

# WE INTERNATIONAL

24 YEARS OF WOMEN & ENVIRONMENTS

Summer/Fall 2000 • Issue 48/49 • Double Issue

## Healthy Communities Through Women's Eyes

Women Creating Healthy Communities  
Women & Environments Research  
Innovative Projects from Around the World

Summer/Fall 2000 • Issue No. 48/49  
Double Issue • \$5.95



# WE INTERNATIONAL

24 YEARS OF WOMEN & ENVIRONMENTS

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**WE International** is a unique international magazine which examines women's multiple relations to their environments - natural, physical, built, and social - from feminist perspectives. It provides a forum for academic research and theory, professional practice, and community experience. Editorial board members volunteer their time to the collective editing and production of WE International as a contribution to feminist social change. The magazine is associated with the Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto.

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### Cover Art

#### "Greek Parade" by Tobi Asmoucha

Tobi Asmoucha is an award winning photographer based in Toronto. Her photographs are little blue prints of Tobi's relationship to the communities she has visited. About her work Tobi says: "The images are about life's little mysteries that are constantly occurring. The people are not posed: I let them show me who they are on their own terms, using spatial alignments and the inexplicable moments when something hidden is revealed."

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# WEspeak

**W** *WE International* has always been about how things might be different. How would cities and regions look if gender-related concerns were taken into account? What if more women had the power to design and manage the environments in which we live? Would the relationship between humans and the natural world be more harmonious if women's experiences were more valued? Even if we've never been able to answer these questions with certainty, to paraphrase a new friend, the act of envisioning what might be has made us better able to critique what is.

Since at least the mid-1980s, planners, policy-makers, and academics have been using the language of "healthy communities" or, more recently, "sustainable communities" as a short cut for describing the kind of places that are green, liveable, democratic, and socially-just. Because they are being taken up in high-level international policy circles, ideas about healthy and sustainable community development need to be considered through a critical feminist lens. Our theme of "Healthy Communities Through Women's Eyes," therefore, is in part a response to the proliferation of books, policy documents, plans, and organizations that are dedicated to the search for liveable communities. We find that, as in many other cases, when these are not specifically written or run by women, women's voices and perspectives tend to be left out. Consequently, we felt it was high time to ask women to comment on what they feel would make their communities healthy and sustainable. The range of contributions to the conversation is remarkable and several common threads are evident.

First, it is important to note that the concepts of "health," "sustainability," and "community" are contested ones, open to many different interpretations. We intentionally left these terms open-ended. It is therefore not surprising that different contributors have envisioned "healthy communities" in different ways, depending on their own social, political, economic, built, and natural environments. For example, where as community may mean a specific geographical place to many, it can also mean "creative space" to artists or the sharing of physical and social challenges such as HIV or workplace risks. Communities can also be created and maintained in cyberspace – it is not insignificant that this issue of *WE* was almost entirely developed through electronic communication. Similarly, "health" can refer to concerns for healthy

and bodily well-being or the viability of living spaces and local economies.

Second, because there is such a gap in our knowledge of what "healthy communities" mean for women, the importance of on-going, participatory research should not go unnoticed. For this reason, we have included a section in the magazine on *WE Research*: a section highlighting the kind of innovative research that asks us to listen to the missing voices. The researchers whose work we have included in this issue are contributing invaluable pieces to the larger puzzle of what a more inclusive understanding of healthy and sustainable communities might entail. We hope to profile more examples of this kind of transformative research in future issues.

Finally, the present issue contains both exciting success stories about how women have contributed to movements for healthy communities as well as some caveats against thinking the New Jerusalem has been found. Clearly, women have had a big hand in designing and leading local community initiatives. Woman-centred microfinance projects and women's health collectives have made real differences in the quality of life for many individuals and communities around the world. However, it would be a mistake to let these local successes take our minds off the persistence of global "isms" like sexism and racism, as well as increasing ecological destruction and corporate control of democracy. Given that so many governments and international institutions have adopted the discourses of healthy communities and sustainable development, we must be ever vigilant not to get duped into serving the profoundly unhealthy and unsustainable agendas of the power elite.

This is why, with our cover art, we have alluded to the continued importance – now and for generations to come - of women marching to express their resistance to patriarchal power. As we write this editorial, millions of women are participating in the World March of Women, being held in cities in every part of the planet throughout the year 2000. Fighting to eliminate poverty and violence and demanding equal human rights for all remains central to the project of building the kind of environments in which women want to live. **WE**

Sherilyn MacGregor

*"World March of Women: Change of Plans: Towards a Non-Sexist Sustainable City."*  
Globe, 1999, 1999

# WE Moved!

As of July 4, 2000 *WE International* magazine is delighted to have found a new home at the Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies (IWSGA) at New College, University of Toronto. The Institute has been kind enough to offer us support in various ways; precious assistance for a magazine whose subscription revenue does not meet its printing and distribution costs. The Institute also offers us a stimulating feminist intellectual environment. We are looking forward to the contributions of its staff and students.

For those of you who have followed *WE International's* history, you will know that some years ago the Editors created the WEED (Women and Environments, Education, and Development) Foundation to be a home for the magazine and to carry out other projects. Those other projects have been keeping WEED very busy and WEED has recently changed its name to WHEN (Women, Health and Environments Network) to better reflect the focus of these projects. So, having established yet another energy centre for women to carry forward our struggle for better communities and a better world,



Illustration by R. Modlich.

we are glad to be back in the University of Toronto again. We look forward to working collaboratively with WHEN in the future and we will keep you abreast of WHEN's various activities.

If you happen to be in the Toronto area on September 21 from 4:00 to 7:00pm, please join us when the Institute welcomes us formally to our new home and we launch this issue of the magazine. It will be a great warm up for our up-coming 25th anniversary year. **WE**

Joy Woolfrey

## Thank You

**WE International** gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the University of Toronto, the Publications Assistance Program (PAP) for reducing mailing costs, the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Gender Equality Division, the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC), and from the following individuals: Tobi Asmoucha, Serina Morris, and Judith Bell.

## Message from the IWSGS Director



I AM DELIGHTED to welcome *WE International* as a new partner to the Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies (IWSGS) at the University of Toronto.

IWSGS started in January 1999, with a mandate to foster and encourage women's studies and gender studies within the entire university. We have an Undergraduate Program and a Collaborative Graduate Program in Women's Studies, organize symposia, conferences, and talks, sponsor and co-sponsor various events, and generally serve as a focus for Women's Studies at the U of T. The Institute will be officially launched in November, 2000 with an international conference on 'Feminist Utopias: Redefining Our Projects'. One of our functions is to reach out to the wider community. It is especially in this context that *WE International* will help us fulfill our mandate.

IWSGS is located at New College which houses a number of other progressive and innovative programs including Equity Studies, Caribbean Studies, African Studies, and others. We are looking forward to a stimulating and mutually beneficial relationship with *WE International* and we are happy to have this important feminist magazine with us!

Margrit Edhler

Institute of Women's Studies and Gender Studies  
University of Toronto

# Shaping the Movement

Women's Contributions to Ontario  
Healthy Communities

Monique Beaudoin, Lisa Caton, Anna Jacobs, Susan Larsh & Alison Stirling

*"The aspects of the Healthy Community movement that make me as a woman want to participate are those that relate to being collaborative, inclusive, and having a holistic perspective. In addition, the sharing of power, the building on community strengths, and the action orientation stimulated me to become involved."*

- Martha McSherry, Community Health Nurse and Healthy Community advocate Kirkland Lake, Ontario

The Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (OHCC) draws much of its inspiration from hard-working and visionary women. As part of the international Healthy Communities movement, which has its roots in Ontario, the OHCC works with community groups, coalitions, and individuals across the province to address social, environmental, and economic well-being. The international movement began at a one-day workshop entitled "Healthy Toronto 2000" at the *Beyond Health Care* conference in 1984. This workshop motivated Ilona Kickbusch, director of health promotion at the World Health Organization (WHO), to initiate its healthy cities project. Dr. Kickbusch, a native of Germany, came to the WHO in 1980 from a background in women's health, determined to bring innovation and change to her work. She took the concepts presented in Toronto and pushed the WHO to embark on a healthy cities project, moving the international organization into a new arena: the local arena.

While the men whose names have become synonymous with healthy communities (Dr. Trevor Hancock and Dr. Len Duhl) outlined the key concepts of the approach – community participation, intersectoral collaboration, municipal government commitment, and healthy public policy – many women around the world, like Ilona Kickbusch, have turned the theory into practice.

Although the Healthy Communities movement is not, and never has been, described specifically as a women's movement, it has been shaped by the strong role women have played in its development. By involving representatives from a cross-section of sectors in the community, as well as encouraging the broader community's participation and input, the Healthy Communities approach promotes the use of tools developed by feminists and utilized by many women's groups such as consensus decision-making and participatory evaluation. After five years of on-the-ground experience, and several more years prior to that of creating, planning, and

developing the approach and structure, we at the OHCC are now in a position to reflect upon that work.

## The Participation of Women

The gendered dimensions of Healthy Communities work has been apparent, if not often recognized, since its origins well over a decade ago. When the OHCC began to form in 1990-91, and as provincial organizations and community representatives gathered to debate the structure, function, and criteria for membership, many women around the table promoted a specific way of doing things. They promoted community process over securing municipal government commitment; participatory research through stories over indices of change; and the collaboration of all sectors and members of the community rather than everyone working in their own silos. It can be said that our hierarchical, fragmented communities are a product of a male-defined society whereas women value participation and collaboration in community.

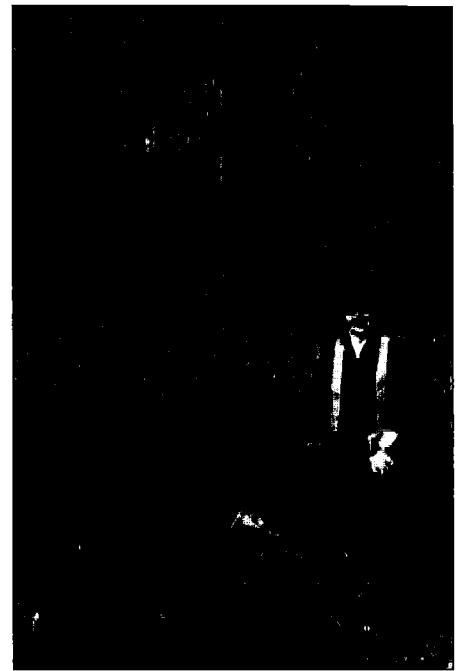
The Claringdon Healthy Communities Committee hosted a very successful community clean-up of the Bowmanville Creek Valleylands to promote the vision of a restoration/rehabilitation and trail project in the valley. Cynthia Strike, Municipality of Claringdon planner (right), provides enthusiastic and valuable staff support to the group. Photo by Susan Larsh.

It has become clear that a majority of volunteers and paid staff in the movement are women.<sup>2</sup> And these active women have told us that they use the Healthy Communities approach because they are attracted to its holistic aspects. For many, the experience of motherhood influences their long-term view of the health of their families and communities.

As the movement took shape across the province in the late 1980s, community groups came together to develop their own vision of a healthy community. Their

Imagining a community that is a safe, vibrant, economically stable, clean, green, and diverse place for children and families to live captures creative imaginations and builds a commitment to change.

Becoming active participants in public processes tends to be rather difficult for women who have not typically been involved in local politics. The Healthy Communities approach, however, offers space for women to learn about and be active in their own communities. For example, Carla Rhody, who is the co-



## Imagining a community that is a safe, vibrant, economically stable, clean, green, and diverse place for children and families to live captures creative imaginations and builds a commitment to change.

vision then is similar to their vision today. At the recent *Building Bridges to Women's Health* conference in Victoria, British Columbia, Dr. Joan McHardy, director of Vox Populi Research, presented findings of a paper she has written for the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in Women's Health. After conducting focus groups with women between the ages of 45 and 64 and with women involved in the community design and planning professions, there was agreement from all groups that a healthy community means: a sense of belonging, good surroundings, personal control, and diversity. The community planning and design "experts" also thought that a healthy community should have a sense of balance and a vision and commitment to action.

ordinator of the Durham Region Community Wellness Study, says that it was the issues - including transportation in suburban communities, basic needs, and access to housing - as well as the empowerment aspects of the approach that attracted her to the movement: "I'm working to integrate issues of social needs with the built environment and we still have a long way to go. I'm also getting women in my community involved. Many don't feel they have something to contribute, when they do."

Understanding that women have different needs and concerns, women working in the Healthy Communities movement have also advocated women-centred analysis in the development of communities because traditional male-centred analyses

often overlook the different experience of women. Interestingly, the idea of women-centred analysis has been met with some resistance in arenas such as the WHO. This could be because it challenges the way resources are traditionally allocated and the way programs are developed. But Marilou McPhedran, former corporate director of Healthy City Toronto and a leader in the international women's human rights movement, is particularly proud of how a women-centred analysis was integrated into the City of Toronto's first *State of the City Report* (1992). One very important contribution of that report was the introduction of women's vulnerability as a barometer of safety and ultimately of community health. The report's discussion of violence looked beyond tra- ▶

The women involved in these initiatives understand holistic community development and see positive aspects for everyone in the community now and in the future.

ditional indicators to include sexual abuse and violation. Safety and violence, it is clear, is experienced differently by men and women.

While most Healthy Community initiatives across Ontario are not necessarily woman-centred, they are initiatives that people have come to recognize as necessary to improving the quality of life for everyone in their community. The women involved in these initiatives understand holistic community development and expect positive results for everyone now and in the future.

#### **Participatory Processes, Exciting Results**

As in the women's movement, a focus on participatory approaches and the use of stories are common elements in many Healthy Communities initiatives. For a movement striving to be multi-sectoral with an emphasis on wide community participation, a strong inclusive process is needed. This type of process presents unique challenges, however. It is often slow and difficult, and resistance is felt from those who want to see immediate action. The underlying tension seems to be the fear that if methods of involving people and getting groups to work together are utilized, then the end product itself will be less well defined and the results diminished. Lisa Salsberg of Healthy City Toronto relates: "[Many of my colleagues are] very results oriented, and I am to a certain extent too, but I see results in a different way... The process of getting people working together has spun off to a bunch of other things." She explains that involving people at the beginning of a process actually speeds things up as there will be fewer amendments and last-

minute challenges. There are fewer delays at the end of the process when policies are ready for approval and implementation.

The gendered underpinnings of this difference in attitude toward participatory approaches are important to note. For example, as Roni Summers Wickens, executive director of the Community Development Council of Quinte (Belleville and surrounding area), observes: "women tend to value the process of coming together, whereas men tend to look at the deliverables or outcomes. We need to balance that constantly." Finding a balance is a key challenge for building a healthy community, and finding that balance clearly depends on nurturing equality and respect between the sexes.

The fact that the Healthy Communities approach is process-oriented, however, does not mean that only women are attracted to the movement. Gloria Williamson, director of Ear Falls 2000 Healthy Communities Inc. (north of Thunder Bay), believes strongly that the Healthy Community approach is attractive to both men and women because her coalition has many very committed male volunteers. However, she feels that "women generally understand holistic community development... Women seem to relate more easily to impacts of economic development on social well-being." Similarly, former OHCC board member, Anne Balding (also of the Community Development Council of Quinte) finds that "men tend to focus on specific projects while women tend to think of a community as a whole."

This participatory process is yielding amazing results that have created change in communities throughout Ontario. For example, a visioning session in 1995 instigated the revitalization of the econo-

my in Ear Falls. 7 years after the closing of the local mine, Ear Falls 2000 brought new life to the community by using the Healthy Communities approach. Their many projects include collaborating on the opening of a Native transition school and addressing issues of racism in their community. They have also assumed the management of the local provincial park which was once slated to close but has since had a 125 per cent increase in visitors. Much of this work was led by the Ear Falls Healthy Communities Coalition.

Woolwich Healthy Communities has gone through many stages in their development. Most recently they have developed a public education program on well water – including the cleaning of existing wells and ways to prevent future contamination. Their trails group, started in 1992, has expanded its work from hiking and bicycling trails throughout the township to an active living and recreation program with schools and community groups. They have also developed a set of community indicators to measure the progress of their community towards their goals over time. In Russell, a new by-law bans the use of pesticides on municipal property. Residents of Russell advocated this policy change for many years before it became law earlier this year. And the London Healthy Communities Coalition with many other partners developed an environmentally-friendly healthy community bus. These are just a few of the many exciting examples from around the province.

While the strong-participatory process of Healthy Communities can be a barrier to men's participation in the movement, it is one that draws women to community



visioning and participation. This process requires that we think about results in a new way and trust that an open, inclusive process will yield even stronger results from which all community members can benefit.

### Together We're Building Healthy Communities

As key members, staff, and community leaders, women are committed to shaping a movement that values participation and cooperation, invests in building a strong foundation, prefers developing guidelines learned from practice to imposing criteria drawn from theory, and sees the connection between the process and the product. The belief is that building a broad-based movement informs the healthy public policies we create.

The Healthy Communities groups in Ontario are proving this belief to be true. Many of the changes that have taken place in communities across the province would not have happened if it weren't for the contributions made by women. We believe that with the Healthy Communities model and the strong, active women who are working in the movement, we can create communities that are equal, democratic, and co-operative. **WE**

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all the dedicated women in our movement who inspire us, particularly the several participants who took time out of their busy lives to share their insights with us.

*Monique Beaudoin is OHCC Community Animator in Northeast Ontario.*

*Lisa Caton is OHCC Executive Director.*

*Anna Jacobs is OHCC Communications Facilitator.*

*Susan Larsh is the OHCC Community Animator in Central East Ontario.*

*Alison Stirling is a Health Promotion Consultant with OPC [formerly called Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse] and a long-time member of the OHCC Board of Directors.*

<sup>1</sup>In this article, when we capitalize "Healthy Communities" we refer to the international Healthy Cities/Communities model adopted by the World Health Organization in 1985 and thousands of cities and communities around the world since then. The Healthy Communities model addresses the broad determinants of health through four characteristics: community participation; intersectoral involvement; local government commitment; and healthy public policy development.

<sup>2</sup>The focus on women's contribution to shaping the Healthy Communities movement does not imply a dismissal or underestimation of the significant contributions of men in the movement.

### Further stories of organizing processes, reflection, working together, and actions in many communities in Ontario can be found in OHCC collections/resources such as:

- \* Update, OHCC's tri-annual newsletter
- \* Using Stories to Guide Action (1995)
- \* OHCC's web site ([www.opc.on.ca/ohcc](http://www.opc.on.ca/ohcc))
- \* OHCC's monthly electronic bulletin
- \* Communities and Local Government: Working Together
- \* Signs of Progress, Signs of Caution
- \* The Ground Talks: Organizing Skills for Healthy Communities
- \* Healthy Food, Healthy Communities
- \* Pathways to a Healthy Community: An Indicators and Evaluation Tool Kit User's Guide
- \* Healthy Environment, Healthy Community Kit

And in the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse's Newsletter, Healthy Communities Stories Edition, March 1994.

## Evolution

I dream of a time when black  
berries grow over  
crumbling concrete.

When grass, animals,  
and trees move in and the  
infrastructure is local.

When I pick and skip my way  
across the land by foot,  
horse or bicycle.

Over abandoned cars and  
strip malls by moonlight, traveling  
between villages slowly.

And camping out with birds in  
old bank buildings.

Meeting fellow travelers in  
the wild world beyond and  
within this one.

When progress ends and a  
more conscious evolution  
begins, has begun.

