



# Women & Environments

international  
magazine

35 YEARS OF WEI MAGAZINE 1976-2011

## Women, Aging, Poverty & Other Constraints

**African/Canadian  
Grandmother Power**

GAYE-FRANCES ALEXANDER

**Long-Term Care  
Homes Legislation  
and Women**

BEV BAINES

**Women and Aging**

AN INTERVIEW WITH

LAURA SKY

**Sexuality in  
Long-Term Care**

JUDITH WAHL

**Age-Friendly  
Communities —  
A Women's Issue**

REGGIE MODLICH

CND \$6.95 US \$4.95



DOUBLE ISSUE



**Editorial Team:**

Gaye-Frances Alexander, Reggie Modlich, Christine Mounsteven, Paula Psyllakis, Sharmila Shewprasad, Elliot Spears, Erin Stoik, Sybila Valdivieso.

**Poetry Editor:** Sonja Greckol

**Arts Editor:** Elliot Spears

**Editorial Assistants:** Kristy Kilbourne, Amanda Vega.

**Design:** Dinah Greenberg, NOMAD Design

**Logo:** Elizabeth Forrest

**Cover Photography:** Dr. Mark Nowaczynski

**Cover Art:** Karen Hibbard

**Contributors:** Gaye-Frances Alexander, Carol Anderson, Bev Baines, Linda Chebichii, Shirley Farlinger, Erin Harris, Karen Hibbard, Michele Hibler, Kate Marshall Flaherty, Reggie Modlich, Dr. Mark Nowaczynski, Joanne Osborne-Paulson, Lee Gould, Sonja Greckol, K.V. Skene, Laura Sky, Itzela Sosa, Heather Spears, Mama Darlina Tyawana, Sybila Valdivieso, Judith Wahl.

**Editorial Board:** Genevieve Drouin, Dayna Scott, Sharmila Shewprasad, Olga Speranskaya, Sybila Valdivieso.

**Editor-in-Chief:** Sybila Valdivieso

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Women & Environments International is a unique Canadian magazine, which examines women's multiple relations to their environments — natural, built and social — from feminist and anti-racist perspectives. It has provided a forum for academic research and theory, professional practice and community experience since 1976. It is published by a volunteer editorial board and contributes to feminist social change. The magazine is associated with the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University and has been previously associated with the Women and Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto.

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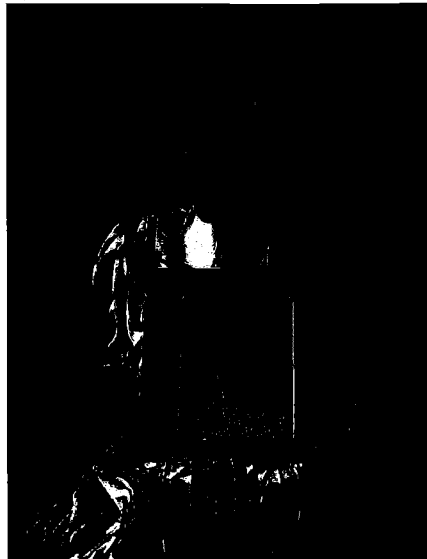
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## ON THE COVER

**Dr. Mark Nowaczynski** is the Clinical Director of House Calls, an interdisciplinary program providing ongoing home-based care to frail, vulnerable, and marginalized seniors in Toronto. Using photography to stimulate change, his work has been profiled nationally in print, radio, television, and in the Gemini Award winning NFB documentary **House Calls**. A solo exhibit of his photographs opened at the Royal Ontario Museum in 2010.

