



### THE HUIROU COMMISSION CALLS FOR SUSTAINED INVESTMENTS IN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS AND REALIZATION OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) BY 2015

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**The MDGs will not be achieved and global poverty will not be reduced without empowering grassroots women to function as leaders in development decisions and processes at all levels.**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of the MDGs and are preconditions for overcoming poverty, hunger and disease. But progress has been sluggish on all fronts—from education to access to political decision-making. It is widely recognized that in order to achieve the MDGs, women, and particularly poor and marginalized women, must be prioritized and front-and-center in all development interventions (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, p. 4).

**“Women’s empowerment means articulating women’s work from a position of strength rather than as recipient of aid.”**

-- Sarah Silliman, Coordinator MDG3 Initiative

It is widely recognized that involving and investing in women is a key component to poverty reduction. However there are very few examples where this has been effectively translated into the participation of grassroots women in decision-making or investments to recognize and support grassroots women’s vital contributions to development.

Grassroots women make sustained (and unpaid) contributions to development from involvement in participatory planning and budgetary processes, to facilitating aid distribution and providing vital information during disasters, and providing direct care and advocacy for community members infected by HIV. Women, who represent 2/3 of the world’s poor, need political leaders and institutions to design and implement policies that ensure their inclusion, consultation and leadership in solving the daily challenges that impact the and their communities. Yet women are not waiting for policy makers to enact these changes -- grassroots women are organizing, building leadership and developing their skills to press for changes in decision-making and community-level investment.

The Huirou Commission, a global coalition of networks, non-governmental and grassroots organizations, institutions, and individual professionals, supports grassroots women globally to make change. In 2008, the Huirou Commission launched the MDG 3 Accountability Initiative through the support of the Dutch Foreign Ministry’s MDG 3 Fund.

To date, the Huirou coalition has supported 42 grassroots women’s organizations in 27 countries to advance MDG 3 through increasing women’s leadership and participation in decision-making and improve their ability to secure assets, particularly land and housing.

Through the MDG 3 Initiative grassroots women have demonstrated their commitment to poverty reduction and realization of all MDGs and have made significant advancements towards the realization of the MDGs, from increasing the number of women holding land titles, to launching leadership and community development funds, to creating curricula for local government to be more accountable and responsive to their constituents. Grassroots women members of the Huirou Commission have demonstrated that investing in organized groups of grassroots women leads to big changes for communities

### WHY GRASSROOTS WOMEN?



Grassroots women have firsthand experience of what works and what does not work in their communities and have a strong track record for community problem solving by being information creators, problem solvers and knowledge holders.



Grassroots women have valuable skills, goals, and social networks that can be tapped in the planning, implementation and monitoring of quality and accessible basic services and infrastructure at the local level.



Grassroots women, particularly those linked to organized groups, reduce corruption and increase accountability when they are involved in public life. Investing in grassroots women’s empowerment and inclusion in decision-making benefits not just themselves, but entire communities and societies.

# Grassroots women's initiatives accelerating progress toward the realization of MDGs: examples from Huairou Commission's MDG 3 Accountability Initiative

## MDG 1

Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and building sustainable and nutrient-rich food systems through investing in women's cooperatives and networking.

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The women's farming cooperative **Ser do Sertao** in Brazil has proven that investing in grassroots women's cooperatives and entrepreneurial activities not only results in income generation, but in better nutrition and food security for families and communities. Situated in Pintadas, Ser do Sertão developed an educational program to train women members on the production of high-quality nutritious food for their families without waste. In partnership with local government, they developed technological capacity to commercialize surplus food products - developing drip irrigation for the first time, producing fruit pulp for sale, and now have the capacity to sell 80 liters of milk daily to the government for use in the schools.

### We recommend:

- Local Government create district level agricultural training and support services for women led producer cooperatives and federations; and work with those cooperatives to provide services and products to communities.
- National Ministries of Local Government develop policies that integrate women-led producer cooperatives into the local governments' budget allocations and development plans.
- National Ministries of Agriculture support producer cooperatives and federations as a sustainable source of large scale food production.
- Donors invest in women's organizations and federations to develop holistic approaches to community development concerns.
- We also recommend investing in funding mechanisms that allow for grassroots peer learning, networking, exchanges and knowledge transfers as grassroots women's organizations can learn new strategies and solutions for community challenges through peer learning and exchange.