Brenna Jael Nies, 1998  
Reprinted from *W/ Moon '00*, with permission of  
the artist.



"Three Sisters" by Eunice Henry.  
Photo by Rachel O'Neill. Printed by permission of  
the artist.

# Where Have All the Women Gone?

Gloria DeSantis

**N**owhere. We found them right here. And it wasn't hard. It was simply a matter of listening and looking carefully around us as we embarked on a journey to discover whether Cambridge, Ontario was becoming a healthier, safer, and more sustainable community. In fact, when we did, we found women asking some very tough questions about community well-being. We also found them engaged in some incredible work toward making our community a better place to live, work, and play.

It all began in 1999 when we (the Social Planning Council) formed a partnership with Cambridge City Council to update their strategic plan, called *Our Common Future*, which was first released in 1994. We formed a steering group to guide our work. We wanted to know where we – our community – were making progress and where we still needed to do some work. Objectives for the City of Cambridge had been formulated in 1994 around the following themes:

- Strong community leadership;
- A place where people want to live and visit;
- A vibrant and diverse economy;
- The necessary infrastructure;
- Strong urban core areas with a single civic centre; and
- A safe and caring community.

We went out into the community and talked to almost 150 residents. We

created a series of reports that contained the voices and experiences of women, among others. It would have been easy to have lost their voices in a project as big as this one without a focus on women specifically, but we didn't let that happen.

The following quotes by community women offer a small glimpse of the tough questions and issues on which they want to see action:

- "We need doctors – especially women doctors."
- "There are longer stays at the women's shelter because there is nowhere for women to go. There is a need for second stage housing for victims of abuse."
- "Diverse peoples are not represented in special events and service planning."
- "The amount of pesticide use is disgusting. When I'm walking with my kids, they are out spraying, but they have masks on and we don't. Don't spray. I don't mind the dandelions."
- "Senior citizen apartment buildings are often built nowhere near a grocery store. If you don't drive anymore, then getting to a grocery store – especially in winter – is a big problem. I hope they don't close all the small neighbourhood grocery stores."
- "In Churchill Park, I don't feel safe, even at dusk. It should be lit up more."
- "I could wait a long time to cross my intersection safely with my stroller. That area is too busy. Traffic lights are needed there."
- "I can't walk to the store in the winter because I have a stroller and the snow isn't cleared."

There was much discussion about women's incredible work toward making our community healthy. The discussion included the following points, to name but a few:

- Special awareness-raising events like Take Back the Night and the YWCA Week Without Violence are organized by women;
- Data from the last census for our community show that women consistently commit more time than men to informal and unpaid care-giving for children and older adults;
- Women are working hard at neighbourhood organizations to bring services closer to women, but there is a down side: "the volunteers are burning out; we have five volunteers and four want to quite because they've been doing it for a long time."

The Healthy Communities movement is alive and thriving in Cambridge and women are playing critical roles to ensure that this movement continues. They are also challenging some of the conventional wisdom about what makes communities healthy as well as the work people can and should do to move in that direction. And it is important that we listen. **WE**

*Gloria DeSantis has lived in Cambridge, Ontario for 12 years with her three children and her partner. She is also Executive Director of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, an organization that is deeply concerned about fostering healthier communities.*

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# Banking on Women:

Achieving Healthy Economies through Microfinance

Kathryn N. Gow



Women use microcredit loans to pay for home improvements. Photo by Kathryn Gow

**M**icrofinance projects have become instruments for change in the lives of poor and landless rural women around the world. With their help, many women have become models of excellence in training and community economic development (CED). Lend women some cash and they begin not only to achieve their own goals but to improve conditions in their families and communities as well.

## What is Microfinance?

Microfinance is a system of savings and credit designed for people who cannot gain access to formal banking or credit unions. Because poor people are not considered credit-worthy, they are unable to take advantage of regular financial ser-

vices. In addition to lending them much needed funds, microfinance projects teach people how to acquire the kind of self-discipline needed to save money. The borrowers usually qualify for loans in the range of \$50 to \$5,000, but sometimes as high as \$10,000 (Canadian). Most loans are well under \$500.

Women who become members of the Centre for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD) lending project in the Philippines must also save money each week and deposit their savings into a group savings plan, or the people's bank. The dynamics and procedures of the savings plans require staff and members to have, or to learn, appropriate

skills and to exercise persistent efforts to make the plans a success. They are encouraged to become involved in their local community and bank workers are coached in the importance of CED approaches. All activities are conducted in a supportive and caring manner, an approach which is often lacking in traditional banking environments.

For example, the dedication of the Laguna women is very special as their outreach operations extend to many parts of the Philippines. No doubt much of this success is due to women like Dolores Torres, who is now the president of CARD. Dolores started with CARD when it was a non-governmental organization (NGO) and has worked with the poor women in her country ever since. She is dedicated to motivating women and has the special quality of making all women feel empowered regardless of their educational or economic status.

In addition to regular project loans, which are meant to increase income and improve the economic conditions of the family in which they live (including food, clothing, education, and housing), there is also the option of multi-purpose loans. These loans are to be spent on other areas such as improved health care. Special housing loans are granted to improve borrowers' living conditions.

While financially successful, the real wealth of the CARD bank lies in its psychological empowerment, which influences the community in its economic, social, and educational development. The CARD program proves that women in development can lift themselves out of poverty in an effective and satisfying way by working together in a mutually supportive environment.

It is important to note that the CARD bank is a near-replica of the world renowned Grameen Bank. The brainchild ►

of Professor Muhammad Yunus, who took the first step in challenging existing notions about banking with "the poor" in Bangladesh, the Grameen Bank model has been in existence for 23 years. Professor Yunus has received several Peace Prizes and Honorary Doctorates for his work with the Grameen Bank. His vision has meant the end of poverty for women in many parts of the world.

cient funds, they buy or rent small parcels of land. Women also ensure that the additional income is spent on improving their children's education (rarely their own), renovating their houses (fixing leaking roofs and mud walls and adding rooms) and purchasing medicine. In some rural areas, women and their families rely on agriculture, aquaculture, and animal hus-

the rural poor to improve their per capita income and standard of living. Promoters of microfinance projects in Malaysia (and other countries) have concluded that a contributing factor to the success of the projects is the participation of underemployed women. With the financial assistance of AIM, these women can now make use of their available time to earn additional income for their families.

The CARD program proves that women in development can lift themselves out of poverty in an effective and satisfying way by working together in a mutually supportive environment.

#### **Loans to Women benefit Families**

The Grameen Bank provides women who have no collateral with the opportunity to access both credit and savings facilities that are denied to them through normal banking institutions. The reason that the Grameen Bank's current efforts are focused on very poor women is that these women have proven to be a much better credit risk than very poor men. The Grameen Bank has confirmed that women make the best borrowers because, so far, they have repaid their loans more faithfully than men have. Men generally, but not always, tend to spend money on their own endeavours – sometimes in ways that can be destructive to their families and communities (e.g., gambling, prostitution, and alcohol consumption).<sup>1</sup>

Women, on the other hand, tend to spend money on improving the standard of living of their whole family. Reports from around the world reveal that women initially utilize their loans to improve their businesses, by buying more crops, animals or materials. Once they have suffi-

bandry to increase their incomes. In others, women focus their efforts on garment making, shoe production or acting as agents through buying and selling products or providing a service such as herbal medicine or hairdressing.

Making loans available only to women has not always helped the popularity of the Grameen Bank, but in most countries, now that numerous projects have been tried, its commitment to women has been applauded. Formal banks and credit unions in rural areas have been critical of what they see as "fly by night" NGO intervention, where an NGO will support such a scheme for 2 to 4 years and then leave the region, or turn their funds to other projects, sometimes leaving the community worse off in terms of economic development.

Another microfinance organization is the Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM), which has done so well with its program over the past two decades that the Malaysian government recently provided it with a substantial amount of funding to assist

#### **Assessing the Success**

Members of the academic community have played an important role in the development and evaluation of microcredit projects. For example, Professor Louis Renter-Guerrero from the University of Sonora in Mexico has recently completed the Grameen Dialogue (a special training program for Grameen Bank microfinance replicators) in Dhaka and is enthusiastic about the potential of microfinance to change the lives of many poor women and their families in Mexico. His program, like the one I am working on in Vietnam, is just the beginning of my adventure with women in development.

In my capacity as a faculty member at the Queensland Institute of Technology, I am establishing a microfinance scheme for poor rural women in Ba Ria, Vietnam (in partnership with the Women's Union). Through this work I have had the good fortune of being able to consult with representatives from AIM and CARD. I have also met hundreds of women now in microfinance projects in Asia and feel

privileged to be part of the kind of processes that are increasing their self-confidence, self-reliance, and family income and improving their health, education, and housing.

From the early work of Professor Yunus and the Grameen Bank, to the more recent endeavours of CARD and AIM, microfinance projects are making it possible for millions of people to benefit from borrowing programs. Communities are growing strong because of their creative ideas for local economic development. With women as the catalysts, we can put money on the fact that the lives of the poor and landless will change – and are changing – for the better. **WE**

<sup>1</sup>Diane Elson (1995). Household Responses to Stabilization and Structural Adjustment: Male Bias at the Micro Level. In Diane Elson (Ed.) *Male Bias in the Development Process* (second edition). Manchester University Press.

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#### Further reading:

*Journal of Microfinance - Practitioner and Development Perspectives*  
[www.microjournal.com](http://www.microjournal.com)

*Village Banking Credit for Change*, Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) [www.villagebanking.com](http://www.villagebanking.com)

Author's Note: There is a plentiful supply of information on the Internet for interested readers, but establishing a microfinance program is not for the faint-hearted. However, there are many ways to assist without personally leaping into this incredible economic adventure and there are Grameen Bank advisory groups in most countries who can answer some of your questions.

## A Success Story from Bangladesh

Rebeka Parvin with Sandy Tanny

This is a story about women in the villages of Sherpur and about how, with the help of the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) women's program, they are improving their living conditions. Sherpur is both a town and a second-tier administrative district about 130 kilometres north of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is one of the world's least developed countries. Over 120 million

people are crowded into an area of less than 144,000 sq. km. The land is fertile, but it is flooded regularly. As is common in most developing countries, rural women in Bangladesh are at the absolute bottom of the economic scale. Infant mortality in Bangladesh is 69 per 1000. That is the average. In rural areas, it is higher. An estimated 75 per cent of rural women are illiterate, and only 35 per cent have access to hygienic sanitary facilities.

I worked in Sherpur as a research officer

with the BRDB for 10 years after completing my Master's degree. Like many of my fellow students, I had a dream of contributing to the effort of helping the poorest people in Bangladesh improve their standard of living. Working with the BRDB gave me the chance to fulfill my dream.

The BRDB has a number of programs, but the women's program is its biggest. It is carried on all over Bangladesh, out of offices similar to the one in Sherpur. The program helps rural women to organize and discuss their conditions. It provides training in tailoring, poultry rearing, fish pond development, and handicraft production. It provides loans so that women can put their training to work and produce income. And it brings the women together for weekly hygiene, nutrition, and family planning education sessions. My job was to supervise the village level workers, who monitored how loans were spent, organize the hygiene, nutrition and family planning education sessions and to visit each of the loan groups twice a month, providing encouragement and advice.

To receive a loan, a woman had to join with ten to twenty other women to form a group. They then had to register the group as a Co-operative Society with the government. Each member could receive a loan once a year for an activity in which they had been trained. These loans were repayable with interest.

Noorjahan Begum's experience provides an illustration of how the program works. Noorjahan was a widow living in the village of Madhobpur. Her husband died when she was 30 years old, leaving her with three children (ages 8, 11 and 13) and no source of income. They were without land. He had been a farmer working for others. While he was working, they could barely survive. After he died, the future seemed grim. ▶

## If we could...

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like this:

- 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere, 8 Africans
- 52 women and 48 men
- 70 people of colour and 30 white people
- 70 non-Christians and 30 Christians
- 6 people possess 59 percent of the wealth and all 6 from the U.S.
- 80 live in substandard housing
- 70 are unable to read, 1 has a college education
- 50 suffer from malnutrition
- 11 is near death and 1 near birth
- 1 has a computer

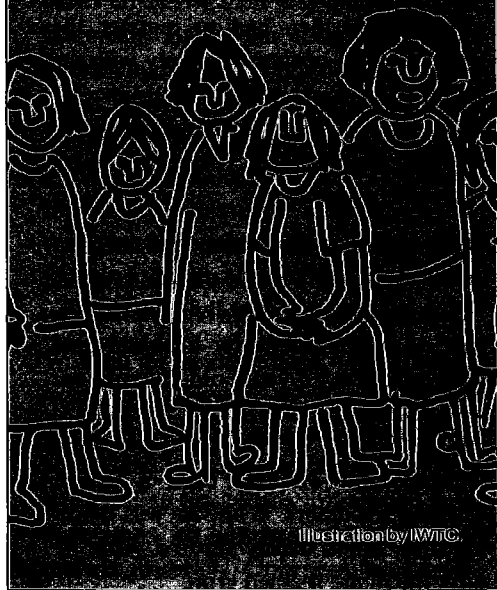


Illustration by IWT/C.

One day, Noorjahan heard about the BRDB women's program. She came to see me at BRDB. I told her about the training and the loans, and explained how to form a society. When Noorjahan went back home she found another nine women who were in situations similar to her own and organized them. She then came to see me again. I helped the group get a loan of about 90,000 taka (or \$334 Canadian) per person.

With her portion of the loan, Noorjahan bought 10 hens, 10 ducks, a rooster, 15 chicks and ducklings, and poultry food. Every two months she sold fully-grown chickens and ducks and then bought more chicks and ducklings. She did so well that, by the end of the first year, she had repaid the entire loan (in small weekly instalments) plus interest.

The following year Noorjahan borrowed money again. This time she bought a rickshaw and a sewing machine. She went to the tailor training course and tailoring then provided her with another source of income. Her eldest son started to pull the rickshaw. Noorjahan continued to raise chickens. By the end of the year, she repaid her second loan.

The third year, Noorjahan borrowed money again. This time she bought a second rickshaw that she leased to a rickshaw puller. Then she took the fish pond development training, dug a small pond, stocked fish, sold them, and the following year enlarged the pond, sold more fish, and made more money!

Within four years Noorjahan had become a self-supporting and well respected woman in her village. She had enough funds to self-finance her activities, so she no longer needed loans. She worked hard, she had determination and drive, and so she repaid, with interest, all the

money that she borrowed.

Within two years of starting to work in Sherpur, I could see signs of the program's success. Most of the women who had formed Co-operative Societies had improved their income levels and their sanitation facilities. By the time I left, 10 years later, women and their families were eating better, they had more money to buy medicine and other essentials, and they had improved their housing. They were even able to dress better. One of the most important results of the program was the confidence that women had gained in themselves. Women now felt at ease speaking with other people. They knew what their needs and problems were and how to go about solving problems together. They were encouraging other women to form Co-operative Societies so they too could improve their standard of living.

When I left Sherpur, it was with pride in the work accomplished. I had arrived in Sherpur with little experience of rural life and of the challenges faced by poor rural women. I had worked very hard with the women there. And I had worked carefully, because I knew that if the program should fail, all rural women in Bangladesh would suffer. With tears in their eyes, the women of Sherpur bid me a sad farewell, showering me with their handicrafts so that I would remember them. **WE**

*Rebeka Parvin was born in Bangladesh, in the district town of Jamalpur, adjacent to Sherpur. She completed her MA in Bengali literature at Dhaka University and then worked as a researcher for BRDB for ten years. She has recently immigrated to Canada with her husband and now lives in Toronto.*

*Sandy Tanny is an adult education teacher and freelance writer. She has worked with Rebeka for the past 6 months. She is a member of the WE International editorial committee.*

# WOMEN ARTISTS CREATING SPACE FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Suzanne Farkas

*I am standing here before you  
I don't know what I bring  
If you can hear the music  
Why don't you help me sing.*

- Leonard Cohen

**C** theorist Theodor Adorno once wrote that while art could not completely solve many social dilemmas, it could solve one problem: the loneliness of spirit. After all, art is derived from the Latin *ars* or *artis* meaning a joining together.

Carol Berker, Dean of Faculty at the Art Institute of Chicago, writes that “among the new generation of artists I encounter everyday, they know they want to find a way to root themselves in community settings, to align themselves with groups outside of the art world and find ways to make serious contributions to society; they no longer want to comment without actively engaging the collective in the process. In the past 10 years increasing numbers of artists have worked in community-based contexts, joining well known and socially engaged artists like Suzanne Lacy, Helen Mayer, and Judy Baca.”<sup>2</sup> Is it mere coincidence that it is women who are at the vanguard of this movement?

In our search for relevant artists to feature in this issue on “Healthy Communities Through Women’s Eyes,” it became apparent that women artists everywhere are actively committed to projects that

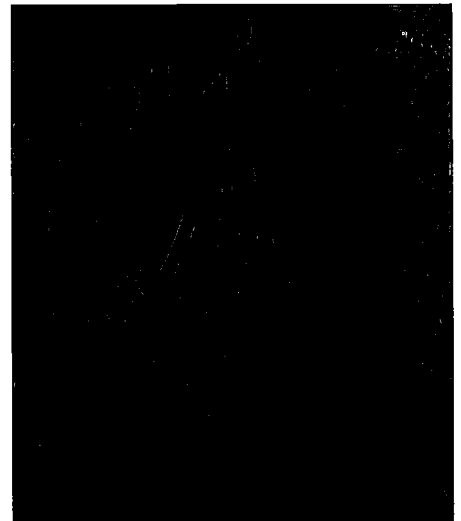
engage with and celebrate the creative and healing forces of “the collective.” Their use of technology, materials, and even their definitions of “collective” vary widely. Yet, like those described below, they all express an element of healing and interactivity while actively building a collective experience. Central to all of these artists’ work is the creative exploration of space and place (either in the virtual or real dimension) – fundamental building blocks in our definitions and sense of community.

## **Ghostnets**

*Ghostnets* is an exciting example of how an artist’s exploration of the traditional

concept of space (as a tangible or real place) can be used to create ephemeral threads of community relationships that thrive beyond its limited physical boundaries.

Aviva Rahmani was suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (a debilitating disease), when she moved from New York City to an isolated island fishing community off the coast of Maine to contemplate the concept of safety and the implications of past abuses. Feeling the need to reach out of her isolation, she began her *Ghostnets* project. It became an evolving 10 year performance art journey that used the physical setting of her home, a former dump site, to examine the



“What the earth needs is a really good housekeeper.”

- Aviva Rahmani

concepts of interdependence with the earth, community, sense of place, health, time, and the frameworks of feminism and ecology.

Her exploration was all-encompassing: art and life truly became one as she and her emerging community documented and transformed the site into a series of ecologically-thriving salt-water marsh wetlands. The complexity and resonance of this project is truly amazing. It opened many dialogues that included, for example, the roles of housewife, caretaker, and steward within the context of the earth as body. Reflecting on this dialogue, she recorded what she had done to the ▶

site, as well as her own literal and emotional housekeeping chores, in a daily *Ghostnets* journal.

Rahmani writes that "as a feminist, it was most interesting to explore the metaphor of housekeeping to an ultimate conclusion: the world is our home and we keep it orderly and healthy for our common well being. It was interesting to layer the experience of meticulous attention to details of the entire process that included my personal well-being. When it came to actual bioengineering of the site, the release of seeing those big machines carving up the former dump and making it into a beautiful habitat, it was exhilarating. It was also amusing throughout to see people struggling with the idea that a single woman was doing this. It was more profound to get across the idea that I was limited in resources both physical and financial. Of course many people never did get that idea."