**Name of Image:** Joyce holding her portrait.

**Mrs. Joyce A.**, age 80, July 2007, holding her portrait as a young woman after moving into supportive-housing geared to seniors with dementia. From the exhibit **House Calls with my Camera**, on display at the Royal Ontario Museum from May 15, 2010 until January 16, 2011 online at <http://www.rom.on.ca/exhibitions/special/housecalls.php>

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Canada

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**Address all correspondence:**

Women & Environments International Magazine  
Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University  
HNES Building, Room 234,  
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3 Canada

T: 416-736-2100 x 21055

F: 416-736-5679

e-mail: [weimag@yorku.ca](mailto:weimag@yorku.ca)

website: [www.weimag.com](http://www.weimag.com)

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# WE Speak

## A Word from WEI

Women & Environments International Magazine Turns 35

This is a Special Anniversary Issue of *WEI* as 2011 marks the magazine's 35th anniversary. *WEI* was founded in 1976 at the first United Nations Habitat Conference by Professors David Morley, Rebecca Peterson and Gerda Werkele of the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. They developed the idea for the magazine with the initial focus being on the built environment. The focus then grew to encompass the natural, built and social environment and today *WEI* is one of the longest surviving feminist magazines in Canada.

Therefore, it seems appropriate that this issue of *WEI* be dedicated to the theme of aging, poverty and additional constraints. We were drawn to this topic by the insight that the majority of older persons are women and that while the disadvantages related to aging are disproportionately borne by women a gender analysis remains lacking in this area. We want to raise awareness of these issues by bringing you a variety of voices and considerations across the spectrum of aging.

We are honoured to have had Gaye-Frances Alexander and Reggie Modlich as guest editors of this issue. Their knowledge and experience of having worked with *WEI* for many years provided the framework for the issue's various articles from diverse cultures and communities. We thank the entire Editorial Team which included Gaye-Frances Alexander, Reggie Modlich, Christine Mounstevan, Paula Psyllakis, Erin Stoik and Elliot Spears. This issue has been a learning experience and a process of discovery from seeking submissions to finding the right fit at every stage.

In this issue we also wish to extend a special thank you to Sonja Greckol, *WEI*'s Poetry Editor. It is thanks to her dedication that *WEI* provides you with amazing poetry twice a year. Sonja's first book *Gravity Matters* was launched in 2009 and one of the poems from that book is featured in this issue. Congratulations Sonja!

We also thank all the contributors to this issue who shared their thoughts, perspectives, poetry, art, photographs and personal insight with us.

The editorial focus for our issues in 2011 will be on Labour and Environment (Spring/Summer 2011) and Food Security (Fall 2011/Winter 2012). If you wish to contribute an article to one of these issues, or if you wish to volunteer as editor for one of the editorial teams please send us an email.

Finally, we are planning a BIG 35 year celebration party sometime in the spring of 2011. We will keep you posted! ❧

**Sharmila Shewprasad & Sybila Valdivieso, Editors**  
weimag@yorku.ca

### Putting This Issue Together

**Gaye-Frances Alexander** served for many pleasant years (on and off) as a member of the WEI Editorial Board. She joined the editorial team for this issue of WEI because she truly is an aging woman, so has a lot of self-interest in issues of women and aging.

**Reggie (Reggie) Modlich, MES**, is a retired urban planner. She has been a pioneer in the feminist critique of urban planning and the built environment. As such she was a founder of Women Plan Toronto and its successor, Toronto Women's City Alliance. For many years, she served as WEI managing editor and board member.

**Christine Mounstevan** is a retired Professor at George Brown College in the Community Services Division where her focus was addictions and mental health counseling. She has been on the Board of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly since 2008. Christine is the former President of Canadian Pensioners Concerned, the Ontario division, and she represents Canadian Pensioners Concerned at the Ontario Seniors Secretariat Liaison Committee.

**Paula Psyllakis** has worked with or on behalf of older adults for many years, most recently in her capacity as a board member and Chairman of the Board (2007-2009) for the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly. She holds a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics from York University and wrote her thesis on "Formulaic Language in the Discourse of Individuals with Alzheimer's Disease".

**Sharmila Shewprasad** has an MA in International Development Studies from Dalhousie University and a BA in Women's Studies from York University. For two years, she has done parliamentary advocacy for women's sexual and reproductive rights across Asia. Prior to this, she did community organizing in marginalized communities Toronto and Halifax for five years. Her current work focuses on refugees.

**Elliot Spears** currently practises law in Toronto. She served as a junior editor, then senior editor, for her law school's law journal. Elliot is happy to be once again participating in the work of a publication, particularly one that explores environments.

**Erin Stoik** currently practices as a research lawyer in a small litigation firm. She has degrees in anthropology and sociology and clerked at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. She is currently one of the Vice Chairs on the Board of Directors of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly.

