timor) was colonized by the Portuguese for 450 years. The people's life then was difficult. People did not have access to livelihood, education and health. For 450 years, education was limited to people who could afford it. Only about 5% of people were able to get food and education and these are the children of Portuguese families. In 1974, the people started to revolt against the dictatorial government in Portugal and the government gave them freedom to form parties. Different parties like, UDT, a federation with Portugal, Apodeti, a federation with Indonesia, and Fretilin, who wanted national independence were formed. In Nov. 28, 1975, Fretilin won power and proclaimed Timor-Lorosa'e as a Democratic Republic.

Indonesian Invasion (Military Rule). After the proclamation of Fretilin, Indonesia invaded Timor on 7th December 1975, during the regime of Suharto. Indonesia ruled for 24 years. East Timor became the 27th province of Indonesia. East Timorese communities, compared to other nations and other Indonesian provinces were economically deprived. Many of the people are unemployed. People from Java and other Indonesia provinces dominated businesses and the government sector.

However, access to education was improved. They opened schools and people were able to attain higher education in the universities. Schools were opened in the villages. The Indonesian culture became dominant. But the Indonesia government gave the people of East Timor the freedom to also develop their own culture. Infrastructure development carried on. Government buildings, schools, road and bridges and village community Centres were built.

The communities, however, were limited in conducting their own economic activities like going to their farms. People were not allowed to go out after 6 p.m. Even cars / vehicles and people were not allowed to be on the streets. There were illegal arrests and the rules of the military applied to the people. It was because of this that people started to be politicized. The people began to fight for independence. The problem between Indonesian and East Timor was in the UN agenda.

Struggle for Independence. Guerilla Activities. The people began to arm themselves and join the guerilla movement and hide in the forests and attacked Indonesian military posts. Men joined the guerrilla movement because they knew that what they did was not only for themselves but also for their country. **Clandestine Activities.** The communities began to form secret organisations. The clandestine movement slipped out documents and reports of atrocities to the international community.

The youth also began to make protests against violations of human rights by the military. Those Timorese who went exile to countries like Portugal, Australia, Macao, Angola and Mozambique lobbied the international community about the problem of East Timor, giving them the reports of human rights violations they received from the clandestine movement.

Indonesian Reform and the Referendum. Reform in Indonesia began in 1998 with the downfall of the dictatorial government of Suharto. He was replaced by B.J. Habibie. Pres. Habibie gave East Timor the choice of independence or autonomy with Indonesia. These two options were given to the people to decide through a referendum. On August 30, 1999, a UN



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administered referendum was held. The people voted for independence (72%) and autonomy (27.3%)

The September 1999 Violence. The people who voted for autonomy did not like the result of the referendum. They asked for the support of the Indonesian military to kill the people, destroy all towns of East Timor, burn all government buildings and communities.

Emergency Phase (1999 to 2000). October 1999 began a phase of economic crisis in Timor. Many donors came to give food, clothes, medicines and housing materials. All these were distributed to the communities. This was the phase of dependence. Many international NGOs came to give assistance to the people of East Timor.

After Emergency Phase. That time, East Timor's economy was zero. There is no employment. Local products like coffee, candlenut, coconut, etc. could not be marketed. Basic commodities were imported and therefore expensive.

Community Organising/Planning

CIIR programme in East Timor

At the beginning of 2000, the Catholic Institute for International Relations decided to establish an office in East Timor after 21 years of accompanying the people in their struggle for independence through international advocacy coordinated from London. The main priority was building the capacities of women. CIIR developed a programme in East Timor, which addresses this at international, national, and grass-roots community level.

CIIR began working with women's groups in village level communities in 2000. During the initial phase the emphasis of the programme of "Strengthening Women's Organisations" was on increasing the capacity of East Timorese community groups to develop democratic, gender sensitive, inclusive internal structures. Training was provided in participatory methods, equal opportunities, management and assertiveness.

In 2002 CIIR strategically reviewed the priorities of the existing programme in order to re-focus on the immediate economic challenges facing women in the communities. The aim was to identify community problems and the potential projects that could be implemented to alleviate them. Low production, few market outlets, unemployment and lack of skills were identified as major needs.

Groups of women who had organised themselves to collectively engage in farming, sewing, vegetable production, tais weaving and general trading expressed frustration at not having the capacity and capability to undertake income-generating activities successfully. In all economic areas, it was observed that women had been relegated to the background; whilst men struggled to engage in a changing economy women were doubly disadvantaged. Women's groups strongly expressed their desire to organise to undertake income-generating projects.

The organising process

The CIIR programme began capacity building training workshops for women's groups initially in four villages in four different districts; working both through East Timorese intermediary NGO and directly with community groups as appropriate. These initial training workshops



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addressed issues such as domestic violence, assertiveness, environmental concerns and community healing. This was part of a strategy to increase awareness in the village.

