



HUIROU COMMISSION  
Women, Homes & Community

# Transforming Development

*Creating Synergies between Grassroots Women  
and Institutions of Governance*



On behalf of Huairou Commission edited by Sangeetha Purushothaman and Sarah Silliman  
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## FOREWORD

I am very proud to introduce *Transforming Development: Creating Synergies between Grassroots Women and Institutions of Governance*.

The compendium was designed for our members, and other women's organizations who are working to strengthen women's voice and leadership in decision-making at all levels of government. As we are a learning community, we want to create resource materials that enable women to learn from each other, as experienced practitioners. We have worked hard to show the multiple ways women are building democracy and helping to build democratic practice in their communities, starting with local structures and decision makers.

From this compendium, you will see that there is no one way for women to claim their voice in decision-making, to build political power and make change, but diverse strategies are tailored to different contexts. From women working in countries with sophisticated decentralized decision-making structures, to those with centralized governments or living in repressive regimes, bottom-up strategies such as organizing, building knowledge of the political processes, and initiating dialogues with local government, have not only been effective for women to make advancements in the public sphere, but have led to real gains in the lives of women and their communities.

Women have the belief that democratic practice is important and that working with local government matters. It is our hope that this compendium will be a resource guide for women working to build democratic processes, foster peer-learning, and be considered a rich contribution to the field of women and governance.

In order to tell these women's stories, we would like to thank the following people and organizations for their contributions and efforts. We would like to acknowledge the work of Best Practices Foundation for leading this project and the authors Preethi Krishnan, Priya Pillai, Tara Tobin, Sudha Menon and Carolina Pinheiro. Thanks for the final product and design goes to Sudha Menon. Many thanks to Sangeetha Purushothaman and HC's own Sarah Silliman for their editorial work. Most importantly, we are grateful to the women of DAMPA, Espaço Feminista, GROOTS Kenya, GROOTS Peru, Lumanti, SSP, and Pintadas for sharing their struggles and triumphs.

Remember, keeping democracy alive is long term and on-going!

Janice Peterson  
*Chair of the Board*  
Huairou Commission



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## INTRODUCTION

# Governance and Women's Empowerment

“Governance is a sanitized term that masks many messy realities. One such reality that is frequently overlooked in discussions on governance is the question of power and power sharing. Yet it is this which is at the heart of true democracy... grassroots women can reconfigure power relationships to advance their interests and thereby transform the practice of governance.”

- UN-Habitat and Huairou Commission (2004)

‘Governance’ refers to the way institutions function and how resources are managed within communities and institutional structures. It encompasses the traditions, institutions and processes that determine how power is exercised, citizens’ voices are heard, and decisions are made on issues of public concern<sup>1</sup>. Decentralized governance has the potential to bring development decisions closer to communities, and to reach those most marginalized. However, for decentralization to be meaningful to grassroots women, their capacities to access entitlements



and participate effectively in local governance must be enhanced<sup>2</sup>. Unless women become active partners with local governments, they will continue to remain on the margins of governance processes and to be excluded from development decisions that impact their communities. The seven grassroots initiatives presented in this compendium provide insights on a range of experiences which demonstrate the impact of women's leadership on governance and decision-making.

### The Huairou Commission Governance Campaign

Since 2002, the Huairou Commission has had a clear mandate from its members, through its Governance Campaign, to prioritize the development of grassroots women as leaders and as active participants in local decision-making processes and structures. In the past ten years, it

<sup>1</sup> Institute on Governance. "What is Governance? Getting to a definition" as found in Institute of Governance. 2002 (December)

<sup>2</sup> March 2004 Local to Local Dialogue: A Grassroots Women's Perspective on Good Governance. UN Habitat and Huairou Commission

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has steadily supported the strategies and initiatives of such organizations and networks to increase women's leadership roles, build alliances with other community organizations and engage with partners and authorities at multiple levels of decision-making. By seeding the development and evolution of the Local-to-Local Dialogue process (Box 1.1), supporting grassroots women's participation in local planning and budgeting, and advocating for win-win partnerships between women and those in positions of authority, the campaign has demonstrated how democratic and participatory governance can be built from the bottom-up. The Huairou Commission's successes in empowering women to influence development decisions have increasingly gained the attention of the development community as well as international sponsors. These efforts encouraged the Dutch Foreign Ministry to invest in women's leadership as a mechanism to achieve the Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG3) on women's empowerment and gender equality.

## The MDG3 Accountability Initiative

The Huairou Commission began the MDG3 Accountability Initiative with financial support from the Dutch Foreign Ministry in 2008 to bolster women's empowerment by using the MDGs as a framework and advocacy tool to increase women's participation, asset ownership – particularly in land and housing – and ability to influence decision-making on a local and national level. These factors are key components to advancing sustainable gender equality as they seek to address the root causes of disempowerment. Throughout the MDG3 Initiative, 42 women's organizations and networks in 27 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have shown how grassroots groups can initiate cycles of change within their communities and beyond, by increasing women's participation in political, economic and civic life, including holding elected officials accountable. A central element of the MDG3 Accountability Initiative has been expanding women's capacities to effectively participate in political processes. The Huairou Commission's investment in leadership development has demonstrated that observable improvements can be made in poor communities when grassroots women are at the decision-making table and their role is recognized and supported.

This compendium details the initiatives of grassroots organizations which have been supported in part by Huairou Commission initiatives, including the MDG3 Accountability Initiative and the Governance Campaign. However, the case studies are based on each organization's work in its entirety, which have been developed over time with multiple collaborations and associations. Therefore, this compendium is intended for use as a resource showing the specific strategies, lessons and impacts of work in leadership development, participation in decision-making and improvement in the lives of women, their families and communities. These grassroots organizations illustrate how

### Box 1.1: Local-to-Local Dialogues

These are locally designed strategies whereby grassroots women's groups initiate and engage in ongoing dialogue with local authorities to negotiate a range of development issues and priorities to influence policies, plans and programs in ways that address women's priorities. The Local-to-Local Dialogue is situated within self-organized groups of poor women, who create and claim political spaces in communities where the local government has not developed adequate space for women's political participation. In these spaces, grassroots women engage with local authorities to satisfy a variety of needs and build an on-going relationship with their government. The groups using the Local-to-Local Dialogues seek mutual understanding with their local governments, whereby the authorities begin to see them as agents with resources and as having the potential to contribute, with whom it is in the authorities' best interests to collaborate (Bystydzienski and Sekhon, 2002).

The Local to Local Dialogue method was first developed by the Asian Women and Shelter Network with support from UNDP (The Urban Governance Initiative). The method drew heavily on work led by SPARC, Mahila Milan, and the National Slum Dwellers' Federation of India (Goldenberg, 2008).

mobilized groups of women use existing governance mechanisms to participate actively in planning, decision-making, implementation and monitoring of public services in partnership with local government bodies. Where such mechanisms do not exist, women have created systems and processes to engage with government agencies. Watch Dog Groups, Local-to-Local-Dialogues, Gender Desks, Health Governance Groups, Farmer Cooperatives and Networks, and the Champions for Transformative Leadership Initiative represent such innovative participatory engagement mechanisms. By carving out new ways to engage with governing institutions, grassroots women have taken the governance process much beyond electoral politics in order to attain concrete outcomes for their communities.

### Global Trends on Gender and Governance

The Global Summit on Grassroots Women's Leadership and Governance was convened by the Huairou Commission in March 2011 to share and analyze practices in leadership, empowerment and governance. The Summit identified several emerging global trends that have both opened doors for women's political

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participation and engagement and presented new challenges (Pinheiro and Silliman, 2011).

## Affirmative Action for Women

Increasingly, governments around the world are establishing quotas and other types of affirmative action that mandate representation of women in various levels of public office. By 2006, nearly 40 countries had introduced gender quotas in parliamentary elections. In more than 50 countries, major political parties have voluntarily set aside quota provisions among their electoral candidates. Kenya, as part of its constitutional 2010 reform, mandated that at least one third of political positions



were to be occupied by women. However, according to Relinda Sosa, a grassroots leader from GROOTS Peru, "Affirmative action does not necessarily change structures of power." Therefore, while such mandates are a step in the right direction, it is equally important to bridge the gap between women elected to public office and grassroots women's groups. As such, affirmative action has to be complemented with investments in capacity building and collective organizing. Grassroots women will be able to participate effectively in governance processes only when they are equipped with the knowledge and the capacity to negotiate with stakeholders with the support of a mobilized community<sup>3</sup>.

## Decentralization and Community Engagement

Decentralization within governance structures transfers political decision-making to regional and local levels. In many cases, processes of decentralization have effectively brought development decisions closer to the community. This consequently provides opportunities for women to participate in planning processes, voice their priorities and influence decisions. However, it is often seen that well intended decentralization

legislation is either implemented poorly or designed inadequately, such that increasing local responsibilities are not met with increased resource allocation. Inequitable access to information between men and women on how such mechanisms work, further hinders women from participating effectively. In order to successfully implement these mechanisms, educating grassroots women on governance processes should be prioritized<sup>4</sup>.

## Recognizing Grassroots Women as Key Partners

Many governments recognize women as key partners in poverty reduction and empowerment programs and, thus, solicit partnerships with grassroots women's organizations. Local governments often acknowledge the superior ability of such groups to mobilize women and ensure that programs and services reach those who need them most. However, these partnerships need to go beyond resource transfer to involve grassroots women at all stages of planning, implementation and monitoring. According to Sandra Schilen, the global facilitator of GROOTS International, this would mean "redefining who holds knowledge and power, owns research and documentation, and has the expertise at the grassroots." As members of national and international networks, grassroots women are also voicing their concerns in advocacy efforts to influence policies that can benefit women. Reaffirming the need for policy advocacy by grassroots organizations, Patricia Chavez, coordinator of Espaço Feminista says, "Please do not create policies for us without us. We want to design policies with you."<sup>5</sup>

## Innovations to Operationalize Global and National Frameworks

The MDGs, the Hyogo Framework for Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN-Habitat Agenda and Country Level Poverty Reduction Strategies are some of the enabling international frameworks available to hold national and local governments accountable to grassroots women's priorities. Global frameworks such as the MDG3 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women represent not only political spaces for women's participation but also windows of opportunity. Grassroots organizations in turn create concrete models of engagement and accountability with local governments which highlight issues relevant to them and their communities. This engagement also allows for the emergence of innovative solutions that can be more effectively tailored to local contexts, and through building active partnerships with local government.

<sup>3</sup> Carolina Pinheiro, 2011. Ed Sarah Silliman, Final Report: Global Summit on Grassroots Women's Leadership and Governance

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

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## Opportunities used by Grassroots Women's Organizations

The above directions epitomize the current environment in which grassroots organizations operate. In the coming pages, it will be evident how each organization makes use of these trends to achieve their respective goals.



Innovative solutions often act as models for implementing legislation. For instance, GROOTS Peru's strategies utilize existing decentralization policies to mainstream women's concerns into local and national political agendas. Gender desks, local agreements, partnerships and monitoring mechanisms for government help

women enforce local plans and ensure basic amenities to address women's needs. Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in India monitors public services around issues of health, water and sanitation through the formation of Health Governance Groups. These watchdog mechanisms ensure that the poor have access to health insurance and services.

GROOTS Kenya has pioneered a new strategy called Champions for Transformative Leadership which challenges negative stereotypes of women in leadership roles and builds coalitions of grassroots and elected women leaders to ensure elected officials are knowledgeable and held accountable to local needs. This transformation of affirmative action mechanisms, along with Local-to-Local Dialogues, provides both mentoring of grassroots women as well as avenues for them to access resources.

Espaço Feminista in Brazil connects grassroots women leaders from different social movements in order to develop their capacities and strengthen their voice. It serves as a platform for building strategic alliances to propel advocacy efforts and facilitate dialogue between women and policy makers. Through these efforts, Espaço Feminista has been able to influence local and national policies and programs to benefit women. The Cooperativa Ser do Sertão in Brazil mobilized farmers into food cooperatives, facilitating energy efficient technological innovations

which enhanced income, productivity, and improved food security. Partnerships with government allowed these programs to be scaled up.

A multitude of negotiation techniques are used by women's organizations to ensure that services to the community improve. In the Philippines, DAMPA engages in community mobilization first, and then uses collaborative or confrontational rights-based approaches with local governments. Lumanti from Nepal ensures that the community participates in program planning, implementation and monitoring by center-staging grassroots organizations' involvement in large scale housing projects with government agencies. Both DAMPA and Lumanti have been involved in national advocacy efforts to ensure women's rights to secure tenure and housing by bringing in new legislation or by shaping the constitution.

Grassroots organizations have evolved relevant strategies and processes to utilize and benefit from these trends in their respective contexts. At the same time, through their membership in global networks such as the Huairou Commission, they create a global movement that supports the exchange and scaling up of strategies, and creates strategic alliances with key stakeholders to push governance mechanisms at the local level to be responsive to women and their needs.

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## The Power of Women's Negotiating Strategies for Land Tenure Security

### The DAMPA Story

“**W**hat makes women effective leaders? The first is strength. Not the physical strength but rather strength of will and resolve. Women are also more stable in their resolve: they don't waver easily. Another is support of people, especially the moral support and backing of other leaders, groups, and NGOs. Also training from different groups has helped me learn a lot of things, and I was able to establish the attitude of learning from everything, from talking with government and from studying laws. The most important factor is also practice, always moving to apply what you learn, because otherwise, the learning becomes useless.”

- Virgie Gandia, DAMPA Grassroots Community Leader

### Introduction

Damayan Ng Maralitang Philipinong Api (DAMPA) has been working with communities in Manila's Payatas neighborhoods in the Philippines for several years. DAMPA was organized in December 1995 in response to massive demolitions in Smokey Mountain and other areas of Metro Manila, which left hundreds of urban families in dire need of basic services and social protection. It is a federation comprising of 217 grassroots organizations, with a total membership of 79,197 urban poor families.



DAMPA aims to create viable solutions for the urban poor, such as adequate and affordable housing, protection from evictions, relocation assistance, provision of basic services, literacy and livelihoods training, and development of tailored responses for issues specific to women, children and the elderly. It envisions 'a society that promotes the development of just, democratic, gender-sensitive, environmentally friendly and spiritually nurturing communities whose economic, political and cultural relationship translates into the deepest aspirations of the human spirit.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the Grassroots Women's International Academy, September 2004 From Dialogue to Engagement, from Programs to Policies: Grassroots Initiatives on Women, Children and Development in Poor Communities in the Philippines: The DAMPA Experience

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To achieve its vision, DAMPA helps women to identify gaps in existing land and housing policies and mobilizes them to develop an advocacy agenda on housing support for women. Grassroots women's capacities are developed to negotiate with government agencies for land security, access to social housing and basic services such as electricity, water, and education. DAMPA uses global mechanisms, such as the Millennium Development Goals as advocacy tools. Often it is governments that initiate evictions and demolitions of informal settlements making it vital for local voices to be heard in the planning process of resettlement projects. This case study highlights strategies used by DAMPA to engage with government bodies to in order to achieve local goals.



There are 3.1 million poor families in urban areas, of which 681,000 families live in Metro Manila, attracted by perceived employment and educational opportunities. However, rapid growth exerts tremendous pressure on its infrastructure and ability to provide basic services to growing populations. In Metro Manila, unauthorized settlements have increased exponentially<sup>2</sup>, and informal dwellers live in constant fear of being evicted from their homes. Despite the rapidly increasing number of slums in the country, the government has only allocated 0.5 percent of the national budget to the housing sector, and even less to security of tenure programs.<sup>3</sup> Even when available, the poor cannot access social housing. The national government has turned to private developers for housing in recent years resulting in an increase in cost, thus making it impossible for poor households to own a home.

The Philippines has instituted a number of policies to address the needs of poor communities and ensure their participation in governance mechanisms. This is most effectively done through a) service creation, b) provision of protective measures, and c) avenues for participation in decision-making. For example, the

Philippines' Local Government Code of 1991 mandates community participation and representation of voluntary groups in local development councils. These mechanisms provide opportunities for grassroots women to take part in democratic processes in order to access services which are important to them.

## DAMPA Strategies for Housing Security

DAMPA uses a range of strategies to confront, engage and partner with the government in different sectors to reduce the vulnerability of the urban poor.

### Mobilizing Communities into Networks around Land Tenure

To develop the leadership capacity of local women, DAMPA trains community organizers to use household visits to identify neighborhood concerns. In response to land tenure issues, DAMPA has formed committees and home owners' associations as well as developed forums for discussions with the government. These forums make the voices of the community members stronger. To command greater authority, village level groups are further organized at the city level. There are now federations in nine cities networked at the national level.

DAMPA advocates for policy change, implementation of local programs and participatory research activities. Through community mapping processes with three village organizations, the experiences of poor women and men in accessing government programs were established. PACOMNA, one of the community based organizations from the Barangay<sup>4</sup> 275 village, identified lack of water supply as their primary concern. PACOMNA's women leaders then mobilized their constituents to use opportunities such as elections and workshops to engage with local authorities and advocate for improved water supply. Later, the community organized themselves as a water cooperative and obtained a loan from DAMPA to pay for water connections in collaboration with local authorities (Gupta and Lueng).

### Alliance Building with Government on Housing

DAMPA's member organizations have been able to foster relationships with several government departments to implement housing projects in a participatory manner. DAMPA allied with the Income Restoration Sub Committee of the Department of Public Highways, Japan Bank Cooperation Fund and the National Housing Authority to address issues of incomes and livelihood development of families that were relocated through the government's flood control projects in the Camanava area.<sup>5</sup>

The Community Mortgage Program (CMP) is a social housing

<sup>2</sup> Asian Development Bank, 2009, *Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints and Opportunities*

<sup>3</sup> Written Comments by the Centre On Housing Rights And Evictions (COHRE) Concerning Philippines: For Consideration by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its 41st session, November 2008

<sup>4</sup> Villages in Philippines are known as Barangay

<sup>5</sup> Paper presented at the Grassroots Women's International Academy, September 2004 From Dialogue to Engagement, from Programs to Policies: Grassroots Initiatives on Women, Children and Development in Poor Communities in the Philippines: The DAMPA Experience

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program implemented jointly by NGOs and the Philippine Government which caters to informal settlers. NAMALU (Nagkakaisang Maralita ng Luzon/United Poor of Luzon), a member organization of DAMPA used the CMP alliance to help the community secure land tenure (Box 2.1).

## Box 2.1: Building Alliances and Networks

The Community Mortgage Program is a government program that provides housing loans specifically designed to meet the needs of poor people living with insecure tenure. Informal settlers of the areas around Luzon Avenue identified major issues as lack of electricity connections, unpaved roads which became extremely muddy during the rainy season, sanitation, and security as residents did not have ownership rights over their homes (421 member families were seeking land tenure in this area). Local women leaders acknowledged difficulties in negotiating with the bank for finance to secure legal ownership of their land. DAMPA then partnered with the Home Insurance Guarantee Corporation (HIGC), a government agency which helped with financial documentation, one of the biggest challenges for women to participate in such initiatives. While documents were being collected, the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) bought land in the Luzon Avenue area. Women leaders then had to negotiate with PDIC to ensure that the previously agreed price of 8 million pesos did not increase. However, PDIC required that the organization pay an extra PHP 900,000 as interest. In order to raise this amount, the group turned to partner organizations for support. Under the CMP program, they were able to convince a representative of the legislature to become a loan guarantor for the group with the PDIC. The CMP process took more than six years to complete, and raising PHP 900,000 took two years. Josephine Castillo, a grassroots leader recalls, “We asked our partner non-government organization (NGO) to help us raise the PHP 900,000. We were then referred to another NGO called the Foundation for the Development of the Urban Poor, which provided housing assistance. The NGO, after studying the situation, decided to extend a loan of PHP 700,000, payable in one year. We were able to repay the loan in six months.” Currently, the program has a repayment rate of 95 percent, higher than any commercial establishment, with several families who have completely paid off their portion.