**Sybila Valdivieso** has been on the board of Women & Environments International Magazine since 2007. She is a former chair of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly. She believes that the issues faced by older women, particularly marginalized older women, need our immediate attention.

# Editorial

## Women, Aging, Poverty and Other Constraints

Gaye-Frances Alexander and Reggie Modlich, Guest Editors

**A**s we made final preparations for publication of this issue of *Women and Environments International*, we reflected on *WEI* Magazine's own aging process over the last 34 years since *WEI* began publication. Volume one, number one was a stapled, nine-page cut and paste, mimeographed newsletter — who remembers “mimeograph”?

Some things have remained the same and some have changed:

- *WEI* is published by a volunteer editorial board. We could never afford more than very part-time, minimally-paid staffing. The students and professors at York U. have passed the torch to dedicated feminists and environmentalists — many of us graduates of York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies, where *WEI* started, and has returned again.
- The women who started *WEI* were part of the Second Wave of Feminism, predominantly reflecting issues of women in the north. The current Editorial Board is largely part of the Third Wave, struggling to encompass diversity in Feminisms and women, with some who consider themselves part of a potential Fourth Wave. Those of us on the team for this issue range from those still in school, to those having babies, to those of the sandwich generation and those who are now grandmothers with all the complaints aging brings.
- In 1976, we were inspired and activated by *The Feminist Mystique* and the movement that helped end the Vietnam War. We mobilized to gain the right to abortion, to bring violence against women out in the open, to raise pay equity and around many other issues. In 2010, there is still plenty of world conflict, violence and abuse, and women of all ages — but especially aging women — are still its victims.
- UN-HABITAT in 1976 brought together



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small groups of women — like those who started *WEI* — who decided to stay in touch. 2010 marks the formation of UN Women — a single global body to address all aspects of women's struggles.

- Back then, there were no computers and consequently no e-mail. Today's instant global communication can overwhelm and numb with the volume of information and images, and the leisure time promised by a world of mechanical and electronic innovation seems to elude us.
- Women's concerns about the environment include the looming spectre of climate change. Of course, the housing, child care and health concerns that were the earlier focus have remained. Our problems, rather than resolving, are expanding!
- We are realizing the entrenched systemic complexities of patriarchal powers and greed. Like cancer, they are often internalized in the hearts and minds of both oppressors and oppressed. But what remains, and has grown, is the global network of women who read and contribute their experiences and writings. *WEI* was established to link women and their environmental

concerns in all parts of the planet, and this issue reflects our success in strengthening that network.

- We have experienced disillusionment, even with each other, as in any meaningful movement for change. We have argued and wept and hugged, but keep on looking for answers and solutions to counter the injustices and cutbacks of neo-liberalism around the world and to build a better one.

In this issue, we hear the stories of how women around the world are aging, how they are coping with aging in their rapidly-changing environments, and how the cohort of aging feminists are organizing to shelter themselves, combat their poverty and vulnerability and remain an effective voice on behalf of older women.

From the Rift Valley of Kenya, to the Older Women's Network in Toronto, and reflected in poetry and graphic art (including a list of irritants that plague us as we age), we hope you will be inspired, enraged, amused and informed about aging women and their environments, as you immerse yourself in this issue of *WEI!* ❧

# Features

## African/Canadian Grandmother Power

Turning the Tide of HIV/AIDS in Africa

Gaye-Frances Alexander

The Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) is a Canadian NGO headed by Canada's former Ambassador to the United Nations and Special UN Envoy on Aids, Stephen Lewis. The SLF supports community-based organizations working to overcome HIV/AIDS in Africa. The SLF helps women who are ill; assists orphaned children; and works with heroic grandmothers caring for their grandchildren, whose parents have died of AIDS. Since 2003, the SLF has funded over 300 projects in 15 countries.

Launched in March 2006, on the eve of International Women's Day, the SLF **Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign** raises awareness and mobilizes Canadian support for Africa's grandmothers, with stunning success.