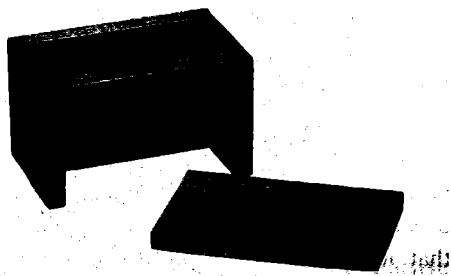
*Ghostnets* has established a rare bond between environmentalism and visual art, a model for seeing the world around us. Its name is taken from the gill nets used by fishermen. When lost overboard, these invisible ghost nets drift through the ocean trapping fish indiscriminately and, in effect, strip-mining the sea. Rahmani claims these nets as a metaphor for how familiar destructive patterns can trap and kill us all. The exploration of her art, workshops, and activism brought a new perspective to her community's memory and understanding of their townsite. She explains: "This was not only a 10 year performance about how individuals can effect global environmental change, but a statement about the resonance of all human interaction."

Rahmani embraces the idea that any relationship is a work of art. Her gradual acceptance into the insular local fishing

culture is a fascinating commentary on community relationships. Since moving to the village in 1990, she has immersed herself in the community, cultivating relationships with neighbors, going out on fishing boats, taking oral histories, and doing extensive interviews. Rahmini continues to expand her definition of community and to experiment with the ecology of place and art. She has been working with vision planning in Israel and in American cities such as Seattle. She recently started singing with the local church choir (an interesting adventure considering her Jewish roots!) and has found a new tool to reach others with her voice not only by integrating it in physical space but also through new technology on her web site: [www.ghostsnet.com](http://www.ghostsnet.com)

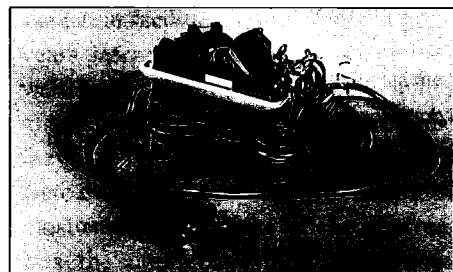
#### Women Beyond Borders

Another example of an artistic exploration of space and physical boundaries working to build community health is the women's collective called *Women Beyond Borders*, a cross-cultural exhibition connecting women around the world. *Women Beyond Borders* is an unprecedented grassroots collaboration involving over 500 artists and sponsors, that originated in Santa Barbara, California, in 1992. Collaborators contacted curators in 30 countries who each invited up to twelve women artists to participate. Each artist received an identical miniature wooden box as a point of departure. The boxes – historically sym-



The original box provided to artists.

bolic of a gift, vessel, shrine, treasure, and hope – have been transformed in a myriad of ways via sculpture, painting, mixed media, and photography. The celebration of the results of this endeavor has included many forms, including exhibition spaces in



USA - Wired f-e-mail by artist Victoria Vesna.

shopping malls and community centres to internationally recognized museum spaces.

*Women Beyond Borders* is a timely endeavor trying to bring together women's visions at the end of the century. It affects and engages people while cutting across all borders – physical, political, religious, racial – as it travels around the world. It is about dialogue, a gathering of women as they identify themselves and speak for themselves. As Jony Waite, curator of the National Museum, in Nairobi, Kenya, remarks: "What a lovely simple yet important idea. In Kenya women have been subjugated for years as chattel, but recently many have begun finding their voices and power and it is good to see. *Women Beyond Borders* is an enormous step in enriching and connecting us."

Engaging community and investigating boundary and physical space are at the heart of this project. Again, the artistic creation of a simple physical space – a box – has opened the imagination of all and transformed not only the artists but also the community around them. *Women Beyond Borders* has traveled around the world and has been viewed by thousands



of people in over twelve countries. School children of all ages have been enlisted to participate and have created expressive interpretations of their own boxes.

*Women Beyond Borders* continues to seek curators and new countries interested in joining the experience and community. They can be reached through their web site ([www.womenbeyondborders.org](http://www.womenbeyondborders.org)) or [Lorart@aol.com](mailto:Lorart@aol.com).

### Momentum

While the artist's fascination with space and place is a traditional one, new technology is revolutionizing not only communications but also artistic imagination. Some new media artists are using the web as a tool to expand the collaborative process, redefining concepts of relational space, community, and the artwork itself. Michelle Teran is one such media artist. She and her artist collaborator, Slavica Ceperkovic, initiated a cyberweb project called *Momentum* ([www.liveart.org](http://www.liveart.org)). Teran is fascinated with the process of spontaneous and interactive art, and the challenges of creating non-linear, non-hierarchical, and synergistic interactions through artistic exploration. Her experiments in art are living laboratories in social learning that cross national and physical boundaries. Space is expanded and timelines collapsed into a single but continual moment.

Teran's *Momentum* project was a weekend of ambient theatre and live art activities placed in a social setting. It was coordinated by Ryerson Polytechnical University in Toronto and Motherboard, Bergen Electronic Art Centre, and the Society for Old and New Media in Amsterdam. Participating artists worked together with an analog and digital video mixing sound, media-based and sculpture installation, net art, and live perfor-

mances. Three performance spaces in Norway, Canada, and the Netherlands were joined by the use of the Internet as a platform for exchange.

The performance space in Toronto was a social lab: a space designed to facilitate a two-day dialogue between space, sound, image, and live and tele-presence. It was divided into work and play stations with lounge islands placed in between. This allowed the participants and visitors to wander through the spaces, sit, relax, and even become a performer in the event. Mediated viewing and participation was also possible from anywhere in the world through the Internet connection. The event was commissioned by Nordic Art Biennale's Momentum which is taking place in Moss, Norway, throughout the summer of 2000 (visit [www.momentum.no](http://www.momentum.no)).

Teran's work builds on the history of traditional visual arts. Yet the new technology has inspired women artists to explore its many facets. For example, "Digital Me" was a digital art site in which a collective of artists used new interactive multi-media concepts to build on a tradition of storytelling. At [www.Studioxx.org](http://www.Studioxx.org), a virtual space women's collective curates and sponsors the "Maids in Space" feminist web-based art event. This creative event shows the power of this new conceptual tool to expand our perceptions of space and place and community through creative exploration. Featured artist Leah Lazaruk's *Virtual Squat* exhibit is such an example. A powerful piece of dancing images, never lingering quite long enough to be identified, she describes it as "the first online experience of squat life."

I have provided here just a sample of women's art which is creating spaces for healthy communities. Artistic endeavors allow for unique and renewed perspec-

tives, and its fostering of individual expression is a fundamental building block for healthy communities. Yet as we can see through the eyes of these artists, it can also challenge perceptions, and actively create collective experience and identity as well as its own places for healthy communities to grow. Women everywhere are inviting us to join them in creative celebration. As we look to the future let us hope that a space continues to grow for women's creative visions. **WE**

*Suzanne Farkas is an environmental health consultant and a lecturer at Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto. She is a member of the WE International editorial committee.*

### Related reading:

Griselda Pollock (Ed.). *Generations & Geographies in the Visual arts: Feminist Readings*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Lisa Bloom (Ed.). *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.



MATCH International Centre supports women's groups in developing countries which are striving to enhance the status of women and to eliminate violence. You can read about this year's projects and the issues women are dealing with by going to:

[www.web.net/~matchint](http://www.web.net/~matchint)  
or by calling (613) 238-1312  
1102-200 Elgin St. Ottawa,  
Ontario, K2P1L5, Canada

# Women Moving Mountains:

Women Work to Close the Occupational Gender Safety Gap

Ellen Roskam

*Thanks to a small but powerful initiative of the International Labour Organization (ILO), women around the world are learning the potential of their shared experience. Now, through an occupational safety, health, and environment (OSHE) training program focusing on women, they are finding ways to expand personal possibilities and develop creative health promotion strategies for trade unions and communities.*

**W**omen represent some 40 per cent of the global workforce, yet their jobs and the health and safety risks particular to them remain virtually unstudied. Corporate and government policy-makers have yet to give these issues adequate consideration. Occupational safety, health, and environment is often seen as a man's domain, where women are out of their league. This perspective not only limits the empowerment of women but also the drive for, and the nature of, effective solutions to workplace problems. The equation is simple: globally, if more people are trained and made aware of the importance of OSHE, the numbers and the staggering social costs of workplace fatalities, accidents, and environmental catastrophes may be significantly reduced.

Women are conspicuously absent as decision-makers in corporate boardrooms and trade union offices. Women workers face many hardships: they find it difficult to advance in the rank and file of a trade union; they lack support from the male leadership for organizing and conducting OSHE training courses; and they have difficulty ensuring that other women participate in such training courses. For women, demonstrating particular competencies or advancing in union ranks often

provokes jealousy from colleagues. Furthermore, they may even experience obstacles just because they are women. As a result, women workers often feel intimidated when addressing technical health and safety subjects, especially in front of a group of male workers.

The lack of participation by women in solutions affecting their own health is exacerbated by the fact that women are often reluctant to get involved in officially designated Occupational Health and Safety Committees. They feel that they lack the critical technical skills and expertise - a belief that only increases the cycle of low self-esteem and feelings of incompetence.

The ILO recognizes that, in order for real change to take place, safety and health professionals need to demystify technical areas, empower workers, focus on the risks particular to jobs performed by women on the job, and encourage unions to activate Women's Committees as well as involve women in Health and Safety Committees. This reflects the recognition that the health and safety risks to women in jobs performed by women are different from those experienced by men. For example, because tools and personal protective equipment (PPE) are designed for

men, women often face a situation where their size renders the equipment and PPE ineffective, thereby increasing their risk of injury or illness. In addition, women's bodies react differently to certain chemical exposures than men's bodies. Failure to study the effects particular to women, then, leaves an "occupational gender safety gap" that causes women to be unnecessarily exposed.

## **From New Delhi to Manila: Globalizing Women's OSHE**

In an attempt to reduce the barriers to women's participation in health and safety in their workplaces, the ILO sponsored a series of workshops with the help of a grant from the Norwegian government. The success of the first workshop in New Delhi, India in 1993 led to others in India and the Philippines, and inspired other union safety programs aimed at supporting and utilizing women in the workplace.

To date, this ILO effort has provided training for some 60 women union members throughout the Philippines and India in conducting health and safety workshops for their respective unions. The impact of these women has been tremendous, as they have gone on to train several hundred other workers in health and safety issues. They have won the support

of their mostly-male union and company management and, as a result, have continued to organize their own training workshops. Some of them have gone on to do further community health work, which again impacts many more thousands of people.

These “train-the-trainer” workshops helped the women to understand the importance of their role in their unions and their potential to become agents of change. By working together and creating a supportive group environment in the classroom, the workshops empowered the women to carry out newly adopted roles with their newly developed skills in the field.

“I don’t want my daughter to grow up feeling inadequate and uneducated like I did. I want her to feel in control of her life. This is why I want to gain these new skills and pursue this direction.” This powerful statement reveals the motivation behind one Filipina trade unionist’s desire to become an OSHA instructor for her trade union.

The workshops required the participants to leave their homes and jobs to travel to



Kalpana speaks on the role of co-op movements, Jalgon, India

tural and personal stress that this presented, no one left the program and all barriers seemed to be overcome.

Seeing and hearing each other tackle technical issues was extremely effective for the women participants. It built the self-confidence needed to face all male or mixed groups of workers. The classroom was designed to be a “safe zone” with the participants as owners. They were encour-

aged for critical consciousness,<sup>1</sup> trainees underwent the process of relating what was being discussed and practiced in the classroom and in the workplace to their own life experiences. In contrast to lecture-based learning, this consciousness-building process allowed the trainees to translate how workplace and environmental hazards could affect them and their families, and to build up the confidence to think creatively about ways of

## Failure to study the effects particular to women leaves an “occupational gender safety gap” that causes women to be unnecessarily exposed.

the city where the workshop was held for at least one week at a time. Building a strong sense of solidarity among each group of trainees took time, the outcome of days and nights spent together. Many women had never spoken or instructed in public, some had never traveled alone or so far from home before. Despite the cul-

aged to utilize the training space as they saw fit. For example, trainees decorated the walls of their classrooms with “risk maps” visually depicting the location of different hazards at their workplaces.

Using participatory techniques and the principles of Paulo Freire’s “education

addressing problems. Equally important, the process created a greater understanding of group dynamics and provided the facilitation skills needed to work effectively with their fellow workers – skills which they could then use to reach the goals of heightened awareness of workplace safety, health, and environmental

issues. In the classroom, women workers benefited from practicing their role as OSHE trainers in front of a highly supportive group. This was a key element in building self-confidence and creating successful outcomes.

#### **From "Zero" to Bombay's "Best Citizen"**

"I was a zero when I came to the first workshop," said Kalpana, a computer operator at the port in Bombay, India. Kalpana carried out her union work on her lunch hours, in the evenings, and on weekends and volunteered to attend two OSHE train-the-trainer workshops.

Kalpana had never taught or organized workers before the first workshop. In the first workshop, sixteen Indian women learned participatory and empowerment training techniques and studied technical OSHE material. At the end of the first workshop, Kalpana had developed enough self-confidence to go out and begin organizing numerous OHSE training workshops for her local union. Ten months later, a second workshop reinforced their mastery of the technical OSHE material. After the second workshop, Kalpana was elected to the Women's Steering Committee of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITWF).

Today, Kalpana organizes and teaches trade union workshops on OSHE, has gone on to attend a three-week international OSHE trade union training course in Israel, and has addressed 3,000 delegates from 120 countries at the ITWF World Centenary Congress in London. Among the 84 speakers present, she was one of only four women asked to speak. She has also organized contract workers for wage revision, participated in the ILO's XIVth World Congress on OSHE in Spain, and speaks publicly in her community about HIV/AIDS.

In India, Kalpana has not stopped moving and shaking the Transport and Dock Workers' Union and the City of Bombay. She has borne a heavy burden as a woman activist in her union. She also undertook an individual initiative to organize non-union ports. Doing what others in her union had not tried to do, she was labeled, scandalized, and her reputation was tarnished. But she is a crusader who keeps going. On February 1, 2000, the Municipal Corporation named her "Best Citizen of Bombay." Kalpana and her sisters demonstrated their self-transformation into motivators and transmitters of OSHE information and created a multiplier effect. Experiences training women workers in the Philippines yielded similar results.

One group of women can end up training literally thousands of workers. In industrialized countries the results are the same. LaVerne, an American woman working for a gas company, was required to answer customer billing complaints at an average of one phone call every one minute and 69/100ths of a second, while remaining friendly at all times. She was sent by her union to an OSHE train-the-trainer workshop. Having her self-confidence built up by the training, the practice, and the supportive environment, LaVerne went on to become the national director of training for her union's OSHE department. Today, moving more mountains, LaVerne is the director of an Occupational Health Center, responsible for an entire city (and she is still friendly!).

#### **Against Barriers, Endless Possibilities**

The success of these women have provided the inspiration to move into other arenas with women workers. In Brazil, for example, women widowed by occupational accidents will be given the

opportunity to become transmitters and motivators of the safety culture on construction sites, with remuneration from the Civil Construction union. This program will help to mitigate the poverty that often engulfs workplace widows who may become marginalized by their plight. Instead, women in this program will be encouraged to participate in on-the-jobsite literacy training and will be involved in training seminars where they can discuss prevention, rehabilitation, return-to-work policies, and access to treatment services.

This is just one example of an innovative way to provide women living on the edge with a new future in which they can move from feelings of isolation into a new sense of solidarity with others facing a similar situation. In the Philippines, women trainees illustrated this sense of solidarity with poignant drawings showing themselves connected to sister trade unionists on other continents by an imaginary umbilical cord. Many of the ILO workshop graduates have continued to keep in touch with their classmates.

In our global village, the experiences and successes of one group of women workers can directly impact the lives of another. There does indeed appear to be an invisible umbilical cord between these groups of women, nourishing their efforts and giving life to others in faraway places who they will probably never meet. The barriers are many, but the possibilities seem endless. **WE**

<sup>1</sup>Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.

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# Fiddling While Rome Burns?

Sustainable Communities and the Politics of Citizen Participation

Sherilyn MacGregor

Increased citizen participation in local governance is being touted as the answer to problems ranging from violence in schools to the global environmental crisis. From different ends of the political spectrum, arguments abound for the benefits of more local decision-making, more community consultation, and more direct democracy. Neoconservative governments want to hear from stakeholders (but not “special interest” groups), while left-wing social movements demand citizen control to put power in its place. But does *more* citizen participation really

of Hamilton resident and environmental activist Burke Austin, at the acclaimed citizen participation process of creating healthy and sustainable communities in Hamilton-Wentworth, Ontario.

## Green and Healthy Hamilton?

Since its rather humble birth in Toronto in 1984, the “healthy community” concept has grown into a movement that includes thousands of cities around the world. The original intention of the Toronto visionaries like Dr. Trevor Hancock was to advocate a more holistic

the 1990s) and places greater emphasis on governance devolved to the local level.

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) led the way in this shift by establishing a *Local Agenda 21 Model Communities Programme* in 1994. The *Model Communities Programme* was a 4 year action research project aimed at helping local governments implement Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, the “global action plan for sustainable development,” which was declared at the Earth Summit in 1992. The programme

Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights gives citizens the right to participate in environmental policy-making but does not establish the substantive right to clean and healthy environment.

lead to better decisions and healthier communities? Or does it, in practice, amount to a lot of busy work that keeps participants fiddling with red tape while Rome burns? And what does it mean that the vast majority of volunteer participants in local governance issues – education, health care, air quality, pesticide use – are already overburdened women?

Recognizing that much of the community planning discourse is rather uncritical about the politics of participation itself, this article considers these questions by taking a close-up look, through the eyes

and community-based approach to health than the conventional treatment-oriented health care model provides. People are healthy or not depending on the quality of their immediate social, economic, and natural environments. Improve the overall quality of life and strengthen community bonds, so the logic goes, and a healthier (and less care-costly) population will result. While such reasoning remains central, the now-international movement has broadened over the past 15 years to include the concept of “sustainability” (the environmental buzzword of

involved fourteen model municipalities in twelve countries that were asked to document and evaluate how their local planning processes managed to observe the principles of sustainable development.

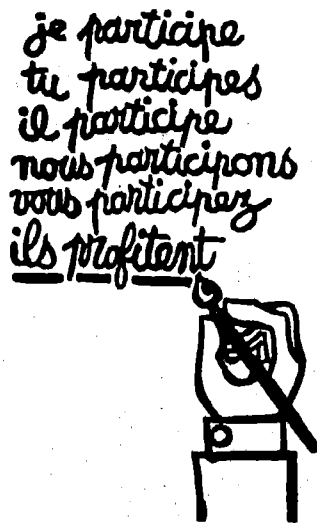
The only Canadian municipality selected by ICLEI to be a model community is Hamilton-Wentworth, a municipality that is not only rife with environmental problems (it is the home of Canada's steel industry and the site of one of the worst industrial accidents – the Plastimet fire – in recent Canadian history) but also well-▶

known for its sustainable community plans. In addition to being named a role model by an international environmental organization, Hamilton-Wentworth has twice received Canadian Environmental Achievement Awards for local government by Environment Canada (the federal ministry of the environment). In 1995 the region was profiled, along with eighteen other cities from around the world, at the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup> Recently, both the Ontario Professional Planner's Institute and the Canadian Institute of Planners have given awards to Hamilton-Wentworth's planning department for its innovative planning projects. In May, 1998, the *Hamilton Spectator* reported that an (unnamed) Ontario social organization had declared Hamilton to be the most liveable city in Ontario, if not the world.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Hamilton-Wentworth has an impressive history of sustainable community planning. Since the late 1980s, politicians and planners in Hamilton-Wentworth have worked, with innumerable rounds of public consultation with thousands of citizens, to develop a sustainable community vision. This vision is now expressed in *Vision 2020: The Sustainable Region*, a policy document that contains over 400 recommendations including several for environmental protection and improvement, compact urban design, diversifying the local economy, and "empowering the community." One of the elements that apparently makes the document so impressive is that it was developed – and re-developed – through a participatory process that made a point of including people from diverse communities with a wide range of interests and concerns.