Source: NAMALU<sup>6</sup> materials and ‘The Community Mortgage Program: An example of effective engagements in a government housing program’. This paper was presented by NAMALU as part of the mapping of best practices in land and secure tenure by grassroots organizations in the Philippines for the Land and Secure Tenure Project, Huairou Commission.

## Negotiations with Government on Water

DAMPA conducts Local-to-Local Dialogues<sup>7</sup> (Box 1.1) with government officials and other stakeholders on solutions to basic needs failure. Community water projects present one example of leaders interfacing with congress to solve problems. Community members wrote a proposal for public funding, and PHP 1.7 million was granted to build a water supply system. They negotiated with a local water company, who agreed to a 50% discounted cost, payable in installments.

The Pasig River Rehabilitation program is another clear illustration of effective governance mechanisms which provided forums for negotiation and participatory planning processes aimed at resettlement (Box 2.2).

## Box 2.2: Effective Governance Engagement in Pasig River Rehabilitation Program

Poor settlers in the municipality of Mandaluyong lived an urban nomadic life, looking for vacant areas to put up their houses. The Pasig River Rehabilitation Program (PRRP) was a national government program started in 1993 which aimed at gradually cleaning up the Pasig River. The first phase targeted the removal of an estimated 2,000 to 3,000<sup>8</sup> families who were living on easements<sup>9</sup> or on stilts where part of the house hangs over the riverbank. Between 1993 and 1995, numerous demolitions occurred, affecting more than 2,000 families<sup>10</sup> all over Metro Manila. Initial responses of the people involved largely advocacy approaches centered on mobilization and dialogue, building and strengthening of local organizations, and setting-up of alliances and networks with other grassroots organizations affected by the same problem.

A first strategy was meeting with Mayor Ben Abalos Sr. of the Municipality of Mandaluyong. Virgie Gandia, a grassroots leader, recalls, “We entered into a dialogue with the Mayor but we did not go to the city hall. Instead we made him come down to the community, and held the dialogue there. We invited local government officials to show them that we were organizing the community and people were helping each other out. We then went to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in a big group. The Pasig River clean-up was the reason why we were being evicted, and we talked with Undersecretary Benjamin Bagadion of the DENR about this.”

If advocacy was the strategy adopted during the first phase of the demolition threats, community organizing was the foundation that enabled people to forge common plans to

<sup>6</sup> ‘NAMALU’ stands for Nagkakaisang Maralita Ng Luzon (United Poor of Luzon), a people’s organization which successfully negotiated for security of land tenure under the Community Mortgage Program

<sup>7</sup> Local-to-Local Dialogue is a community initiated locally customized strategy to help grassroots groups, most often women-led, initiate and engage in ongoing discussions with local leaders and authorities. The Local-to-Local Dialogue Resource Manual: A guide for grassroots women-led engagement with local government and decision-makers. New York, USA: The Huairou Commission, 2011

<sup>8</sup> Based on government census of informal settlements along the Pasig River. In general, government estimates tended to be conservative

<sup>9</sup> An easement is a certain right to use the property of another without possessing it or having the right to build on it

<sup>10</sup> Estimates of families affected by PRRP-related demolitions supplied by the Urban Poor Associates

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address issues. The group undertook collective planning and information dissemination about what the community should do and conducted intensive one-on-one discussions between community leaders and members. The leaders, supported by a local NGO called Urban Poor Associates and DAMPA, undertook research covering the whole stretch of the Pasig River. This established that 65,000 to 70,000 families would be disrupted by the second phase of the project, belying the claim of government that there were only 9,000 families affected. At the request of DAMPA, Senator Rodolfo Biazon, then head of the Senate Housing Committee, toured the Pasig River so that he could see for himself the extent of potential damage that continued eviction would have on the poor. As a result, the Senator himself confirmed the results of DAMPA's research. Confronted with the conditions of the people affected, the Senator became a major ally and convinced President Estrada to go on a similar tour to see the situation, resulting in directives to institute mechanisms to minimize the adverse impact of evictions on people. He formed the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission (PRRC) to directly work on the project.

The PRRC formed an internal mechanism called the Housing and Resettlement Committee (HRC). One of its main tasks was the production of a plan for resettlement based on the lessons learned during the first phase of the program. The HRC had representatives of people's organizations affected by the project as regular voting members of the committee. Virgie says *"We, the leaders, acted as the bridge between our constituencies and government. We would gather and distill the issues and recommendations of our members from the grassroots, and we would then bring these same issues and recommendations to the table at the Housing and Resettlement Committee. So while we were the link to the people on the ground, we were also their voices at the level of the committee and the commission. Since we were legitimate and recognized members of the committee, we were integral parts of the decision-making process, and our views were very much recognized."*

The most important output of people's participation in the HRC was the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP). The formulation of the plan itself involved direct participation of diverse sectors, including people's representatives and the project funder (Asian Development Bank). Problems in the implementation of the plan were brought directly to the attention of the PRRC. The implementation of the plan thus became the focal point of advocacy for affected communities. However, other challenges ensued during the implementation phases. Some community members accepted offers of

money from local representatives and started dismantling their houses without negotiating terms, thereby not honoring the RAP. To ensure that local governments upheld the plan terms, women leaders convinced the Mayor to attend planning and committee meetings. This direct participation resulted in significant improvement not only of service delivery but also of the quality of engagement between the community and the local government.

For people to be meaningfully represented, local grassroots community organizations and participative, inclusive government mechanisms such as the HRC and the RAP are both needed. In this project, Local-to-Local dialogue methods were used for negotiations to ensure that houses were built in resettlement areas prior to relocation of communities.

Source: Kasiglahan Village 3, an example of effective governance engagements and resettlement development planning. This paper was presented by Damayan Ng Maralitang Pilipinong Api as part of the mapping of best practices in land and secure tenure by grassroots organizations in the Philippines for the Land and Secure Tenure Project, Huairou Commission.

## Legal Literacy for Grassroots Women

An important strategy for security of tenure for women is to develop capacities to utilize relevant legislation and understand the documentation and legal processes required. DAMPA's community trainers educate women on applicable laws such as the General Appropriations Act of 1995, The Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000, The Party-List System Act of 1995 and the Comprehensive and Integrated Shelter Financing Act of 1994. For example, the Republic Act 7160 mandates that a local development council be created at the village level and all projects and budgets are to be discussed in this council. DAMPA also teaches local women practical skills (like negotiation and personal finance management) and conducts awareness building sessions on reproductive health and violence against women.



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## Policy Advocacy on Housing, Disaster Management and Health

DAMPA and member organizations have been instrumental in the passing of several pieces of legislation, such as the Reproductive Health Bill and the 2010 Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. The Republic Act 7279 (RA7279) mandates that evictions or demolitions must be accompanied by simultaneous provision of security of tenure. Urban poor groups in the Philippines formed a grassroots network to write this law. In drafting RA7279, DAMPA leaders participated in several consultations with grassroots organizations. When the proposal was ready, the network



identified potential sponsors of the bill within the House of Representatives and worked to gain support from other legislators to pass the law.

## Impact

Through its activities, DAMPA and its member organizations have been able to transform the lives of women by developing their capacities as leaders and improving their status.

## Women Leaders Influence Government on Land Tenure

Grassroots women leaders are now aware of their entitlements and rights and are consequently better equipped to participate in decision-making forums to influence program implementation (Box 2.2). Community leaders such as Josephine Castillo and Helen Vasquez participate in local governance mechanisms where they continuously engage with local authorities for better planning and delivery of services. According to them, "Women are more aggressive on the issue of land tenure. The women were not working, so they are in the community more. When there are demolitions we are the first ones to be really affected. We became well known and

*respected especially in decision-making which extends even to our households... We can influence the legislature both at Barangay and national levels. We can influence the programs only if we enter government structures. We have been recognized by the government to represent our communities in local bodies and ensure that programs are implemented properly."*

## Gender Sensitization of Governance Processes

Bringing their struggles to the notice of local authorities has sensitized government officials towards the community's needs. According to a community leader, "Women also exert a great deal of influence on the way actions are done. In the first place, women can be quite dramatic! For instance, in my case, when I talk to the government, I highlight the fact that I am a widow, and I use this fact to illustrate our situation to government, that we need support, and that they need to address the problem of housing in my community. Other women similarly present their cases. These kinds of pronouncements help the people we talk with, to visualize our situation and make it concrete and more real. Only when they begin to see our situation, are we assured that they will act on our needs and requests. This is not begging, we women do not invent these stories, but we do make them more dramatic and real. This is why



*the value of the presence of women in negotiations and dialogues cannot be overrated."* The staff in DAMPA report that, "Many may find this approach distasteful, but this in fact brings to the fore an untapped potential of women, their ability to communicate at a gut, non-cerebral level that makes their points come alive in ways that no man can communicate."<sup>11</sup> Thus women bring to governance unique styles that reflect different community needs.

## Increased Access to Education, Electricity and Other Basic Services

As grassroots women leaders engage in the planning and implementation of relocation programs, they ensure that a holistic

<sup>11</sup> Kasiglahan Village 3, an example of effective governance engagements and resettlement development planning. This paper is presented as part of the mapping of best practices in land and secure tenure by grassroots organizations in the Philippines by the Damayan Ng Maralitang Pilipinong Api for the Land and Secure Tenure Project, Huairou Commission

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approach guides their negotiations. Thus, delivery of quality services relevant to the community is paramount in their dialogue at all levels. During the Pasig Rehabilitation program (Box 2.2), more than 100 children had to walk long distances to reach their schools from the new relocation site. The communities negotiated with the authorities to build a school closer to the site. The government responded to community pressure by erecting three buildings for a high school with 32 classrooms within 15 minutes from where the community lived. For those commuting to Metro Manila for work or school, the government provided a 50 percent discount on travel expenses. Electricity connections were also negotiated, whereby the government provided infrastructure for 230,000 electrical posts, and the community paid only for connections.

## Improved Coordination between Government Departments

Community leaders in Manila use multiple strategies to ensure that their needs are met, including engaging with existing governance mechanisms. Representation in various committees, councils and task forces connect disparate government implementation units towards creating a holistic, better-resourced relocation initiative. The Pasig River Rehabilitation Program (Box



2.2) demonstrates how the community has been able to bridge gaps between several departments through these committees. According to Virgie, *“Although the Pasig River Rehabilitation Committee tried in the beginning to involve Local Government Units (LGUs) in the HRC / RAP mechanism, early attempts were unsuccessful for a number of reasons, the most notable being that LGUs are semi-autonomous and independent under Philippine laws, and are used to having their own way. However, because of problems created by uncoordinated activities between LGUs and other government agencies in the resettlement, the people decided to act. It was the people who bridged the gap between the LGUs and the*

*HRC”*<sup>12</sup> In order to involve local governments directly in the planning mechanisms, community leaders first convinced the Mayor at the relocation site to attend the planning and committee meetings. They also continued engagements with the LGU of their original locations and arranged for dialogues with the Mayor to raise their concerns. Virgie recalls, *“The Mayor responded by visiting us two weeks after we were relocated. He talked to the local representative of the department of education as well as the principal of the nearby school, and provided us with other services and support.”*

## Challenges and Recommendations

DAMPA and the communities they work with continue to face challenges. Grassroots women leaders need support from their families and their community. Women have obligations both as mothers and as earning members, so many are discouraged from participating in community activities. This needs to be addressed through a combination of financial and community support. If DAMPA and other grassroots organizations could fund women leaders, this could ease the financial burden of community work.

A major challenge facing DAMPA is the lack of financing for land related projects which require significant, long-term funding. In some cases, DAMPA buys land directly to offer resettlement options for informal settlers. However, massive land and resettlement projects will require government support and financing. Therefore, for productive synergy, community groups must have a seat at the table. The 1991 Local Governance Code mandates that community groups have representation on local development councils, thus giving them access to budgetary decision-making. Authorities must fully open these channels to local people for effective synergy.

Poor families face major challenges with respect to financing land and housing. Relocation requires access to capital for amortization payments. The biggest problem faced by relocation awardees at present involves the escalating pricing mechanism of the land payment system put forward by the National Housing Authority. Often, land prices are determined by the market, far exceeding what poor people can afford. Women are capable borrowers and DAMPA projects requiring loans maintain excellent repayment rates. For poor women to access capital, community leaders must mobilize women into bankable groups to establish credit-worthiness. At the same time, government funds must be available to provide legitimized guarantees of funds for women to access loans. The Community Mortgage Program provides a channel for synergy between women's groups and government to accomplish this end.

Women can be powerful advocates, but improvement of policies related to housing for the urban poor requires commitment from

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

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both government and the community. Grassroots groups advocate for a review of resettlement policies and programs. They conclude *“We should be able to bring these problems to the attention of policy makers. Advocacy is now the only way to go about this. Government must be able to match its housing and resettlement policies with the situation of the poor. If they cannot change these policies, then they must be able to provide permanent sources of income for the people. We are willing to help; we are already here in this situation so we cannot do anything else but help government, because in doing so we will be helping ourselves.”*<sup>13</sup> DAMPA currently works in the national capital region and plans to upscale their work to other locations. They would also like to deepen their efforts in some work areas, especially in ensuring implementation of progressive laws. Women leaders are best positioned to innovate models that make implementation of these laws relevant to communities and their needs.



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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Virgie Gandia, a community leader, May 25, 2011

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## Gender Equality in Land Reforms

### Triumphs of Espaço Feminista

“**W**e are the ones trained by Espaço Feminista. It makes us stronger. We are insisting on the question of gender and participation of women. We are the agents of the process. Today, I feel that I am a leader in my community, well prepared and able to sit at the table and discuss any plan that would benefit my community.”

- Daniela Pedrosa, Resident, Ponte do Maduro

#### Introduction

Espaço Feminista is a civil society organization currently engaged in large social movements in Brazil<sup>1</sup> which works directly with 150 rural, urban and Afro-Brazilian women leaders. The organization has multiple memberships in networks such as the Pernambuco Women's Forum<sup>2</sup>, Women and Democracy Network, the Huairou Commission and the Articulación Feminista Marcosul. Espaço Feminista strives to reduce gender inequality, especially women's access to resources. The organization helps women recognize and overcome cultural, institutional and social forms of patriarchy which reinforce women's lower status in society. It works with grassroots women's groups to educate, organize and share information on issues relevant to them. Espaço Feminista is



committed to centre-staging the needs of grassroots women by building and strengthening their roles within communities and social movements.

A main concern for urban women is land, with the issue of informal settlements being paramount. In rural areas, quilombolas<sup>3</sup> also face issues in accessing and controlling their territories. In 2007 on invitation from the State Secretary, Espaço Feminista expanded its work to urban areas.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the interview of Patricia, Director of Espaço Feminista in March 2011

<sup>2</sup> The Women's Forum of Pernambuco is an action network that emerged in 1988, a commitment of civil society to confront the social exclusion of women

<sup>3</sup> Quilombola is a resident of a Quilombo in Brazil. They are the descendents of slaves who escaped from slave plantations that existed in Brazil until abolition in 1888. <<http://www.reference.com/browse/quilombola>>



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Brazilian society is characterized by extreme inequality, especially among women and racial minorities. Women and Afro-Brazilian populations do not have equal access to land and Brazil's skewed land distribution is a testament to this reality. According to a national survey by Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE)<sup>4</sup>, over 45% of the arable land in Brazil is owned by a mere 1% of the population. Most of the country's 16.5 million rural poor are landless or lack adequate land for subsistence agriculture. In the cities with a housing deficit of 8.2 million poor lack of infrastructure and basic services makes life particularly difficult for poor women. Disparities among the poor and marginalized people in Brazil are accentuated by inequalities across gender and between white and racial minorities.



During 2009-10, Espaço Feminista, with the support of the Huairou Commission, joined the Millennium Development Goals 3 Accountability Initiative. Their aim was to strengthen grassroots women leaders' ability to influence national and regional land and housing policies and to strengthen their voice and participation in decision-making processes and forums. Inherent in the work of the organization is the idea that inequality can only be overcome by the redistribution of social power and structural changes in public policies, especially on land related issues. Espaço Feminista has been working with organized groups of urban, rural and Afro-Brazilian women to strengthen their capacity to influence public policy and implementation, increase their knowledge about how gender issues affect their lives, improve their ability to collectively carve out social spaces, and help them engage with policy makers in dialogues and advocacy processes.

Prior to the MDG3 initiative, women active in Espaço Feminista were part of large social movements, many of which did not address gender issues. Nor did women have any understanding of the effect of gender inequality on their own lives. Espaço

Feminista created the opportunity for 25 to 30 rural and urban project leaders from different regions in Brazil to come together and learn from each other. The result was the creation of a stronger, larger movement enabling effective women's participation in local governance and decision-making.

## Achieving Gender Equality in Land Reforms

Espaço Feminista uses several strategies to strengthen grassroots women leaders' abilities to further women's issues.

### Building Strategic Alliances Around Land Tenure Issues

Espaço Feminista has been able to foster supportive relationships with several international organizations, government agencies and academia around land tenure issues. A clear example of alliance building is evident in the case of a public land regularization project in an area named "Ponte Do Maduro" (Box 3.1). In this project, Espaço Feminista developed partnerships with the State of Pernambuco Housing Company (the department responsible for land regularization), FUNDAJ (the department associated with education and research), The National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), the federal agency under the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), and an international NGO (UN Habitat, Huairou Commission and Global Land Tool Network 2011).

#### Box 3.1: Ponte Do Maduro – Gender Equality for Land Tenure

Ponte do Maduro is a settlement in Recife of roughly 10,000 low-income families living on 50 hectares. Though occupied for more than 100 years, its residents do not have legal tenure. In 1963, the then governor Miguel Arraes de Alencar promised to regularize the area by providing basic services, but a military coup the following year prevented this from happening. Successive governors made rhetorical promises to the people of Ponte do Maduro, with little achieved on the ground. The state has been providing basic services, but communities remain vulnerable since they lack security of tenure and therefore, basic rights and entitlements. Mobilization of the community became an important way to put pressure on the government to make a commitment to regularize the area. In partnership with the Global Land Tools Network (GLTN) of UN HABITAT in Brazil, Espaço Feminista decided to work with four communities to advocate for issues related to land tenure security. With the support of the Huairou Commission and the GLTN, Espaço Feminista started networking to build alliances with government agencies. Along with leaders, they conducted

<sup>4</sup> IBGE – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, in English

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meetings with the communities and invited their partners to witness first hand the abject living conditions experienced by residents of Ponte do Maduro. This raised the community's confidence to fight for tenure security. Espaço Feminista then worked with government officials to ensure that adequate resources were allocated to community needs. The State of Pernambuco Housing Company, which is the department responsible for land regularization, linked the community to the President of Companhia Estadual de Habitação e Obras (CEHAB), the state agency responsible for the regularization process. A link was also established with the current Governor of Pernambuco whose grandfather, Miguel Arraes de Alencar, had promised to regularize land 46 years ago. Subsequently, during a workshop in Rio, a formal commitment was made to prioritize land regularization in the area. The governor's office approved the regularization and the involvement of Espaço Feminista in the process to ensure gender equality in its implementation.

The regularization process in Ponte do Maduro was conducted by the State Government of Pernambuco through CEHAB, a firm hired by the state to process the up-gradation/urbanization<sup>5</sup> and regularization of land<sup>6</sup>. The responsibilities of the firm included: preparing a map of the community's existing conditions, collaborating with the community to make sure that they understood all the issues, and conducting a survey of the social and economic conditions. FUNDAJ, the research wing of the government, had already conducted a similar survey which helped to take the process forward.