Now, more than 240 groups of Canadian grandmothers have taken up the call to action and have raised over \$10 million. The SLF directs these funds to community-level organizations in 15 sub-Saharan African countries that provide grandmothers with much needed support, such as food, housing grants, school fees for their grandchildren and grief counselling.

The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign (GGC) is a grassroots movement. The SLF believes that the Canadian grandmothers are the best judges of events that will work in their communities. Grandmothers decide whether their events will focus on fundraising, advocacy or both. However, the SLF emphasizes that the grassroots projects in Africa that are run by and for African grandmothers and the children in their care have clearly articulated that they need funding first and foremost.

Recently, the Canadian grandmothers have set their sights on more ambitious events that have a national scope. Some of the highly successful GGC projects with a winning combination of SLF backing and energized local grandmothers include The Stride to Turn the Tide and The GranAfriCan Gathering.

**The Stride to Turn the Tide** took place June 12th and 13th, 2010. It was a breathtaking show of national solidarity. Grandmothers' groups from across the country participated in local sponsored walks, amplifying the voices of the African grandmothers and raising well over \$350,000!

**The GranAfriCan Gathering** — over 300 grandmothers representing more than 80 groups came together to learn more about the complementary work of advocacy and fundraising.

The Gathering heard from two inspirational African grandmothers: SipiweHlophe and Mama Darlina Tyawana as well as The SLF's Stephen Lewis, Ilana Landsberg-Lewis and Aissatou Diadjate. It was a time of sharing, learning, eating, singing and of course — dancing!

Put quite simply, the message was...

*"African grandmothers need financial support now so they can feed and house themselves and the children in their care, send their grandchildren to school and get the healthcare and medication they require. They advocate in their home countries for their rights. Advocacy in Canada and on the world stage is also needed to protect human rights and make systemic changes that address the grandmothers' needs."*



Mama Darlina at Stride to Turn the Tide — June 2010.

The National Advocacy Committee (NAC) is made up of independently organized, advocacy-minded Grandmothers and "Grandothers" (supporters of all genders and ages) from across the country. The NAC consults the Foundation to ensure their activities are complementary to the identified needs of the African grandmothers.

### AfriGrand Caravan

**"Grandmothers stand up — Granddaughters speak out — Communities take action!"** This is an initiative of the Stephen Lewis Foundation and not the Grandmother's Campaign.

For the first time, individuals in 40



Mama Dartina Speaks to Toronto Grandmothers — June 2010.

Canadian communities from St. John's, Newfoundland to Victoria, British Columbia will be able to connect directly with African women and girls at the heart of these community-based initiatives.

From September to November, 2010 the Stephen Lewis Foundation will travel across the country with African grandmothers and granddaughters orphaned by AIDS. The AfriGrand Caravan will create a forum for these women to tell their stories and share their strategies, challenges and triumphs in dealing with the ravages of AIDS. It will also offer Canadians the opportunity to be inspired by these stories and to join the movement.

In Africa today, grandmothers and granddaughters share the roles of caregiver and income earner within homes and communities. Supported by grassroots organizations, they engage in innovative programs that enable their families and communities to overcome the ravages of

AIDS. These determined grandmothers and granddaughters are proof of the real change possible when we work creatively and across generations.

Canadian grandmothers, youth, activists and community members are invited to welcome the Caravan, engage in a meaningful dialogue with their African counterparts, and understand the concrete difference their support can make.

#### **An African Grandmother's Story — A Conversation with Mama Darlina**

We spoke with Mama Darlina Tyawana during her recent visit to Toronto, where she was consulting with the SLF regarding the upcoming AfriGrand Caravan and her other work with the SLF in Africa. This African grandmother who is now an international community leader was happy to share her family's truly inspirational story with *WEI* readers.

Mama Darlina's beloved granddaugh-

ter is 26 years old this month and Mama D. will be back home to celebrate with her! This granddaughter is Mama D's late sister's granddaughter. Mama D. raised her sister's grandchildren when her sister, Natasha died with AIDS. Several family members carried HIV; some have died.

Mama D. has cared for her sister's granddaughter since she was 3 months old. When she finished school, she went on to college, but needed a bursary, and was not able to continue, so she took up Mama Darlina's work in women's rights.