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As long as women are seen as submissive, there will be a large agricultural production gap. Women's agriculture is diversified, dynamic and sustainable, utilizing all the resources available in the environment.”

- Nereide Segala Coelho  
(President, Ser do Sertão and founder, Rede Pintadas, Brazil)



“What we are most proud of with respect to the MDG Initiative, are the linkages we developed with other organizations.” - Lajana Manandahar, Lumanti



**Improving access to education to children residing in informal settlements through grassroots women-led education funds and local tutoring services.**

**U**rban Poor Women Development (UPWD) is based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and works with community leaders in 19 informal urban settlement communities. Through the Huairou Commission MDG 3 Initiative, UPWD mobilized women to organize as community leaders and work on improving quality and access to services for communities, with a particular focus on training and education.

Women leaders in UPWD created a revolving fund for members to use for vocational training and education. Trained leaders:

- organized children’s awareness workshops to monitor and track the quality of education in their communities;
- negotiated with local government and school directors to waive school fees of poor students;
- taught afterschool sessions to supplement the education that children receive in the public school.

As a result of their efforts, over 800 children participated in workshops on participation and protection of their rights; 210 children from 12 communities regularly attend school without having to pay teachers; and another 230 children who cannot pay for school are given daily lessons from volunteer teachers.

**We recommend:**

- Local Government support community led initiatives that increase children’s access to and evaluation of educational services in communities.
- National Ministries of Education create policies and mandates for local government to involve communities in the design, accreditation and monitoring of educational services and programs.
- Donors invest in alternative education models, led by grassroots women, and promote their inclusion in certification and accreditation programs.

“Empowerment is the process of awareness and capacity building which leads to greater participation in transformative action.”

– Lee Salamanca, GWEC

**ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE MDG 3 INITIATIVE**

**Africa**

- Action for Women and Awakening in Rural Environment (AWARE), Uganda
- Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation (GSF), Ghana
- GROOTS Kenya
- Land Access Movement of South Africa (LAMOSA), South Africa
- Maasai Women Women Development Organization, Tanzania
- Ntankah Village Women Collective (CIG), Cameroon
- PPHP/ Zambia Homeless & Poor People’s Federation, Zambia
- Rural Women’s Movement (RWM), South Africa
- Rwanda Women’s Network (RWN), Rwanda
- Slum Women in Development (SWID), Uganda
- Uganda Community Based Association for Child Welfare (UCOBAC), Uganda

**Asia**

- Damayan ng Maralitang Pilipino Api, Philippines
- Four Regions Slum Network, Thailand
- Grassroots Women Empowerment Center, (GWEC) Philippines
- Himawanti, Nepal
- Himawanti, Pakistan
- Leaders and Organizers of Community Organization in Asia, (LOCOA), S. Korea
- Lumanti Support Group for Shelter, Nepal
- Participatory Development Action Program (PDAP), Bangladesh
- Sundog Community, S. Korea
- Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), India
- Urban Poor Linkage (UPC/UPLINK), Indonesia
- Urban Poor Women and Development, Cambodia

## Building women's leadership and capacity to engage and influence decision-making and increasing the accountability of women leaders through collaborations and dialogues between grassroots women and women in local government.

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The increase of women in leadership and decision-making positions resulting from government actions and policies, such as affirmative action and quotas, is an important step towards the realization of all MDGs, including MDG 3. However, women leaders alone do not automatically translate to responsive and effective governance. Women local authorities need support and resources to be effective and are frequently challenged by male peers in their attempts to promote the women's agenda in government agencies.

Grassroots women not in government positions also need support and resources to be able to effectively and meaningfully participate in the daily decisions that impact their lives. From increasing access to services and improving infrastructure in their communities to ensuring land policies include and benefit women, Huairou members have used the MDG 3 Initiative to strengthen grassroots women's leadership and voice in local governance.

*“When women sit at the table to make decisions, priorities take a different shape.”*

- Nereide Segala Coelho,  
Ser do Sertão, Rede Pintadas

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**Espaço Feminista**, a community organization based in Recife, Brazil uses participatory methods to educate and build the capacity of grassroots women leaders in two main areas: access to and control over land and housing, and increasing women's participation in spaces of social policies.