The constant visits and sharing with the women in the villages developed an open relationship with CIIR, the partner organisations and among themselves. With a grant of \$1,500 for each community, the women in the villages were able to have hands on experience of working together to implement a project. Since then regular meetings were held that led to the formalisation of four women's organisations. These were the "Moris Foun" in Baucau, "Haburas" in Aileu, "Nemfeu" in Oecusse, and "Halao Foun" in Ossurua. Women's groups were assisted in developing their own statutes, job descriptions and procedures. Regular organisational meetings resulted in the formation of HAFOTI.

The Project

Description of the HAFOTI Revolving Loan Fund

HAFOTI means Hamahon Feto Timor or "Shade for Women". It is a Timorese consolidation of four women's groups that is responsible for the implementation of the revolving loan. Representatives of the four organisations manage this formulating policies and systems of fund implementation and constantly monitoring the beneficiaries within and from other participating districts. Hafoti has grown from the original idea of a micro credit scheme but has developed characteristics of its own, especially the focus on group development and training, prior to any funding being made available.

Through the initial capital of \$12,000.00 the organisations were able to start a number of economic initiatives involving individuals and groups of women in the villages. It has also provided the opportunity for the women to work with other women's organisations from the other districts. The revolving fund, which charges 10% per annum from the borrowers, enables both HAFOTI and the village organisations to raise funds to finance their other activities or reach out to more beneficiaries. HAFOTI gets 5% from the proceeds while the other 5% goes to the organisations. This is their way of developing their own financial stability.

One representative of each group comes to a two-day meeting at CIIR each month and reports on the activities. This committee also considers applications for loans. Loans can be made to individual women, but also to small groups of women for economic activities. Individual members can borrow \$150, and groups of 3-5 persons up to \$500. Economic activities so far have included: a kiosk, a bakery, a tailoring service as well as production of palm wine and makanan kecil (small cooked food items), a restaurant, pig raising and the buying and selling of rice, petrol/diesel, fertiliser, pigs and cattle, betel nut, candlenut, carpentry. The repayment period is 6 – 8 months and if a longer period is required 5% interest per year is charged. Although women say that saving money is usually very difficult, Hafoti has a 100% repayment rate. As there are always other women or groups waiting to use the money, community pressure is applied to ensure repayment.

The impact of the project to community and women's issues.

i. **Economic.** The Revolving Loan Fund project yields an income averaging \$ 18 to 35 a month and creates other spin-off initiatives as members of income generating groups use their profits to start individual revenue creating projects. Others invest their modest profits for food and educational benefits for their children. Increased knowledge concerning project management



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and awareness of the importance of financial accountability is evident from their involvement in these ongoing small-scale income-generating projects. That borrowers appear to be establishing good records in loan repayments may be indicative of a good grasp of accounting principles and collective financial responsibility.

ii. Social. Since we began this work, we have noticed that within the communities with which we are working, men, notably male leaders are starting to participate in discussions involving women and gender topics. Women are delighted by the added self-confidence the project has brought them to deal with other issues in their lives. The women also felt empowered economically through the projects. And because of the income they bring to their families, the husbands are less stressed, thereby reducing domestic violence.

Membership in these community organisations is increasing and organisations such as Moris Foun and Haburas to initiate are beginning their own activities, and to work independently.

The impact of project on peace building and reconstructions

Peace building

During the war, the people were not free to sit together and organise themselves. After the war, the people still felt afraid to organise together because they still did not trust each other. It's because of this that it has been difficult for us to organise because groups do not trust other groups. When we started out the project, we began slowly in changing the minds of the community. The community started to work together in this project regardless of origin, religion and party. Then the people began to feel there is peace and freedom to do their daily activities without anybody forbidding them to do so. They are now able to do things that were not possible to do during the Indonesian occupation.

Psychological reconstruction

Through this project, the community also started to get rid of feelings of mistrust that existed even within families- parents to their children, brothers and sisters. But in this project we encouraged the community to be open to one another and to recognise that there is only one remaining enemy and that is poverty. This project has also changed the mentality of people being dependent on others, just waiting for donations. This project trained and taught the community to rely on themselves. It's philosophy follows the saying that "when a man asks for food, do not give him a fish but teach him how to fish".

Economic Reconstruction

In the economic aspect, economic activities that were stopped in September 1999 have started to move again. Even small economic activities that were done before have been reactivated through the provision of the revolving loan fund as capital to community members who want to increase their income. Because of this project, people have started to contribute to the economy of the nation.

Social reconstruction

The East Timor society that was once divided by colonisation has also started to reconcile and work together. This Hafoti project has contributed to the reconstruction because it accepts anybody regardless of culture, religion or political affiliation. The project is open to all communities where women want to organise and work together.



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Conclusions/Constraints/Plans

- The support and training of these women's groups who have embarked on income generating is an ongoing commitment of the project. It will remain responsive to the continually changing training needs of participants.
- Direct contact with the women's groups in relation to the management of income generating schemes as well as training on women's issues will continue.
- With the growing number of people engaged in micro economic enterprises, the problem of marketing their products should be a major consideration.
- HAFOTI will be strengthened further to be able to reach out to other women's organisations in other districts. To be able to respond to this, HAFOTI will not only need additional capital for the loans but also additional capacity on project / enterprise management, credit management and financial systems.