This year Mama Darlina was nominated as Cape Town's Community Builder of the Year. If she wins this award, she wishes to open a shelter for abused women; if need be, her house will become a shelter for women; Mama D. will move to a flat.

Mama D. says with passion and conviction that "women are 'elephants and lions' — they are strong; they can fight

age; if you strike a woman, you strike a rock; she will never give up!

Women carry so much on their backs; if they are abused, they won't speak about it because the man is the breadwinner; children are getting into drugs and crime; schools are not safe; the old age homes need support; women suffer the most even when they are old. Women should have support and Mama D. wants her women's centre to provide that support.

Abused women need to know that there is support for them to speak out, and to leave abusive men. And women need to get out of the house, and into the community! They have a lot to contribute!

There is a great need for free land, and better support for women to become farmers and land owners, and capital or micro-finance tools to set up businesses and co-ops, such as making and selling arts and crafts, skills that many African women have to offer."

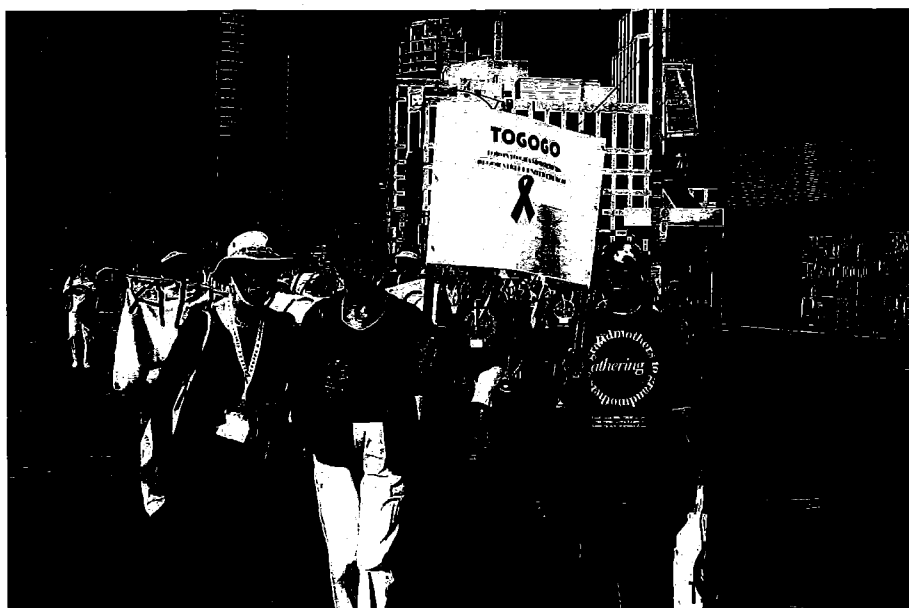
Mama Darlina was introduced to the Stephen Lewis Foundation when the SLF was looking for a Cape Town-based grandmother who could represent South African grandmothers. Not surprisingly, Mama Darlina's name came up; She had been an activist for women and HIV since 1998. Along with advocacy through civil disobedience and talking to parliamentarians, she was nominated to various provincial positions where she could raise her voice to make a difference.

While much has been accomplished, Mama D. remains adamant that it is still not enough — there are still many challenges, such as distances, and communication in the many languages spoken by Africans that stand in the way of provision of adequate health care and other supports for women, in particular.

Mama D. is a pensioner, but she intends to keep working, since her people need support.

Mama Darlina's mother will soon be 90 years old. Mama D. will have a huge party for her to thank her for all she has done and taught her family, never looking for any reward.

Old age homes in South Africa present a special challenge; families look after old people, but if they are all employed, they



TOGOGO's march with African Grans, World Aids Conference, Toronto — September 2006.

have to find time to go to old age homes to give that support to older family members; there are not enough resources; volunteers are also needed to supplement care in old age homes.

Mama Darlina emphasizes that South Africa is democratic; the President has given out his telephone number, and people can call his office staff with their problems and issues. There is just such a need for more resources to solve people's problems.

We spoke of how AIDS and all the suffering it brings can take up all of one's time and thinking — as Mama D. states: "It's not you living in AIDS, AIDS is living in you, but don't let it get you down."

