



HUIROU COMMISSION

Women, Homes & Community

Huirou Commission Pathway of Change : Theory of Change

August 6, 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Huirou Commission is a global movement building organisation working for long term structural change and social justice.

We believe that:

- organized groups of grassroots women are the most critical constituency in development and must be major actors in governance and development at all levels. Positioning women as major development actors is the route to pro-poor, equitable, inclusive, resilient and sustainable development.
- the women's movement in development has brought attention to the relentless work of groups of grassroots women on the ground over the last four decades.
- there are critical linkages across grassroots, local, national, regional and global contexts. These have to be fostered to initiate strengthen and sustain transformation.

I. PATHWAY TO CHANGE

Defining Grassroots

Grassroots women are living and working in low income and poor, rural or urban settlements, are rich in life experience but often not university educated like many development professionals, and despite their demonstrated ability to organize and solve problems, they are usually excluded from decision making processes.

Redistributive agenda

Grassroots women are often seen as 'volunteer workers' because they 'donate' their labour and organise to collectively improve living conditions by necessity (and will power). Although unpaid, grassroots women, generate returns through cooperation and resource pooling. This organising builds constituencies and social roles for women and can shift development work at the community level. Women's engagement in public life as community leaders and problem solvers is driven by their need to have greater control over their lives and livelihoods, as well as those of their families and communities. This kind of public engagement of women at the grassroots invariably challenges the existing power relations by pressing for a re-distributive agenda leading to a pro-poor, equitable and inclusive social order as the basis of resilient and sustainable communities that they seek to build.

Development as a pathway out of poverty

Development essentially means good change. There is a global consensus now that good change is not only about economic growth, but more about reducing poverty and inequality - sharing power and

resources across diverse marginalized groups, mainly poor and indigenous people often with very distinctive socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Poverty is about people and their lives with multiple deprivations in an experience of isolation, exclusion, marginalization, shock, stress, and income and food insecurity. It is lack of voice and choice - not being able to say, decide and do what is wanted and needed. Poverty basically limits the ability to lead a desired life with equitable freedom and security. All development work must seek to reverse this process across different contexts and help create pathways out of poverty.

Development, as good change, entails fair distribution of power, resources, and opportunities. Good change requires enormous amount of human energy and ingenuity. Grassroots women and their collective, creative energy, and ingenuity, have yet to be fully acknowledged and accessed to accelerate the pace of poverty reduction and inequality. Grassroots women and their work constitute the biggest untapped opportunity for effective development that is pro-poor, equitable, inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

Why the Politics of Knowledge Construction and Dissemination Matter

Knowledge, capacity, action, and advocacy are the key coordinates of change. Real development action by people requires both knowledge and capacity. Advocacy requires experience, evidence and the ability to create a common articulation of problems and solutions to engage decision makers. The process and **politics of knowledge construction is the key to effective development action** and advocacy. In the field of development, knowledge and perceived expertise confer authority and power.

Fundamental questions to unpack the politics of knowledge construction include: Whose knowledge? Who creates this knowledge? What is the language of this knowledge construction? Who uses this knowledge for what purpose? HC's approach seeks to consistently position grassroots women as experts with local knowledge and experiences challenging the dominant notion that grassroots women must always be learners, trainees and receivers of knowledge from external technical experts.

Grassroots Academy - an example. The Grassroots Academy is a methodology evolved by the Huairou Commission over the past 15 years that provides a learning forum for grassroots women to share, transfer and analyze their own knowledge and practices thereby asserting their identities as experts and problem-solvers and countering the dominant assumption that professionals are the only experts.

II. OUR ASSUMPTIONS AND NOTIONS: ABOUT EMPOWERMENT AND CHANGE

Empowerment of organised groups of grassroots women is the key to lasting social and political change. Such change is critical for policies and programs to deliver results and transform living conditions and the status of grassroots women at the local level. Our core assumptions of empowerment and change are:

- Grassroots women empowered as a collective, can function in the larger community interest leading to sustainable development. Continually linking small grassroots groups to one another, federating them, building networks and coalitions across diverse groups builds collective power, expands the pool of experiential knowledge and amplifies their voices inside development debates.

- Self representation of grassroots women is key to making visible their priorities, contributions to problem solving and building relationships with decision makers at multiples levels. Self representation of grassroots at global forums presents evidence that counters the dominant imagery of grassroots women as passive victims of development and presents them as actors of agents of change.

Crisis situations such as natural disasters, conflict and the HIV/AIDS pandemic present strategic opportunities to position grassroots women as public problem solvers when traditional development solutions don't work.

- Women organized in groups and networks, across development themes, countries and regions, can make greater headway in shifting development approaches than most other constituencies. Yet their potential and power hasn't been adequately acknowledged or resourced by progressive foundations of mainstream multilateral and bilateral development aid agencies.