In the past 10 years *Vision 2020* has

given rise to a host of local initiatives, many largely suggested and/or organized by citizens. Despite the large number of community initiatives, however, there remains a concern that even more civic participation and a stronger commitment to the principles of sustainability are needed. In March, 2000, a community-based non-profit organization, called "Action 2020," was established to take over the management and initiatives of *Vision 2020*. One of the objectives of Action 2020 is "to broaden community participation in activities that achieve *Vision 2020*." Clearly, in Hamilton-Wentworth, citizen participation is seen



From a 1960s French student poster. In English, I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you participate... They profit.

as a significant means to an unquestionably important end.

Upon closer consideration through the eyes of an actual citizen of Hamilton-Wentworth, however, neither the community nor the process itself seems terribly "healthy." While planners and political officials may choose to measure sustainability by the number of citizens who participate, citizens themselves are growing disillusioned with the process that

seems to take up so much of their time while making little difference in the actual quality of their everyday lives.

### Reality Check: Hamilton through Burke Austin's Eyes

Burke Austin is a community activist who lives in a working-class neighbourhood in the north-east end of Hamilton. She is raising her family in the house she grew up in, a house from which she can see (and smell) the Dofasco and Stelco smoke stacks. Her community is home to two closed toxic waste dumps, a sewage treatment plant, and the region's garbage incinerator that is Canada's largest producer of dioxin emissions. For the past 5 years she and her group, Community Action Parkdale East (CAPE), have been fighting the expansion of the Red Hill Expressway which is planned to cut right through their part of town, decimating 47,000 trees and destroying the only green space left in their neighbourhood. In the process of the fight, the group discovered that the Red Hill Creek, which also runs through their community, is contaminated with PCBs 30,000 times over the provincial standards. As a result, CAPE members are investing a lot of time taking legal action - with the help of the Sierra Legal Defence Fund - which would force the City to pay a fine for the PCB contamination.

Clearly *this* Hamilton, the Hamilton experienced from a less-privileged, grass-roots vantage point, is very different from the one celebrated by ICLEI and in the media. Says Austin: "*Vision 2020* was a product of a lot of time and thought by some of the most civic minded people in Hamilton-Wentworth. It is a dream of the most wonderful place to live: a place with clean air and water, no homelessness, green space, sustainability, and economic vitality. This being the Steel City,

inundated with air, water, and land pollution as the by-product of our economic engine, this vision looks wonderful on paper (even though the indicators are not being met) and [it will be a] huge challenge to say the least.”

In addition to leading CAPE in the strug-

are also unpaid and undervalued. Often “housewives” are called upon by local committees because it is assumed that they have a lot of spare time to donate to improving the community “for their children.” There is often little recognition that the job of raising a family is time-con-

really benefits from participatory processes? In fact, she threatened to resign when she heard that an Action 2020 executive director might be hired for \$98,000 a year. While Austin and her colleagues spend a lot of time voluntarily participating in local decision making processes -

While officials measure sustainability by the number of citizens who participate, citizens are growing disillusioned with a process that takes up so much time while making little difference in the quality of their lives.

gle for environmental justice in her neighbourhood, Austin has been an active participant in many of the advisory committees and stakeholder task forces in Hamilton. She has become a well-known community leader in the past 5 years and has learned a lot about politics in the process. One thing she’s learned is that being an active citizen is a lot of hard work. Being called upon to participate means attending meetings, researching government policy, networking with other environmental groups, and monitoring the air and water quality in the area (all the more important since the provincial government cut its staff members who would normally do the monitoring). All of this takes up a lot of time. Austin finds it a lot like a full time job, minus the pay cheque. And it is sometimes difficult to live the life of an activist while raising a large family with young kids who also need her time while trying to get by on her husband’s modest salary.

Such is the reality of many of the women who get involved in local quality of life campaigns: they are constantly having to juggle their volunteer work with household and family responsibilities which

suming enough or that women’s concerns about local issues go way beyond their own backyards. Austin has found that women (and men) from the north end are also stereotyped and “talked down to” by the officials who invite them to City Hall. Could it be that working-class people make desirable participants because it is erroneously assumed that they are less knowledgeable about local politics?

Meanwhile, the processes involved in local community planning benefit a range of people (most of whom are white and male) who make good money being professional planners, lawyers, politicians, academics, and health policy consultants. Yet they increasingly rely on the volunteer time and labour of women like Burke Austin to monitor the health of their own communities and to fill the seats at the public consultations needed to validate progressive-sounding plans.

After spending a lot of time being active in local environmental processes, Austin has recently become a board member of Action 2020. This has given her even deeper insight into the real politics at play at the local level. She now wonders: who

with sincere commitment to improving the quality of life in Hamilton - some powerful players continue to make deals behind the scenes that determine the outcome of the process before it even begins. For example, the Red Hill Expressway is going to be approved in spite of the consultation process that included CAPE and other community groups who strenuously oppose the development.

In the end, Burke Austin suggests that it was “...the Old Boys Club that put the rubber stamp on *Vision 2020*. I think they made it part of our Official Plan, not because they believed in it, but because they liked getting the awards. It makes us look good in the international community and that promotes prosperity and drives the economic engine. And we can’t forget about the perks! The trips and the fancy dinners at the Chamber of Commerce followed by a boat cruise in the west end of the Harbour where it is pretty and green and cleaned up. They tout being a wonderfully sustainable region while making the most environmentally disastrous decisions that you would ever want to see.”

In Austin's mind, the vast potential of local citizens to make Hamilton a better place to live is being high-jacked by an elite group of people with a pro-development agenda: "Action 2020 might lead to some very significant improvements in the quality of life in Hamilton-Wentworth. IF we-the-public elected a Council that believed in the vision, who understood the concept, and were dedicated to using it to base their decisions upon. Then it might just work. But all the concerned volunteers like myself cannot make things change and chart a course for the vision until we have the political will in check."

#### Local Governance and Healthy Scepticism

In 1969 American planning theorist Sherry Arnstein wrote an excellent, and still highly relevant, article entitled "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" in which

she argued that "participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless."<sup>3</sup> Her central message was that we need to be able to distinguish between participation that leads to citizen control and the kind of participation that can be co-opted and manipulated to support the desires of the municipal power elite. It is this kind of critical analysis, it seems to me, and those based in women's grounded understandings of the way local politics work, that is needed in discussions about healthy communities.

It might be objected that healthy or sustainable community visions really are all about citizen empowerment and the creation of liveable places for all. While it may be the case that there are well-meaning planners with the best of intentions (as there are in Hamilton-Wentworth), it is also unquestionable that these planners are working alongside one of the most right-wing, pro-business governments in North America. "Citizen participation" to Mike Harris, and political leaders just like him all over the world, means less work for government which in turn means lower costs to taxpayers and more votes in the next election. Downloading the responsibility for healthy communities and ecosystems to unpaid and overworked citizens (the majority of whom are women) is a sure way to create the illusion that progress is being made when in fact very little is being done to redistribute wealth or to avert the ecological crisis.

In Ontario, just the opposite is occurring: the gap between rich and poor is growing, more control is being given to transnational corporations, and environmental protection has been sacrificed for tax cuts.<sup>4</sup> The Common Sense Revolution has been particularly harmful to women who rely on social services in order to have a

decent quality of life. Thousands of women are forced to fill in the gaps of a downsized health care system by looking after family members – without compensation – at home. They call this "community care." How can truly sustainable communities be created in this context?

Women have an important role to play in movements to make local neighbourhoods better places to live, work, and play. They have been doing so well before the advent of the "healthy community" concept. So it is important to keep in mind a healthy dose of scepticism that can protect us from being duped into legitimizing empty processes that serve dominant new right agendas. Simply more citizen participation is not the answer: for lasting social, economic, political, and environmental change we must go much deeper. **WE**

<sup>1</sup>Creating a Sustainable Community: Hamilton-Wentworth's Vision 2020 Canada. <http://www.unesco.org/most/usa4.htm>

<sup>2</sup>John Hughes, "Welcome to the best city on the planet" *Hamilton Spectator*, May 26, 2000, DD1,3

<sup>3</sup>Sherry Arnstein (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of American Institute of Planners*, Vol. 35, 216-224.

<sup>4</sup>Since the Harris government came to power in 1995, the Ministry of the Environment has had its budget cut by 40% and Ontario has become the second worst polluter in North America (second only to Texas). The recent Walkerton water contamination disaster may be further evidence of the costs of downloading environmental monitoring to local communities.

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## "It's Really Hitting Home"

### The Home as a Site for Long-term Health Care

Kim England on behalf of The Hitting Home Team, Toronto.

#### AS LONG-TERM HOME HEALTH

care programmes and markets have proliferated in Canada, affected homes end up functioning simultaneously as personal or family dwellings *and* sites for complex, labour-intensive health care work. Discussions of "healthy communities" often neglect what goes on in private households and the work that individuals (mostly women) are increasingly expected to do to ensure the health of the population. Communities are only as healthy as the people who live, work, and play in them. Can a community be healthy if a large number of people are struggling to take care of themselves and their family members? What are the costs (financial, emotional, physical, etc.) incurred by the care-givers? This is an issue that is of particular relevance to women because previous research shows that women perform most care-giving activities (whether paid or unpaid), and, at least among the elderly, are a high proportion of the long-term care recipients. We know very little about how home care systems actually function or about the consequences of this system for care recipients, households, homes or home health care workers. The Hitting Home Team is working on providing the first comprehensive description of Canadian homes where long-term care services are provided and received.

"The home" has been theorized and studied by feminist scholars, and putative importance has been ascribed to it by

others, but what is often overlooked is that the home is simultaneously a symbolic place, a physical place, a work place, and a social space. Although there are some notable exceptions, little is known about how home care is affected by either the dynamics of gender, class, and ethnicity or by structural and organizational conditions. In fact the closer one gets to the actual homes where care is delivered and received, the less research there has been! Our research team is addressing these issues, emphasising the social and spatial relations and material conditions that characterize long-term home care, and we are also taking account of issues of regional difference, gender, ethnicity, and class.

We hope our findings will be of interest to policy makers in the health, social service, housing, and employment sectors at all levels of government; home care service administrators and providers; housing developers; and advocacy groups. Although our research deals with Ontario, we are sure that many of the findings will be applicable to the rest of Canada because provincial home care programs do not differ significantly in terms of their for-profit and not-for-profit provider mix, services, clientele, funding schemes, and problematic issues. Ultimately, we hope that our findings will contribute to the design of equitable home care systems in which services are provided and received in circumstances that do not compromise other important

aspects of Canadian cultural life. **WE**

For more information go to:

<http://www.nursing.utoronto.ca/research/units/hcerc.html>

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*Kim England is Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Washington in Seattle. She is also an Adjunct Professor of Geography at the University of Toronto.*

*The "Hitting Home" research team is led by Patricia McKeever (Faculty of Nursing and Director of The Home Care Evaluation and Research Centre, University of Toronto). The Research Coordinator is Hyacinth Irving (The Home Care Evaluation and Research Centre, University of Toronto). The Co-Investigators are Jan Angus (Nursing, University of Toronto), Mary Chipman (Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto), Alf Dolan (Institute of Biomedical Engineering, University of Toronto), Isabel Dyck (School of Rehabilitation Sciences, University of British Columbia), Joan Eakin (Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto), Denise Gastaldo (Nursing, University of Toronto), and Blake Poland (Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto). The 'Community Partners' include three Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) (Toronto, Durham, and Manitoulin-Sudbury), three provider organizations that employ home care workers (not-for-profit: VHA Home Healthcare and the Victorian Order of Nurses; and for-profit: WeCare), the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, and an indoor air quality testing business (Sporametrics).*

# Listen Up! Women are Talking About...

## Strategies to Reduce Social Risks for HIV/AIDS Infection and Illness Progression

Stephanie Kellington, Monique Desroches, Gina Kjar, Sharyle Lyndon, Wendy Wartman, Tom-morrow Blackwind, Bunsy Jir, Natalie King, Freda Lockhart.

**CONTRARY TO TENACIOUS** stereotypes of HIV/AIDS as a gay male disease, women make up the fastest growing group of people newly infected globally. In Canada, figures prior to 1995 show that about nine per cent of new infections occur among women, while 1999 figures show women constituted approximately twenty four per cent of all new infec-

employment, and racial and gender discrimination affect people's health, and those who have less access to resources, (due to these and other factors) are generally less healthy than others in their community.

Listen Up! is an innovative project that was designed by the Positive Women's Network and AIDS Vancouver, its two

Living in poverty makes it hard for women to access nutritious food and safe water, adequate housing, and necessary medical and complementary therapies - all of which are critical to maintaining health whether a woman is HIV positive or negative. As one woman noted, being a single parent can make the situation even more challenging: "I get \$756 per month [on income assistance] and my rent is \$725 for a two-bedroom apartment. Imagine having to provide for your children on that!"

Further, HIV research that ignores gendered power dynamics in intimate relationships ignores the lived reality of many women. Being in an abusive relationship puts a woman at risk for HIV and being HIV positive can make it harder for her to leave such relationships. For example, one woman reported that: "A couple of years ago I was living with one individual and... he was a very violent person and I found that [catching HIV from me] was one of the things that he wanted to use against me in order for me to stay with him."

Phase Two (November 1999 - April 2000) focused on identifying what changes women felt would help reduce or eliminate the barriers that had been identified previously. The first barrier that we eliminated was a methodological one. Rather than asking women to act as research participants or "subjects," who had to tell

## Creating healthy communities of and for women means finding ways to deal with the global realities of HIV/AIDS.

tions. Currently, UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that women comprise over forty per cent of the more than 30 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world. Increasingly, it is becoming clear that creating healthy communities of and for women means finding ways to deal with the global realities of HIV/AIDS.

The links between social inequality and HIV infection are well documented. Women in Canada are at increasing risk for HIV infection and illness progression for the same reason as women and other marginalized groups around the world are: we share a position on the bottom rung of the social ladder in inequalitarian societies. Social factors such as income level,

main sponsors, to investigate and document the specific pathways through which these social factors affect women's risk for HIV infection, if they were currently HIV negative, as well as their risk for illness progression if they were already HIV positive.

Phase One of the project (May - October 1999) involved a series of six focus groups designed to discover, with women, what they saw as the socially-determined barriers to achieving their best sexual health. During these discussions five key factors were repeatedly identified by women: poverty, power in intimate relationships, relationships with health care providers, discrimination, and problems with AIDS services and service organizations.

their problems to an outside "expert," we asked the same women, "the ex-research participants," to work as peer researchers in their own communities. To do this we encouraged them to develop appropriate research tools, hold focus groups and interviews, analyze the information gathered, and draw conclusions from it.

Nine women, recruited from the communities we had worked with in Phase One, completed a two week research training course. Since then, these women have conducted 44 interviews and six focus groups in their self-identified home communities. Having peers conduct the research gave the project access to women who might otherwise never have participated and created conditions of increased trust and openness during the interviews and groups. As one participant wrote in her evaluation: "For the first time I felt comfortable talking about me."

For the peer researchers themselves, being part of the project has meant a changed self-image, support, and increased knowledge. As Wendy Wartman notes: "...the community that has developed [around the project] has been amazingly supportive. It's the first time since I've been diagnosed that I feel that there's someone that a) cares and b) has some glimmering of understanding of what it's been like." And Bunsy Jir recounted: "What I learned about HIV and AIDS is to educate yourself around safe sex and clean needles, when shared."

Peer researchers have taken ownership of the research, analysis, and information dissemination process. They decided where and how groups should be held, analyzed transcripts, and conducted conference presentations. Therefore, when it comes to talking about what women in their own communities saw as necessary to make those communities healthier, it is

best to hear from the peer researchers themselves:

**Monique Desroches:** "My community is the Christian University I attend in Langley, BC. I spoke with my peers to get solutions from various perspectives. None of the women I spoke to were HIV positive but a few had immediate family members who are. This surprised me as I thought I was alone in my Christian community. I am HIV positive. The one obstacle that all women on campus identified with was safety. Our university is in a rural location and bus service stops well before classes do. We have begun circulation of a petition requesting later public bus service and a school sponsored shuttle bus. We are in negotiations with our student association and it looks quite hopeful."

**Gina Kjar** (who worked with positive women): "The strategies that the focus group came up with concentrated on poverty and substance use issues. They were concerned with finding ways to decrease the abuse of power by persons holding the "keys to the kingdom." Some of the strategies women suggested were to be able to have physicians issue medications daily to those who were in danger of misusing them, and having the Ministry of Social Services set up an opt-in system of accounts with grocery stores and clothing stores so that basic necessities could be met while, for those for whom it was an issue, the temptation to "blow your cheque on stuff you shouldn't" would be lessened. Another thing women suggested was to teach women's health issues in schools, focusing the courses on how to recognize dysfunctional relationships and learning basic life skills.

**Sharyle Lyndon:** "I feel great pride to have been involved with such a diverse group of women. As a gay 50 year old long-term survivor with AIDS, I chose to



Illustration by IWTC.

work with family, friends, and care-providers (paid and unpaid) of people with AIDS (PWAs) both alive and deceased. I had noted both locally and abroad that those affected by AIDS were being left out, both in issues and support, especially once the PWA was deceased. Awareness of their issues and support needs should be the first priority. With more awareness we could take action (such as support and networking groups). We have been losing the precious contributions these people truly make and I look forward to the results this project is destined to put into effect."

**Wendy Wartman** worked with a group of professional women. Women in her group focused on solutions for increasing community spirit - a feeling of helping and caring for other women. They felt business could play an important role in this by developing "adopt an adult" programs, fostering entrepreneurial programs for low income and marginalized women, and encouraging volunteerism. Some women in this group had also experienced violence in relationships. Wartman says that "It has been my experience that violence in relationships is synonymous with being a woman." Women saw ending violence as key to decreasing risk for HIV infection and illness progression. ▶

Not all of the peer researchers chose to make a submission for this article. Other communities of women we worked with included: current and former substance users; Aboriginal women; those living in Vancouver's downtown east-side (the poorest postal code in all of Canada and an area of the city that made national headlines a few years ago for its skyrocketing HIV infection rates); and those with a dual diagnosis (substance abuse and mental illness).

In the future we aim to focus our energies on community mobilization and advocacy efforts around the issues women we worked with prioritized for us: poverty, access to alternative and complementary therapies, safe streets and safe transit, and resources to help women leave abusive relationships, to name a few. We know that having peers talk to others in their communities has already increased the flow of information and the ability of women within communities to talk about their social situations as they relate to health concerns. We hope to build on this increased openness by bringing women together to create action and build concrete change, ultimately working toward healthier communities for all. **WE**

*At the time of the writing of this article, the Listen Up! Project consisted of eight peer researchers and a project co-ordinator who came together to work on a community-based research project on the social determinants of women's risk for HIV infection and illness progression. We form a diverse group of women ranging in age from 28 to 52 and representing a range of ethno/racial backgrounds including White, First Nations, South Asian and Jewish. Some of us are HIV positive and some are not.*

## Rural Ugandan Women's Views about their Health and Health Services

A Report on research conducted by William Rutakumwa and Naomi T. Krogman

**FOR WOMEN TO CONTRIBUTE** to building healthy communities they must be healthy themselves. In rural Uganda, women don't feel very healthy. Funds for health services in Uganda are scarce, so it's important to make every shilling count. And even if funds aren't available for clinical verification of findings, a study of women's own perceptions can provide useful information for designing more effective services.