The participation of women leaders protected women against the traditional practice of distributing land and housing titles primarily to men. Though the 1988 Constitution of Brazil ensures equal rights to women and men, many private contractors in Brazil discriminate against women in the titling process. Given the contradiction between legislation and customary behavior, it was necessary to educate women about their rights and monitor the behavior of contractors to overcome this institutional bias. To accomplish this, Espaço Feminista's women leaders stressed the importance of a participatory, gender sensitive approach, to state agencies and the community. In May 2010, more than 50 community leaders of Ponte do Maduro met with the President of the State Housing Department. The participation of community leaders in the land regularization process of Ponte do Maduro was advocated and women leaders argued for prioritizing female-led households in titling. As a result, the President

made a pledge to include women and the community in the titling process.

Espaço Feminista developed three strategies to integrate grassroots women in the upgrading process:

**Organizing grassroots women leaders:** Espaço Feminista provided grassroots women leaders the physical and mental space to build their capacity to raise their awareness on gender and regularization mechanisms. They facilitated meetings between these leaders, neighborhood associations and other groups.

**Creating a multi stakeholder body:** A Local Committee, with representatives from different levels of government, was established for women to have direct access to information and government agencies. This forum also helped sensitize government agencies on gender issues. Before Espaço Feminista's interventions, only a few community leaders had access to CEHAB and other agencies. As grassroots women started organizing and participating in the capacity building program, they understood the importance of their contribution and started claiming their legitimate place in negotiations with government agencies. Some women leaders indicated that, when they contact CEHAB, the staff now recognize them by name.

**Conflict Resolution Teams:** Women formed conflict resolution teams to resolve disagreements, reduce tensions and help facilitate the regularization process in the community. Espaço Feminista built capacities on legal and tenure-related issues which facilitated mobilization and demystified the findings of the official socio-economic land surveys.

During the negotiation process, the Local Committee approved Espaço Feminista's proposal requesting full titling in the name of individuals. This would allow women to have access to other assets such as credit. Debate on whether the title should be in the name of the woman alone or in the name of both spouses resulted in a decision that the land title would be shared by both. This achievement shows progress in reversing the male-only 'head of household' tradition prevalent in Brazil.

Source: UN Habitat, Huairou Commission and Global Land Tool Network (2011) report on 'Ponte do Maduro: Fundiary Regularization with Gender Equality Shadow Advisory Committee's International Mission to Ponte do Maduro, Recife'.

Espaço Feminista serves as a platform to implement practices of common interest to women. Linking and building strategic alliances with government is achieved through exchanges and

<sup>5</sup> Slum upgrading (or urbanization) is the provision of basic infrastructure (such as street paving) to existing settlements and enumeration of existing housing units but without providing them legal titles

<sup>6</sup> Land regularization is a process that often follows urbanization but the outcome is the issuance of legal titles to residents. It is carried out in three steps: 1) a social survey, 2) mapping of houses and cadastration, and 3) issuance of title deeds

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participation in national and regional activities. Officials are invited to workshops to share their knowledge on subjects such as land, race and gender. For example, at a land regularization workshop, land department officials were invited to speak, and simultaneously sensitized on difficulties faced by women with respect to land.

Partnerships with researchers have helped Espaço Feminista develop 12 indicators across three dimensions of empowerment: engagement, leadership and partnership. These indicators monitor empowerment at individual, community and political levels where they measure engagement based on the number of activities in which women participate and the number of activities women conduct in their communities. At the political level, they measure leadership based on the number of women in decision-making positions, the number of women campaigning for gender equality in their own communities and those influencing other communities through exchanging information. Espaço Feminista builds community awareness on gender issues. They organize meetings and events where stakeholders such as university and state government representatives are invited to address the community.

## Building Leaders Among Grassroots Women

Espaço Feminista empowers grassroots women by involving them in all community activities and strengthening their roles within social movements. Participatory workshops are held to build capacities of women leaders from both urban and rural areas to increase their participation in decision-making and influence on public policies. The goal of these workshops is to increase the democratic participation of women, build a culture which respects women's rights and secures equal gender relations. Espaço Feminista conducts an annual planning workshop attended by 150 women from different communities to address the needs of those communities. Based on the outcomes, it coordinates workshops within the communities. From this larger group, 25 grassroots women leaders are invited four times a year for rigorous sessions on different issues such as gender in families, human rights and citizenship, land reform and city statutes. These topics contrast sharply with formal education content, which does not recognise women's roles in history, perpetuates gender stereotypes and treat women as invisible.

Women's capacities are built on technical issues related to the constitution, the city, land reform and the basics of economics to enable them to negotiate on land and housing issues. In 2010, Espaço Feminista held a participatory workshop in Assentamento Ismael Felipe for 20 women to increase their capacity to engage with local authorities and effectively influence policy decisions. The training curriculum included social movements, women's representation in history, power structures and governance, which includes how government works and its roles at different levels.

While most grassroots women were already organized in large social movements the implementation of the MDG initiative catalyzed a union between women leaders from the urban areas, 'quilombola' and the landless movements. These women now work together towards the common cause of women's empowerment and pro-women policies in Brazil. Through these exchanges and knowledge sharing experiences, Espaço Feminista helps create a strong body of leaders.



## Enhancing Research Skills to Build on Women's Knowledge

In capacity building workshops, community knowledge is shared as part of a larger goal of women seeing themselves as experts, thereby strengthening their voices, leadership abilities and visibility. Grassroots women build a broad knowledge base through consolidating their knowledge of the community, training women on information collection, and constructing a shared understanding of gender issues, human rights, and democracy. As an example, women of color are invited to speak about racism and quotas, offering expert analysis based on real-life experiences. Currently, Espaço Feminista is trying to build alliances between the landless urban and rural populations. Capacity building comprises of participatory processes in training workshops, round-tables and exchanges. In the Ponte do Maduro project (Box 3.1), CEHAB committed to including women in the baseline data collection process to include women's priorities. As part of the land regularization process, the Local Committee had the responsibility to ensure that the survey questionnaire included a gender perspective and that grassroots women were trained to perform as surveyors. The questionnaire itself was designed based on discussions and pilots with grassroots women leaders.

Espaço Feminista conducted research in the community that helped influence a large government program known as the Wealth Transfer Program which provided a monthly allowance to women who were vulnerable and in poverty. Pavement dwellers

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were excluded from this program because they did not have a formal address which could identify them. Espaço Feminista coordinated a study in 20 municipalities interviewing 800 pavement dwellers, many of whom had been living in tents for over eight years. This study and the advocacy efforts around it exposed the living conditions of women excluded from the program. At a national workshop conducted in December 2007, around 260 grassroots women themselves presented the results of this study to local authorities, government agencies and policy makers. The workshop witnessed women from landless movements engaging in a dialogue with decision-makers. This



advocacy effort resulted in the incorporation of more than 1,000 landless women into the Wealth Transfer Program.

## Impact

Over the years, through the involvement of grassroots women, the initiative has increased women's voices, impacted their lives, and provided access to land and entitlements. This is evident in the improved capacity of women to engage and influence government.

## Women Earn the Right to Land Titles

In the case of the Ponte do Maduro project (Box 3.1), the biggest value that Espaço Feminista added to the process, was to ensure that the land regularization happened from a gender perspective. This recognition guaranteed its inclusion in the Local Regularization Committee. As a result of the workshop on joint titling of land coordinated by Espaço Feminista, grassroots women understood that they could have land titles in their names. When they discovered that their name was not included in official documents, women organized protests and demanded formal inclusion. Similarly, Espaço Feminista helped groups of women recognize their right to public education, regardless of whether

they could provide a permanent address or not. In both cases, women's awareness of their basic entitlements triggered a struggle where they raised their voice to claim their rights. Through this project 4,686 women expect to get land titles in their names.

## Inclusion of Women in City Planning and Policy Mechanisms

Grassroots women now seek collaboration with government officials both around policy implementation as well as to sensitize them on women's concerns. According to the city statute, every municipality with more than 20,000 inhabitants is required to create a master plan through a participatory process. Lu Ribeiro, a grassroots leader, has been a critical influence in the "Master Plans" of the Ponbós municipality. She interviewed the Mayor to evaluate his understanding of the Master Plan and its inclusion of women. However, both the Mayor and his staff were unaware of the details of the Master Plan and its implementation. Lu Ribeiro then conducted a workshop to explain the concept of the Master Plan and how it needs to be executed from a gender perspective. She replicated this training in five other municipalities illustrating a successful intervention by grassroots women increasing their influence over government.

Espaço Feminista has been invited to participate in policy formulation forums at state and national levels<sup>7</sup>. Under its leadership, these forums have been instrumental in creating networks and alliances among women's groups in Brazil, and in building dialogues between grassroots women and decision-makers, especially those related to land regularization and social policies. In one such forum, Regional Seminars for Prevention and Urban Land Dispute Mediation which discussed prevention and mediation of urban conflicts, six grassroots women raised the need to include women in conflict resolution for land regularization. They also engaged with representatives from the Ministry of Cities and from the National Council of Justice. Additionally, Espaço Feminista distributes informative bulletins to engage with policy-makers, residents, and local women. They produce analytical reports for documentation, dissemination, and advocacy for policies on women's empowerment. Such initiatives have resulted in large scale collective efforts among women's groups to aid policy change.

## Increased Women's Leadership in Land, Housing and Budgeting

Espaço Feminista reports that women have seen an improvement in their self-esteem, sense of leadership and political knowledge. Learning more about gender inequality and how it affects their own lives has enabled them to act as informed citizens and strong

<sup>7</sup> In 2009, Feminista was invited to participate in the following policy formulation spaces: Seminar Planning Public Policies For Rural Women; National Meeting Of FNRRU - Advancing The Struggle For Reform Urban; Regional Seminars For Prevention And Urban Land Dispute Mediation - Northeast Region

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leaders. For example, two grassroots women have taken the lead in organizing and in decision-making bodies. Lu Ribeiro from the landless movement leads the women's regional movement. Daniela Pedrosa, another grassroots leader is engaged in the Participatory Budget Forum for women. She is also a delegate of the Municipal Housing Conference which discusses civil society housing policies in Recife in the State of Pernambuco.

Overall, Espaço Feminista builds on the knowledge of the grassroots women and enhances their leadership skills to foster strategic alliances with government departments, ministries and research organizations. As active partners in community development programs and land regularization projects, women make certain that the community has access to basic entitlements. At a broader level, they have also been able to influence policy at different levels of administration.

## Challenges and Recommendations

Espaço Feminista has invested in building capacities of grassroots women to dialogue with government authorities. It aims to expand its work to include more women and at the same time deepen its impact in existing localities. Long term change requires consistent work which is often not met by short term funding that is usually focused on single-issues. This reduces the priorities of building capacities in other areas. *“Latin America, especially has been receiving less priority in the international funding scenario”* says Patricia. Lack of resources, is thus the main challenge that the organization faces. This is further exacerbated in urban areas where a longer engagement is needed to overcome individualistic attitudes. Urban women often do not understand that land struggles are primarily to benefit the community as a whole. Only continuous involvement helps instill a sense of community among women.

Espaço Feminista has been able to foster partnerships at various levels nationally and internationally which is its biggest strength. They have used these alliances to share the experiences of grassroots women and to transform their current reality. Grassroots women understand that their struggle has to reverse years of oppression and discrimination based on gender and race. However, in order to succeed in this struggle, it is critical that more women attain positions of power in the government, are able to favorably influence policies and programs towards women, and play an active role in the implementation of these policies.

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# kenya

## Affirmative Action

### GROOTS Kenya's inclusive support of local women leaders

“**T**he Constitution promulgated in August 2010 has major gains for women but all these will be meaningless unless women are organized from the local level onwards to take advantage of the provisions in this new constitution.”

- GROOTS Kenya

#### Introduction

GROOTS Kenya is a movement which strives to shift the role of women in disadvantaged communities from vulnerable, victimized recipients of charity to empowered, effective leaders engaged in community development work. It was founded in 1995 in response to the low visibility of grassroots women in development processes and decision-making forums. Today, it is a force constituting over 2,000 community-based organizations and self-help groups with the shared mandate of guaranteeing that grassroots women are at the forefront of community change. Since women are the most affected members, they should play a pivotal role in decision-making regarding the needs of the community and solutions. GROOTS Kenya empowers, promotes and facilitates grassroots women to do just that.



The Kenyan government has committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), by 2015. Even with considerable effort by both state and non-state actors to meet MDG3, poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, political instability, negative cultural attitudes and practices abound, hindering gender-based initiatives<sup>1</sup>. With this in mind, GROOTS Kenya began work on the MDG3 Accountability Initiative in 2009. It aims to strengthen the organizing capacities of women, improve their socio-political participation, influence policies and practices by having women in leadership positions and acting as policy makers, and by

<sup>1</sup> Proposal submitted to Huairou Commission in 2010

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conducting civic education within communities. This case study highlights the strategies and processes that bring women into mainstream governance processes.

In Kenyan society, men often hold most of the decision-making power. Deeply entrenched patriarchal systems in Africa push women 'into the kitchen' and don't encourage female participation in the public arena. Moreover, women in public service have responsibilities – family, work and community – which makes it



difficult for them to perform well in their official roles. Women's lack of economic power further hinders their ability to effectively contribute in decision-making. National policies mask these inequalities on the ground. For example, the Kenyan Constitution, newly ratified in August 2010, guarantees equal representation for women in democratic governance. Article 81(b) states that not more than two-thirds of government seats can be held by one gender, in essence guaranteeing women at least one-third of government seats<sup>2</sup>. It prohibits all forms of discrimination including violence against women and any customary law that perpetuates it. Kenya's constitution also warrants that a minimum of 47 of the 347 National Assembly seats are filled by women by mandating that each county elect at least one female official<sup>3</sup>. While the policy changes have been designed to include more women in critical decision-making forums, the reality reflects deeply embedded cultural biases. At present, women make up only 10% of the National Assembly – the constitutionally guaranteed minimum<sup>4</sup>. Although women are 33.7% of the total workforce in local government agencies, only 10.2% of senior-level management, including heads of departments, are women. Even when women hold positions of authority, their ability to participate effectively in decision-making is limited. Active inclusion of women representatives is restricted and they are not empowered to

challenge the status quo. Men are more likely to be aware of the Municipal Council's meetings and a larger number of men participate in democratic processes<sup>5</sup>. Low levels of literacy further hamper women's participation in governance.

## Women's Leadership and Governance Strategies

Recognizing that Kenyan women's leadership abilities are underutilized and that local needs are not being adequately addressed, GROOTS Kenya helps build women's capacities to negotiate and navigate through district and national level decision-making processes. The following section details these strategies.

### Local-to-Local Dialogues (Box 1.1)

GROOTS Kenya began Local-to-Local Dialogues in 2002, in order to gain the recognition of grassroots women as capable public servants in governance processes. Women's groups use the Local-to-Local Dialogue method to reach agreements and maintain ongoing partnerships with local government bodies. As a result, authorities have begun to see grassroots women as key informants, possessing knowledge about the challenges faced and the resources available to the community.

With increased credence, many local governments have given women leaders direct control over resources for the community. For example, Violet Shivutse, a leader from the Kakamega community, has been appointed by the high-level District Commissioner to the position of Treasurer of the District Development Fund. This devolved fund is used to implement the Millennium Development Goals, as part of the national government's Vision 2030 program. Other community leaders in GROOTS Kenya have acquired positions in the Constituency Development Fund and the Local Authority Transfer Fund, which allocate development funds at the grassroots level. Women's leadership has facilitated the fair distribution of resources, to combat HIV/AIDS or to form school bursaries for orphans, to name a few examples. This demonstrates a synergy between women's knowledge of community needs and the allotment of resources from local authorities (Goldenberg 2008).

### Champions for Transformative Leadership Strategy

GROOTS Kenya realized the need for an innovative strategy where a mutually beneficial partnership could be fostered between women in leadership positions and the community. Work on the Champions for Transformative Leadership Strategy began in 2009 and is characterized by the recognition that grassroots support helps women in leadership perform better due to an increased awareness of local issues and priorities.

<sup>2</sup> The Constitution of Kenya, 2010, <[http://www.parliament.go.ke/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=83&Itemid=79](http://www.parliament.go.ke/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=83&Itemid=79)>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> UNIFEM (2010) "Women representation and participation in the public and private sectors in Kenya." Base line study conducted by Strategic Research Limited in August 2010

<sup>5</sup> Creighton, Colin and Felicia Yieke (eds.) (2006), "Gender Inequalities in Kenya", UNESCO

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GROOTS Kenya formed task forces in each of the three districts of the Champions Strategy in order to recognize grassroots women leaders and assess opportunities for them to engage with each other. First, all women occupying key decision-making positions were identified. The task force found 161 women officials and mapped their leadership roles. Leaders were chosen from a variety of professions, such as teachers, councilors, health professionals and representatives of the private sector. The task force documented their vision and capacities to influence committees and other decision-making spaces. A forum was created where the community showed support for these women and grassroots leaders reaffirmed their commitment to represent them. For example, part of the mandate of the Constituency AIDS Control Committee is to channel government funding to community based groups. Grassroots women identified Nanyuki as one of the community leaders and when she joined the alliance, she networked with other professionals working on HIV/AIDS related services which increased her understanding of their activities. Equipped with this knowledge, Nanyuki ensured that funding went to genuine groups and provided technical support to those who did not have the capacity to write proposals for projects<sup>6</sup>.

These task forces bring issues faced by particular communities to the attention of women officials. Linking leaders to their constituents enable them to hold that leader accountable and also helps identify gaps in community's representation. For instance, if particular constituencies lacked female leadership, they identified a woman from the community who could be groomed to assume the position. They ran capacity building exercises for potential women leaders in areas such as lobbying and advocacy skills, understanding legal frameworks, ability to build networks and alliances and leadership.

Task forces organize monthly meetings to highlight opportunities for women's participation in public spaces. Sometimes government officials like the Assistant Chiefs of the Provincial Administration Department, forward information to the task forces about such opportunities. Monthly meetings are attended by women who head self help groups, informal groups, and religious groups, and community members at large. This is an open forum for interaction where leaders share the challenges they face and try to make men understand the need for women in these forums. Jael Amati, one of the coordinators of GROOTS Kenya says, "More women have understood the gender equation and more men understand why women should be involved in leadership positions. The stereotype of women hating women is no longer valid. Women are now encouraging other women to participate in leadership positions. More women express their wish to become councilors and many of them are getting into provincial administration and district technical committees."

<sup>6</sup> Follow up interview with Jael Amati, grassroots leader from Kenya

## Civic Education

A national referendum was conducted on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2010 to get inputs on the draft constitution. During this time, GROOTS Kenya complemented government activities by helping grassroots women and their communities read and understand the proposals for the constitution to make informed choices when voting. At least ten grassroots women and task force members from different regions were selected and trained to conduct civic education. The training covered international agreements on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, human rights, and the Millennium Development Goals. Experts on the constitution were invited to conduct sessions. GROOTS Kenya acquired education, information and communication materials (6,000 copies of the constitution and various guides for civic education) from the government which were distributed



locally through taskforces. This was done in the Kenyan districts of Busia, Gatundu, Kakamega, Kirinyaga, Kisii, Kitui, Kendu Bay, Limuru, Nairobi and Nanyuki (Progress Report 2010). Through this initiative, women understood the constitution and transferred their knowledge to other women in the community. Armed with this information, grassroots women held consultations at district levels within their networks on the constitutional review processes. Through these activities, grassroots women were positioned as experts and linked to the government and NGOs working in the area of civic education.

## Watch Dog Groups

Women's property rights' violations are even more widespread in the context of AIDS-related deaths. A woman could be blamed for her husband's death, and her access to justice is further obstructed by complex and expensive legal systems, regressive attitudes within legal institutions, and the under representation of women in governance structures. Where the Kenyan government



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failed to implement and protect the property rights of women, a community led model of land and property called Watch Dog Groups (WDGs) was established. This model demonstrated the prevention of disinheritance of widows and orphans through reconciliatory collaboration with state actors.