Espaço Feminista has contributed to MDGs 3 and 7 by increasing grassroots women's awareness of gender inequality and how it negatively impacts their lives, increasing their ability to participate in decision-making, establishing mechanisms for women to influence public policies, and supporting women who

run for elected positions. Through this work grassroots women have influenced government policy of slum-upgrading and land regularization in Brazil in favor of the poor and women. As a direct result, land in one previously informal settlement has been formalized and the residents are no longer in threat of eviction.

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In Chinchá, a small town south of Lima, in Peru, the **Federación de Mujeres Municipalistas de América Latina y El Caribe** (Latin American and Caribbean Federation of Women in Local Government, FEMUM) facilitated a meeting between grassroots women members of the Local Observatory of Women's Agenda, who had never even spoken with local authorities before, and three local authorities from Lima. By the end of the meeting, the authorities felt confident to address women's concerns in Lima and the grassroots women increased their knowledge on how the district government is following their agenda. Through dialogue and exchanging knowledge, female authorities and grassroots women have built a common political platform, have strengthened their political participation, and advanced women's empowerment.

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The **Uganda Community-Based Organization for Child Welfare (UCOBAC)** also focused on mobilizing both grassroots women's self help groups to increase their engagement in public life, and women local authorities to be accountable and responsive to their constituents. UCOBAC first worked with grassroots women to map the women leaders in the district and survey them on their mandates, responsibilities and perceptions of community needs. Based on the findings, UCOBAC developed and conducted trainings for local authorities on how to increase accountability and responsiveness in their role in local government and facilitated Local-to-Local Dialogues between grassroots women and local authorities. As a result, both women and local authorities recognized the particular role and contribution that each makes in addressing local development concerns. In addition, the dialogues changed perceptions on women's leadership roles, both formal and informal, in the community.

**Huairou member organizations have demonstrated that organized groups of women can increase their political participation through capacity-building initiatives, action research and dialogues with local authorities.**



### We recommend:

- Local Government establish participatory mechanisms that ensure on-going formal (not ad hoc) participation of women and community members in local programs, planning and resource allocations. We also encourage local government to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment are integral components of all urban poverty reduction policies and programs implemented by cities and local authorities.
- National Government create decentralized policies and mandates that ensure local officials, both men and women, engage with grassroots women's groups regularly, in particular as related to development policy and budgeting. We also encourage national governments to provide local leaders with resources and tools necessary to govern effectively and accountably, and contradict misguided perceptions of gender.
- Donors invest in action research and capacity building that ensure grassroots women have leadership skills and knowledge to effectively engage in decision making processes.

### EMPOWERMENT AS DEFINED BY GRASSROOTS WOMEN

Empowerment for women goes much deeper than defined by the targets of the MDG3. While MDG3 focuses on education, numbers in wage employment and national government, in reality gender equality and empowerment is a wide-ranging concept, with many different meanings for women around the world.

As part of its Mid Term Review of the MDG3 Accountability Initiative, the Huairou Commission asked its grassroots members what empowerment means to them. The responses revealed an emphasis on leadership, accountability and responsiveness, resources sovereignty, and collective action.

#### Area of Empowerment

#### Example Grassroots Indicators

Grassroots women consider women's **leadership** a key element in empowerment. This includes decision-making positions at home, village and at the national or even international level. The ability to take leadership, participate in and influence decision-making processes all contribute to women's empowerment.

- # of women in village council and committee posts
- # of grassroots women informed of development processes in their communities
- Increased voluntary participation of women in community development processes (e.g. local authority service delivery action plans)

Grassroots women emphasize **organizing** to collectively address issues of concern to the community, and find empowerment when that contribution to community development is recognized by local authorities and others, as demonstrated through collaboration and joint action.

- # and % of women groups formed
- MOUs and formal recognition of women's groups by local authorities
- # of women providing mentorship/ acting as role models for other women

Grassroots women also recognize that empowerment is directly related to their ability to **hold stakeholders**, specifically government, **accountable** by taking on monitoring and evaluation roles that are accepted and respected.