This study of 80 women in two communities in Mukono District in central Uganda discovered some interesting things about what health issues women will talk about, what issues they won't talk about, and what issues, being taken completely for granted, would not normally surface as issues at all.

The women interviewed for the study were 15 to 55 years old. They were selected through a random sampling process and interviewed by trained women research assistants over a period of eleven weeks. The interviewers focused primarily on reproductive health. The two most frequently reported health problems were STDs such as syphilis and abdominal pain. Other problems reported included malaria, headache, respiratory health problems, uterus/cervical and breast problems, and physical abuse.

### Women Talk about their Health Problems

Almost 50 per cent of the women interviewed believed they had had syphilis. It is spread, women feel, because men have so many sexual partners. One man spreads the disease to all of his partners. It

is also difficult for women to get money and permission from their husbands to seek treatment, and even more difficult for them to get their husbands to seek treatment. Some of the women explained:

"My husband may refuse to give me money for treatment and I feel embarrassed to keep going to a health facility without money."

"I have syphilis... The health worker told me to go for treatment with my husband but my husband has not yet agreed to go for the treatment."

Many women are continually re-infected, leaving them convinced that symptoms have failed to respond to various drug regimes, and even that syphilis is incurable.

HIV/AIDS are endemic in Uganda. But because of the strong stigma, rural women are uncomfortable discussing it. Everyone, however, knows someone who is affected:

"There is a major issue of AIDS... and this has left many children parentless."

"My married daughter was brought back here when she developed AIDS. Her elder sister died of the same disease and now I have to look after her children without any source of income."

Almost 25 per cent of the rural women interviewed reported abdominal pain. This can originate from many causes. STDs can be the infective agents in pelvic inflammatory disease. Other causes can include fibroids, ovarian cysts, and uterine malposition. Abdominal pain can also be orthopaedic, resulting from skeletal dysfunction. Pregnancy can trigger the pain.

Some of the women interviewed reported breast pain, lumps, and itching. Others reported pain and complications with their uterus and cervix:

"I have pain in my breasts but I have never sought treatment because the pain subsides by itself, but resumes later."

"I always fear that I might have cervical cancer because my uterus (cervical area) and lower abdomen are very sore."

"I feel sickly most of the time. I have low abdominal pains and often feel like my uterus is collapsing."

There is a low level of cancer awareness among rural women. There is slightly more awareness of breast cancer than cervical cancer: "I have heard people talk about cancer of the breast but not that of the cervix."

## Rural health services should be adapted in response to recommendations from rural women.

Only one of the women interviewed said she had had a breast examination by a health care worker. None had had a Pap smear, or knew of health facilities that offered such a service. The women generally viewed health care in terms of treatment, not prevention. They seemed unaware of the importance of early detection.

"I do not need any cancer examination since I do not have that disease."

"I have never been examined for either of the cancers. How do I get examined when I'm not sick?"

Although women in many other countries put issues related to personal security and domestic violence at the top of their list of health concerns, in rural Uganda vio-

lence seems to be considered a normal consequence of marriage. Many of those in this study acknowledged having been physically or verbally abused by their spouses, but they saw this as inevitable, so there was no point in mentioning it.

"My husband sometimes beats me, but it is usually when I have either delayed to serve food, or gone away from home without his consent."

"If you have a home and you are married, you have to bear problems of being beaten or looked down upon by your husband."

The women interviewed for the study reported that as well as being worried about their health, they are constantly worried about financial problems, about the heavy burden of daily chores, and about excessive childbearing.

"My husband does not take care of my children and me... I'm so disgusted with childbearing... I have to walk a long distance to collect water..."

"I have no peace... My husband does not care for me at all. I take financial responsibility for all the children's clothes..."

### Women's Health Service Recommendations

Women participating in the study made numerous recommendations for addressing their health problems. They want health education with a major focus on women's reproductive health. They want family planning education and they want it targeted mainly at men, since it is men who are the major obstacle to their use of family planning services. Some women

suggested the provision of confidential family planning services for those women who are restricted by their husbands from seeking help.

Rural women want free health services provided by health care centres with good facilities and well-trained resident health care providers. They want women's clinics at the health care centres (gynaecological, antenatal and maternity). They want better training of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) and more midwives. Because many deliveries take place in homes rather than in health care institutions, they feel TBAs should be trained and permitted to carry out minor surgical procedures.

The women interviewed suggested that Community Health Workers (CHWs) receive more training and do more community outreach. Most preferred women health care providers because they felt women better understand their problems.

The report from the study recommends that rural health services be adapted in response to recommendations from rural women: family planning education programs for men; more attention to reproductive health problems; reliable diagnostic tests carried out concurrently with education on STDs, violence against women, and other health issues. It recommends a multi-sectoral approach to health promotion: co-ordination of efforts by different government departments and non-governmental organisations and other program interventions that can help alleviate women's stress and contribute to women's overall well-being, in particular by allowing women the time and resources to seek health care. **WE**

*William Rutakumwa is a PhD student in Human Ecology at the University of Alberta and Naomi Krogman is Assistant Professor of Rural Economy at the University of Alberta.*

## WAINIMATE

### VALUING WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL MEDICINE KNOWLEDGE IN FIJI

Kerrie Strathy

On World Health Day 1995, women in Fiji established a grass-roots women's organisation called the Women's Association for Natural Medicinal Therapy (WAINIMATE). WAINIMATE, the Fijian word for medicine, was launched in an effort to promote the use of safe and effective traditional medicines, as well as to encourage the conservation of medicinal plants. These efforts are especially crucial in Fiji because many people live in communities on remote islands where access to modern health services is limited. Where health centres do exist, the supply of medicines is often limited to the three Ps: panadol, pepto bismal, and penicillin.

Although both men and women in Fiji know a number of common herbal treatments, such as the use of guava leaves to treat diarrhea and roman candle leaves to treat fungal infections, these practices tend to be the domain of women more often than men. Women tend to know more medicinal plants than men, and older women tend to know more remedies than younger women.

Interest in regaining knowledge about women's traditional medicine in Fiji emerged during a Women and Forests Workshop held in 1992 immediately following the UN Earth Summit in Rio.

Many of the women who took part in the workshop remembered being given traditional or herbal medicines by their grandmothers as they were growing up, but most had forgotten exactly what they were given, what the medicines were for, and how they were prepared. Several of the women who took part in the workshop went on to organise a regional traditional medicine workshop to bring together their sisters from other Pacific Island Countries (PICs) to discuss the status and availability of traditional medicines in other areas of the region.

Since its beginnings, the members of WAINIMATE have carried out village-based workshops and awareness sessions and have decided to visit every village in Fiji in order to compile a directory of traditional healers. They have lobbied the Ministry of Health in Fiji and the World Health Organisation's (WHO) South

Pacific Program Office, located in Fiji's capital, Suva. They were also involved in international meetings to discuss issues related to biodiversity conservation and the protection of indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights. On April 7, 1999, the efforts of WAINIMATE were publicly recognised at the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the WHO. Even more recently, the Fiji Ministry of Health has invited WAINIMATE staff and members to work together in promoting the use of safe and effective traditional medicines.

#### Women as Medicine Makers not "Witches"

Formal education systems throughout the world tend to dismiss the experiential knowledge held by women and other traditional healers. This attitude has existed for centuries and was especially evident in 15th C Europe where women were burned alive as witches for practising traditional medicine. These knowledgeable women – medicine women and midwives – were perceived as a threat to the male hierarchy and religious leaders. Today, the experiential knowledge held by traditional healers around the world continues to be challenged by religious leaders and western-trained medical practitioners who are similarly trying to maintain their positions of power and control.

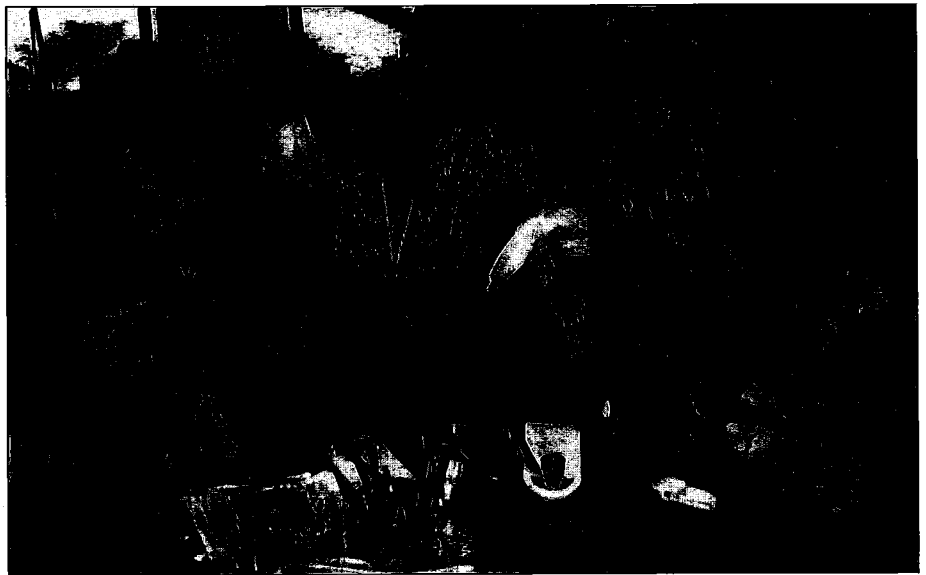


T-shirt design for Pacific Science Conference, WAINIMATE Research & Training Institute.

In Fiji it is not uncommon to hear people refer to traditional healers as "dauva-gunu," a word that conjures up images of witches' potions. This is not surprising given that Christian and colonial leaders went to great efforts to eliminate the practice of traditional medicine in the region, going so far as to adopt legislation to outlaw these practices. Much of the legislation to prohibit the practice of traditional medicine is still on the books despite the fact that there is much scientific and anecdotal evidence to justify traditional practices.

Traditional healers report that they are finding it increasingly difficult to encourage their daughters and granddaughters to become their apprentices. This is due in part to the fact that young girls spend considerable periods of time in school where they learn about "modern" health care systems and subsequently become reluctant to continue "old" practices. Time spent in the classroom also significantly reduces opportunities for experiential learning that previously occurred when young girls accompanied their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts on medicine-making expeditions.

The WAINIMATE regional traditional medicine gatherings, and the subsequent national follow-up activities, have been successful in generating support for traditional healers and plants. They have carried out public awareness campaigns to encourage people to regain important knowledge that was suppressed by years of "modern" schooling. Many of those who took part in the 1992 workshop on women and forests knew that the plants around them had medicinal uses, and some even knew the conditions they were used to treat. Now these same women are training other women in the preparation and administration of simple, safe, and affordable medicines using common



Sister Mary Rita, a healer from the Solomon Islands, prepares medicines at demonstrations held as part of the Pacific Science Congress held at the University of the South Pacific. Photo by Ruth Lechte & Diane Goodwillie

plants that are found in and around their own communities. In light of all this, healers and their supporters in Fiji make a point of using the term "dau soli wai" to acknowledge the fact that they are "medicine makers" rather than witches.

#### **Promoting Traditional Medicine**

Through WAINIMATE's efforts to protect and promote traditional medicinal knowledge and practices, an increasing number of western-trained medical practitioners have come to appreciate the value of traditional medicines and practitioners. Some nurses and doctors have even acknowledged that traditional treatments are more effective than the ones they administer in hospitals and health centres. Efforts are being made to encourage these medical practitioners to work with groups like WAINIMATE and its counterparts in other PICs to incorporate safe and effective traditional medicines into national health delivery systems in order to supplement and/or replace increasingly expensive imported medicines.

One such medical practitioner is

Filomena McKay, past Chairperson of WAINIMATE, who is an instructor at the Fiji School of Nursing. She learned that chopped pawpaw (papaya) leaves mixed with warm coconut oil is an effective treatment for beka (boils under the armpit)—a very painful condition that is not uncommon in Fiji and other tropical countries. Prior to learning about this treatment, Filo had taken repeated doses of penicillin to clear up her boils. She also had her abscesses surgically removed on numerous occasions since they kept recurring in spite of the penicillin treatments. Then one day the gardener at the Health Centre where she was working told her about this traditional treatment. Since trying the pawpaw and coconut oil treatment, Filo has not had beka and has gone on to encourage others suffering from beka to use this safe and effective traditional treatment.

Many nurses admit that they have administered traditional medicine treatments to patients in hospitals. Even though they know that these treatments are safe and effective, most nurses frequently adminis-

ter them after-hours or during the night-shift when doctors are not around. Sokoveti Ravovo, the founding secretary of WAINIMATE, cited an example of nurses she saw administering aloe vera to an ulcer on a diabetic patient's leg while she was in hospital. These treatments were given once the doctors went home and within a few days the man, who was in hospital to have his leg amputated, was released with his legs intact because the aloe vera cleared up the infection.

While the healing value of traditional medicine plants is gaining acceptance by some conventional medical practitioners, it is also important to note the economic value that they hold for women healers. Medicinal plants are extremely valuable assets for women since they help to conserve limited time and cash reserves. In many Fijian communities, women are now planting medicinal plants close to their homes to treat common ailments, resulting in fewer visits to health centres and hospitals to get basic medical treatment. Where the closest health centre is a three-hour walk – or a \$60 (Canadian) boat ride – there are significant savings for women. The increased use of safe and effective traditional medicines is also advantageous to the Ministry of Health, given its limited resources and increasing demand for services. As a result, the Ministry is becoming more interested in promoting the use of safe and effective traditional medicine to treat simple ailments before they become more serious and require visits to health centres or hospitals where more expensive treatments would be administered.

### **Protecting Traditional Knowledge from Global Capitalism**

Celebrating traditional medicine knowledge can be risky, however. As Katy Moran, executive director of the Healing

Forest Conservatory, acknowledges "The contributions that indigenous peoples have made to medicine have yet to be recognised, much less protected and paid for." Clearly, the time has come for traditional healers in the Pacific Island region to become aware of their intellectual property rights so that their indigenous knowledge can be recognised and protected for the continued benefit and well-being of all Pacific Islanders.

Although the *Convention on Biological Diversity* adopted at the Earth Summit encourages benefit-sharing as a result of indigenous knowledge, there is very little national or international legislation to ensure that this happens. Overseas researchers continue to look for traditional healers in PICs to get more information and samples of the plants that healers use to make herbal medicines. In some cases the researchers provide small tokens of appreciation, but in other cases researchers take plant samples with no compensation. For example, researchers are now deriving personal benefits from patenting neem products that were developed with the knowledge derived from India where neem has been used medicinally for many generations.

A case in point for Pacific Islanders is kava, or yaqona, which has gained widespread use as a stress reducing treatment in many western countries. While Pacific Islanders earn some money from supplying the raw material to pharmaceutical companies, they receive no compensation for the knowledge that has generated millions of dollars in profit for the companies.

One healer from the Solomon Islands gave researchers from Japan samples of the plant she uses to treat malaria patients. While the researchers informed her that the plant contains properties similar to those of the well-known anti-malarial drug quinine,

which is also derived from plant sources, they have failed to provide any compensation for her valuable assistance. As the search for treatments for malaria and other conditions continues, there will undoubtedly be more Pacific Island healers in danger of giving away traditional knowledge without compensation.

Thanks to WAINIMATE members who have carried out extensive awareness campaigns, traditional healers in Fiji are growing more aware of their rights. WAINIMATE has worked closely with the Ministry of Fijian Affairs and others to encourage the drafting of legislation that will make it necessary for researchers to recognise and compensate those who provide plant samples or share traditional knowledge with them. The organization has held regional workshops to address these issues and some members have subsequently been involved in facilitating workshops in Samoa, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Marshall Islands, and Kiribati. The ultimate aim has been to encourage the formation of traditional healers associations to work on safeguarding the knowledge of traditional healers in other Pacific Island Countries. **WE**

*Kerrie Strathy is an adult educator who spent seven years working with Pacific women on environmental awareness programs. She was WAINIMATE's Education Advisor. Currently, she is working for the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation (SCIC) and volunteers with Pacific People's Partnership and other NGOs concerned with gender and environment issues.*

### **Related reading:**

Vandana Shiva. "Women's Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity Conservation," in Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (Eds.) *Ecofeminism*, pp.164-173. London: Zed Books, 1993.



# Knot A Breast

## WOMEN DRAGONS WITH A FIGHTING SPIRIT

The Knot A Breast Team with Suzanne Farkas

Dragon boat racing is hot, wet, and tiring, but that's no big deal for the breast cancer survivors of the small town of Burlington Bay, Ontario. In defiance of all medical and social stigmas, struggling for funds and resisting government red tape, a group of women – ranging in age from 30 to 64 and living with breast cancer – have organized themselves into a dragon boat racing team. With bravery and a wry sense of humour, they call their boat "Knot A Breast." They are part of a growing number of women survivors entering this inspiring movement across Canada.

Dragon boat racing has roots in a 2,400 year old Chinese tradition where farmers raced their boats to ensure bountiful crops and life-giving rains. It is a very physically-demanding activity for the average individual, let alone for one who has had major invasive upper body surgery and lung damaging radiation. It was a firm medical belief that in order to avoid lymphedema (a painful and chronic swelling of the arms and chest area which restricts movement, reduces oxygen supply, and leads to bacterial infection), a woman must refrain from any upper body or repetitive physical activity after breast surgery.

"Women hold down the home, we have jobs, we have to be able to function. And kids to look after. It's just not practical, but we have to try" says Kathryn Levy, founder and team captain of Knot A Breast. As it turns out, the medical wisdom that prescribed the restricted activity of these women has never really been proven. So in 1996, a Canadian sports

physician at the University of British Columbia, Dr. Don McKenzie, began experiments with dragon boat racing as its testing ground. The early results now indicate that not only are the participants not harmed by their dragon boat activities, but in fact they are thriving. In order to avoid injury and to be able to proudly compete, the teams undergo weekly training and strengthening sessions months in advance of the races. Personal commitment is high.

Dragon boat racing is giving those whose lives have been affected by breast cancer a chance to heal and grow in a recreational setting. It allows for an active way of supporting people who want to get on with their lives and who don't feel that traditional support systems are helpful to them. It fosters camaraderie, good physical exercise, and psychological healing. "It empowers us. Last year we were just in the race to finish. Now we want to show everybody that we are not just breast cancer survivors." Healing the spirit is as important as healing the body.

Another advantage of this unique group is the chance for the spouses, children, and other family members to have a support system as well. Until now there was little mutual support to help them cope with the stress of this disease. The focus and setting of the races give the family members (mostly men) a chance to talk together, to share concerns and information in a relaxed setting. Children can see their mothers and fathers enjoying life and being active like other parents. The team has never had a formalised group



The Knot A Breast team of cancer survivors hopes to triumph. Photo from the *Hamilton Spectator*.

"sharing meeting." However, when they are socialising at races or after practices they have become aware of each others' situation and they seem to evolve a little more each year.