GROOTS Kenya conducts paralegal training of WDG members to build their capacities. Local-to-Local dialogues are used to influence local authorities and to seek support for women.



GROOTS Kenya and the WDGs have enlisted the collaboration of key government institutions such as the local provincial administrators (chiefs, assistant chiefs, and divisional officers), law and policy enforcement officers at various levels, to solve problems in their communities. By engaging policy makers through advocacy and dialogue, WDGs have helped women and children recover their property through land tribunals, land boards and, in some cases, in the courts of law. In Gatundu district, the WDGs successfully handled 17 out of the 43 land and property violation cases during 2008-09.

## Impact

By providing opportunities for women to participate in mainstream governance processes, GROOTS Kenya increased women's aptitude for political participation, influenced the work of government agencies to benefit the community and created informal forums in collaboration with government bodies to enable women to combat injustices in their lives and to access basic services such as health and education.

## Women Claim Space in Political and Justice Provision Spheres

Through GROOTS Kenya, several grassroots women have had the opportunity to lead and anchor development agendas in their communities. Ten women spearheaded civic education activities

in the three districts of Gatundu, Kakamega, and Nanyuki. This meant that every location had local women leading efforts in her community. These leaders were responsible for tracking and networking with women in decision-making positions, as well as identifying and helping remove barriers that hinder effective participation. Women officials ranging from the Chair of a national women's movement for development founded in 1952<sup>7</sup>, the Chair of a women's financial fund, to a school treasurer were mapped. Other leaders identified were members of various committees such as the Municipal Bursary Committee, the District Technical Committee, and the Constituency Development Fund. As visible resources, these grassroots women are now consulted as a preparatory measure to planning and participating in meetings, especially on resource allocation. Leaders strive to cater to women's priorities in planning processes. Existing activities have become a channel for local officials to mentor aspiring community leaders. For instance, Helen Kamahi, a District Peace Committee member, currently acts as a mentor for Margaret Ngina, a councillor. The work of grassroots women has not only helped women leaders perform better, but also encouraged other local women to participate in such committees and forums.

## Community Work Attracts Visibility and Public Resources

Through continuous interaction with government agencies and structures, grassroots women have been able to influence public allocation of benefits to the community. Grassroots women try hard to bring transparency and accountability into the system. A clear demonstration of this was seen during the African Women's Decade Conference, where every gender officer was asked to bring five people from their district. One gender officer brought her sister and sister-in-law. The grassroots leaders responded by asserting that the selection of representatives must be based on criteria such as a leader who would listen to the community, has the ability to disseminate information, and who could mobilize the community.

By being involved in management committees and building partnerships with government officials, grassroots women have been able to make real contributions. This visibility further strengthens their legitimacy and credibility to participate in decision-making. As a result, they have influenced government resource allocation and increased their responsiveness to community needs, especially those of vulnerable groups like home-based care giving (Box 4.1).

## Watch Dog Groups Provide Affordable and Accessible Gender Justice

Women are able to access affordable justice through Watch Dog Groups (WDGs), an informal judicial mechanism. The WDGs complement and sometimes use the formal systems, in property

<sup>7</sup> Considered to be one of the largest grassroots organization in Kenya, Maenedeleo ya wanawake has branches in every district of the country, more than 25,000 group affiliates and, over 3 million individual members <<http://mywokenya.org/mission.html>> January 20, 2012

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## Box 4.1: Role of Women in Influencing Government Offices

Kenya's Community Home-Based Care is part of a larger Africa-wide alliance nurtured by GROOTS Kenya, GROOTS International and the Huairou Commission. Women-managed home-based care groups have improved the quality of public services in the Likii constituency of Nanyuki. Women have lobbied and ensured that at least one group member is appointed in the local administration, government devolved funding committees, and policy making committees, like the hospital management committees. In all public meetings, women representatives have had a major impact by ensuring that their priorities are heard.

In terms of medical care, women care groups started by volunteering services at the local district hospital so that their members could access treatment. They demanded an audience with the hospital management to lobby for free treatment for patients with HIV/AIDS. Another strategy was to accompany the sick to the hospital and pressure nurses and administrators to admit them.

Many groups provide home-based care for people affected by HIV/AIDS. Through their work, they improve the lives of people in their communities by caring for orphans and vulnerable children, promoting food security, encouraging income-generating activities, helping in stigma-reduction, training community health workers, engaging stakeholders such as government officials, acting as traditional birth attendants, and providing counseling and psycho-social support. The groups have created partnerships with district hospitals where care givers can refer sick people for treatment and if they are unable to pay their bills, a waiver is granted through the Social Department. In addition, the public mortuary accepts dead bodies referred by home-based care givers without demanding payments, which was the case in the past. The hospital now recognizes the organized Likii home-based care providers as part of the larger continuum of care. Consequently the care givers have gained access to basic services from the hospital like drugs and gloves to dispense to bed ridden patients inside the village.

Source: Okech, Awino (2007) 'A Case Study of GROOTS Kenya'

matters where legal sanctity is required by documentation. In a case where orphans lost the rights to their land, the WDG, with help from the community, obtained a court order to reinstate them as the lawful owners of the grabbed land. However, as there was no one to enforce the ruling, the relative who grabbed the land did not comply with the court order. The land was returned only when the WDG mobilized the community along

with the collaborative efforts of a faith-based organization and the provincial administration to take responsibility. Typical legal systems do not have the capacity to ensure enforcement of court orders. Thus WDGs play a complementary role to the formal systems ensuring that justice reaches those who need it most. The WDG initiative involves the active participation of the community and therefore, its influence is not only restricted to singular cases but also to the larger environment to promote gender equity. It has been observed that previously assisted women have been inspired to participate in land board meetings and seek appointments in the provincial administration to aid other vulnerable members of the community. Their activities



have also influenced village elders who earlier had not been receptive to women-led community empowerment, thus reversing traditional gender attitudes.

## Alliances and Monitoring Networks Secure Basic Services

In order to strengthen the public delivery systems, women's organizations establish relationships with governments and other development partners. Historically in Kenya, gender roles have shaped women's access to, and control over, services and assets. GROOTS Kenya has been able to reverse this trend and increasingly, more women are able to lobby to improve service delivery in the public sector.

Different organizational strategies help to ensure access to basic services and entitlements. Organizations such as the Mwirutiri Initiative in Gatundu (Box 4.2), Power Positive in Kendubay and Shibuye community health workers in Kakamega are mounting vigorous campaigns on property rights for widows and orphans. In Gatundu and Kakamega, groups working towards protecting inheritance rights have launched campaigns for registration of births and deaths. The Registrar of Persons is the district government official who receives reports from the provincial

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administration and other officials on births and deaths. Through several campaigns, grassroots women managed to negotiate with this office to set up a registration desk in the community. This meant that poor women and children did not have to travel to district offices or follow the lengthy procedure of getting letters and approvals from the provincial administration.

The member organizations of GROOTS Kenya undertake a wide variety of social and economic activities such as revolving loan schemes, income diversification, small business development, expansion of education, health care, governance, basic rights and natural resource management functions. These activities play a complementary role to their governance work. By delivering relevant services effectively and efficiently, grassroots women have been able to create alternate models of service delivery that have the potential of influencing public service delivery mechanisms (Box 4.2). Organizations have taken an active role in mitigating the impact of HIV/ AIDS on their members and ensuring relevant health services for the needy.

## Box 4.2: Gatundu Mwirutiri Women Initiatives

A member of GROOTS Kenya, Gatundu Mwirutiri Women Initiatives, is a women-led community based organization which was started as a merry-go-round savings and credit group with 24 members in 1997. Its main objective was to support the many orphans in the area. Later, the group began to address the gross impact of HIV/ AIDS ravaging the community. Currently Gatundu Mwirutiri is an umbrella organization with 26 sub-organizations spread out across all villages operating in Gatundu district with plans to extend services to Kiambu East district.

### Strategies

The group has developed alliances with public service providers such as the provincial administration and district health officials as well as with non-governmental organizations operating in the area. It also brought together all the home-based care volunteer workers whose work is seldom recognized and who are often left out when consultations regarding policies and programs and resource allocations are done. The creation of a Home Based Care Alliance spanning the district has helped the communities monitor policies and programs and have made local government officials more responsive to community needs. In addition, 18 'watchdog' groups have been formed with women leaders in every village to safeguard the inheritance and ownership rights of the vulnerable.

### Successes

- The group has influenced staffing for, and stocking of Anti

- Retro Viral drugs<sup>8</sup> at the local dispensary. They were also instrumental in garnering investments by a development partner to facilitate collection of CD4 count samples<sup>9</sup> at the local dispensary.
- Poor orphans and vulnerable children are receiving education bursaries from the government.
- Cases of asset stripping among widows and orphans have significantly reduced and many of them have been able to repossess their properties.
- District agriculture extension offices and government officials in other departments are now holding public meetings to educate the public on government policies and resources.
- Through public education, the community has been empowered to take issues affecting them to the relevant government officers without fear of reprisal.
- The group has influenced the Registrar of Persons to set up a registration desk at the village for legal documentation.

Source: Huairou Commission, "The Role of Organized Grassroots Groups in Influencing Women's Access to Public Services in Kenya" *Grassroots Women and Decentralised Governance: Change through Partnership*, (2010) 5-8



## Challenges and Recommendations

GROOTS Kenya designed their initiatives to facilitate women's participation in governance processes, and to help women in leadership positions perform their roles effectively. Through this work, grassroots women have been able to put in place effective checks and balances that increased the transparency and effectiveness of women leaders. Moreover, they seek opportunities by which other potential leaders can be trained in

<sup>8</sup> Antiretroviral (ARV) drugs are medications used for the treatment of infection by retroviruses, primarily HIV  
<sup>9</sup> Medical professionals refer to the CD4 count to decide when to begin treatment during HIV infection

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the democratic processes. Parallel systems such as the Watch Dog Groups fill the gaps left by the formal systems, and at times, complement them. Groups of mobilized women, by combining collaborative and confrontational strategies, have been able to bring justice to the community. It is important that the Kenyan government recognizes these informal systems as important tools of social justice which can complement the formal justice delivery mechanisms.



Most community groups state that employed government officials are unwilling to recognize their contributions with respect to service delivery programs in poor communities. Elected officials have the legitimacy to represent communities and they also have a large mobilized voting constituency. What they do not have is a mobilized organization with the knowledge and reach within the community and the capacity to deliver and monitor public services. This is what grassroots organizations bring to the table, a resource that government officials need to recognize.

Grassroots organizations need strategies that build visibility. A key contribution here would be to highlight the achievements of such organizations and their innovations. Memberships in large networks such as GROOTS enable these organizations to build credibility and recognition for their work. International communities and bilateral agencies need to support these organizations to further build visibility. Global strategies used by international networks attract the world's attention to local models and have proved to be successful in enabling grassroots organizations to negotiate better with the local governments.

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## Making Decentralization Work

### How GROOTS Peru Creates Spaces for Women

“ represent more than 100,000 organized women in 500 community-based organizations in 16 regions of Peru. We are working to strengthen leadership and political participation that allows grassroots women to exercise full citizenship. We are active on capacity building and strengthening inclusion through Local-to-Local dialogues. We have strengthened women's involvement in planning and decision-making and are working towards gaining representation in national government. However this still isn't sufficient.”

- Relinda Sosa, CONAMOVIDI, member organization of GROOTS Peru.

#### Introduction

GROOTS Peru is a national network of five autonomous organizations: Bancos Comunales, Red de Mujeres de Lima Este, la Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Organizadas por la Vida y el Desarrollo Integral (CONAMOVIDI), Mujeres Unidas Por Un Pueblo Mejor and Servicios Educativo El Augustino (SEA)<sup>1</sup>. These organizations federated during the 2007 Grassroots Women Academy in Lima, Peru, hosted by Huairou Commission and GROOTS International. GROOTS Peru's mission is to empower grassroots women and their organizations at local, national, and international levels. Member organizations work on capacity building and



advocacy campaigns, each from a unique perspective. Mujeres Unidas mobilizes grassroots women to increase access to safe and resilient housing. Bancos Comunales aims to bring about awareness of domestic violence and develop the skills of local women to respond to this issue. CONAMOVIDI organizes women through community kitchens. Women leaders of Red Lima Este, CONAMOVIDI and SEA create and utilize public spaces to engage with political candidates and elected authorities in order to ensure that decentralization policies are implemented at the local level.

<sup>1</sup> The translation of the names into English are as follows: Community Banks, East Lima Women's Network, National Confederation of organized women for holistic development and life (CONAMOVIDI), Women United for a Better Community, and Educational Services Augustino (SEA)

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The efforts of its member organizations have resulted in increasing the participation of grassroots women in decision-making processes across a variety of issues. This model takes advantage of Peru's decentralized planning, mandated since 2002, which invite the participation of women in mainstream governance and as active collaborators in development. The decentralization process expects regional and local governments to encourage the participation of citizens in the formulation, discussion and finalization of development plans, budgets, and



public governance<sup>2</sup>. The Equal Opportunities Plan 2007-10 guarantees the economic, social and political rights of women and designates that inputs of both local women and men should be considered when formulating regional development policies, plans, budgets and projects.

While Peru's decentralization policies have been designed to ensure equality for women in society, and particularly in the political process, the reality does not match the rhetoric. Legally, each of Peru's 25 administrative regions must have a plan that promotes equal opportunities for women, but only 10 have actually allocated resources to the task, and 10 have not even drawn up a plan<sup>3</sup>. In spite of regulations on gender equality, Peru's society is deeply entrenched in gender-based inequity.

Through GROOTS Peru's intervention, mobilized grassroots women have utilized the enabling environment provided by Peru's progressive decentralization and participatory budgeting schemes to set in motion pro-women policies and legislations that present a space for women as political actors. GROOTS Peru makes women's participation in governance processes possible and builds their capacity to play a central role in decision-making forums. Through its member organizations, it aims to 'Fortalecer la Red de GROOTS Perú y sus bases, desarrollando capacidades de

liderazgo y de gestión colectiva - strengthen their network and develop grassroots women's leadership skills and collective management.' Their member organizations work on a range of issues across economic, social, political and environmental arenas such as housing, land rights, violence and women's political participation. This case study highlights strategies and processes adopted by GROOTS Peru and its federated organizations, to bring women into mainstream governance processes. Women's participation in democratic processes have led to quality delivery of basic services, ensured enforcement of local plans, facilitated the inclusion of women's issues in the mainstream agenda and helped build a network of grassroots women leaders. They have also demonstrated that legislation and policies come to life when the community and women themselves find localized solutions by collaborating with government officials towards its implementation. The improved networking and coordination among grassroots women's organizations through the federation has helped women voice their priorities in decision-making forums, negotiate for their space, and implement legislations that promote gender equity.

## Women Engaging with Decentralized Governance

GROOTS Peru has used several strategies to enable women leaders to access Peru's formal democratic processes. These strategies include capacity building of women leaders, raising awareness of the community and government authorities on issues related to women, pressurizing officials to operationalize gender and other thematic desks (nutrition, health, education, violence against women, and environment), and creating partnerships with government officials to monitor the implementation of national policies at the municipal level.

### Training Women to Exercise their Voice

Using the Equal Opportunities Plan, GROOTS Peru has focused on eliminating barriers to public participation of women. As domestic violence often prevents women's inclusion in public spheres, it became imperative to increase the community's awareness of domestic violence issues, as well as develop the skills of local women to respond to these issues through community political action. Bancos Comunales trained 50 women as community promoters in women's rights issues, focusing specifically on abuse within families. These promoters are recognized in the community and they help local women value themselves and improve their self esteem. They also identify cases of domestic violence, seek to understand the details of each situation, and follow up with women facing abuse. To increase their legitimacy, Bancos Comunales also invited local authorities

<sup>2</sup> These laws include Organic Law of Regions Law No. 27867, Code of the Decentralization Law No. 27783, Organic Law of Municipalities Law No. 27972, Participatory Budget Framework Law No. 28056, The National Accord (eighth line) and Equal Opportunities Plan 2007-2010

<sup>3</sup> Salazar, Milagros (15 April 2011) Peru: Local Governments Fail to Prioritise Equality for Women <<http://www.globalissues.org/news/2011/04/15/9297>>

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to these workshops. This helped to elicit an interest in their work from government officials.

GROOTS Peru also conducts workshops to teach women how to engage in public decision-making. Over 300 women have been reached through these meetings and informed of their electoral and voting rights. In some workshops, women leaders hone their leadership skills and political aptitude so they can better exercise their rights as citizens at local government forums. Under the 'Promoviendo El Ejercicio Politico De Las Lideres De GROOTS Peru - Promoting the political exercise of the leaders of GROOTS Peru' project, 60 women leaders developed their capacity to act as community representatives. They were taught to critically analyze, write and monitor proposals. By using these newly developed skills, women drafted actual inputs for national agendas based on their local communities' issues. As a result, 27 proposals were submitted in various decision-making forums. Topics covered in these workshops were specific to the needs of women from different communities and the proposal areas ranged from domestic violence to disaster-based vulnerability and land titling, using strategies such as political participation through desks, committees and enabling women's public participation (Proposal for Project titled 'Promoting the Exercise of political leaders GROOTS Peru').

## Creating Spaces for Women through Government Mechanisms

GROOTS Peru encourages women leaders to engage with gender/thematic desks and local government forums which are governance mechanisms ensured by the state, in order to address the needs of their community.

### Gender/Thematic Desks

Local commissions enable grassroots women to allocate resources for community issues through participatory budgeting. Given these tools, Red de Mujeres de Lima Este negotiated with government authorities for the creation of a desk for equal opportunities in the Chaclacayo region of Lima. This desk is responsible for creating local plans so that the national Equal Opportunities legislation can be enforced in their community. The organization's role was to bring more women into the process so that women's agendas and needs were expressed. Through participatory budgets<sup>4</sup>, women use these desks to negotiate the allocation of resources to implement local plans for equal opportunities. These spaces, which were previously only used for political discussions, have now been transformed into implementing bodies with budgets allocated for action.

Commissions and desks for specific issues have become the most accessible public spaces for women in Peru and it is, therefore, critical to ensure the inclusion of women's agendas in decision-

making. These spaces help women increase their knowledge about democratic processes, develop their confidence to participate in decision-making forums, and facilitate their roles in politics, by integrating their needs into governance processes, plans and programs.

### Local Government Forums

Grassroots women leaders regularly engaging with government authorities in formal and informal forums, helps to create an inclusive environment. As their work becomes more visible, leaders from grassroots organizations are increasingly invited to participate in meetings with the government. Women leaders in turn invite government officials to their project locations for various events, thus creating opportunities to build relationships.



In doing so, grassroots women physically show off their work and thus add to their legitimacy. These events also provide a viable opportunity to negotiate with officials on pressing matters. For instance, the Mayor's attendance at a GROOTS Peru project event gave local women leaders an opportunity to address the malfunction of a multi-sector committee. The women used an existing project site for the community to debate and participate in decision-making on issues pertinent to them. As a result, the relationship with the Mayor has been strengthened and the deficiencies of the multi-sector committee were corrected.

### Improving Services through Government Agreements

Bancos Comunales has worked in conjunction with various government departments for specific community projects. One such project is the creation of a branch of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs at the district level to provide better local responses to reports of domestic violence. This initiative has had two distinct impacts, an increase in reporting of domestic violence

<sup>4</sup> In budgets formulated every year, greater participation is sought from residents. Community based organizations have increased their capacity to make proposals and amendments to the budgets through support and interventions from civil society organizations



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and an improved response from the authorities. Gender desks have increased the reporting by giving domestic violence victims a safe environment to speak out and report incidents, ensuring that women are not victimized when they come to register complaints, and by improving the quality of interaction for women in the department. Support from the police improved as training



on domestic violence sensitized them on how to cooperate with women making complaints. Furthermore, as officials are transferred to other precincts, community organizers continue these capacity building activities with new officers, which lead to a larger cadre of officers trained to deal with domestic abuse.