- % of women's agendas which have been incorporated into development plans
- # of women reaching out to government representatives to learn roles and responsibilities
- # of women confidently pursuing justice in formal and informal mechanisms

When grassroots women are able to access and benefit from **resources**, in particular land and housing and income generating activities such as savings and credit groups, they not only reduce their economic vulnerability, but improve their social status in the home and community.

- # of women who have acquired land titles (both through customary and formal land practices)
- increase in income due to participation in livelihoods programs
- # of women able to take primary decisions over economic production matters

## MDG 4 and MDG 5

**Reducing child mortality and improving rural health by empowering women to improve access to and monitor the delivery of government services.**

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**S**wayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) is a learning and development organization based in Mumbai, India whose mission is to facilitate economic and social development competencies of women and communities at the grassroots. Through the MDG 3 Initiative, SSP has focused on developing grassroots women's leadership and skills to hold government entities accountable through monitoring the delivery of basic services and promoting community development.

Focusing on public health services in rural areas, SSP developed Health Governance Groups (HGGs), which are community monitoring groups led by grassroots women that work with public and private hospitals to negotiate prices and quality services for poor families. These HGGs increase rural communities' access to quality health care and function as monitors of the government-provided services. Governments are recognizing the important role that HGGs play and work with the women to monitor the implementation of two government policies in India: the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the National Rural Health Mission. The project is implemented in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu states, covering more than 200 villages.

### **We encourage:**

- Local Governments to actively seek partnerships with grassroots women's groups to improve the access and quality service delivery to communities, particularly those in rural areas.

### **We recommend:**

- Donors support leadership and skills-building initiatives that expand the roles grassroots women can play in monitoring and promoting access and quality of services available to communities.

## MDG 6

**Grassroots home-based caregivers make gains towards universal access to treatment and mitigate the impacts of HIV.**

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**T**he achievement of universal access to treatment, care and support is dependent upon the capacity and knowledge of communities, and particularly the leadership of grassroots who are women home-based caregivers who bridge the gap between communities, health and social service systems.

**The Home-Based Care Alliance**, initially organized by GROOTS Kenya, is an innovative mechanism by which home-based caregivers have been able to directly overcome many of the current barriers to achieving universal access by:

- Strengthening linkages between communities and formal health and social service systems;
- Improving accountability of AIDS funding so that it responds to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable;
- Increasing income and improving social safety nets for people living with and affected by HIV;
- Decreasing the fragmentation of caregivers and ensuring more effective coverage of care for people living with HIV, orphans and vulnerable children.

The Home-Based Care Alliance, currently being organized in 8 countries in Africa, is bringing together thousands of caregivers from the community through the regional level to press for resources and recognition for the vital work caregivers are doing in achieving MDG6 and other health and development goals.

### **We recommend:**

- National Governments make immediate financial investments in the formal recognition of home-based caregivers.
- National Ministries of Health to facilitate the comprehensive and efficient integration of caregivers into health systems, including referral systems and on-going trainings.



**Grassroots women advocate for the establishment of national tenure and financial mechanisms in order to access and own land or housing.**

In Tanzania, the **Maasai Women and Development Organization (MWEDO)** works with Maasai women to ensure they have sustained access to land. Through the MDG 3 initiative, they have sensitized women on the mandates of the Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999, which allows women partial ownership of family land and grants women land titles through village level authorities. The women build relationships with the local government and traditional authorities, and utilize the law to demand land titles. As a result, 350 women have acquired land and 180 have registered through the local land surveyors.

In Ghana, **Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation** has also mobilized women to work within legal and traditional structures to demand land titles, and as a result, 80 women now have land in their own names. In Nepal, as in many countries across the world, women do not have access to credit, which presents a significant barrier to securing assets such as land or housing. Grassroots women are unable to speak independently and are frequently left out of decision-making processes that impact their lives, both in the public and private spheres.

In Nepal, **Lumanti Support Network for Shelter** has supported the creation and expansion of women’s saving groups and cooperatives whose network now includes more than 10,000 members. By increasing grassroots women’s financial independence, women are empowered to take part in decisions inside and outside the home. As a result, some of the savings cooperatives have begun to mobilize their joint funds and negotiate with local authorities to purchase land plots for collective settlements. This is a big step for grassroots women in Nepal who will have security of tenure as a result of their economic independence.