II. UNDERLYING REASONS FOR OUR BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Sources of evidence

Our belief is based on the evidence accumulated from hundreds of thousands of communities from more than 50 countries and 5 continents representing varied social, cultural, economic and political contexts. There is overwhelming evidence that empowerment of grassroots women transforms gender relations in very fundamental ways at the household and community level. This often can be situated in a manner that unleashes transformative energy and generates strategic resources for equitable and inclusive change in society.

Empowerment as defined and experienced by grassroots women

Grassroots women were asked to define what empowerment means during the Midterm Review 2010. In their words empowerment can be defined as being able to articulate our women's work from a position of strength as actors and contributors , not recipients of government aid. Additionally they expressed:

"It is the process of awareness and capacity building which leads to greater participation in transformative action."

"Empowerment is based on factors such as capacity, the ability for strength and leadership but it is also focused on factors such as self-esteem."

"A woman who is empowered has self-respect. Self – respect and self- esteem are often under represented to build women's strengths as role models."

"Everything we do now (voice, engage, dialogue, hold authorities to account) connects to the changes we are seeing in women and the men of our community. It is not just the result of a house, understanding what is ours, but attitudes are changing from men and how they work with women."

III. MEASURING EMPOWERMENT: DEFINED BY EXPERIENCE OF GRASSROOTS WOMEN

Five key areas for the achievement of grassroots women's empowerment are:

Leadership: the extent to which a woman's role, capability, presence and influence in decision making processes at all levels is increasing. Grassroots women knowledge and experience from local realities brings a solid knowledge of community needs and issues to decision making. Women are increasingly involved in the choices for greater community social value, conflict resolution, community commitments and services delivered by local authorities. From these leadership positions, decisions, negotiations and actions are able to influence for outcomes which grassroots women advocate for.

Collective Organizing: the ability in which women can network, organize, and collaborate in order to achieve their mutually agree aims. Grassroots women's work worldwide focuses on collective action, community space and community building in order to engage members of the community to solve issues which are affecting them. Collective organizing strategies of grassroots women can create a favourable environment for grassroots women's participation and active involvement in development processes which affect their lives. Grassroots women's organizing to meet and strategize collectively allows women to learn as a group, transfer skills and knowledge and to formalize and sustain their involvement in local development beyond short-term volunteerism.

Accountability and Responsiveness: the extent to which women and men scrutinize government and hold them to account, and the extent to which public policies and institutions respond to the needs of grassroots women and uphold their rights, including access to basic services, equality, and civil liberties. Power dynamics, corruption, politics and government continue to marginalize grassroots women's voices. As a result, grassroots women are organising to expose mistreatment and press for institutional mechanisms that will produce fair and equitable results. The rise of grassroots women led accountability is demanding for new forms of governance that include new ways (mechanisms) in which women can engage with and hold governments to account for services provided, and for duty bearers / Governments to account for their actions in terms of social justice, realising rights and well-being outcomes.

Resource Sovereignty: the extent that a woman has control over her resources and their derived benefit. Having authority over resources ensures that a woman is more likely to build an asset base. The grassroots emphasis on collective action and community also applies to resource sovereignty and economic activities around income-generation and livelihoods.

Grassroots women's strategies for the creation of economic assets and resources are linked to the creation of collective assets and the development of the community. Resource sovereignty seen in a grassroots women's approach links the strengthening of household or individual economic literacy and financial self-reliance to improving the economic well being for communities and even regions. Building on community resources, self-sufficiency is built and community enterprises can develop.