We spoke of aging in South Africa and in Canada — in spite of different circumstances, we agreed that it is important for older women to stay involved and connected in their communities and to support younger women to keep moving and upgrading their status.

While Canadian grandmothers can raise money to assist their African sisters, it is perhaps equally as important that we listen to each other's stories, to learn from each other, so that each one can teach one. Mama Darlina is returning to Canada later this year with her granddaughter to join the GranAfriCan Caravan, travelling across Canada to meet with grandmothers

and granddaughters, to share stories and learn from each other.

Mama Darlina exudes a quiet and confident sense of the power to make things happen! The energy she brings to her work with the Stephen Lewis Foundation and her dedication and love for her African sisters makes her an unstoppable force for good!

To complete the story of African and Canadian Grandmother Power, Shirley Farlinger, shares her reflections and her story on being a Canadian-Gran.

### **A Canadian Grandmother's Story — Shirley Farlinger**

"On reaching the 'golden' age of 80 I am taking stock of what I can no longer do, what I can still do and what I want to do in the coming years. I am sure of one thing; I want to remain a TOGOGO.

This is a Toronto group of grannies — GOGO is African for granny. In this group of 20 grannies I have congenial friends with a worthy goal. So I have the prerequisites for a long and happy life — friends, a purpose and a window on the world, especially on Africa. Our objective is to help the African grannies with some of the many resources we have in Canada.

We meet every month to plan our fundraising and support activities. The money goes to the Stephen Lewis Foundation



which directs it to those most in need in Africa. It is not a large financial burden for me; we raise the money from those who come to our events, a concert, a tea or a sale of African goods.

This started for me when I read Stephen Lewis' book, *A Race Against Time*. You could say I am in love with Stephen Lewis as so many are. I will gladly help him help our African friends.

One hundred of us met 80 of the African gogos in Toronto during the global AIDS conference in 2006. We sang and danced like Africans, or as much like them as we could.

How in the midst of the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic could those gogos be so happy? Throughout Africa the grannies are left to care for their grandchildren and local orphans whose parents have died of this devastating disease. This means that the gogos must see to physical needs, like food, school uniforms and also emotional needs. The children must be taught how to avoid the fate of their parents in countries where AIDS is rampant and they must find employment.

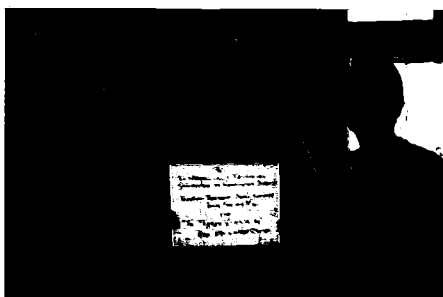
The men go to the city to find work and may return with the virus. Women account for about 60% of HIV infections. The stigma of admitting to AIDS and getting tested in Africa is causing the disease to spread.

An estimated 2 million deaths occurred worldwide in 2008, 72% in sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa has the world's highest number of people living with AIDS.

Yet we are making progress: The number of new infections in 2008 is approximately 25% lower than the peak in 1995.

Sometimes it's hard to know where to begin. But we don't have the agonizing job of choosing one place over another. That is the job of the Foundation and they check progress in each project undertaken — regular updates with pictures and stories are sent to us via [www.stephenlewisfoundation.org](http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org).

I have an additional reason for supporting this cause. My eldest son died of AIDS here in Toronto. It was shortly before the antiretroviral drug (ARV) therapy was available. I think of this as some-



Ruth, TOGOGO Founder, delivers fundraiser proceeds to Stephen Lewis Foundation — January 2007.

thing I do in Brian's memory. I think he would have wanted to know why Africa is so short of doctors, hospitals, schools and social services in general. Why are there shortages of good food, a necessary part of fighting the disease? Why is there a shortage of jobs for young people? Many of the reasons behind the problems are explained in Stephen Lewis book, *Race Against Time*. The structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, forced on African countries over the years have caused these problems. These are policies Canada supports and no African country can get a loan anywhere if they do not follow these devastating rules. Also when the usual wage is between one and two dollars a day there is no money for social programs.