In partnership with the Mayor's office, Bancos Comunales has led The Global Program Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls. As part of Safe Cities, grassroots groups conducted community mapping exercises to determine safe and unsafe areas of the city as well as held workshops and campaigns to raise awareness among the local women. The local authorities and district commissioner were also involved in the project. This leads to opportunities where women and the grassroots organizations develop contact with government authorities. Since the government is unable to reach the community directly, these grassroots organizations are crucial in their provision of tools for dialogue, creation of spaces for public consultations, and in their support of official programs.

One of the important aspects of governance is the ability of civil society organizations to monitor existing programs and to follow up on commitments made by the government. Local women's groups have also been able to do this through *governance pacts*, which are agreements between electoral candidates and community-based civil society organizations. For instance, before elections in El Augustino y Cañete, candidates agreed to honor the agendas prioritized in previous district and zonal events. Through these pacts, SEA and CONAMOVIDI have ensured that the government commits to women's agendas such as the fight

against tuberculosis, maternal deaths, combating malnutrition, and so on. The organizations monitor how these pacts are implemented at local, regional, and national levels.

The organizations develop indicators for commitments made, which can then be followed up on. In 2010, SEA facilitated a pact between the Mayor's office and a civil collective, where the Mayor promised to work on issues such as tuberculosis, chronic malnutrition and maternal death. SEA was actively involved in the creation of a diagnosis map with indicators for political and institutional development. Some of the indicators included guaranteeing qualified personnel, having designated areas for consultation and involvement in the processes of policy making. With such indicators, this new model of governance assures local participation in decision-making, framing of public policies and budget allocation.

The involvement of women and the community ensures that their inputs are considered in local planning as well as in the delivery of quality services during implementation. They also monitor and follow up with authorities and see that the plans are indeed enforced (Box 5.1).

## Box 5.1: Women Claim Space in Housing Boards

Mujeres Unidas has been working in the field of settlements and has utilized the Law of Expropriation, a human settlements law which is primarily about regularization of informal settlements. The law says that a piece of land can be purchased or regularized at the market rate after some years of occupancy even though it was worth much less when it was first occupied, because of the services and infrastructure which have been developed on it. The organization conducted ten workshops that raised the general awareness of women and ensured that they were knowledgeable about the laws that affected them. Though women were involved in working for food security and against violence, they were not represented in the community land boards which are organizations that collect dues to make improvements in the community. These associations have no formal relationship with the local government because the community is informal. Through the work of Mujeres Unidas, women have started positioning themselves in these housing boards. They also held a public presentation/dialogue on Human Settlements, which included Mayors from three districts, the Commissioner of Housing, and 146 women and men leaders. As a result, women directly engaged with the Mayor and other officials to improve services.

Source: Progress Reports from GROOTS Peru





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## Impact

Many grassroots women are now political leaders making a visible difference at the community level, in terms of ensuring transparency in the implementation of programs through citizen participation, assuring basic services that include the needs of women and including women's issues in mainstream agendas.

## Claiming Public Spaces

Through GROOTS Peru programs, women are empowered to access political arenas, discuss political issues, and participate more effectively in local planning. The programs have also helped to improve women's knowledge, raise their self-esteem, and change their self-image, thus making public leadership more achievable for women and increasing their capacity to effectively perform official duties. As a result, women have been elected into administrative and public offices. Furthermore, several grassroots women are recognized as national leaders and are often approached by community members for political advice and



clarifications on their citizenship rights. Lucy Mejia says, "People ask these leaders whom they should vote for and what they think about different candidates. This shows the changing image of women in the community. We are very glad to see women occupy positions such as General Secretaries in human settlement associations and not just in places where they have no voice or opinion." Women now assume many different roles such as trainers, organizers, managers and problem solvers. These public roles allow women to directly approach the municipalities to solve problems in the community.

## Increasing Accountability in Governance

The inclusion of grassroots women in governance mechanisms for community-led development often results in effective monitoring

of local programs. For instance, when governance pacts are signed with the Mayor, grassroots women help form consultative collectives which monitor the progress of activities and projects that have been committed to by the government. Citizen participation in decentralized government programs has meant that resources are more transparently allocated to relevant programs, thus holding the government accountable to promises made to meet local needs. For example, grassroots women were involved in the participatory budget process for a government campaign against cancer in Lima, allowing them to monitor the expenses of the project and to guarantee that monies were spent as agreed. Women leaders also use local forums as opportunities to bring transparency and accountability to the governance system. With increased knowledge of their entitlements, women leaders are able to demand that officials honor their commitments, leading to better services for the community.

## Engendering Governance

The participation of women from GROOTS Peru in decentralization processes has not only meant that local women leaders are included in governance, it has also influenced their work within their specific groups. For instance, Bancos Comunales now includes a gender perspective in disaster reconstruction projects. The GROOTS Peru network pressured the government for the creation of a desk for disaster reduction. By participating in this desk, women are educated and collaborate for the design of disaster resistant houses. Grassroots women have ensured that every plan made at the local government level includes a gendered perspective. Through well-articulated action points, discussions on gender in these forums have resulted in projects, campaigns and workshops. A grassroots leader remarked, "Women are pushing their agenda forward, not only in terms of policies and programs but also in their execution."<sup>5</sup> Thus local women have been able to develop credibility in mainstream governance bodies with regard to their issues. This has further ensured that policy makers and decision-makers carefully consider the inclusion of women's interests in policies and programs (Box 5.2).

### Box 5.2: Mainstreaming Women's Agendas

In El Augustino, the Equal Opportunities Plan for 2008-11 includes the following points:

- Introduce and adopt ordinances that would enhance the status of women
- Advocate for 10% of the Participatory Budget becoming a policy designed to promote equal opportunities between men and women

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Carmen Sanchez

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- Support and campaign on issues of sexual and reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, prevention of teen pregnancy and family planning
- Prevention services and counseling in cases of family violence
- Operation of the CEM (Center for Women's Emergency)
- Organization of Marketing Fairs of products made by women
- Generate a policy for women's organizations
- Organize a School of Leadership for Women

Source: Progress Report from GROOTS Peru

Grassroots women associated with GROOTS Peru have been able to include women's issues into mainstream agendas. The campaigns for safer cities, against malnutrition and tuberculosis,



and initiatives against domestic violence have involved both civil society as well as government in their implementation. Not only have decentralization laws given opportunities for women to participate in local level planning, but also to include issues related to health, education and nutrition in the mainstream agenda. In these projects, grassroots women have collaborated with the Mayor's office, district hospitals, Civil Defense Office, and Centre for Emergency Office to ensure that these plans are implemented.

## Challenges and Recommendations

While GROOTS Peru member organizations have been able to make considerable progress in increasing citizen participation in governance mechanisms, a lack of political will among some officials and groups is a major challenge going forward. In some instances, local authorities have refused to divulge information regarding policies or projects, making community monitoring nearly impossible. Not all local leaders recognize the value of the

monitoring role that communities can play in the implementation of programs. Grassroots women have created well-developed community monitoring systems, which include transferable processes like creating indicators, forming consultative collectives to follow up with local authorities, and enforcing official commitments through governance pacts. It is imperative that community-based monitoring systems are recognized in the legal framework.

Adding to this, some local authorities are not even aware of national plans and participatory budgeting requirements, nor do they have the knowledge and skills to facilitate these processes. Resources are needed to educate local authorities on their responsibility to include citizen participation in planning. Success stories from some communities should be made visible at the national level and advocacy efforts must be built to institutionalize community monitoring mechanisms as part of governance processes.

GROOTS Peru women's organizations currently work on a project basis where funding is time bound. Empowerment processes must work on a continuous basis. Many initiatives suffer from a lack of resources, especially when the project ends. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges for these organizations is to sustain their funding sources. A healthy funding mechanism would ensure that organizations can concentrate solely on their work. Thus, their participation in global networks such as the Huairou Commission not only helps develop visibility in seeking out resources but also increases their credibility and recognition and contributes to achieving their goals with much less resources.

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## Taking Ownership of Community Projects

### Lumanti's Collaboration with Government

“**T**he Kathmandu Municipality contributed USD 100,000 to the Urban Community Support Fund, and this is the first time in Nepal that a local government has contributed such a large amount to support people's own initiatives to address their problems of poverty and housing. Also, this is the first time that poor people are sitting with NGOs, professionals and government officials on the board to administer these funds. This has never happened before in Nepal! We see this as a very big achievement.”

- Mayor of Kathmandu on the Urban Community Support Fund

#### Introduction

From 1993, Lumanti Support Network for Shelter, a non-government organization dedicated to the alleviation of urban poverty in Nepal, has worked as a driving force in putting housing, environmental and disaster issues on the development agenda. Initially, Lumanti was associated with Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), Servicio Latino Americano, Africano Y Asiatico de Vivienda Popular (SELAVIP, an international NGO supporting shelter issues) and Asia Pacific 2000 (A UNDP Project). Over the last two decades, Lumanti has expanded and developed partnerships with local organizations as well as international donor agencies to conduct



programs focused on providing shelter options for squatters. These partnerships have provided core support for other programs, such as microfinance, education, child development and shelter up-gradation<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, Lumanti helps develop grassroots organizations, including women's federations and networks, to ensure that women are active participants in development planning rather than mere beneficiaries.

As in most developing countries, shortage of affordable housing is an issue facing the poor, especially in the overtaxed urban centers that attract migrants in search of work or other opportunities. Nepal's capital city,

<sup>1</sup> Tanaka Masako, "From confrontation to collaboration: A decade in the work of squatters. A movement in Nepal, Environment & Urbanization, pp 143, April 2009

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Kathmandu has better health care facilities, schooling and employment opportunities which attract large numbers of rural poor each year. Hostilities between the Maoists and the monarchy-led government has further fueled migration into the city (Tanaka 2009). Unplanned urban expansion means that many are living without basic necessities such as water, sanitation, and housing services. Additionally, the urban poor often lack the documentation required for legal status, a prerequisite for civic participation. Squatters, without proof of land ownership, find it particularly difficult to exercise their rights to basic services, social welfare and other entitlements.



For women, the impact of poverty has even greater implications on their economic and political participation. Socially sustained patriarchy in Nepal further increases gender-based discrimination in terms of ownership of productive assets, work burden, access to resources such as land and property, health and educational opportunities, decision-making forums, mobility and overall cultural status. Even within families, husbands and fathers maintain control over major decisions. This marginalization of women extends to governance mechanisms in the country. However, in June 2006, the Government of Nepal passed a declaration mandating that one-third of government seats should be filled by women. Although implementation has been slow, this landmark decision reflects a positive change towards the inclusion of women and marginalized groups in all governance mechanisms. For instance, one-fourth of the membership of the interim constitution drafting committee consists of women. Such initiatives provide opportunities for poor urban women to play an active role in government.

## Engendering Governance in Nepal

Grassroots initiatives in Nepal follow a multi-pronged approach, aiming to improve living conditions by increasing access to basic

services, security of tenure, and participation by women in mainstream development planning. Strategies to engender governance include: building capacities of local women and their institutions; engaging grassroots leadership in planning; promoting community ownership over development processes; building partnerships to access public resources; and developing advocacy initiatives on issues related to urban poverty.

## Federating and Networking Organizations to Increase Women's Voices

To enable women to voice their opinions and concerns, Lumanti works to *build their capacities* so that they gain skills and confidence to effectively participate in government structures. Lumanti is associated with four grassroots community-based organizations including the Nepal Mahila Ekata Sama (NMES), a squatter federation for women. NMES was formally registered in August 2000 after years of working on evictions, savings and credit activities among peer groups, to specifically ensure that women's issues were included in all negotiations regarding development plans and policies. Lumanti organized several peer learning initiatives, through exposure visits where women learned how other community organizations were run. Women have thus been able to raise issues of concern to them in public forums, advocate for women's land and housing rights, and increase women's access to basic services. According to Bimala Lama, the current Chairperson of NMES, "*Our savings and credit program not only addresses financial matters but also mobilizes people to raise their collective voice for rights.*"<sup>2</sup> The strength of this strategy reflects in the inclusion of the NMES federation in many decision-making platforms such as the squatter commissions. The federation and its networks become a major driving force while negotiating with the government.

## Building Grassroots Women Leaders

Through these institutions and their processes, there is also a clear strategy to build *women leadership* to represent community issues related to basic services. Lumanti trains emerging grassroots women to occupy positions, such as President, Treasurer and Secretary, within their own federations and cooperatives. In these arenas, women can voice their issues and plan and execute ideas to benefit their communities as well as themselves. Leadership skills are further enhanced by developing their ability to manage large scale development projects related to education, sanitation and housing. Through workshops and training programs, these leaders are trained on land reform policies, roles and responsibilities of squatter commissions as well as leadership skills. Specialists on women's rights and experts from financial institutions are invited to conduct sessions for grassroots women leaders. These grassroots organizations

<sup>2</sup> Tanaka Masako, "From confrontation to collaboration: A decade in the work of squatters. A movement in Nepal, *Environment & Urbanization*, pp 150, April 2009

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provide the training grounds for women leaders to set agendas, mobilize community support, collaborate with government officials and monitor their own progress.

## Building on Grassroots Knowledge and Expertise

Underlying Lumanti's work is the belief that grassroots women are experts on the situation in their communities and that their first hand experiences are crucial to decision-making. Lumanti's strategies seek to facilitate the use of women's expertise, especially in their engagement with local government.

To begin with, Lumanti hosts informal community discussions on the issues faced by residents such as land and housing security, water and sanitation. Through analysis and reflection, communities then prioritize capacity building needs to improve their situation. Using participatory methods, Lumanti staff and community leaders create and implement action plans and simultaneously organize capacity building workshops and activities.

For grassroots women to be able to use their knowledge to influence change, the community must know how to articulate their struggles. Involving grassroots women in the creation of knowledge, therefore becomes critical. Local women and men are involved in enumeration, surveying of squatter households and mapping of settlements. They also use official digitized maps to raise the understanding of squatters about their own situation. According to Sandra Schilen, the global facilitator of GROOTS International, this exemplifies how grassroots women are "redefining who holds knowledge and power, owns research and documentation, and has the expertise at the grassroots level." Through these activities, the community is now armed with a strong knowledge base with which it is better able to negotiate with local authorities. In fact, the government Skill Development Institute now invites women from the squatter federations to conduct programs to develop skills for other communities.

## Sustainability Through Partnerships with Government

Towards the inclusion of grassroots women's issues in mainstream development agendas and to influence policy, partnerships with government, funding agencies and research organizations are seen as critical. The biggest issue for squatters continues to be land tenure security, and this remains consistently at the top of advocacy agendas. Negotiations with government are viewed with greater legitimacy once the community is mobilized. Federations are then recognized as legitimate representatives by both government and the community. These networks have subsequently developed actual partnerships and programs on the ground, thus demonstrating the ability to take ownership of local development needs and act on them.

One example is the *Kirtipur Housing Projects* (Box 6.1) which led to the establishment of the Urban Community Support Fund<sup>3</sup> in 2003 with government in partnership with the community and other NGOs. The city government contributed USD 100,000 to the fund from which squatters could take soft loans for income generation and emergencies. This Fund has now been replicated in other cities. The collaboration with the Kathmandu municipality has enabled access to government funds thereby increasing the sustainability of local initiatives.



### Box 6.1: Kirtipur Housing Project in Partnership with Government

The Vishnumati Link Road (VLR) project is a 1980 government-led initiative, which planned the construction of a road to run along the Vishnumati River where a number of communities live in informal settlements. The road, if constructed, would have resulted in the displacement of these communities. Numerous meetings between the residents, Lumanti, slum-dweller federations, and the government succeeded in terminating the project.

However, the issue re-emerged in 2000 when the government began construction of the road and communities were evicted. The federations lobbied and came to an agreement with the government to secure housing for the families affected by the VLR project. This contract to provide alternative housing was endorsed in a formal agreement with the Kathmandu Municipality. The agreement committed to both permanent housing for the families and rental compensation until the houses were built and handed over. The government helped build 44 houses over two years on public land, making the community responsible only to pay

<sup>3</sup> Contributors to the fund include Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Slum Dwellers International, Action Aid Nepal, Water Aid Nepal, and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and Lumanti Support Group for Shelter.

for the houses. Initially, more than 100 families registered for houses. However, not all of them were genuine squatters. Hence, the federations and Lumanti took the responsibility of identifying genuine squatter families and allocating houses to them. The establishment of the Urban Community Support Fund provided easy credit to families for housing and income generation.

Source: <<http://www.lumanti.com.np/kirtipur-housing-project>> and Interviews with Sobina Lama and Nani, NY March 2011

## Community Ownership of Multifaceted Development Programs

Issues surrounding land tenure security are compounded by inadequate provision of water, education, health care and livelihood opportunities. A prominent feature of the federation's



work is their ability to address multiple issues faced by the community, using several models to develop unique solutions. Lumanti's project areas include education, micro-finance, water and sanitation, disaster reduction and housing. In each of these activities, the community takes ownership of project planning, implementation, and monitoring. The Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) program in Bharatpur Municipality (Box 6.2) demonstrates this innovative approach (ACCA Program 2009).

The Community Based Primary Education Action Research Program, Biratnagar Water, Sanitation and Health Program for Sustainable Livelihood, and Kirtipur Housing Projects (Box 6.1) demonstrate the community's ability to take up a wide range of issues and formulate solutions on the ground with support from multiple stakeholders. Many of these programs have come to fruition because the community can access available government resources and negotiate terms for program implementation.

## Box 6.2: People-led Development Project in Bharatpur

The city of Bharatpur is now an industrial town, attracting many people for jobs and opportunities. Thus, an increased number of settlements became one of the major concerns in Bharatpur. Though many pro-poor schemes have been initiated, the number of settlements outnumbers the available government resources. Moreover, the poor did not have direct access to the funds, restricting their access to basic facilities. Therefore, the Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) program was initiated in Bharatpur with the objective of giving the poor an opportunity to work together, strengthen their capacity, and bring about a positive change in their communities. Lumanti facilitated the collaboration between the municipality, the existing network of communities, and the squatter federations who were active in the city to achieve this objective. A formal agreement was signed between the principal stakeholders (the Municipality, the Urban Resource Centre (URC), the integrated body of all squatter federations and the communities) for the proposed collaboration. It was agreed that the Municipality commit to providing land for the housing project, which was to be designed by the community members themselves, based on the existing structure of the community, surrounding environment, and limitation of the resources. The URC was given the responsibility of managing the project, including the resources to ensure accountability to the needs of the community. An ACCA-Program Management Committee was formed, comprising of representatives from URC, community members, Lumanti and the municipality. By involving the municipality, communities could ensure access to government resources and could hold them accountable. Women were active participants in the design process where they designed their dream houses. Pilots are in process in the municipality to implement the housing project. Regular meetings and sharing sessions are held to keep the community informed about the activities under the project.

Source: ACCA Program Bharatpur. Initiating People's Process July 2009

## Advocacy and Lobbying

Since the Nepalese constitution is currently being rewritten, squatters are aware that this is an opportune moment to make housing a legally guaranteed right. NMES (the Women's Savings Cooperative Network) and NBBSS (Nepal Basobas Basti Samrachayan Samaj – the National Federation of Squatter Communities) have been lobbying to add housing rights to the constitution. District wide discussions were held and settlement maps created in each district. From this work, the federations

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produced an advocacy paper which was submitted to constitutional assembly members. NMES and NBBSS organized rallies and protests as well as held media conferences with press releases, to gather support for the issue.