The chance to give to others has also helped. Last year the team members participated in several community events. They were also able to donate money to the Guelph Breast Strokes as a reminder of the kindness the Vancouver team had shown them in their first year. In the spirit of their mandate, there were donations to Burlington Breast Cancer Support Services and to the MRI fund at Henderson Hospital. Some of the members are now producing a brochure with needed new breast cancer information. ▶

## Healing the spirit is as important as healing the body.

You will begin to hear much more about these "floating support groups." Vancouver was the first team formed in 1997 with a boat called "Abreast In A Boat." Magically teams have since formed in towns and cities across Canada: Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Saskatoon, Calgary, Winnipeg, Halifax, Guelph, Coburg, Peterborough and Hamilton.

Pink has become the universal colour of

breast cancer and most of the teams wear pink. However, Burlington is somewhat unique: their dragon boat team now has a male crewman. While rare, there are men with breast cancer who desperately need support and, consequently, this team has adopted the team colours white and black and their logo is a pink ribbon tied around the dragon's neck. Any person living with breast cancer is welcome on

the team. Somewhat sadly, the team size increases each year. The year 2000 has seen them welcoming twelve new dragons to the joys possible in life after treatment for breast cancer.

The crewmembers are not only doing this for themselves. They want to extend the tradition and memory of the dragon boat races to honour the memory of and raise awareness for women with breast cancer. They hope to get a message of awareness, hope, and health out to the public. As one teammate stated: "Once your life is threatened, you can't put things off anymore. You have to know what your dream is and make it come true." **WE**

### A History of Dragon Boat Racing

It was in the aftermath of Qu Yuan's unfortunate death that the myth and pageantry of dragon boat racing was born.

Qu Yuan was a poet, philosopher, and revolutionary in China. To protest the unfair practises of the ruling monarchy and State, Qu Yuan decided to end his life by drowning himself in the Mi-Lo River.

When news of his suicide reached the villagers, they immediately took to their boats in an effort to save this hero of the people. Unable to reach him in time, they began beating drums and slapping the water with their paddles to frighten the fish and water dragons away, and prevent them from eating the body of their fallen poet. To nourish his weakened spirit, villagers also began throwing bags of rice and rice dumplings into the river. Both the act of beating drums and throwing rice to feed Qu Yuan's spirit are traditions that have carried through to today's dragon boat races.

Dragon Boat Racing is rapidly growing as an International sport. It is present in cities throughout Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and South Africa. In Canada, every major city has a race that is one of the biggest events of the year.

Those interested in starting their own breast cancer survivors team can contact any one of a number of Canadian organizations or visit the International Dragon Boat Association on-line at [www.dragon-boat.net](http://www.dragon-boat.net) and link to Dragon Boat Associations worldwide.

Creating Supporting Communities for Women with Breast Cancer

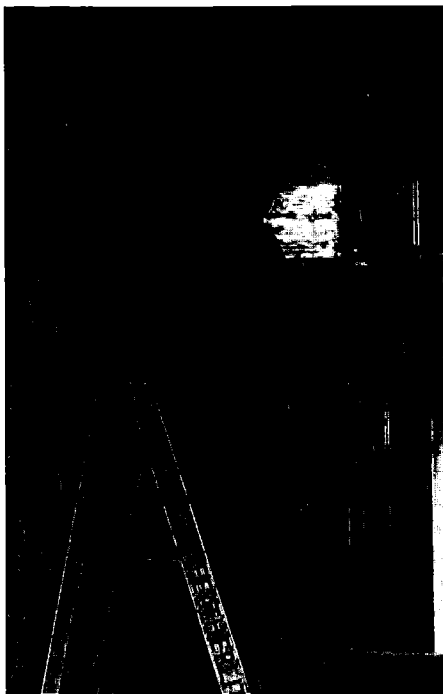
[www.bcans.org/communities/contents.html](http://www.bcans.org/communities/contents.html)

You may also contact the International Dragon Boat Federation, IDBF Secretariat, c/o Hong Kong Tourist Association, 11th Floor, Citicorp Centre, 18 Whitfield Road, North Point, Hong Kong. Fax (852) 2807 6586, [www.dragonboat.com](http://www.dragonboat.com)

# They Huffed and They Puffed...

**BUT WE BUILT A STRAW BALE HOUSE IN THE BURBS!**

Cheryl Bradbee and Grace Terrett



Owner Grace Terrett works on the wall of her suite.  
Photo by Cheryl Bradbee.

The first straw bale walls went up at the house in April 2000. We watched with excitement as the builders “sewed” the chicken wire to the bales and applied the first layer of stucco to the exterior. Those straw walls are gold in more ways than just their colour.

Our quest for a healthy home began back in 1995 when we became aware of co-housing. As middle-aged women, we were concerned about financial and health issues related to aging while living as solitary tenants rather than as homeowners in a community. Conversations began among several women friends about the possibility of shared ownership. Co-housing is a unique form of

shared ownership: each owner has title to a certain amount of private space and an agreed-upon share of the common space. Responsibilities and rights are laid out in a legal agreement.

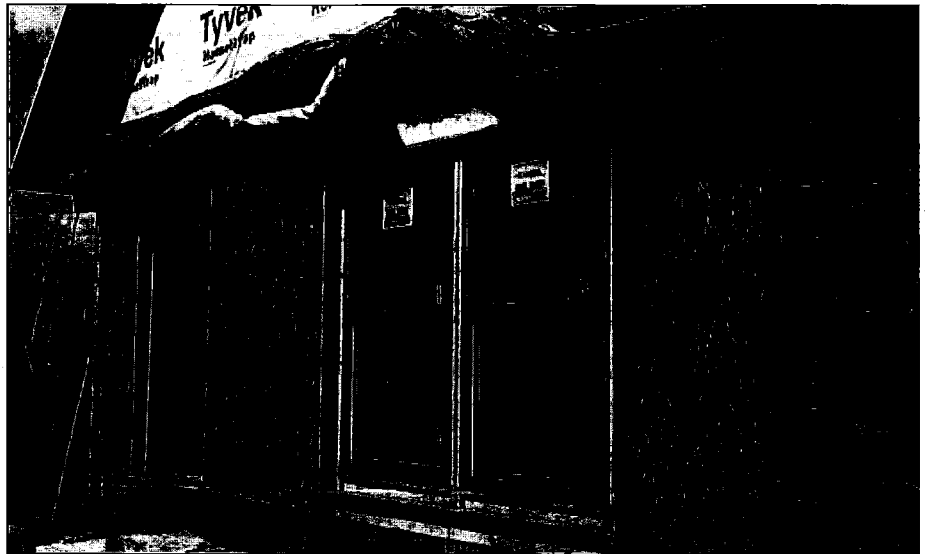
As our group of three came together, the search for an appropriate property began. Beth has Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) which immediately set part of the agenda for our housing. After an unsuccessful search for a resale home in Toronto, we purchased a lot in Mississauga, Ontario. Martin Liefhebber was the obvious choice as our architect. He had built the Toronto Healthy House and was very much in sync with our environmental concerns and plans for co-housing. He designed the home to accommodate three independent individuals with three separate areas. The common area includes a kitchen, living room, library, laundry room, guest suite, and storage space. From the beginning, the assumption was that the house would be as healthy as possible for both humans and the environment.

No one had ever attempted such a project in Mississauga. While there are at least 50 straw bale homes in Ontario, almost all are in rural areas. Our home is the most urban straw bale home ever built in Ontario. Predictably, the City of Mississauga planners just scratched their heads. It began to appear as though they hoped to discourage this innovation by making the process difficult for us. We surmised that,

since the suburbs appear to be built on the assumption of conformity, going against the grain had to be discouraged. The City bureaucrats were not up to speed and did not even seem to access the heaps of material we gave them on what we were doing. We were, after all, three women.

Several city officials implied that we were agreeing to something very risky because it was not something they recognised. The irony is that we understand the systems of the house far better than they do and we feel far more confident in our house than we feel about much of the new construction we have seen in southern Ontario. What the officials didn't count on was our perseverance. We simply outlasted them. We went to the Ontario Building Code Commission and came away with the longest ruling in their history regarding the use of straw bales as an alternative insulation. Finally, after 18 months, we had the permit in hand to do the straw bales. Just in time for those straw bale walls.

There is an underlying principle for building this house in the suburbs. Historically, promoters of suburbia have made promises of the good life to those who moved there. Everyone is to be safe in homogeneous neighbourhoods, each surrounded by their bit of green lawn. But the suburbs can be a counterfeit for true community. Over the past 25 years, Mississauga has covered farmland with a subur- ▶



Straw bales stacked and ready to be finished. Photo by Cheryl Bradbee.

ban built form that is environmentally unsustainable. Lawns and gardens are doused in chemicals. Treed lots are levelled. The separated, single-use zoned areas demand the use of polluting vehicles to cope with daily needs. Apartment buildings stand isolated in green wastelands while the road system makes simple pedestrian travel difficult and dangerous. The planners and building departments of cities like Mississauga have presided over all of this "development."

And so it was clear that the city officials did not appreciate our environmentally

healthy straw bale home. The house is designed to provide both common life and privacy, to be both accessible and hospitable, and to be an asset - not an eyesore - in the community. Our neighbours seem to be happy about what we are doing. It is our fervent hope that others will be encouraged to step out into new urban territory and press for more changes to the way things have always been done. **WE**

*Cheryl Bradbee has worked for the past decade in the city of Toronto doing church-based community development. Grace Terrett has been a social worker and a manager of several programmes for the YMCA of Greater Toronto for 20 years (including YMCA House - a 50 bed shelter for homeless youth). She left 2 years ago on sick leave and is currently pursuing a graduate degree (part time at the present) in philosophy. Both have been admitted to the Masters Program in Landscape Architecture at the University of Toronto.*

## KMVS

### WORKING TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA

Seema Patel

For eight months in 1996, I had the opportunity to work with a rural women's collective in Gujarat, India called *Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan* (KMVS). My year of graduate school, spent theorizing about critical environmental topics such as environmental justice, in no way prepared me for the realities of women's

lives. In India, I learned first-hand what environmental justice actually means for the rural women involved in KMVS.

KMVS is based in the Kutch district of Gujarat, an extremely arid and drought-prone region. At the time I was there, over 3,000 women from five sub-districts of

Kutch had organized as members of KMVS to address issues of health, legal support and awareness, control over handicraft production processes, savings and credit, and natural resource conservation.

Ecological issues are especially crucial in Kutch due to resource scarcity and harsh

climatic conditions. Land degradation, lack of clean drinking water sources, and the depletion of fuel wood and fodder have had serious consequences for rural livelihoods. Rural women, as the primary users and managers of these resources, are especially adversely affected. The depletion and disappearance of traditional drinking water sources and indigenous plant species means that the women spend a great deal of time and energy in meeting water, fuel, and fodder needs. They suffer not only in terms of deteriorating health but also of diminishing control over resources as their knowledge of the natural environment, historically passed down generation after generation, is lost.

According to the Sangathan women, significant changes have taken place over the past 50 years. There is a growing dependence on external sources such as government facilities and the market for meeting basic needs. For generations, local people obtained resources such as water, food, fodder, and medicine directly from nature, but now they must rely on a cash economy and state services. During drought years, local people depend on state-run drought relief work for their main source of income.

These societal changes have had direct implications for local communities. With changing values and the breakdown of local institutions, there are far more divisions within households and communities than there once was. Whereas communities once exercised collective responsibilities and standards to ensure the welfare of everyone, including the poorest families, these norms are now breaking down and families are often left to provide for themselves. Local knowledge of community histories, traditions, health practices, and ecosystems is slowly disappearing. As

traditional resource management systems disintegrate, environmental degradation has increased with direct implications for women's health.

KMVS initiated its environment program in 1994 in response to these fundamental problems being raised by Sangathan women. The program's approach was conceived out of the awareness that natural resource conservation, reflecting women's needs and knowledge, is essential for rural women's social, political, and economic empowerment.

KMVS staff have initiated a process where Sangathan women are in control of prioritizing their needs as well as planning, managing, and implementing activities. Women start with implementing simple technological solutions like biogas plants, smokeless chullah, and vermicomposters, and then move on to larger challenges such as soil and water conservation and watershed management.

The environment program was also set up as a conscious effort to move beyond issues usually defined as "women's issues" (such as handicraft production) to address broader social concerns regarding the family, community, and society. For KMVS, experience shows that women's authority in decision-making will be accepted only when Sangathan women are actively leading environmental action and independently managing environmental projects.

The case of one village, Khari, in the northern region of Kutch near the border of Pakistan, perfectly illustrates the significance of women's activism in environmental issues. In 1993, KMVS started working with the Khari mahila mandal (women's group) to initiate a drinking water project to restore a traditional water source – an old lake. At this point, the



Illustration from *We'Moon '00*. Artist: Shiloh McCleod

women had no support from the men in their village and the project was considered by most to be useless. Many other women dropped out of the project, and only a small group of women was left to complete restoring the lake. That lake was the only nearby source of water for the next two years of drought.

The Khari women's determination was a catalyst for the rest of the village, particularly the men. After witnessing the success of this project, men joined the women to start a watershed management program and the Khari women's group continued to play the key role in environmental work and decision-making.

The work of KMVS shows that environmental justice is not just about the fact that environmental issues affect different groups in very specific ways. For the Sangathan women, environmental justice ultimately means new forms of activism (i.e., mobilizing as a women's organization across caste barriers) to tackle the fundamental concerns of health, community welfare, and sustainable livelihoods. **WE**

*Seema Patel* currently works at *Greenest City*, a community environmental organization based in Toronto. 244 Gerrard Street East, Toronto M5A 2G2, E-mail: [seema727@yahoo.ca](mailto:seema727@yahoo.ca), Phone: (416) 922-7626.

# World March of Women 2000

Joy Woolfrey



Women in communities around the world have been marking the new millennium by marching against poverty and violence, demonstrating their determination to change the world. The World March of Women campaign builds on the experience of the Bread and Roses march by 15,000 Quebec women, organised by the Federation des Femmes du Quebec (FFQ) in 1995, the year of the Beijing Women's Conference. At Beijing, women from the FFQ captured the imagination of women's groups and began to plan for a world march. Now much more than a march, it links local actions by women's groups into a chain of regional, national, and international events. At every level, women's groups have been invited to relate their activities to the themes of the march.

Women in rural areas and in cities, in the formal sector and the informal sector, in unions, housing rights groups, the peace and environmental movements, and in

health and child care organisations are dedicating special projects to the march. From tiny Bermuda, where all three political parties are led by women, to Afghanistan, where women walk without shoes in tent-like personal prisons, only able to organise in exile, women are demanding that governments end the poverty and the violence which is so often the lot of women. Some examples:

In Burkina Faso on May 6, 10,000 women gathered in Boromo to the beat of drums with banners flying. Delegations from 45 provinces presented the president and the prime minister with their demands. The president promised to create a national forum where women's delegations could meet with the government to discuss the implementation of policies to meet women's demands.

In every city in Switzerland on June 14, women marched to link their demands to those of the World March of Women.

June 14 is the anniversary of the 1981 inclusion in the Swiss Constitution of the principle of equality of rights for women. It is also the anniversary of the women's strike in 1991 protesting that this principle was not being applied.

On June 17, delegates from every province in France assembled in Paris for a World March of Women rally. They concluded the demonstration with a celebration at the Place de la Bastille, where the French Revolution began. A week later the French World March of Women co-ordinating body was to meet with the prime minister to discuss their demands.

And so it goes around the world. Belgian women will rally in Brussels on October 15. Canadian women will rally the same day, in Ottawa. Two days later, on October 17, which is the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, the World March of Women will culminate in New York when women

## The Petition

Starting on March 8, women have been gathering signatures in support of the demands of the World March of Women for the end of poverty and of violence against women. The signature campaign is being carried out using postcards, petitions, signature books, banners, quilts, and symbolic objects. At least 10 million signatures are anticipated: 10 million reminders for UN representatives of the voices of the world's women and their urgent calls for action.

**To get involved**, to sign the petition, to distribute it further, to find out more about World March of Women activities around the world, visit the World March web site in Australia at [www.uq.net.au/march2000/](http://www.uq.net.au/march2000/) (you can download the postcard for the petition from here); in Brasil at [www.sof.org.br/marcha2000/](http://www.sof.org.br/marcha2000/); in Cameroon at [www.gcnet.cm/marche2000/](http://www.gcnet.cm/marche2000/); in Québec at [www.ffq.qc.ca/marchequébec/](http://www.ffq.qc.ca/marchequébec/); and in the rest of Canada at [www.canada.marchofwomen.org/](http://www.canada.marchofwomen.org/); in the United States at [www.worldmarch.org/](http://www.worldmarch.org/); in Belgium at [www.marchofwomen2000.org/FR/Europe.htm](http://www.marchofwomen2000.org/FR/Europe.htm); in Catalogne and in Spain at [www.pangea.org/dona/marxa2000/](http://www.pangea.org/dona/marxa2000/); in Switzerland at [www.marche-mondiale.ch](http://www.marche-mondiale.ch); and in other parts of Europe at [www.marchofwomen2000.org/](http://www.marchofwomen2000.org/); in Mexico at [www.laneta.apc.org/mmm](http://www.laneta.apc.org/mmm); in Senegal at [www.famafrique.org/nouv/nouv5-11-99.html](http://www.famafrique.org/nouv/nouv5-11-99.html) and in other parts of the world (and to sign the petition) at [www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000](http://www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000).

from around the world will present UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with hundreds of thousands of petitions from their sisters and the men who support them. But October 17 is not the end: it is a new beginning! **WE**

*Joy Woolfrey is a consultant in international development and past E.D. of Canadian Physicians for Aid & Relief. She is an advisor to the WE International Editorial Committee.*



Photo: World March of Women Brasil

## **World March of Women 2000 Demands**

### **Demands to eliminate poverty (abbreviated)**

**P-1** That all States adopt a legal framework and strategies aimed at eliminating poverty. This would include statutory protection for work in the home and in the informal sectors of the economy; pay equity and equality at the national and international levels; association and unionization; right to safe water; decent housing; health care and social protection; food security; full citizenship, including in particular recognition of civil identity; incentives to promote the sharing of family responsibilities; access for women to decision-making positions and an end to the commodification of women in media to suit the needs of the market.

**P-2** The urgent implementation of measures such as the Tobin Tax; investment of 0.7% of rich countries' gross national product (GNP) in aid for developing countries; adequate financing and democratization of United Nations programs that are essential to defend women's and children's fundamental rights; an end to structural adjustment programs; an end to cutbacks in social budgets and public services; rejection of the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).

**P-3** Cancellation of the debt of all Third World countries, taking into account the principles of responsibility, transparency of information and accountability.

**P-4** The implementation of the 20/20 formula between donor countries and the recipients of international aid. (20% of the sum contributed by the donor country must be allocated to social development and 20% of the receiving government's spending must be used for social programs.)

**P-5** A non-monolithic world political organization, with authority over the economy, with egalitarian and democratic representation of all countries on earth (ensuring parity between poor countries and rich countries) and equal representation of women and men.

**P-6** That embargoes and blockades - principally affecting women and children - imposed by the major powers on many countries be lifted.

# Making Space into Place

YORK UNIVERSITY'S 6TH ANNUAL ECO-ART AND MEDIA FESTIVAL

Natasha Myers



"Housecat" by Christine Witte symbolizes the amalgamation of bricks, windows, trees, and humans and how it is possible to make a beautiful place out of unused spaces. Photo by Joanna Fine.