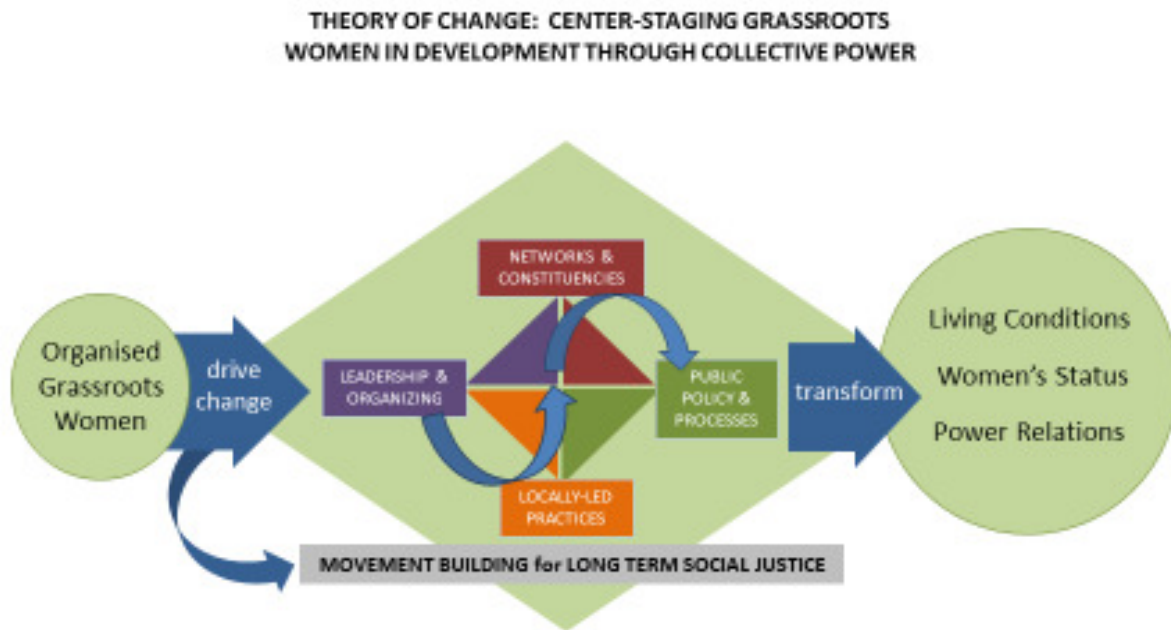
For example, grassroots women's access to land is essential to their income and livelihood needs. Yet, without security of tenure it is difficult for women to acquire and use land resources. Land can be used to produce food and other vital resources for households and communities.

Knowledge Management and Communication: the extent to which women are able to generate information and documentation on their own knowledge, have access to external information, are able to exchange and communicate with relevant stakeholders.

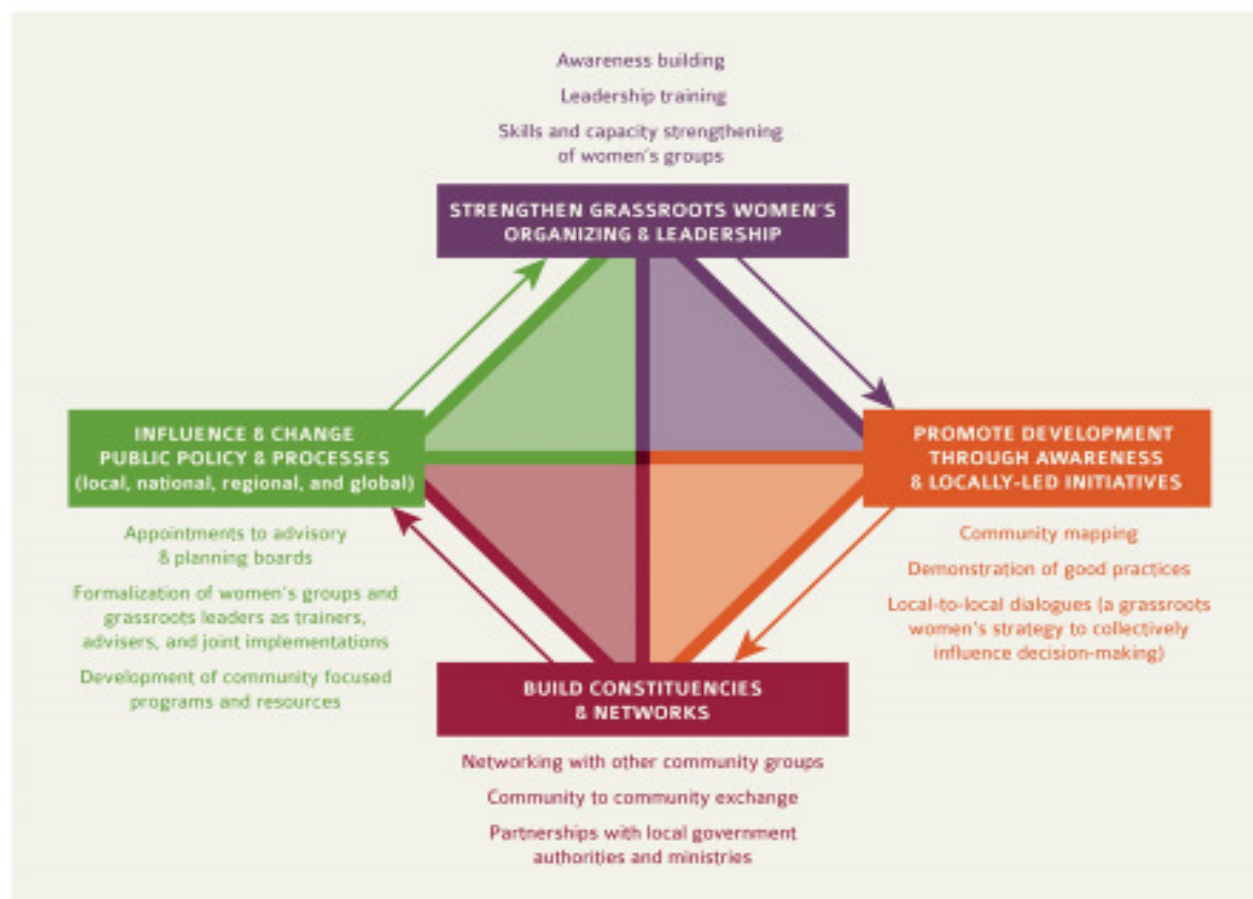
Grassroots women hold and generate a significant amount of practical knowledge and information about the challenges and opportunities within their communities along with strategies to address them, however this information is rarely credited, captured and disseminated in a way that is beneficial to diverse practitioners and stakeholders. In addition, grassroots women’s ability to access external knowledge, being from their peers or technical experts, is a key factor in empowerment and their ability to make changes in their environments.