Lumanti, NMES and NBBSS have drafted another housing bill in partnership with lawyers and representatives from the Ministry of Land Reform and Management. This advocacy document is designed to prevent forced eviction and to provide security of tenure. The alliance organized several drafting workshops in Kathmandu and other municipalities with grassroots women and men being a key part of these discussions. NBBSS, NMES and the Child Development Youth Network submitted the Housing Bill for Squatter and Unplanned Settlements (2007) on World Habitat Day in 2007. The Bill is under examination by the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works, while the alliance member organizations continue lobbying with the Constituent Assembly members.



## Impact

Through these initiatives, Lumanti aims to connect local leaders to decision-making and political positions, thereby increasing the community's access to resources, tenure security, housing, and credit. Participation in decision-making forums and in program implementation committees ensures that women's needs are met by public resource allocation processes.

## Engendering Leadership

Women's leadership often benefits the entire community since their knowledge encompasses community issues. They think beyond economic parameters, raising and dealing with issues of water, health and education (Box 6.3). As female leadership is encouraged, physical and reflective spaces are built to meet collectively, interact, reflect, mirror their competencies and learn

as a group. These spaces formalize and sustain women's involvement in local development beyond the short term.

### Box 6.3: Women Leaders Act as Mediators

Within close proximity to most people's living quarters in Patan were two open defecation areas. This lack of toilets was seen as a major problem for the community. As a response, Lumanti initiated a sanitation project in Patan. Toilets could not be constructed because there was no drainage system and insufficient space to build pit latrines. The women were greatly affected by this problem, particularly during menstruation. The community also lacked a constant supply of drinking water, as the existing supply would dry up during the summer, when the water reservoir levels became low and the level of ground water would decrease. They then decided to install the drainage system and water supply connections. The women visited the Nepal Water Supply Corporation and succeeded in getting pipes for the installation. However, the next phase to completing the construction work had problems. The neighboring community did not want the digging to continue and the women acted as "peace keepers" whenever conflict arose. The neighbors demanded a longer route for the drainage pipe, which resulted in additional costs and delays. Ultimately, the construction work was completed in 39 days of hard work managed mainly by the women.

Source: Background and case study of Settlement and Slum Improvements in Nepal: The role of the urban poor in Kathmandu

The movement has given rise to grassroots women leaders who can not only drive large scale land-related programs (Box 6.2) in collaboration with the government, but can also negotiate for their women's entitlements as illustrated by joint titling of land (Box 6.4).

### Box 6.4: Federations Ensure Joint Ownership of Land

During the August 2008 Koshi flood, more than 425 families were displaced from their homes and lived in camps for 7-11 months (nearly one year). The District Development Relief Committee (DDRC) identified 1,096 landless families, and 235 families received shelter support in collaboration with UN Habitat, Lumanti, community and the Government. The government provided 0.0667 hectares of land for each family. Initially the property was given in the name of the men. The federations lobbied and ensured that the land was titled in the name of both the spouses. It was the first time in Nepal's history that an entire settlement had joint titling in land ownership.

Source: <<http://www.undp.org.np/newsroom/details.php?n=1306>>

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Bimala Tamang, the Chairperson of the women's federation (NMES) epitomizes the strength of grassroots women leaders, who have evolved out of Lumanti's work. As such leaders emerge, they take up issues important to women. For instance, they have taken up rape as a key issue and have addressed it with the Legal Aid and Consultancy Centre (LACC), an NGO providing legal support. The federation chairperson is also a member of the squatter commission. The members of the women's federations have raised their voices against discriminatory practices in the issuing of citizenship certificates<sup>4</sup>. NMES conducts interaction programs with squatter women, situation assessments, negotiates with the Ministry for Women, Children and Social Welfare and engages with media to bring equity in the area of citizenship.

## Box 6.5: Projects and Achievements

### **Community Based Primary Education Action Research Program**

1. Two schools were handed over to community management
2. Communities access NRS 2.5 million government resources for infrastructure development of school
3. Regular participation of government authority in school programs
4. School systems improved, different forms developed, notice board maintained, record system well managed
5. Child centered teaching introduced in schools to provide quality education

### **Establishment of Urban Community Support Fund (UCSF) in Birganj**

The main purpose of the fund is to create access to loan for housing and infrastructure development of the poor communities.

1. Municipality contributes NRS 100,000 to the bank account
2. Municipality also provided office room for UCSF secretariat

### **Collaborations with Birganj Municipality**

1. Commitment from Municipality to construct drain and road with community contributing 40% labor and money
2. User's committees meeting with municipality chief
3. Initial situational assessment conducted as first step

Source: <<http://www.lumanti.com.np>>

## Access and Control over Basic Services

For women, an important aspect of their role as community leaders is to ensure that the community has access to basic

services such as education for their children, water and sanitation, housing and financial support. Box 6.5 outlines some projects in collaboration with government and their corresponding achievements in these areas.

Lumanti and the federations have also initiated community-driven projects such as Biratnagar Water, Sanitation and Health Program for Sustainable Livelihood, which has provided 12,198 people access to safe drinking water, 7,097 people access to hygienic latrines, and 1,801 people access to environmental sanitation facilities such as storm water drainage and bio-gas<sup>5</sup>. Thus, communities take ownership of basic services either through the government or through partnerships with other organizations.

## Policy Level Changes Favourable to Women and Squatters

Lumanti organizations have been able to influence several policy changes at the local and national level. The Kirtipur Housing Project (Box 6.1) was an important milestone for the community's influence over policy. The squatter and women's



federations successfully lobbied for protection from the challenges associated with eviction and the Mayor of Kathmandu Municipal Corporation committed to providing alternative land or compensatory house rent to such people. In this way, 44 affected families acquired resettlement sites and basic infrastructure free of cost.

NMES has been particularly effective in ensuring that policies are inclusive of the needs of women. The constitution assembly opinion collection team held a public meeting where 122 women from the federations and cooperatives participated and gave suggestions (Box 6.6). The team leader of the constitution assembly, Promod Prasad Gupta, said that the practical solutions

<sup>4</sup> Citizenship Certificate Distribution Directives 2006 has a discriminatory provision where it requires married women to have additional documents like proof of Marriage Registration, Citizenship Certificate of the Husband or Father in law, Voucher by father/mother-in-law or brother-in-law  
<sup>5</sup> <<http://nepalwashblog.org/?cat=17>>



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from poor women of Birjung exceeded his expectations. One of the major impacts is the inclusion of housing as a fundamental right in the draft constitution.

## Box 6.6: Women's Suggestions for the Constitution

- Housing rights with land title should be incorporated as fundamental rights in new constitution.
- Assure the fundamental rights of free education at all levels for slum and squatter children.
- Assure the rights of free health check up facilities for women, old people and slum and squatter children.
- Assure employment to slum and squatter people.

Source: Program for the improvement of the housing and living condition of the urban poor in Nepal, June 2009

## Challenges and Recommendations

Lumanti's grassroots leaders have demonstrated how women can lay claim to public resources through engagement with government and participate actively through democratic mechanisms such as committees, commissions and federations. An important consequence of this has been the community's ability to take ownership over development projects. By collaborating with the government at various levels of development project phases, women leaders have developed their expertise and knowledge for creating innovative solutions to community problems. Through heightened interaction with powerful leaders, these federations have been able to push for policy changes that benefit them.

For all of Lumanti's successes, political instability in the Nepalese government adds to the challenges currently facing women's federations. Political flux creates delays in decision-making and many local projects remain pending. Although official legislation calls for affirmative action and gender representation, the number of women in elected positions has been minimal. However, looking forward, Lumanti can further empower grassroots women to participate in the political process through technical training, thus increasing their ability to successfully influence policy. Overall, Lumanti facilitates the development of leadership impacting women at the individual level, ensuring access to basic services including housing for the community and also engages in policy level advocacy to impact national policy.

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## Governing Public Health

### The Swayam Shikshan Prayog Experience

“ always look ahead but I also try and see my past and present conditions. I can see the distance that I have traveled personally. Earlier, I could not decide for myself, but today I can decide for myself and others.”

- Godavari Shirsagar, Secretary of Tujapur Block Federation

#### Introduction

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), a learning and development network headquartered in Mumbai, India, strives to increase grassroots women's leadership opportunities, decision-making skills and political participation; build partnerships and linkages between grassroots women's groups and local and district authorities; and increase grassroots women's participation and influence on the actions of local/district government. It reaches 72,000 women in 1600 villages across the three states of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. SSP builds women's awareness of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), improves service delivery for the poor, and provides feedback from the ground to influence policy. Community involvement, and collaboration and synergy with the government define SSP's approach in most of their interventions, particularly in their community health program.



The state of Maharashtra, where SSP intervened with the community health program, mirrors the national scenario in rural health care. Underutilization of services because of poor facilities, low attendance by medical staff, scant supplies, insufficient hours, lack of community involvement and inadequate monitoring results in high dependency on exploitative private health care providers. Communities are unaware of the implications of poor sanitation and nutrition. This combined with stigma and superstition presents obstacles to preventative care and effective treatment for issues surrounding sexual health, maternity care and immunization<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Swayam Shikshan Prayog (2009). Grassroots Women Driving Demand and Increasing Access: Governance and Health in Maharashtra, India

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The key features of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM, 2005-2012) launched by the Indian government include decentralized planning for health, community participation, and inter-sectoral convergence to achieve the National Health Policy goals and health related MDGs<sup>2</sup>. SSP has particularly utilised four main features of the Mission – mandated NGO participation in planning, monitoring and evaluation, provision of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) to increase accessibility and availability of



health care, availability of untied funds at the Village Health and Sanitation Committee (VHSC) level, and Community Based Monitoring to promote accountability and community-led action<sup>3</sup>. This case study serves to highlight how grassroots women in Maharashtra are improving health and health service provision and making it more accessible to poor rural communities by driving grassroots demand for better health services and collaborating with the government<sup>4</sup>.

## Governance for Improved Community Well-being

SSP employs multiple strategies to ensure convergence between community demands and responsiveness of government health service providers. It builds capacities of women as grassroots advocates to work with the government to ensure accountability. These women then organize the larger community to demand better health, water and sanitation towards the overall well-being of their families and the community.

### Strengthening Local Health Governance Networks

The Community Based Monitoring<sup>5</sup> mandated by the NRHM requires community members to be part of the Monitoring and

Planning committees at the village level and Public Health Centers (PHCs), block, district and state levels. Using this provision to their advantage, SHG women lobby the Gram Panchayat<sup>6</sup> to secure their presence on Village Health and Sanitation Committees (VHSC), the lowest unit in the mandated Monitoring and Planning structure. Also, SHG women leaders are organized into Health Governance Groups (HGGs)<sup>7</sup> to act as monitoring groups that hold public health service providers (PHCs, Taluk and District Hospitals) accountable.

The mission mandates the strengthening of the network of ASHA workers, the first point of interface for the community on health related demands. SSP's dual strategy for influencing government on the selection terms for an ASHA while simultaneously mobilizing the women from their SHGs to secure the post have led to a more competent health workforce. The ASHA worker is selected by the Gram Sabha and is accountable to the Panchayat. These mechanisms provide for increased community ownership over the process, enabling them to demand greater accountability from healthcare providers.

Information workshops and health camps are organized to facilitate interaction between the District Health Officer (DHO) and SHG members. The presence of the DHO results in patients receiving better services at the PHC. Members are made aware of their rights with regard to public services, encouraged to access these services and demand their rights, thus forcing PHCs to be responsive to the community. The community monitoring of public health service provision mandated by the government and synergistic relationships developed by the HGGs and community women with doctors and staff, build acceptance for their monitoring role. Overall, the increased involvement and participation by grassroots women ensure that the collective voice of women is heard in these committees. This guarantees proper implementation of schemes as well as the maintenance of health, water and sanitation infrastructures<sup>8</sup>.

### Convergence with Local Government

The NRHM mandates the inclusion of NGOs for planning, monitoring and evaluation roles within its governance structure at district, state and national levels<sup>9</sup>. Further, NRHM's provision of untied funds at the local health committees favour increased autonomy for the community in design and planning of programs and provide flexible financial resources. Capitalising on these features, SSP seeks partnerships with Anganwadi Centers (government child care centers), PHCs, block and district

<sup>2</sup> Satpathy and Venkatesh (2006). Human Resources for Health in India's National Rural Health Mission: Dimensions and Challenges. *Regional Health Forum*, Volume 10, No. 1, p.30

<sup>3</sup> National Rural Health Mission: Community Based Monitoring Program (June 2011). <<http://www.maha-arogya.gov.in/programs/nhp/nrhm/Concept%20NRHM%20JUNE%202011.PDF/CBM%20Concept%20not2note.pdf>>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Maharashtra is one of the 9 selected states in India in which the implementation of the system is being piloted and Osmanabad is one of the five districts within the state, selected for pilot in the initial phase

<sup>6</sup> Gram Panchayat is the village level elected government. This NRHM committee is led by a Gram Panchayat member and the secretary is the Government Nursery worker. The other ten members are men and women from the community nominated by the Gram Panchayat

<sup>7</sup> Groups of 15-20 women focus primarily on health, water and sanitation of their communities. They are constituted from interested and active SHG leaders and members to effectively lobby local government and service providers

<sup>8</sup> Sakhi Federations - Groots India Network: Leadership Fund, SSP Documents

<sup>9</sup> Das A and Bhatia G P: A Promise of Better Healthcare Service for the Poor: A summary of Community Entitlements and Mechanisms for Community Participation and Ownership for Community Leaders

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hospitals, to strengthen public health systems, and advance community health. SHG members in the Village Health and Sanitation Committee expand the government allocated budget through funds mobilized from the community. This assumes significance in a context where PHCs refused monetary help to needy community members citing insufficient funds as a reason. The increased budget size now allows for most needs, especially emergencies, of the community to be met with ease. The Community Health Workers (CHWs), HGGs and SHG women leaders participating in committees contribute to supplementing the human resources in public health care. Additionally, through participating in these committees, women influence decisions on the use of untied funds to benefit the poor.

The SHG members and CHWs supplement government efforts in the provision of health services to the community (Box 7.1). Community women acting as peer educators collaborate with the Anganwadis to identify HIV infected pregnant women, educate these women about mother to infant transmission and help them access HIV care services. Women SHGs also actively collaborate with village governments to check open defecation, develop community plans for safe water and sanitation and gather resources for households and communities to set up water and sanitation infrastructures and services<sup>10</sup>. Through these efforts, they link communities to government programs in this sector.

## Box 7.1: Supporting Government to Address Gaps in Service Delivery

For long, the community women in Gandura village of Osmanabad district could not utilize the PHC services as the PHC nurse always visited the village when the women were away in the field. The health workers conducted a meeting between the community women and the nurse, and a decision was made for the nurse to visit the village earlier in the day. To ensure better reach of the services meant for adolescent girls, the Health Governance group also organized various training programs for the daughters of the SHG women. Since then, the immunization rates, antenatal care and anemia checkups, and life skill education for young girls in the village has shown a significant increase.

Source: Interview with Naseem Shaikh, Team Leader, Community Health Programs, SSP, September 14, 2011

SSP in partnership with the Oriental Insurance Company Limited, a government insurance company, offer its members, the Universal Health Insurance policy. Members pay an affordable premium to avail of a range of benefits including reimbursement (limited to INR 10,000 per hospitalization) on in-patient services, discounted services within the network of service providers,

diagnostic tests, prescriptions and continuous referral services from CHWs. Members receive a report card, which serves as an identity card, detailing their health status, the amount saved at clinics due to the membership, and the status of claims. The card can be referred to by a list of recognized doctors and hospitals, which assures the members timely quality treatment. In short, these initiatives that complement government efforts result in improved service delivery, an increased health workforce, better availability of information and awareness among the community and effective monitoring systems.

## Promoting Women's Leadership and Initiative

A key strategy of SSP is to develop women leaders to play a variety of roles across all entities including those of educators, promoters, monitors, innovators and change agents<sup>11</sup>. Community Health Workers provide doorstep healthcare services, both curative and preventive, to the community. Services include basic consultations, first aid and emergency care, informed referrals and maternal and child care (Box 7.2). In short, the program moulds them into leaders, capable of individually responding to issues of the community. Federations at the cluster level also play a role in broad basing women's leadership by running campaigns such as the Clean Village Campaign, anti-alcoholism campaigns and monitoring of ration shops or public food distribution outlets.

## Box 7.2: Health Leaders Taking Charge

*"Everyone knows the Arogya Sakhi. She continuously meets us and gives us information. She makes us aware about the financial problems if we fall ill and helps us analyze our expenditure with and without insurance... When we fall ill, she phones and connects us to the doctor. She also accompanies us to the hospital when we need treatment. She visits us at our home, when we are not well."*

Source: Focus Group Discussion with Community Health Insurance Consumers, Osmanabad District, December 13, 2010.

## Building on Women's Knowledge of Health Care

The Community Health Workers (CHWs) were trained to conduct community mapping to identify community health needs and the gaps in public and private health service delivery systems. The process enabled women to develop their own perspective on community health needs, infrastructure and services in the village. The CHWs used this information to develop monitoring parameters and a report card to record the impact of their work. They are taught the importance of information and communication in community health education as well as communication with health service providers. Their capacities are built to interface with

<sup>10</sup> Sakhi Federations - Groots India Network: Leadership Fund, SSP Document.

<sup>11</sup> Purushothaman et al (2011). Integrating Microfinance and Livelihoods: The Swayam Shikshan Prayog Experience.

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local government officials such as the Panchayat Health Committee members.

In the Village Health and Sanitation Committee (VHSC), around 70% of the women members are from the SSP formed SHGs. Both SHG leaders and members are trained on health issues by SSP, which improves their quality of participation in these committees. The SHG leaders are trained through dialogue workshops and



learning exchanges, by Community Health Workers in SHG meetings. SHG members are also trained by CHWs and HGGs in SHG meetings, and through information exchanges, *taluka melawa* (block level peer exchanges) and home visits.

The Health Governance Groups (HGGs) are educated in various health issues, in addition to disease identification, their causes, treatment and management. They are further acquainted with the functioning of the Government Health Department. They are taught rapport building to initiate dialogue between the community and government bodies. The trainings are conducted by reputed training institutions and women are provided certificates on completion. These trainees are recognized by the local District Health Office, which establishes their legitimacy within the community and the health administration.

## Impact

The impact of SSP's initiatives in health is evident in the improved access to quality health care and the decreased vulnerability seen among consumers. For the community, the building of health care leaders, increased health awareness and better community governance, access and monitoring of public health care services help improve health in general.

## Strengthened Public Health Systems

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes the importance of governments collaborating with civil society organizations 'to

organize the social dimensions of health actions, to build wider constituencies for health rights and goals, and to strengthen public accountability and responsiveness within health systems'<sup>12</sup>. In SSP, the HGGs and CHWs ensure better accountability and monitoring of public health services. The HGGs in each village participate in NRHM committees to influence decision-making and budgetary processes. Additionally, the HGGs and alert members regularly report the status of service utilization and provision of services by the PHC to the government. This takes place through dialogue workshops and *Jan Sunwai* (public hearings) organized by the District Mentoring Committee<sup>13</sup> attended by grassroots women, civil society organizations and government health representatives. Such interactions serve the dual purpose of ensuring constant accountability from service providers to patients and women in particular (Box 7.3). In short, these mechanisms help overcome limiting factors such as lack of necessary infrastructure, poor diagnosis, communication and service delivery by the providers.

### Box 7.3: Ensuring Accountability and Action from the Government

In the District Mentoring Committee meeting of Osmanabad district, held on April 2011, the community women participants raised the issue of sexual harassment of a pregnant woman during labour by the PHC doctor in Salgara village. The District Health Department initiated an investigation based on the complaint, which resulted in the suspension of the doctor in August 2011.