Art and activism combine powerfully to generate new ways of communicating about environmental issues. The pairing of environmentalism with art has been such an important facet for both teaching and learning at the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES), York University, that an annual Eco-Art and Media Festival was launched 6 years ago. The focus of the 2000 festival, *Making Space into Place*, was finding creative ways of expressing human relationships to nature and celebrating the places in which we dwell. *Making Space into Place* is an important theme for commuter schools such as York University where the majority of students, faculty, and staff who live, learn, and work in this space are still reluctant to call it "home."

By bringing artistic expression, imagination, and collective energy to the common spaces of the campus, the festival generated the momentum for on-going initiatives to make the spaces we inhabit into places we can call home. The week of activities

at the 2000 Eco-Art and Media Festival explored ways of "reclaiming space" including: a forum on greening the campus, attended by York University's president, Lorna Marsden, and members of the newly appointed Sustainability Task Force; a forum on the links between ecology and diverse spiritual traditions; an exhibition to promote cycling at York University; multi-media performances; movement and sculpture workshops; and a Gala Celebration with film screenings, visual arts, theatre, storytelling, and music. In addition, the festival extended beyond York University to greet the wider Toronto community through a morning of art and environmental education workshops at Oakridge Elementary School in the east-end of the city.

Importantly, the festival was a collaborative effort that brought together the Faculties of Environmental Studies and Fine Arts. Such collaboration and inter-disciplinarity were crystallized during the *Dancing Space into Place* workshop

hosted by Professor Mary-Elizabeth Manley in the Department of Dance. Numerous environmental studies students flocked to join dance students in an improvisation class that explored the ways in which human impacts on, and transformations of, the environment can be expressed through bodies in motion. What ensued was a joyous celebration of movement, expression, and community. This workshop embodied the spirit of the Eco-Art Festival by bridging disciplines and finding creative ways to explore and celebrate our relationships with the environment. **WE**

*Natasha Myers is a Master's Candidate in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. She has been involved in the organization and planning of the past two Eco-Art and Media Festivals.*



"Reclaiming Quilt" was the community process creation of collective of women at the FES. Photo by Joanna Fine.



# Textspace

## DANGEROUS INTERSECTIONS: POPULATION, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Jael Silliman and Ynestra King (Eds.), for the Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment (CWPE). London: Zed Books, 1999.

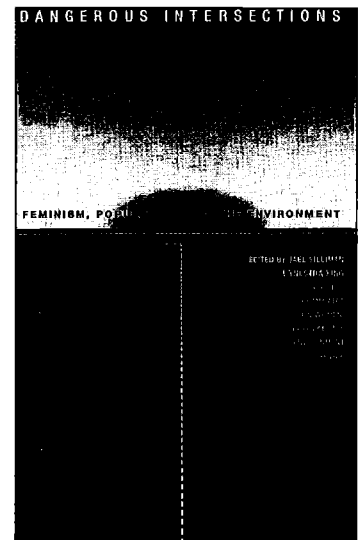
Contributors include: Asoka Bandarage, Marsha J. Tyson Darling, Marlene Gerber Fried, Betsy Hartmann, H. Patricia Hynes, Joni Seager, Andy Smith, Justine Smith, April Taylor, Meredith Turshen, and Meredith Tax.

Reviewed by Elaine Batcher,

Given the fact that concern for population control re-emerges in every decade in a new disguise, most recently in the urging upon us of genetically-modified foods as the way to feed the earth's children, this book is very timely.

The international writers in this volume begin from the traditional paradigm – that the population will soon out-run the earth's capacity to sustain it – and examine from a number of perspectives the intersection of three global problems: environmental degradation, economic development and the so-called population explosion. Rather than the usual call for controlling the fertility of poor black women, they seek the security of the planet in less-explored directions, such as stopping military destruction of the environment and re-orienting the converging roles of government and non-governmental organizations.

These writers would have us take a new look at the very concept of environmentalism and re-examine all existing categories of understanding, including the formulae used to calculate viability, toward the ultimate task of redefining the social justice agenda. This is a book which should be read by everyone who cares about the planet. A brief abstract at the start of each chapter, however, would have made this reader's job a little easier.



## NATURAL DISGUISE

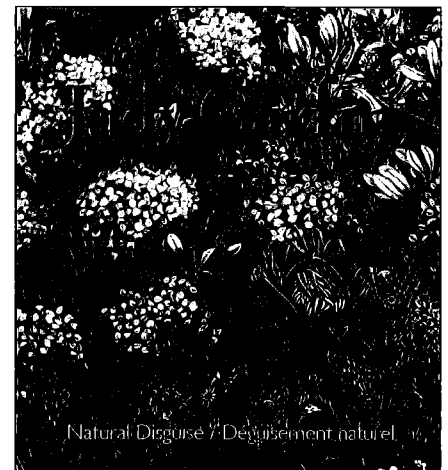
Judy Garfin, Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1998.

Reviewed by Elaine Batcher

To say that Judy Garfin's work is evocative is merely to approach the surface. To say that her use of high and subtle colour can touch an ache one didn't know one had, would go a bit further. As Freud described it, these works are uncanny – familiar and at the same time unfamiliar. In one painting called "Witnesses," birds watch as clusters of worm-like creatures spring into life. In another, scarves and feathers and birds and beads eerily come together as "The Bride."

Unreal as literal landscapes, they nevertheless pull us into a world of wildlife and wild possibility. It is as though we could walk into Garfin's woods, sink into her seas – comprehend beyond the human with the natural community.

This gorgeous glossy book in French and English is also rich in literary reference. There are poems by Denise Levertov and May Sarton and an interview with the artist herself. Several essays discuss the meaning of Garfin's work, placing her in the context of her family and community, and placing her work in the context of European floral paintings. A life and work chronology and a list of the artist's works are also included.



## ALL ABOUT LOVE: NEW VISIONS

bell hooks. New York: William Morrow & Co., 2000.

Reviewed by Kathleen O'Grady

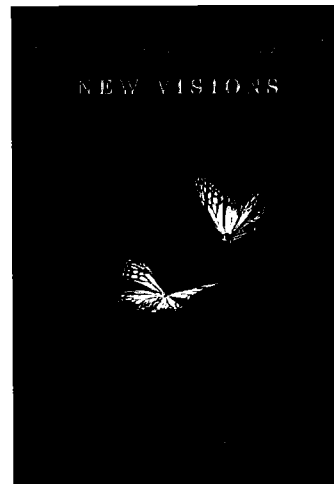
What happens when a gifted author creates a very bad book? For a writer as prolific as bell hooks – aka Gloria Watkins – there is bound to be the occasional lapse in judgement. hooks is one of the most important cultural critics of the last decade, penning more than sixteen books on everything from mourning and melancholia to race relations and feminist theory.

hooks may be best known for cutting through the crap – be it academic etiquette or high theory jargon – and for her straight forward prose-style that can sum up in a sentence or two what most of us require a life-time to articulate. Anyone who has had the pleasure of seeing hooks speak publicly can't help but be fascinated by the contrast between her kick-ass rhetorical style and the soft, sweet, honed voice that delivers the zingers that knock her opponents flat.

hooks functions best when she is on the attack which is precisely why her latest book can only be described as a flop. *All About Love* is a philosophical, some could even say "theological" exposition of the lovelessness that pervades contemporary American culture, expressed through our miserly public policies and our voracious and inexhaustible consumerism.

Cynicism replaces love as the defining characteristic of youth culture in particular, hooks observes. *All About Love* offers to "tell us how to return to love" and harness the "transformative power" of love's works. What follows instead is an eclectic assemblage of new age truisms on the joy of true communion with an other that we all yearn toward but rarely achieve.

I wish I could say that I found these meditations to be original or even well-written, but they only periodically rise above mediocre platitudes and often fall into an uncritical assumption of New Testament theology ("God is love").<sup>1</sup> Missing from this book is the voice of the critic that hooks does so very well. Love has made her soft, I suppose, and while these warm-fuzzies are occasionally touching, they lack the intellectual vigor with which hooks is usually associated. By all means read bell hooks – just don't trouble yourself with her latest.



<sup>1</sup>Editor's Note: bell hooks is well-known for her recent writings on Buddhism and may very well incorporate Buddhist principles in her book as well.

**Kathleen O'Grady** is a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Gender Studies and Women's Studies, University of Toronto. She has written for *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Women's Review of Books*, *BUST*, *The Toronto Star*, and other publications.

## EMPOWERING WOMEN: AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY FROM RURAL INDIA

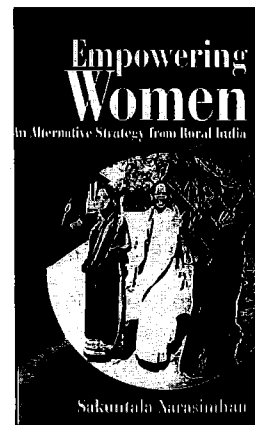
Sakuntala Narasimhan. London & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999.

Reviewed by Elaine Batcher

"We are happier now than we used to be before we got 'thelivu' (awareness)." The voices of women are central to this fascinating study of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women of rural India. Discussing historical background data and recent case studies, Sakuntala Narasimhan reviews current methods of helping to develop the resources of women.

Past initiatives have shown that economic assistance alone cannot ameliorate women's suffering from poverty, powerlessness, and vulnerability. Through non-governmental programs like AWARE (Action for Welfare and Awakening in Rural Environment), women have developed an awareness through which they can focus on – and work to change – the problems in their lives. The book documents that, when women begin to exchange information, and as assistance is offered in the form of loans and community support, they can start to create their own employment. By measures such as wage increases, health improvements, and educational gains, the study shows that both women and men were much better off after a few years in the program than those in control groups who did not participate. Stressing self-help and group-help, women become not mere objects or targets, but agents, of change.

**Elaine Batcher** is a writer and educator who lives in Toronto. She has been a long-time member of the WE International editorial team.



## FEMINISM AND ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES: AN ETHIC OF FLOURISHING

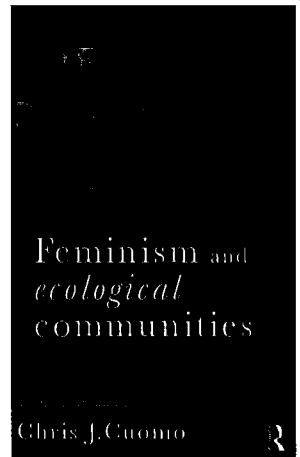
Chris J. Cuomo. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Reviewed by Sherilyn MacGregor

American philosopher Chris Cuomo aims in this book to develop an ecological feminist ethical position and an open-ended understanding of ecofeminist activism. The title of the book refers to Cuomo's argument that a goal of ecofeminism should be to ensure the well-being of all members of ecological communities. The ethic of flourishing is derived from the Ancient Greek concept of *eudaimonia* – roughly translated as “the good life.”

Refreshingly, Cuomo is not afraid to take up and work through some of the problems that plague ecofeminism today. For example, she questions some ecofeminists' celebration of the care ethic (premised on bourgeois notions of femininity and motherhood), their often uncritical use of the concept of “diversity,” and the need to find unity among all women. Referring to criticisms of feminist ethics based on the glorification of women's traditional care-giving roles, Cuomo reminds us that ecofeminist celebrations of women's life-sustaining work as an answer to the ecological crisis may lead to a rejection of the long-standing feminist goal of emancipation. If women are best suited to cleaning up the ecological mess, then might ecological sustainability be logically inconsistent with gender equity?

Cuomo raises some very original points about the prospective links between ecofeminism, cultural studies, and queer studies and about the contributions that such an alliance might make to a more multi-vocal green and postcolonial politics. Her book is both philosophically-sophisticated and intellectually honest. She avoids the common pitfall of prescribing unattainable virtues while addressing concerns that are relevant to everyday life. She writes: “I am not content with an ecological feminism that does not have anything to say to me as a lover of women, cities, and machines, a creature of comforts, and a political being whose moral imagination is currently obsessed with questions about sexual freedom and racial responsibilities. I do not want to be fixed, or limited, by common notions of what ecological feminist lives are. But I also need inspiration...” (p. 82). Don't we all.



## Habitat +5: Keeping Gender on the Agenda

*Habitat Debate*, Volume 6, No. 1, 2000, UNCHS (Habitat) P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi Kenya, phone: (254-2) 623988; fax: (254-2) 623080, e-mail: rasna.warah@unchs.org, web site: www.unchs.org

Commentary by Regula Modlich

Diana Lee-Smith, the coordinator of the Gender Unit at the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat), has contributed two important articles to the most recent *Habitat Debate*, the UNCHS (Habitat) publication. UNCHS is preparing for the Habitat + 5 conference in June of 2001 and all feverishly developing and applying measurements and indicators to evaluate progress since the Habitat II conference in Istanbul 5 years ago.

In “Women's Role in Urban Governance,” Lee-Smith writes: “In the favelas and barrios of Latin America, mothers organized for better sanitation, water, and food for their families in the latter part of the twentieth century. Yet the urban movements that formed as a result were led by men. Why? In a slum in Nigeria, the quality of water supply deteriorated sharply because women were not involved in the community decision-making about how to manage it. Why were they not involved?”

Technological and economic transformation and massive and sudden urbanization is changing what men and women are doing and challenging the notion that women are supposed to stay home while men go to meetings and make decisions. Home and neighbourhood are an integral part of urban governance. Empowerment of poor urban women is seen as a key indicator to implement Habitat's Global Campaign on Urban Governance.

UNCHS (Habitat) declared “Women in Urban Governance” as the theme of this year's World Habitat Day, October 2. This includes the poor majority in the South and mostly ethnic minority groups in the North and unites both North and South, women and men on an equal basis. It is a recognition that women are half of humanity and need to be more involved in discussions and decisions which have an impact on their urban environment.

Lee-Smith argues that, to achieve more efficient and democratic local governance, women – particularly poor women – have to

## [ Text space ]

be more involved. For example, local governments rarely address cheap domestic fuels, like charcoal, or the potential of urban farming. Only when poor women participate, will public policy and private-public partnership manage and deliver the needed goods and services effectively and efficiently. The Women's Advisory Committee for Housing in Utrecht in the Netherlands, the European Charter for Women in the City, *Safer Cities: Guidelines for Planning, Design and Management* by Gerda Wekerle and Carolyn Whitzman in Toronto, Canada, and the Union of Local Authorities' Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government are efforts in this direction.

A set of indicators for monitoring participatory decision-making already puts gender centre-stage. It was described in *Habitat Debate* Vol 5, # 4 and is currently being tested in pilot cities. It can measure whether gender disaggregated data is used, women's priorities are reflected in a city or neighbourhood level assessment, gender equality is considered in participatory decision-making, and whether women and men have been empowered to participate effectively and sensitized to gender issues. The Campaign for Good Urban Governance aims to provide means for setting up structures which equally includes men and women and their organizations.

In "Our Communities, Ourselves," Lee-Smith, together with Catalina Trujillo, the Coordinator of UNCHS (Habitat)'s Women and Habitat Programme describe how women in poor communities are taking ownership of urban indicator research in their communities.

In 1992, in Nairobi, Kenya, the Women and Habitat Programme decided to involve women from poor communities in six countries: Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Uganda. They formed an Ad Hoc Expert Group to collect and analyze data and evaluate and recommend future improvements

to this research method. Together with UNCHS (Habitat), the Mazingira Institute, a Nairobi-based non-governmental organization, developed indicators measuring women's social and economic status, their access to land and shelter, their role in the provision of services and their role in decision-making.

Lee-Smith and Trujillo explain that through this grass-roots indicators process, the women gained a better understanding of things they had taken for granted. This led them to realize that solutions can be found through collective efforts and that together they could explain their needs and problems to authorities. Whenever trainers focused only on data collection and failed to encourage the grass-roots women and communities in taking charge of the process, things did not work well. The Women and Habitat Programme then prepared a manual and developed indicators of women's participation at national and local level.

The first round of research and collection of baseline data has led to various initiatives at the community level in several countries. Experience in Ghana shows that the indicator process brings gender issues to the forefront in local planning. "Not only is women's important role in managing urban settlements recognized, but new, gender sensitive institutions have been set up at the local level." A train-the-trainer process followed, involving women from Bolivia, Ghana, and Zambia and then Cuba, Egypt, India, Jordan, Kenya, Palestine, the Philippines, and Senegal. Ten of these countries have started on the second and third phases with local and national governments.

The work of Lee-Smith and Trujillo provides important examples of gender-specific research and suggests how recognizing women's experiences and views may lead to more gender-sensitive policies. **WE**

### WE Book Shelf

Catriona Sandilands. *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Chaia Heller. *Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1999.

Kate Braid. *Emily Carr: Rebel Artist*. Montreal: XYZ Publishing, 2000.

Maria Mies and Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen. *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy*. (Translated by Marie Mies, Patrick Camiller). London: Zed Books, 2000.

Martha C. Nussbaum. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Myriam Wyman (Ed.). *Sweeping the Earth: Women Taking Action for a Healthy Planet*. Charlottetown, P.E.I.: Gynergy Books, 1999.

Naomi Klein. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2000.

Sarah Blaffer Hrdy. *Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1999.

(So many books, so little time...)

# WE Surf

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## Healthy Communities Web sites

### Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities

[www.healthycommunities.org](http://www.healthycommunities.org)

A great US-based online community joining people and organizations interested in healthy community issues throughout the US. Contribute your story or learn from others.

### International Healthy Cities Foundation

[www.healthycities.org](http://www.healthycities.org)

Connects Healthy Cities and Communities programs worldwide. Check out the newly-added Documents and Proposal for Healthy Cities section or Stories from the Field. Available in five languages.

### Healthy Community Resources

[www.bhconline.org/resources.htm](http://www.bhconline.org/resources.htm)

Links to over 150 organizations involved in issues such education and youth, environment, community organizing and public policy, health care and wellness, housing and community development, women's organizations.

### International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)

<http://www.iclei.org>

Visit ICLEI's home page: ICLEI is an association of local governments dedicated to the prevention and solution of local, regional, and global environmental problems through local action. Over 300 cities, towns, counties, and their associations from around the world are members of the Council.

## Web sites of Interest

### Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly

[www.monitor.net/rachel/rehw-home.html](http://www.monitor.net/rachel/rehw-home.html)

Run by the Environmental Research Foundation in Annapolis, MD. Sign up for the free weekly newsletter or search the archive of articles on health and environment issues. (Last up-dated September 1998.)

### WomenWatch

[www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch)

Find out how the United Nations is working for women and access global information on women's concerns, progress, and equality. Listen to the UN Radio's weekly features on women's issues.

### Women's Health Strategy

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pcb/whb](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pcb/whb)

Find out about the work of Health Canada's Women's Health Bureau including links to the women's health strategy, breast cancer initiative, HIV and AIDS and women in Canada, and body and spirit.

### Canadian Women's Health Network

[www.cwhn.ca](http://www.cwhn.ca)

Up-to date information on current issues in women's health. Check out the new edition of Network magazine, or sign-up to receive the free women's health news bulletins by e-mail. Contribute to the growing women's health database by adding your organization, project, or resources.

### Women, Ink

[www.womenink.org](http://www.womenink.org)

A project of the International Women's Tribune Centre. Marketing and distribution of more than 250 publications from over 70 publishers on a wide range of women and development issues - focusing on the perspectives of women from the Global South.

### Daughters of Eve

[www.doenetwork.com](http://www.doenetwork.com)

A monthly e-zine celebrating women of color. Stay connected by signing up for the monthly newsletter!

### WomenAction 2000

[www.womenaction.org](http://www.womenaction.org)

A global information, communication, and media network that enables NGOs to actively engage in the Beijing +5 review process with the long term goal of women's empowerment, with special focus on women and media.