Case Study Contributed By: **Mr. Ildefonso Guterres**



CASE STUDY 16.

BRAZIL, PERU AND BOLIVIA

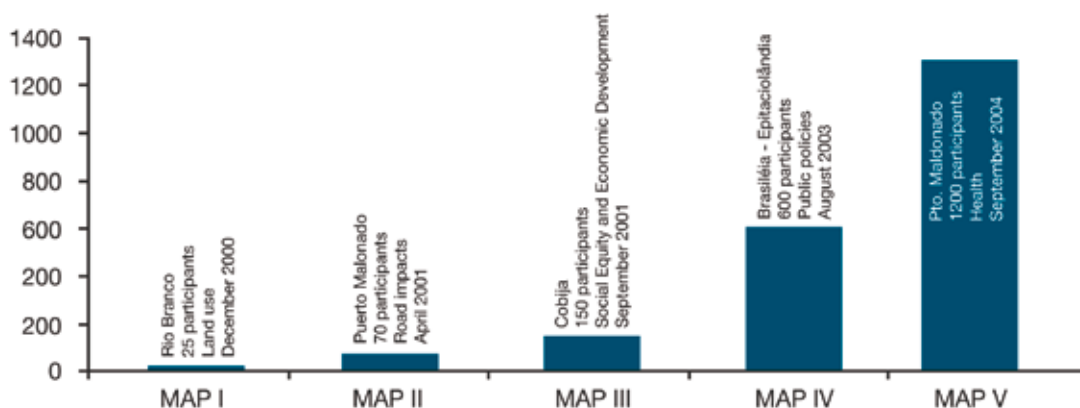
The MAP Initiative, South Western Amazon Region

The Case of the Map Initiative

In the heart of south-western Amazon, formed by the Peruvian state of Madre de Dios, the Brazilian state of Acre and the Bolivian state of Pando, here referred to as the MAP region, is encountering a decisive moment in its history. Regional integration plans, advances in infrastructure, and the need for a better life in the region's societies are producing growing demands on natural resources and ecosystems. The result is that this territory has become a regional stage for global changes, where poverty, hunger, sickness, illiteracy, and the continuous degradation of ecosystems are causes of great concern in the region. The integration of innovative environmental and development initiatives offers an alternative to alleviate this difficult situation. With this integration, it is envisaged to improve the quality of life in regional communities and to achieve better ecosystem management for a more secure and prosperous future. This integration will require solidarity and effective collaboration between and within countries.

The MAP initiative started in the year 2000, aiming at fostering the collaboration between professionals and community leaders at the tri-national frontier Bolivia-Brazil-Peru, where cultural wealth and economic poverty are evident. The meetings of the MAP region are the results of initiatives by individuals and institutions that seek to develop trans-bordering collaborations in search of solutions for regional problems. The participation at the Annual MAP gatherings increased exponentially (see graphic below) from 25 participants in MAP I (2000) to 1,200 in MAP V (2004), including international, Bolivian, Brazilian and Peruvian institutions, encompassing NGOs, governmental agencies, social movements, universities, rural-workers' unions, and representatives of indigenous peoples.

Evolution of the MAP meetings



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These gatherings are organised around the crosscutting theme Public Policy, with thematic axes, such as Social Equity, Environmental Conservation, and Economic Development, and their specific groups, such as:

SOCIAL EQUITY	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
Indigenous	Business Integration	Community Management
Human Health	'Brazil Nuts'	Protected Areas
Education and Human Rights	'Cupuaçu'	Watershed
Social Communication	Roads	Biodiversity
'Campešinos' and 'Extractivists'	Timber	Fishing
Culture, Art, History and Sport	Micro-business	Forest Fires
Children and Adolescent Rights	Cattle Ranching	Agrarian Sanity
Gender	Tourism	'Agroflorestania'

The MAP initiative is based on the exercise of two basic human rights emphasized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Principle 10 of the Rio de Janeiro Declaration: the right to have access to relevant information about sustainable development and the right to participate in collective decisions. The rights to know and to participate form the pillars of the democratic process, and their exercise is essential for constructing sustainable development in the MAP region.

The spirit of MAP reflects a social movement across frontiers, which perceives that only through the collaboration between Bolivians, Brazilians and Peruvians, and integration of various segments of local, regional, national, and global societies will it be possible to attain development of South-western Amazon with the capacity to sustain itself in the coming decades and beyond, to the 2100. This initiative promotes the effective participation of the local communities in the regional governance, which is understood as a social, economic, and political process in which the communities are engaged towards their own self-management. Examples include the shared management of the tri-national Acre River watershed, and the harmonised curricula for the regional schools.

More information, in English, Portuguese and Spanish, can be downloaded from <http://map-amazonia.net>

Case Study contributed by: **Professor Manuel Cesario**