Source: Interview with Naseem Shaikh, Team Leader, Community Health Programs, SSP, September 14, 2011

Significant nutritional improvements have been noted since SHGs were contracted by government to provide mid-day meals to children, pregnant women, and adolescent girls. Consequently, there is more accurate identification and better outreach, improved quality of food being served, arrest in the leakage of food grains meant for the community, and better monitoring of the system. Thus, when considering access to adequate nutrition, and proper water and sanitation facilities as being integral to holistic health care, these initiatives of SSP strengthen the capacity of the public health system to reduce exposure to disease and increase access to affordable, quality healthcare for the community.

## Policy Change on Recruitment

The positive relationship developed by the SHG members, CHWs, and HGGs with the government at multiple levels have enhanced their credibility and strengthened their capacity to influence policy decisions on health service delivery.

<sup>12</sup> World Health Organization (2001). *Strategic alliances: The role of civil society in health. Civil Society Initiative - External Relations and Governing Bodies; Discussion Paper No. 1, CSI/2001/DPI, pg.10*

<sup>13</sup> National Rural Health Mission: Community Based Monitoring Programme (June 2011). <<http://www.maha-arogy.gov.in/programs/nhp/nrhm/Concept%20NRHM%20JUNE%202011.PDF/CBM%20Concept%20note.pdf>> Under NRHM, the District Mentoring Committee (DMC) is the top tier of the Monitoring and Planning committees to be constituted within a district to support the implementation of the project. The functions of DMC include carrying out specific facilitation with the district health authorities, ensuring the quality of district and block nodal NGOs interventions, and scrutinizing the periodic reports prepared by the District nodal NGOs.



SSP demanded and successfully pressurized the District Health Officer (DHO) to influence and change the terms of selection of ASHA workers at the panchayat level (Box 7.4). The government directives stipulate that only those women who have completed their high school education are eligible to be ASHA workers, resulting in many poor community women being disqualified for the position. In addition, dominant panchayat leaders nominated their own family members with far less experience in working with the community for the job. Through concerted lobbying by SSP along with other civil society partners, the DHO in Osmanabad district modified the recruitment terms to allow for women with relevant experience in health to be considered. SSP then widely publicized this change within the community, provided experience certificates to their members and encouraged them to apply. Today, more than 200 women from SSP have been selected as ASHA workers resulting in a more competent and responsive health workforce.

### Box 7.4: Changing Terms of Selection of Health Workers

Surekha Kamade, of Perthkhurd village in Osmanabad district, had eight years of experience, as the SHG president, mobilizing women to help them access their entitlements from the various government programs. She had good communication and record keeping skills but was educated only up to the 7<sup>th</sup> standard, which disqualified her from being an ASHA worker. A change in the rules of selection paved the way for her to apply to Gram Sabha and be selected as an ASHA health worker. Today, her sincere work and goodwill in the community has resulted in her being elected as a member of the Gram Panchayat.

Source: Interview with Naseem Shaikh, Team Leader, Community Health Programs, SSP, September 14, 2011

### Inclusion and Better Health Care of Marginalized Women

The Community Health Workers (CHWs) initiate discussions on HIV/AIDS within the SHGs, creating a 'culture of openness' within the villages, where members freely discuss issues related to HIV/AIDS. In addition, CHWs assist pregnant women to get tested for HIV/AIDS at the Integrated Counseling and Test Centers (ICTCs).<sup>14</sup> They are also referred to rural hospitals for anti-retroviral treatment, where they are advised on family planning, nutrition, and formula feeding. Through regular follow up and support from the CHWs, pregnant mothers are able to use the recommended health care guidance. Likewise, the health worker also makes sure that tuberculosis patients undertake DOTS treatment<sup>15</sup>. Thus, through increased community awareness generation and routine monitoring of the patient's health, the health workers reach and ensure reduced stigma, improved and sustained health care of these vulnerable women and their families.

### Improved Health Financing System

Two of SSP initiatives – community health insurance and supplementing the Village Health Committee (VHC) budget – have increased available funds to meet the health needs of the community, thus reducing vulnerability.

The community insurance initiative is best understood in light of the debilitating effect that health care expenditure has on poor rural families<sup>16</sup>. Of the 13,873 members, 457 made claims worth INR 2.08 million<sup>17</sup> exceeding the total contribution of INR 1.87 million. This resulted in health benefits worth about INR 0.2 million covered by the public health insurance policy. The comprehensive services provided by the CHWs include informing members about where they can access treatment and making them aware of their rights as a care seeker/patient and about services during out-patient treatment. The insurance initiative records a high renewal rate of 80%, indicating the relevance of the insurance product for the poor. In the words of an insurance card holder, "Having a card means money and courage. I have confidence that even though I am poor I can face any health crisis. Before, I was scared that if I fall ill I will have to borrow from others. Now, I don't have that fear<sup>18</sup>".

In the bi-monthly planning meetings of the VHC, the provisions for fund usage are decided and emergency needs accounted for. The expanded VHC budget helps community members meet their expenses for medical emergencies (Box 7.5). In short, both these health financing mechanisms guarantees that people can use the required services, provide equitable access to quality and

<sup>14</sup> Over 11,000 pregnant women were tested in 2008, 83 of whom were found to be infected.

<sup>15</sup> DOTS or Directly Observed Treatment Short course is the internationally recommended strategy for TB control that has been recognized as a highly efficient and cost-effective strategy.

<sup>16</sup> National Sample Survey Report No 507 referred to in Meeta and Rajivlochan (2010) notes that the people in rural areas are able to manage only INR 409 out of INR 1000 from their own income during hospitalization and INR 772 out of INR 1000 in the case of outpatient treatment, with the difference being collected through borrowing, loans from friends and relatives and even from distress sale of household assets.

<sup>17</sup> 1 USD is equivalent to 45 Indian rupees

<sup>18</sup> Focus Group Discussion with insurance consumer in Osmanabad District on 13 December, 2010

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cost-effective medical products and protect them from financial impoverishment associated with expensive health care payments.

## Box 7.5: Budgets for Medical Emergencies

In Khatgaon village, in Osmanabad district, a woman due for delivery went into labour much before expected. She had not set aside money to meet the expenses. The presence of women on the VHC ensured that the committee released INR 2,000 to help her reach hospital in time for the delivery.

Source: Interview with Naseem Shaikh, Team Leader, Community Health Programs, SSP, September 14, 2011

## Improved Health Information System

The community is educated on the importance of good water and sanitation practices, adequate nutrition to maintaining good health, hygiene practices and healthy eating habits. This preventive health care knowledge is supplemented with activities from other SSP entities, such as sale of water purifiers for safe drinking water, bio-fuel stoves and organic fertilizers and growing of nutritious organic vegetables through the *Krishi Ghats*, (women farmers groups). All these help advance the application of health care knowledge in the community. Thus, through myriad ways, the community has access to reliable and timely information on determinants of health, the health status and performance of the health system.

## Challenges and Recommendations

Swayam Shikshan Prayog's interventions in health demonstrate a workable model of collaboration and convergence between a grassroots women's organizations and the government to yield quality community health outcomes. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was launched by the Government of India to address curative services which favoured the non-poor and lack of community ownership of public health programs. The public health system was also characterized by centralized management, fragmented efforts of inter-related sectors and isolated strategies. The NRHM has provided a framework and institutional system for decentralization of health services. It facilitated community participation, especially that of women, in decision-making bodies and as resource persons. However, diverse challenges remain to be addressed.

The provision for female health activists (ASHA) at the village level have to some extent resulted in increased linkages to health services for the community. However, the effectiveness of these workers continues to be plagued by issues of improper selection and inadequate training. At the local level, favouritism by the panchayat members and stipulation of education up to seventh standard often lead to unqualified women being chosen for the role. The government should redefine the selection procedure of ASHA to mandate prior experience in community health as a

requirement along with formal education. This has to be supplemented with regular capacity building training on preventive health care to develop a more capable local level health workforce.

The predominant focus on reproductive and child health result in the neglect of other common health problems. More importantly, this poses a danger of lack of attention to the provision of water, sanitation and nutrition, factors which directly impact on health. Education, employment, social exclusion and gender discrimination indirectly impact on health. Thus, there is a need to influence other determinants of health through increased synergy among various government programs and departments for a more comprehensive primary healthcare. Grassroots health workers of SSP through their participation in committees across



multiple sectors, effectively utilize the inter-sectoral convergence imperative of the NRHM to address health holistically.

Another potential challenge is the identification of competent community based organizations (CBOs) to monitor the health programs. CBOs with a strong grassroots base and a foundation in community health initiatives can more easily mobilize the community to engage in community monitoring of health services. The scaling up of NRHM country wide can present difficulties in locating experienced CBOs with the preparedness and capacity to conduct community health monitoring. To address this lacuna, NRHM should provide funds for replication of the HGG model and a working community monitoring system, where CBO presence is weak or absent.

The lack of affordable health care combined with limited availability of service providers often threatens the financial security of the rural poor. The Rashtriya Swasth Bhima Yojana (RSBY), a government health insurance scheme, aims to provide protection to poor households from financial liabilities arising out of health shocks that involve hospitalization. However, health

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expenses of the poor is not just a factor of hospitalization but of expenditure on drugs during out-patient care, dependence on exploitative private providers, over treatment, random tests and other indirect costs such as loss of wages during hospitalization. In this context, a community health insurance scheme, such as the one provided by SSP gain value. It puts in place a network of community health workers trained to deliver basic health services, a low-cost high-quality drug supply chain, and empanelled doctors, hospitals and lab facilities. All these provide an integrated health care system that simultaneously addresses community attitudes towards health, ensures service delivery and supplies drugs at discounted rates.



The uniqueness of NRHM, according to Gill (2009)<sup>19</sup> lies in structural reconfiguration of the public health system to facilitate decentralization and community participation, promotion of inter-sectoral convergence, integration of previously segregated vertical disease-specific programs, provision of a flexible financial pool for innovative and need-based decentralized utilization of funds, provisos for planning and management at the district level, and fostering a true partnership between the community and peripheral health staff. The SSP experience represents a combination of strategies capitalizing on these governance reforms. This has resulted in a significantly higher usage of public sector services, increased community financing of health care, improved accountability of service providers and provided an integrated, holistic health care system.

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<sup>19</sup> Gill, Kaveri (2009). *A Primary Evaluation of Service Delivery under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM): Findings from a Study in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan*. Working Paper 1/2009 – PEO, Planning Commission of India.



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## Scaling up Community Innovation Through Partnerships with Government

### The Rede Pintadas Network

“**W**omen's agriculture is diversified, dynamic and sustainable, utilizing all the resources available in the environment. When women sit at the table to make decisions, priorities take a different shape”

- Nereide Segala Coelho, President of the Cooperative Ser do Sertão, an organization member of Rede Pintadas, Brazil

The Pintadas municipality, a semi-arid region of North-Eastern Brazil, is a highly vulnerable area due to climate variability, water shortages, and persistent poverty. Ser do Sertão, an organization member of the Pintadas Network (Rede Pintadas) and affiliated to the Human Development Network (Rede de Desenvolvimento Humano, REDEH), is a farmers' cooperative led by women working towards better health, improved income, sustainable environmental activities, and to change the habits of consumerism and waste within the community.

The Rede Pintadas Network comprises eleven local organizations that together have fostered Pintadas' development through community-based programming. Besides Ser do Sertão there are other three cooperatives members of Pintadas' Network: SICOOB-Sertão, a community-based financial institution, the Agro-Industrial and the Transportation cooperatives. All the organizations have legal status just like the Pintadas Network.



Rede Pintadas is part of Adapta Sertão, a network that brings together municipalities, public, private and non-profit institutions with a vision to integrate technical, scientific and human resources by linking clean water and energy technologies to social entrepreneurship in order to help small-scale farmers adapt to the effects of climate change. The forum emerged from the expansion of the pilot Pintadas Solar developed between 2006 and 2008 to other two municipalities in the region (see Box 8.1).

Ser do Sertão was founded by the local Women's Association and have played an important role in Pintadas by enabling sustainable development

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mechanisms, diversifying the food production in the region and mobilizing women to take leadership roles in several activities. Through the MDG3 Accountability Initiative, the Cooperative Ser do Sertão with the collaboration of Pintadas Network seeks to further engage with grassroots women to improve food security and livelihoods opportunities in small scale agriculture. Their initiatives focus on building women's capacities in food production and on educating communities within the municipality of Pintadas on natural agricultural farming methods.

## Box 8.1: Pintadas Solar Project

The Human Development Network (Rede de Desenvolvimento Humano, REDEH) developed the Pintadas Solar Project ([www.pintadas-solar.org](http://www.pintadas-solar.org)) between 2006 and 2008 in the municipality of Pintadas, Bahia. This pilot program, through its innovative approach in managing technical, scientific, social and public policy resources, has striven to help vulnerable communities generate a sustainable income and adapt to the effects of climate change. Pintadas Solar Project won the SEED award in 2008 for its innovation in promoting food security, income generation, social development and environmental management in Pintadas. The prize was used to replicate the experience in the Municipalities of Quixabeira and Baixa Grande. With the expansion, the project gained new allies and a new name: Adapta Sertão.

The project Adapta Sertão resulted in invaluable contributions to Pintadas, Quixabeira and Baixa Grande.

### Adequate Technology

Identifying water supply solutions such as irrigation and water pumping are crucial for agricultural and rural development projects in the semi-arid region. Based on the Adapta Sertão program, community members decided to use standard technological systems that are easy to install and can be adapted to different situations, such as irrigation kits, water pumps, organic fertilizers and inter-cropping technologies.

### Microfinance

In the context of social technology, there is a significant and growing space in collaboration so that the management of the rural banks can be equipped with the relevant knowledge regarding the latest technologies and production systems, and can offer farmers specific microfinance solutions already linked to technologies that are known to work. Adapta Sertão offered a revolving fund of its own and assisted rural families to access the government micro credit scheme, Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar (PRONAF).

### Technical and Administrative Training

The Adapta Sertão network develops training programs and

forums that function as incubators where knowledge is spread through practice, stimulating learning by doing. The participants of the training programs are taken through the complete project life cycle beginning with the identification of the implementation locations, evaluation of the water resources available, choice of irrigation and water pumping systems, purchase and installation of the systems, evaluation of the crops that will be grown, choice of the systems required for production, organic production and fertilization of the soil, pest control, through to the commercialization of the products to market and microfinance.

### Market Access Strategies

Adapta Sertão created a network of small producers that are adapting to the challenges that climate change brings and need access to new markets in order to guarantee sustainability for their businesses. Therefore, key initiatives are being developed such as products to cater to the fair-trade markets, organic food produce and the development of a specific certification for producers that work in areas with a high risk of climate vulnerability.

Today, Adapta Sertão is a network that links different stakeholders from private and public sectors with a vision to integrate technical, scientific and human resources by linking clean water and energy technologies to social entrepreneurship. The forum has helped small-scale farmers adapt to the effects of climate change. The forum disseminates climate resilient technologies that are innovative and relevant for semi-arid regions. They use and share knowledge about small irrigation systems such as drip irrigation and organic farming methods in agriculture. Further, they create channels for commercialization which helps to create sustainable livelihoods for small-scale farmers without destroying the local eco-system. In doing this, these networks work in close coordination with government agencies not only for political support of their initiative but also for availing credit resources and for commercializing their produce.

## Changing the Concept of Food Production

The Pintadas Network has changed the notion of food production by investing in small technologies, by encouraging organic farming and by creating channels for commercialization to ensure their sustainability. Farmers have organized the food production process into four steps – production, production organization, manufacturing, and commercialization. Production refers to individual farming, harvesting of fruit or other agricultural products, milking of cows, rearing of animals used for meat, and so on. It is generally linked to subsistence agriculture. Ser do Sertão has enhanced grassroots production through modules on how to use local food sources, especially fruits and vegetables. As

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a result, grassroots women improved the quality of local diet besides decreasing the cost of food.

Organizing the production involves mobilizing individual farmers into larger groups to assess individual production and bringing them together as a preparatory step to manufacturing. For instance, milk producers have organized to transport their milk production to the community refrigerator. In doing so, they avoid wasting milk and create collective incentives to increase their production.



Manufacturing refers to the transformation of raw products into finished goods. This is a common challenge amongst individual farmers producing on small plots of land. Generally, they are not in a position to negotiate for better prices or invest in expensive, but beneficial, technologies. When organized in food cooperatives, however, farmers are able to share the expenses related to machine purchases, maintenance, lab testing, human resources for technical assistance, and materials for analysis. The Cooperative Ser do Sertão successfully converted raw fruits into packed frozen pulps and raw milk into canned powdered milk.

The cooperatives also help overcome the lack of access that small farmers have to new technologies by creating a distribution network of efficient technologies, which are not only 'distributors' and 'retailers' of technologies but also disseminators of knowledge. The Solar Project and its expanded version Adapta Sertão (see Box 8.1), is one such initiative. The objective of the Adapta Sertão model is to overcome the deficiencies of the region by developing a methodology that integrates technology, training, microfinance and commercialization in a way that allows the small rural agricultural producer to be self-sufficient, capable of generating an income and to become a replicator of the model.

Commercialization is the process of selling the products. The network uses a number of strategies to ensure that the entire

cycle is conducted in a manner that is cost effective and yet ensures food security. Meeting international and national legal standards for food commercialization, however, has blocked the cooperatives' production to fully integrate the market. The state has supported the distribution of the cooperative's production through specific social policies and incentives for promoting local production.

## The Cooperative Ser do Sertão Promoting Women's Perspective in Food Production

Ser do Sertão is a women's cooperative network comprising of 900 rural women from 30 different communities in the Municipality of Pintadas. Nereide Segala is a farmer and the President of the Cooperative Ser do Sertão. She is precise when affirming that "women's participation in farming activities diversifies the production." This Cooperative was created by Pintadas Women's Association as an attempt to address women's perspectives on food production. Ms Segala explains that 98% of community members involved in the production of milk and meat are men. Male members generally consider these products as having guaranteed distribution. Women, traditionally excluded from mainstream production, developed broader concerns involving the quality of their family's diet and the environment's sustainability. Evidence of such a divide is the less significant participation of men in the production of vegetable and fruit pulps. Respectively 90% and 80% of the participants are women. Ser do Sertão has enhanced grassroots production through training on how to use local food sources, especially fruits and vegetables.

## Engaging with Government

The Office of the Mayor of Pintadas mainly supported the Solar Project through the Municipal Secretary of Agriculture with regards to machinery purchase and other negotiations. The major role of the government in technological innovations was to provide credit for farmers to facilitate their investments in technology.

Political support to distributing production has been essential for the sustainability of all cooperatives. The network has been able to access and utilize the National Program for Strengthening Family Farming (PRONAF)<sup>1</sup>, the government micro-credit scheme for small family agricultural production.

During commercialization processes, farmers have taken advantage of the Family Agriculture Food Acquisition Program (PAA)<sup>2</sup>, which allows for 30% of the food bought by schools to be sourced from farmers in the community. Farmers engage with government officials to ensure that they get the contracts to supply food to the schools. The network has utilized this

<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.mda.gov.br/portal/saf/programas/pronaf>> Last accessed on January 20, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> <<http://comunidades.mda.gov.br/portal/saf/programas/paa>> Last accessed on January 20, 2012.

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opportunity not only to sell their produce but also to influence the menu used in schools for children. By meeting and negotiating with the school nutritionist, they have been able to diversify the annual menu. Students now have access to naturally high quality food, consuming local seasonal fruits and vegetables as part of their diet at school.