IV. THEORY OF CHANGE: CENTER-STAGING WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COLLECTIVE POWER

Approaches aimed directly at empowering women lead to far reaching, desired changes in the lives of concerned women, their household and communities. In our experience, empowerment of grassroots women does not only transform gender relations, but also the relationships of community groups to governance structures including institutions of local self government. While strategic shifts in gender relations tend to transform the socio-economic positioning of women within households and communities, their empowerment also by repositioning them in public roles that transform institutional relationships in very fundamental ways having significant implications for good governance and inclusive equitable development.



V. THEORY OF CHANGE DIAMOND - STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



1. Strengthening Grassroots Women's Leadership and Organizing

Advanced grassroots leaders mentor, train and advise less experienced /newer grassroots groups on strategies for organizing to mobilize in response to a range of development issues in their communities. When women learn to take on new leadership roles that position them as experts and leaders in the community, e.g. trainers, mobilizers, mappers (of risks & vulnerabilities, resources), monitors, fund managers, grassroots advocates, they are already changing their status and positioning themselves to transform decision making and development processes.

2. Promote Development through Awareness and Locally led Initiatives

A key aspect of HC's approach to empowering women to transform development is building their awareness, analysis and nurturing their practices in response to everyday practical problems they encounter in terms of access to housing, land, livelihoods and basic services as well as decision making. Over the past 20 years, grassroots groups within the Huairou Commission network have been taking collective actions to improve housing, infrastructure, basic services, livelihoods linked to sustainable agriculture, food security and natural resources. These include:

- Building an awareness of where, what and who (which locations, what structures and which people) are vulnerable, identifying resources or strategies that reduce risk and build resilience with communities and decision makers.
- Developing pilots is to demonstrate to local authorities the benefits of grassroots women-led solutions in agriculture, food security
- Developing a set of signature tools including peer exchange, risk mapping, Local-to-Local Dialogue.

3. Build Constituencies and Networks

- Federating and linking community groups and women's groups to build on community development.
- Strengthening coalitions and networks through joint planning, implementation, evaluation.
- Expanding networks by transferring knowledge and practices to new groups.
- Identifying allies – government officials, donors, researchers, NGO leaders who are prepared to collaborate and / or champion grassroots women's roles in advancing community resilience.
- Developing Tools: Peer learning exchanges, Grassroots Academies, Community Practitioners Platform for Resilience.

4. Influence and Change Public Policy Processes

- Identifying and engaging decision makers and allies who recognize grassroots women as experts, such as holding joint training programs
- Organizing action-research on issues and presenting the findings and recommendations to officials
- Establishing agreements to collaborate with government to plan, implement, scale up, monitor or evaluate programs
- Accessing government resources or budgets for grassroots initiatives
- Tools: Local-to-Local Dialogues, Grassroots Academies, Community Practitioners Platform for Resilience

VI. SUMMARY STATEMENT - CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

We envision a world transformed with balanced power relations and sustainable resilient communities with grassroots women leaders and their groups at the centre of decision making in which people lead lives free from poverty, inequality, violence, insecurity and all forms of injustice (racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, class) We envision a world where no one is excluded and marginalised. We envision a world where everyone has equal freedom, opportunity, resources, and support to lead the life that they consider worth living. We envision a social order where power relations are evenly balanced and everyone is free to pursue the kind of life one wants to lead.

This has to be a world where women and men do not only have notional equal opportunity, but have real access to resources, assets, and opportunities leading to equality of outcomes. This is a world which is pro-poor, equitable and just and is built on inclusive, resilient and sustainable communities. This is the world of our dreams. This world of our imagination is the cause of our real action on the ground and at the global level.