**We recommend:**

- Local Government ensures procedures for granting land title are localized and affirmatively target women.
- Local leaders ensure communities are sensitized to the importance of women’s land ownership, that women know their rights, and are supported to access laws and policies that confer them rights.
- National Ministries of Land and Housing ensure that a normative framework is in place to affirmatively grant women equal rights over land and housing as men.
- For countries where land ownership by women is low, special measures be taken to ensure women become land and housing owners.
- We recommend Donors invest in gender sensitive land reform and land administration.
- Finally, we call for all land reform processes to engage women and ensure they are included in decision-making bodies over land.

**Latin America and the Caribbean**

- Alianza de Mujeres Líderes de la Región del Istmo de Tehuantepec, Mexico
- Articulacao das Mulheres do Rio, Brazil
- Centro das Mulheres Pombos, Brazil
- Centro de Atención a la Mujer Trabajadora de Chihuahua, Mexico
- El Comité de Emergencia Garifuna, Honduras
- Coordinacion de Desarrollo Integral de Mujeres Mayas (CODIMM), Guatemala
- Espaço Feminista, Brazil
- Federacion de Mujeres Municipalistas de America Latina y el Caribe, Argentina
- Federación de Mujeres Municipalistas de América Latina y El Caribe, Peru
- GROOTS Jamaica
- GROOTS Peru (Bancos Comunales, Mujeres Unidas, CONOMOVIDI, Lima Este)
- Mujeres Candelaria, Bolivia
- Mujeres Liderazas de Maipu en Seguridad, Chile
- Rede Pintadas/ Coopertiva Ser do Sertao, Brazil
- Unión de Cooperativas de Mujeres Las Brumas, Nicaragua
- Uniao dos Movimentos de Moradia Sao Paulo (UMMSP), Brazil

“ A space has been created through the MDG3 Initiative to bring women together, reflect on their experiences, share with one another and establish concrete links. ”  
- Fides Bagasao, LOCOA



**Piloting new mechanisms for aid distribution, ensuring funds reach and are accessible to communities at the grassroots, with particular attention to gender equality and women’s empowerment.**

The recent commitments made by governments, such as the Dutch MDG 3 FUND and the Spanish commitment to gender equality through UNIFEM, represent unprecedented investments in women’s empowerment and gender equality. However these one-time investments are not enough. Development institutions, multi-laterals and governments (from national to local) must make sustained investments in women’s organizations and commit to a new way of partnering if we are to make significant advancements towards the MDGs in the next five years.

An example of a partnership funding mechanism is the **Community Disaster Resilience Fund (CRDF)** which channels funds directly to community based organizations in at-risk communities to support them in implementing effective disaster-risk-reduction strategies. The CDRF is operating in 7 states in India, indigenous communities in Honduras and Guatemala, and flood prone communities in Nicaragua.

Partners include: GROOTS International, The Huairou Commission, the ProVention Consortium, the National Disaster Management Authority (India) and CEPREDENAC (Central America), the Indian National Alliance on Disaster Risk Reduction (NADRR), UNDP Bureau of Development Policy, UNDP India and the Government of Norway.

Creating funding mechanisms to grassroots women’s groups is a key strategy to ensure that aid reaches those the Goals intend to reach and is put towards increasing sustainable achievement of all MDGs.

**We recommend:**

- Donors create sustained funding that channels resources to women’s organizations and networks.

**We encourage:**

- Donors to invest in alternative funding mechanism that ensure funds reach communities and organizations directly that are working on developing sustainable resilient communities.

Huairou Commission  
249 Manhattan Ave.  
Brooklyn, NY 11211  
Tel: + 1 718 388 8915  
Fax: + 1 718 388 0295  
www.huairou.org

Huairou Commission Member Networks:  
Federación de Mujeres Municipalistas de América Latina y El Caribe FEMUM/ALC  
GROOTS International [www.groots.org](http://www.groots.org)  
International Council of Women (ICW) [www.icw-cif.org](http://www.icw-cif.org)  
Information Center of the Independent Women’s Forum (ICIWF) [www.owl.ru](http://www.owl.ru)  
Red Mujer y Habitat de America Latina [www.redmujer.org.ar](http://www.redmujer.org.ar)  
Women and Cities International (WICI) [www.femmesetvilles.org](http://www.femmesetvilles.org)  
Women and Peace Network