## Changing Lives

### Women's Leadership Strengthened

Ser do Sertão has strengthened women's leadership in the community by addressing the need to focus mainly on the organization of the production. Since organizing the producers is a large portion of organizing the production, the economic importance of this phase is as great as its social meaning. It is in this process that conflicts are transformed, social relations strengthened and gender imbalances are also likely to arise. Women's leadership is thus critical to affirm both male and female cooperative members as farmers and decision-makers.

### Improved Livelihoods

The Network, by using multi-pronged approaches to technology, access to credit and markets, and capacity building, has been able to ensure that farmers are better equipped to produce in the semi-arid regions of Brazil. Their efforts have led to better water management, seasonal farming and inter-cropping which has helped improve food security. By securing market channels for commercialization, they have been able to ensure livelihoods for the farmers. Eliena Machado, a woman farmer comments, *"It is a very interesting project. It pays to see that this will increase our revenues for our families to live better."* They have trained fifty farmers to grow organic crops more effectively by linking them to experts who provide technical assistance in efficient irrigation technologies. Lenice Machado, a participant of the Solar Project says, *"My life has changed. I used to bend to do my work and had a lot of pain. Now I can stand while working. I feel much better and also earn more money."*<sup>3</sup>

### Improved Health Awareness, Especially Amongst the Youth

The work of the Pintadas Network in schools has resulted in increased awareness on the links between health, nutrition, irrigation and food security, in the younger generation. The health benefits of a natural diet have also been recognized by school authorities. The Director of the Public School says, *"Earlier, twice a year based on seasons, many children would get affected by a viral infection and miss classes. But after the change in menu, children are eating seasonal fruits and vegetables and honey. The number of students missing classes due to illness has reduced."*<sup>4</sup>

During the Pintadas Solar Project in 2009, sixty students were trained on healthy food habits and efficient food production systems. To conclude the program, they held a knowledge fair where all steps of production were linked to scientific research on sustainable technologies and methods. They formed eight groups to develop their research and built educational booths to



exchange their findings. The groups comprised the following themes/activities:

- 1) Irrigation systems
- 2) Organic school garden (with the demonstration of accessible irrigation system)
- 3) Food processing and production (featuring for instance the transformation of sugar cane into syrup)
- 4) Scientific contributions to food security
- 5) Food commercialization
- 6) Adequate use of renewable energy
- 7) Agriculture tools and food production machines (from rustic tools to current machines used in the community such as the pulp fruit maker) and
- 8) Sustainable consumption

Before the project students could not identify the social origins associated with farming, although the majority of their parents were local producers. Reviving such social identity was critical to improve the nutritional quality of the students' diet and involving the youth in community driven development activities. Today, the Cooperative Ser do Sertão receives technical assistance from young community members who have engaged in formal and informal educational systems to improve their knowledge on organic, sustainable and adequate food production (See Box 8.2)

<sup>3</sup> Transcribed from the video <<http://www.adaptasertao.net/videos-conteudo.asp?cod=19>>

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Nereide Segala, President, Cooperative Ser do Sertão in July 2011

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## Box 8.2: Young Leaders Provide Technical Assistance to Local Producers

The assimilation of new technologies is a long process that requires periodic community gathering combined with technical assistance. The youth has generally greater ability to learn, transfer and enhance new technologies. This is why Pintadas has privileged technical assistance provided by young leaders in the community to help local farmers manipulate and assimilate new tools.

During one of the Cooperative monthly meetings, Rosita Oliveira, a local farmer in Pintadas, shared her problem about pest crops that were preventing her harvests from maturing. Other local producers shared with her the recipe of an organic syrup developed from local knowledge, scientific research and government support, to combat pests. After sharing the recipe, Laise Santos da Silva, technical assistant and young leader in the community visited Rosita's land until she assimilated the syrup fabrication and manipulation. After a few months, Rosita's plantation reacted to the new technology and started growing healthy again. This case illustrates the importance of linking investment on scientific research and technology development to community mobilization. This model has allowed Pintadas to sustain development projects over time as much as strengthened local knowledge and social relations.

Source: <<http://pintadas-solar.org/>>  
<<http://www.unhabitat.org/bestpractices/2008/mainview.asp?BPID=2043>>

## Conclusion

It can be seen that the Pintadas Network in general, and Cooperative Ser do Sertão in particular, have successfully advanced a model that associates community mobilization with social entrepreneurship and technology development. Including government departments as a main partner in these projects was critical for ensuring sustainability and scalability. Since technological innovations require farmers to change their conventional methods of production, the network had to invest not only in training but also in motivating farmers to adopt the technology. Going forward, some important recommendations made by Harvard University through a public policy analysis can be noted. Integrating these agricultural systems as part of a 'decentralized rural development program' with support from local and national governments will ensure sustainable agricultural programs and policies. Another important aspect is that the government needs to see these initiatives not only as a business but also as a means of improving the quality of life. Organic, natural agricultural production has several health benefits in comparison to large scale factory produced food products. Nereide expressed how shameful it is that "everyone is now

*educated only to earn money, and not to improve quality of life!"*

Holistic awareness on food production amongst male community members and government authorities is needed to take the initiative much beyond its present scope.

The Pintadas Network is a demonstration of how farmers can organize themselves into cooperatives, deal with the entire cycle of food production and jointly invest in technological and process innovations that help them deal with climatic changes and protect the environment. The Cooperative Ser do Sertão is an important initiative led by women that has diversified the production in the region, encouraged the youth to value seasonal local resources and challenged gender imbalances through constructive and sustainable ways.

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## R E F L E C T I O N S

### Grassroots Women's Perspectives

“**T**he goal of governance initiatives should be to develop capacities that are needed to realize development that gives priority to the poor, advances women, sustains the environment and creates needed opportunities for employment and other livelihoods.”

- UNDP, *Initiatives for Change* (1994)

Good governance is today understood as a system wherein state, private and civil society actors constructively engage with each other to promote and support the achievement of human development objectives. These include a lessening of deprivation and inequity in spheres of education, health and political freedom, expansion of individual human choices and sustaining a rise in quality of life for the poor and most marginalized. It is characterized by the principles of participation, fair and impartially enforced legal frameworks, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and a strategic vision<sup>1</sup>.

Over the past decade, experiences around the globe have proved that development problems are more effectively addressed through decentralization of fiscal authority and devolution of responsibility to local actors. As a radical departure from top-down planning, decentralised governance has had the potential to improve the quality and reach of



government services, facilitate collaboration between public agencies and users of local resources, enhance participation of marginalised groups in decision-making arenas, and create institutions more attuned to local needs and preferences<sup>2</sup>. However, many local development programs have systematically alienated and excluded women, differently-abled, ethnic minorities and other marginalised sections of the population. Therefore, changing the structure of who holds decision-making power through decentralized or participatory processes remains a significant governance challenge.

<sup>1</sup> UNDP (1997). *Governance for Sustainable Human Development: A UNDP policy document*. <<http://www.pogar.org/publications/other/undp/governance/undppolicydoc97-e.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Craig (2003); *Decentralisation in India: Poverty, Politics and Panchayati Raj*, Working Paper 199; <[http://www.indg.in/social-sector/nird/decentralisation\\_in\\_india.pdf](http://www.indg.in/social-sector/nird/decentralisation_in_india.pdf)>

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In most developing countries, social exclusion of women continues to exist, characterised by lack of access to education and health care, little or no participation in decision-making processes, lack of involvement in development projects, unequal rights to land ownership, inheritance of property and opportunities for employment<sup>3</sup>. However, the importance of viewing women as active contributors, agents of change, and promoting their enhanced participation in the development process has been forcefully advocated by leading state and non-state actors. It has been well established that encouraging women in development can promote 'social transformations which can positively alter the lives of men, women and children'<sup>4</sup>.



Increased participation of women in governance opens doors for developing women's leadership, contesting gender-blind policies, center-staging women's agendas and influencing actions that consider the unique needs of the women. Representing a diversity of communities (indigenous, multi-ethnic, north and south, slum dwellers, rural and urban, etc.) grassroots women are key actors rooted to the diverse demands of various constituencies in the community. Therefore, they constitute a group that can comprehensively represent and address its myriad needs. The multiple development issues they seek to address urges them to engage in dialogue with actors across sectors and departments within the state, develop multi-pronged strategies and foster collaborative partnerships. This facilitates convergence of development partners, priorities and actions resulting in more relevant and sustainable outcomes. They provide an alternative development voice, transform institutional structures and processes, influence a more inclusive political and economic agenda and guarantee provisions and legislations that promote gender equality.

The bottom-up strategies of grassroots women's organizations create a foundation for community empowerment and imagine an alternative to mainstream development discourse<sup>5</sup>. Examples in this compendium demonstrate how grassroots women assume leadership roles and foster partnerships to influence governance for a more comprehensive development agenda and better delivery of public services.

### Grassroots Women's Strategies on Governance and Development

The activities of community organizations involve a range of innovative strategies including mobilization of grassroots women, building their capacity as leaders, unique strategies such as community mapping and peer learning, building alliances and collaborating with the government to gain legitimacy for grassroots women expertise, and influencing program delivery and policy design through monitoring and advocacy.

#### Mobilising Grassroots Women and Leaders for Collective Action

Grassroots women's organizations first and foremost mobilize in order to address problems faced by their communities through innovating solutions that are workable. The women are mobilised into local collectives, networks and federations linked to each other. DAMPA (Philippines), Lumanti (Nepal) and Pintadas (Brazil) constitute and build capacities of women's networks from local to national levels, thus forging and expanding the human and social capital base. The collaborative efforts across these networks is what enabled effective engagement with formal institutional structures and actors, more forcefully influencing policies and actions in diverse areas of housing and land security, urban poverty and food security. Groots Peru and Espaço Feminista (Brazil) coordinate a network of diverse women's groups working on a range of issues, facilitating knowledge transfer, exchange of strategies and collective leadership and action to find solutions. Espaço Feminista successfully mobilized the community to pressurize and collaborate with the government to achieve regularization of the Ponte do Maduro settlement in Recife. This resulted in land tenure security for 10,000 low income families, inclusion of women as community surveyors, and prioritisation of female-led households in titling.

#### Capacity Building

Unlike traditional capacity building efforts which depend largely on external expertise, a unique feature across countries is the focus on women's own expertise. This form of capacity building includes mapping and peer learning. For example, Lumanti

<sup>3</sup> Mategeko, Betty (2011), The effect of social exclusion of women from development in Uganda; <<http://www.interestjournals.org/ER/pdf/2011/February/Mategeko.pdf>>

<sup>4</sup> Sen, Amartya (1999), "Women's Agency and Social Change" in *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; pp 189-203

<sup>5</sup> Goldenberg, Dahlia (2011), "Grassroots Women Organising for Resilient Communities around the World". IDS bulletin (Brighton, 1984)(0265-5012), 42 (5), p. 74. <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/gate2.library.lse.ac.uk/doi/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2011.00255.x/abstract>>

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organized peer learning initiatives that influenced the formation of women's federations that advocated for women's land and housing rights, increased access to basic services for women, and housing and land tenure security for squatters. In SSP (India), the Community Health Workers (CHWs) conducted community mapping to identify community health needs and gaps in public and private health service delivery systems. This process helped the women to develop their own perspective on community health infrastructure and services, design interventions, as well as demand better delivery of public health services.

Capacity building also involves transfer of technical knowledge through grounding this in the grassroots initiatives themselves. For example, DAMPA educates women leaders on relevant legislation, required documentation and legal processes on land and housing. As members of local development councils they help these women to better intervene to influence decision-making within these bodies. Enhancing grassroots women's capacity also entails building their leadership to represent their communities, and engage and negotiate with the government on behalf of their constituencies. For instance, Groots Peru taught women leaders to critically analyze, write and monitor proposals, as well as developed their capacity to act as community representatives. The women used these skills to draft proposals with inputs for national agendas, based on issues of women in the local community such as domestic violence, disaster-based vulnerability and land titling.

### Local Authorities Recognizing and Legitimizing Grassroots Women's Expertise

Encouraging and creating platforms for decision-makers to recognise the expertise of grassroots women is important to affect an attitudinal shift both within the government and the women themselves. It can help to sensitise state institutions and actors, influence political decision-making and redefine development planning and implementation. To illustrate, the Local-to-Local Dialogues strategy of GROOTS Kenya has helped to reach agreements and maintain on going partnerships with local government bodies. As a result grassroots women are seen as key informants, possessing knowledge about the resources available to the community and the challenges faced by them. This has resulted in their membership in local decision-making bodies such as the District Development Fund, Constituency Development Fund and the Local Authority Transfer Fund, with the power to determine allocation of these funds.

In another case, grassroots women presented the results of a research study facilitated by Espaço Feminista, to the local authorities, government functionaries and other policy makers. This resulted in bringing to light the living conditions of vulnerable

women excluded from the Wealth Transfer Program and incorporation of 1000 landless women into the program, thus providing them access to a monthly allowance. Also, women's technical knowledge and capacities are built on issues about the city, the constitution, land reform and economics to increase their competence to engage with local authorities, and effectively influence their policy directions and decisions.

### Forms of Engagement with Government

The grassroots women's organisations engage with the government in a variety of ways to build alliances that advance pro-poor, women sensitive development priorities. Inclusion of more women in the government and their participation in all aspects and stages of development enable a truly engendered form of governance<sup>6</sup>.



Grassroots engagement with government takes the form of informal sharing of information through *dialogue forums* to community initiatives in *monitoring of government*. For instance, through ensuring participation in forums and committees with government representatives and collaborations with government, women leaders in Lumanti have enabled the poor to access resources, defend their entitlements, and ensure integration of their recommendations in plans and policies. In GROOTS Peru, Bancos Comunales invited local authorities to participate in training for women as community promoters in women's rights issues, which generated interest in the government officials about their work and helped increase their legitimacy. The Red de Mujeres de Lima Este successfully negotiated with the government to constitute a desk for equal opportunities, which will form local plans that will enforce the national Equal Opportunities Legislation in the Chaclacayo region of Lima.

*Monitoring of government* in the delivery of public services is another strategy used by community organizations to engineer

<sup>6</sup> <<http://www.huairou.org/governance/good-governance>>



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public participation in government. For example, the Watchdog Groups (WDGs) of Groots Kenya and Health Governance Groups (HGGs) of Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) are local women's groups constituted with the explicit mandate of monitoring. The WDGs help prevent cases of asset stripping, eviction of widows and orphans, and mediate conflicts within the community offering protection for poor women against violation of property and inheritance rights. The HGGs through a dual strategy of collaboration with government health practitioners and driving grassroots demand for health services ensure improved delivery of quality health services. Likewise, in Groots Peru, creation of indicators and consultative committees enforce official commitments through governance pacts, participatory budgeting helps women determine allocation of resources and monitor expenditure, and participation of informed women leaders in local forums have increased transparency and influenced program delivery.



*Formal partnerships*, facilitated by the government themselves, such as in the case of SSP, is an outcome of government recognizing the value of community driven initiatives. The Community Health Workers and Health Governance Groups of SSP, through their participation in the government health committees, influence decision-making and budgetary processes to be more relevant to community needs.

Finally, grassroots organizations also interface with the government through their efforts at *policy advocacy*. DAMPA federations have allied with legislators and Congress representatives to advocate and garner support for legislation that benefits the community such as the Reproductive Health Bill and the Disaster Reduction and Management Act (2010). In Pintadas, the Adapta Sertão network's credibility and effective alliance building with the government have resulted in the inclusion of their inputs into the National Climate Change Policy Plan.

In short, community organisations have defined new terms of engagement with local government authorities gaining recognition for grassroots women as strategic allies for formulation of pro-poor, gender sensitive policies and effective delivery of public services.

### Lessons Learnt

*"If there are persistent problems with poverty, with decent housing and with sustainable development, there is probably something wrong with the knowledge base in our countries... One vital reason is that grassroots expertise and know-how is missing... This is quite amazing, considering the fact that it is there that they need to be implemented. It is there where the ultimate proof, answer and test to ideas, theories and best practices, is to be found"*

- Monika Jaeckel, *Advancing Governance through Peer Learning and Networking: Lessons learned from Grassroots Women*

Governance, in the context of the grassroots women's movements, moves away from the narrow view of electoral politics being the sole arena of engagement and recognizes that governance is embedded in the daily reality of women's lives. The MDG3 Accountability Initiative defines and understands women's empowerment as *'being able to articulate women's work from a position of strength process instead of a recipient of government services, an actor in the process.'*<sup>7</sup> The seven case studies examined in this compendium demonstrate how grassroots women take leadership roles in their community - engaging as active partners involved in planning, implementation and monitoring of public services. They show how grassroots women have been able to build their status as credible partners of governments at local, national and regional levels and simultaneously increase the effectiveness of governance mechanisms.

Grassroots women's organizations operate in such a way that every action respects the skills and knowledge of the community, center stages their participation, and therefore, ensures that the strategies and processes are relevant to the local context. The foundation of grassroots women's organizations lies in a large, mobilized constituency which has provided the base for many transformative innovations that have breathed life into governance mechanisms over the years.

**Invest in Grassroots Organizations:** Increasingly, as an outcome of decentralization, countries have evolved governance mechanisms that open up access to communities. These include processes where communities determine development priorities, such as committees with mandated grassroots participation, participatory budgeting, use of untied funds and affirmative action. However, community participation needs to be supported, where the formation, management, capacity building and strengthening of grassroots organizations is well resourced. There is also a need

<sup>7</sup> Kantelberg, Renee and Tsui, Josephine (2010). Huairou Commission Midterm Review of MDG3 Accountability Initiative, The IDL Group

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to invest in grassroots organizations' role of creating an enabling environment through building community awareness of their rights and entitlements.

**Create Platforms for Sharing Innovations:** Grassroots women respond to situations on the ground, by creating new solutions to concerns that emerge. By being members of large global networks and through peer learning, grassroots women have the opportunity to share these innovations and successfully replicate them. Peer learning also takes place locally based on the assumption that learning at the grassroots is quickest when it is directly from each other.

**Prioritize Grassroots Women's Expertise:** Grassroots organizations have created models for implementation of national laws and programs that actually work for the poor. For example, the constitution of Health Governance Groups is an innovation of SSP within the mandated community monitoring component of the National Rural Health Mission. These groups work to increase knowledge and awareness of the communities on health related rights and entitlements, and simultaneously demand accountability from the government service providers. Token participation of the community in government committees cannot ensure effective program design and implementation. Programs and policies have to be refined to embody the expertise of grassroots women to capture what is relevant for the ground.

**Support Forums for Engagement:** The lack of political will to include grassroots women into mainstream governance mechanisms is often a challenge that women face in their governance work. Building alliances with local authorities has not always been easy. Corruption remains a barrier to transparency and good governance. Often, governance mechanisms do not have a space for dialogue, let alone negotiation. The Local-to-Local Dialogue is a global mechanism that initiates this engagement, creating platforms for involvement of both grassroots communities and local government. Face to face meetings and guided tours to facilitate interaction between communities and officials result in local authorities being able to understand the situation in person, forcing them to take action.

**Better Understand Women's Participation:** Finally, for governance to be both engendered and pro-poor, affirmative action is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. To enable elected women representatives to be effective leaders, they need to be supported by, and be in touch with, a mobilized grassroots constituency. This sensitizes them to community issues, and helps them act as a bridge between the community and decision-making spaces and actors. The need of the hour is to develop indicators that can measure grassroots women's participation, not just in terms of numbers but in terms of their ability to make decisions, influence policy, implement programs and hold governments accountable.

The seven cases thus underline the importance of providing resources, supporting and recognising the strength of grassroots communities in engendering and redefining governance. As noted by the World Bank, the quality of development delivery can be significantly impacted by, *'...putting poor people at the centre of service provision: by enabling them to monitor and discipline service providers, by amplifying their voice in policymaking, and by strengthening the incentives for providers to serve the poor'*<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The World Bank (2003). Making Services Work for Poor People. World Development Report 2004.

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