### Women's International Net

<http://welcome.to/winmagazine>

An electronically published free monthly international women's magazine interested in furthering women's issues worldwide by bringing together women from around the world for dialogue and greater mutual understanding. Uniting and enabling women from different countries to express their views and situations. Available in 8 languages!

### United Nations Development Fund for Women

(UNIFEM) [www.unifem.undp.org](http://www.unifem.undp.org)

Working for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality. Read the latest biennial report entitled "Progress of the World's Women."

### National Asian Women's Health Organization

[www.nawho.org](http://www.nawho.org)

Find out more about the work of NAWHO including research, education, and public policy advocacy in order to empower Asian Americans to provide leadership for their communities. Projects include Reproductive and Sexual Rights, and a Mental Health Awareness Campaign.

### Beijing+5 Outcome Document

[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/finaloutcome.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/finaloutcome.pdf)

Download the outcome document from the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century." A discussion of further actions and initiatives needed in order to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.

### Connections, Women's Health and Environment Network

[www.web.net/~wnhe](http://www.web.net/~wnhe)

WHEN's quarterly newsletter is a working tool for concerned citizens who are popularizing complex environmental issues that affect women's health. Issues include: breast cancer and its environmental links; pesticides; nuclear industry; organochlorides; transportation; and new scientific findings.

### The African Women's Development and Communication Network

[www.africaonline.co.ke/femnet](http://www.africaonline.co.ke/femnet)

Dedicated to sharing information and ideas between African NGOs in order to promote gender sensitive development plans, policies, and programs.

### CROW

[www.members.tripod.com/~crowwomen/index\\_e.htm](http://www.members.tripod.com/~crowwomen/index_e.htm)

A great place to visit for issues concerning women from Croatia and what they are doing to speak up for themselves in their culture.

### Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment

[www.cwpe.org](http://www.cwpe.org)

A multi-racial alliance of feminist activists, health practitioners, and scholars committed to promoting the social and economic empowerment of women in a context of global peace and justice. Check out their on-line publication "Political Environments."

### Alternatives Journal

[www.fes.uwaterloo.ca/alternatives/](http://www.fes.uwaterloo.ca/alternatives/)

A quarterly magazine of news and analysis on environmental thought, policy, and action. An independent refereed journal of the Environmental Studies Association of Canada which provides critical and informed analysis of environmental issues, and promotes an understanding of "environment" in the broadest sense including social and political dimensions.

### Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE)

[www.egale.ca/lgsurvey](http://www.egale.ca/lgsurvey)

A national organization committed to advancing equality and justice for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals at the federal level. Check out the site to keep up to date on lobbying efforts and changes in legislation.

### ISIS International - Manila

[www.isiswomen.org](http://www.isiswomen.org)

A feminist NGO dedicated to women's information and communication needs with a focus on advancing women's rights, leadership, and empowerment in Asia and the Pacific. Great links to the latest in Asia-Pacific women on the net, advocacy, conferences, campaigns, and publications. Check out the on-line edition of Women in Action.

### Poverty and Race

[www.pprac.org](http://www.pprac.org)

A newsletter published 6 times a year by the P&R Research Action Council. Contains reports on actions, analyses, and publications.

Web sites were reviewed by **Joanna Fine**, a graduate of York University's Master's in Environmental Studies program. She now works in the book publishing industry.



### THE CANADIAN CO<sub>2</sub> REDUCTION INITIATIVE

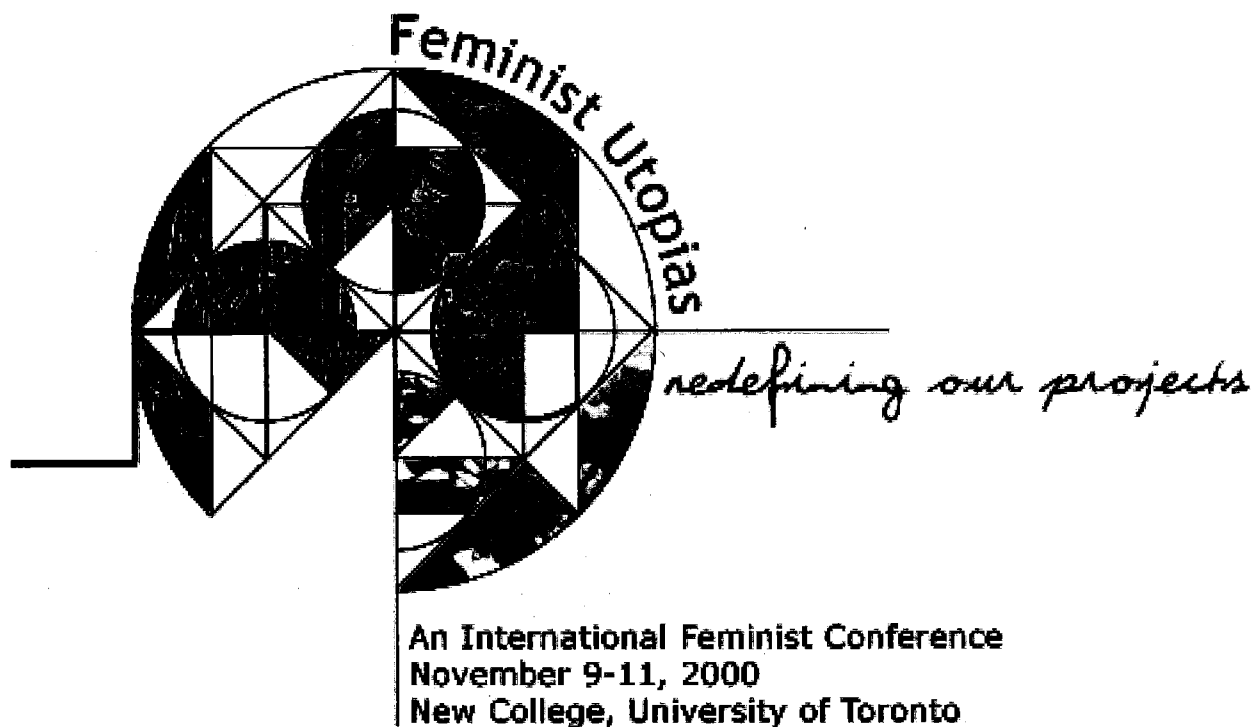
Women's Health & Environments Network (WHEN) and Environment Canada.

Our national campaign is intended to raise public awareness of how individual lifestyle choices contribute to global climate change. We aim to educate and motivate people to make conscientious changes in their behaviour in order to counter the environmentally harmful effects of pollutants such as CO<sub>2</sub>, Methane, and Nitrous Oxide. The campaign will include a 'diet' guide and video to empower individuals to reduce personal energy consumption. We are looking to enlist organizations and businesses with similar concerns to support these efforts.

For more information contact: WHEN at [when@web.com](mailto:when@web.com) or Kimberley Harvey, project co-ordinator, (416) 203-0200 or (416) 928-0880; e-mail: [k.harvey@sympatico.ca](mailto:k.harvey@sympatico.ca)

# Announcements

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## An Invitation to a Conference:

Imagine an ideal world - an ideal feminist world. What would it look like? What would we have to change for us to get there? This conference is bringing together feminists from across the world to assess and redefine feminist projects in a number of areas affecting women's lives today.

This event will include the launch and inaugural conference of the Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies (IWSGS) at the University of Toronto, which came into existence in 1999. In accordance with the mandate of IWSGS, the conference aims to create a "polylogue" between feminists across disciplines, regions and countries as well as between feminist scholars, artists and activist, while integrating race, gender and sustainability.

The conference is made up of two plenary sessions of invited speakers ("Globalization and Sustainable Societies", and "Intersectionalities: Addressing Race, Gender, Class, Sexualities..."). It also includes a large number of parallel sessions which resulted from an international call for papers. Scholars, artists, activists and writers from around the world will speak on issues related to engendering sustainable energy, creating feminist spaces, cyberspace, health, violence, educating for equity, etc.

**For more information about the conference:** check the IWSGS web site:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/iwsgs/conference.html>; e-mail us at: [iwsgs.conference@utoronto.ca](mailto:iwsgs.conference@utoronto.ca);

phone: (416) 946-3817, or visit us at: IWSGS, New College - University of Toronto 40 Willcocks Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1C6

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**March 8 - October 17, 2000 - world wide**, "World March of Women," see also "In The Field" item in this issue, Federation des femmes du Quebec, 110 rue Ste. Therese, #307, Montreal PQ, H2Y 1E6, e-mail: [marche2000@ffq.qc.ca](mailto:marche2000@ffq.qc.ca) , Web Site: <http://www.ffq.qc.ca/marche2000/>

**June 1 - October 31, 2000 - Hannover, Germany**, "Grassroots Women's International Academy." The "Academy" is a series of four, week-long workshops presented by grassroots women's organizations. A feature of EXPO 2000, the world trade fair in Hannover, Germany. The Academy workshops will be held the 2nd week of June, July and September and the 3rd week of October. Contact Monika Jaeckel, Mother Centres, e-mail: [jaeckel@dji.de](mailto:jaeckel@dji.de) . Also at EXPO, UNCHS sponsors "Global Dialogue - Urban-Rural Relationships: Contact Mathias Hundsalz, e-mail: [mathias.hundsalz@unchs.org](mailto:mathias.hundsalz@unchs.org)

**October 2, 2000, World Habitat Day**: "Women in Urban Governance" Global Celebration, Organizer: UNCHS (Habitat) Dubai International Award for Best Practices Ceremony; for further information: e-mail: [habitat@unchs.org](mailto:habitat@unchs.org) , <http://www.unchs.org>

**October 12 - 14, 2000**, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, "Our Health in Our Hands," a conference for researchers, policy-makers, service providers and women's health advocates, Fort Garry Hotel, Winnipeg, <http://www.pwhce.ca> , e-mail: [pwhc@C-H.UWinnipeg.ca](mailto:pwhc@C-H.UWinnipeg.ca)

**October 23 - 27, 2000**, and February 26 - March 2, 2001, California, U.S., Women's Leadership Institute Programs, for further information: Alissa Materman, [execed@anderson.ucla.edu](mailto:execed@anderson.ucla.edu)

**November 8 - 21, 2000 Seoul, Korea**, "World Congress on Environmental Design for the New Millennium" with the theme: "Creativity Respecting Human, Earth and Culture," for further information: [seoul2000@millenniumed.org](mailto:seoul2000@millenniumed.org) <http://www.millenniumEd.org> .

**December 8, 2000, Accra, Ghana**, "Woman and Earth's Annual World Conference/Expo/Film Festival." For further information and/or to send proposals for presentations, film, performances, contact: Tatyana Valentina Mamonova and Carmella Mildred Didio, 467 Central Park West, Suite 7F, New York, NY 10025 USA. E-mail: [womearth@dorsai.org](mailto:womearth@dorsai.org), web site: <http://www.dorsai.org/-womearth/>

**August 31 to Sept. 7, 2001, South Africa**, "World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance," United Nations Commission on Human Rights, <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/racism/index.htm> .

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## MCGILL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING ON WOMEN

### Visiting Scholar Positions 2001 - 2002

The Centre invites applications for the above positions. These positions are open to any scholar who wishes to spend one or two academic terms in a university environment to carry out research in Women's Studies. The Centre offers office space and support, an ongoing seminar programme, and contact with other Women's Studies scholars at McGill and neighbouring universities. Scholars may wish to apply for external grants; limited research funding of \$1,000 is available from the Centre. If interested, please send a copy of your curriculum vitae, a brief outline of the research to be undertaken, copies of two recent short publications, and the names of two referees to:

Dr. Shree Muly, Director, 3487 Peel St., 2nd floor, Montreal, PQ, H3A 1W7, Canada  
phone: (514) 398-3911, fax: (514) 398-3986, e-mail: [mcrtw@leacock.lan.mcgill.ca](mailto:mcrtw@leacock.lan.mcgill.ca)

Closing date: November 15, 2000



## AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO ABOLISH ITS MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

A coalition of Austrian NGOs wants names of media outlets, politicians and VIPs opposed to the Austrian government's decision to abolish its Ministry of Women's Affairs.

e-mail: [wave@xpoint.at](mailto:wave@xpoint.at); List Serve [Aabolition-caucus-subscribe@egroups.com](mailto:Aabolition-caucus-subscribe@egroups.com) (leave body of message empty)

Web Site: <http://www.wave-network.org>; Hofstr. 9/1/4 A-1050 Vienna, Austria

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## THE TALIBAN'S WAR ON WOMEN

The government of Afghanistan is waging a war on women. Since the Taliban took power in 1996, women have had to wear burqua and have been beaten and stoned in public for not having the proper attire, even if this means simply not having the mesh covering in front of their eyes. Women are not allowed to work or even go out in public without a male relative; professional women such as professors, translators, doctors, lawyers, artists and writers have been forced from their jobs and stuffed into their homes. Homes where a woman is present must have their windows painted so that she can never be seen by outsiders. They must wear silent shoes so that they are never heard. Women live in fear of their lives for the slightest misbehaviour. Because they cannot work, those without male relatives or husbands are either starving to death or begging on the street, even if they hold PhDs. There are almost no medical facilities available for women, and relief workers, in protest, have mostly left the country. Medicine and psychologists and other things are necessary to treat the sky-rocketing level of depression among women.

### Information and petitions can be found at:

<http://www.feminist.org/afghan/intro.html>

<http://www.petitiononline.com/taliban/petition.html>

<http://www.gsreport.com/articles/art000059.html>

<http://www.rawa.org>

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## THE INTERNATIONAL WATER MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE (IWMI)

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) translated a Spanish video on gender and participatory rural development. The video shows how women, on equal footing with men, were part of the design and implementation process of an irrigation system. Women built up water rights independently by doing construction work. This video is available in French and English at IWMI. The Spanish version is available with the original producers: CESA Ecuador.

To order: e-mail: [cesaoc@cesa.org.ec](mailto:cesaoc@cesa.org.ec)

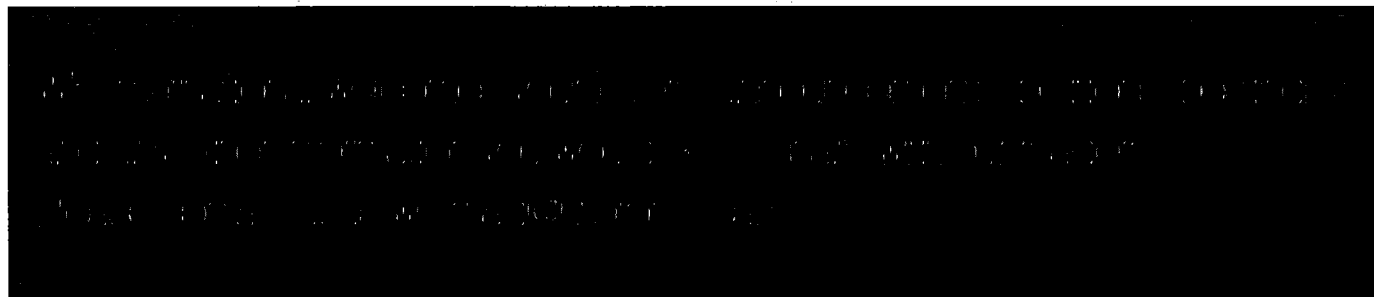
Web site CESA: <http://www.cesa.org.ec/>

<http://www.cesa.org.ec/>

More information on the content of the video can be obtained on the Poverty,

Gender and Water web site: [www.cgiar.org/iwmi/resprog/GPW.htm](http://www.cgiar.org/iwmi/resprog/GPW.htm)

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## Guidelines for Contributors

*WE (Women & Environments) International* magazine is run by a volunteer editorial committee and each issue of the magazine is co-ordinated by a volunteer editor, who may or may not be a member of the editorial committee. Articles and artwork printed in *WE International* are normally solicited, although non-solicited material is welcome and will be reviewed with equal consideration.

Some of our issues are thematic and in the past have been dedicated to topics such as community design, urban agriculture, and women in development. Other issues have covered a diverse range of topics relating to women. Each issue usually contains research articles (800-1,500 words), feature length articles (1,500 – 2,500), book reviews (250-450), and "In the Field" mini-reports on innovative projects and organizations (750-1000). Submissions for all sections, and creative additions (e.g., poetry, short stories, film reviews) will be considered. Proposals for themes and co-ordinating editors for future issues are also welcome.

Because women are the common denominator in all of our articles, submissions must take gender-relations and the experience of women in different environments into account. Articles should state explicitly their relevance to women as agents of change, victims and survivors of oppression, instigators and beneficiaries of projects/policies, and so on. Authors should also consider class, race/ethnicity, and cultural dimensions, among the many other diverse aspects that shape women's lives, in their articles.

All articles submitted to *WE International* for review should be written for a lay audience in a clear and easy to understand

format. We are not an academic journal, so minimal use of academic references and style is expected.

**Manuscripts:** *WE* prefers electronic submissions of manuscripts but will accept hard copies by snail-mail if necessary (accompanied by a diskette, please). Each manuscript should include a 50 word bio on the author(s), plus endnotes and further reading suggestions if appropriate. Indicate if artwork or graphics are available. The author's name, addresses, and telephone number must appear on all pages of the manuscript. Let us know if we may we include contact information at the bottom of your article so that readers may follow up on ideas or projects.

**WE Want Your Visuals:** *WE* encourages freelance submissions of photographs and illustrations (black and white works best). Visual art should represent, but is not limited to, images of the lives of women from diverse backgrounds. Please carefully consider the reproductive qualities of your submissions as well as the page proportions of the magazine. Include any captions, photo credits, and a stamped and self-addressed return envelope. Final design decisions rest with the editorial committee.

If work is accepted for publication, authors/artists will be notified as soon as possible. Please note that because this is a volunteer-run publication, time-lapses between initial receipt of material and review for potential publication can be up to 8-10 weeks. **WE**

Thank you for your interest in *WE (Women & Environments) International* magazine.



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"Sun-dried," Shanghai, China.  
Photo by D. A. MacGregor, 1997.



**Kenojuak Ashevak**  
*Guardians of the Katajjaqatiit*, lithograph, 1992

For almost 40 years Kenojuak has drawn upon her experiences as an Inuit woman to create internationally acclaimed works of art. Kenojuak was born in 1927 at Ikirashak. She spent most of her early years living a traditional lifestyle in Arctic Canada, traveling from camp to camp in South Baffin Island and Northern Quebec. Throughout those early years, it was the Inuit community that helped Kenojuak survive the loss of her father and her three children, and gave her the strength to live in a harsh and inhospitable land. As a sculptor and graphic artist, Kenojuak has not only recorded the past struggles of the Inuit people and a lifestyle that is about to disappear; but she has also commemorated their recent political achievements. The Canadian government commissioned Kenojuak to record the signing of the Inuit land claims Agreement-in-Principle and the creation of Nunavut in 1999. Kenojuak's work can be found in countless prestigious collections such as the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinberg, Ontario and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England. Kenojuak received the Order of Canada in 1967 and was elected to the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1974.

*Guardians of the Katajjaqatiit* by Kenojuak Ashevak reprinted with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts and West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative Ltd.

*Many thanks to Ann Tompkins, Director of The Guild Shop's Inuit and Native Gallery, for promoting with such boundless enthusiasm the work of all artists, and allowing us access to The Guild's extensive art collection.*

*And special thanks to our talented photographer, Rachel O'Neill, who worked in adverse conditions to produce some truly professional images.*