We send letters to the federal government imploring it to facilitate the shipment of ARVs to African countries or facilitating the manufacture of generic drugs in Africa. Progress on this front is very slow.

The African grannies are an inspiration to me. How can my arthritis compare with their problems? I feel I'm an important part of a noble effort."

#### The Caravan Continues...

As this article goes to publication, the AfriGran Caravan makes its way across Canada, with regular heart-warming bulletins of grandmothers and granddaughters, African and Canadian, sharing their stories and making lasting friendships. As the stories and the people become real to each other, there is an ever more powerful bond forming between African and Canadian grandmothers. How can we do less than

mobilize support for our African sisters and continue to advocate for them until AIDS is just a memory, here, in Africa and around the world! ❄

**Gaye-Frances Alexander** is a proud member of the TOGOGO's, a Toronto Grandmothers group, and a long-time volunteer editor and supporter of WEI magazine.

**Mama Darlina Tyawana** is a community leader, activist and proud grandmother from Cape-Town, South Africa.

**Shirley Farlinger** is also a proud grandmother and member of the TOGOGO group, a long-time community advocate and activist for human rights, peace and environmental healing.

#### Further Resources:

<http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/grandmothers.htm>

# ACE

## Advocacy Centre for the Elderly



### Legal Services for Seniors

2 Carlton Street Suite 701  
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3

Phone: (416) 598-2656

Fax: (416) 598-7924

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

# Long-Term Care Homes Legislation and Women

Lessons From Ontario

Bev Baines

## Why Gender Matters

**W**Close your eyes and imagine that you are 96 years old. Your broken hip confines you to a wheelchair from which, perversely, your rapid-onset mild-to-medium dementia liberates you. You get up from the dining table, and fall. You stand to look at or for something, and fall. You clamber over the strange bars on your bed to go to the bathroom, and fall.

They say you are in a nursing home. Now open your eyes, look around and answer the question: What is the most visible feature of this nursing home?

**WOMEN.** Put simply, more than 75% of long-term care home beds are occupied by women. However, not only are the residents mostly women, so too are the caregivers. Women comprise 90% of the hands-on caregivers (professional support workers, physical and occupational therapists, registered practical nurses and registered nurses) and support workers (dietary, laundry, cleaning and clerical staff) who work in long-term care homes. Moreover, at least a majority of residents' regular visitors are female family members: daughters, sisters, wives and partners.

If you did not answer "women" it may be due to the gender-neutral language police who have successfully neutered our discourse about long-term care (LTC) homes, a.k.a. nursing homes, homes for the aged, etc. Consider the new *Long-Term Care Homes Act* that the Ontario Legislature enacted in June 2007 which came into force on July 1, 2010. Known in its pre-enactment stage as Bill 140, it contains no reference to women.

Instead, the Act is phrased in terms of residents and licensees. The former are promised "resident-centered care" to be delivered through a Residents' Bill of

Rights, written plans of care, specified services (including one Registered Nurse but not dental work), and a safe and secure environment. The latter (the owners of LTC homes) are provided with detailed rules about establishing, maintaining and closing LTC homes.

Does gender matter? In the case of residents, do women's care needs differ from those of their male counterparts? In the case of licensees, does it matter that few are female? The short answer is that we don't know. Provincial governments across Canada legislate LTC home policies without examining their implications for women, whether residents or licensees, workers or visitors.

Yet numbers alone tell us that LTC home policies have significantly more impact on women than men. According to 2006 Census data, 4.3 million Canadians are seniors; one million are over 80, with two-thirds of them being women; and 4,635 people are over 100, five-sixths of whom are female.

## Legislating Minimum Standards of Care

In Ontario alone there are over 75,000 nursing home beds, and more than 75% of these beds (more than 56,250 beds) are occupied by women, many of whom have a moderately severe dementing illness.

Dementia is a major determinant of who occupies LTC home beds. It is increasingly found among our aging population and its impact is quantitatively more debilitating for women. In 1991, a study of seniors aged 85 or more who suffered from dementia revealed that 70% were women.

The nature of dementia dictates the care needs of many LTC home residents.

It can lead to falls and fractures, which in turn call for complex care. For example, even mobile dementia residents may need diapers and before the new Act came into effect, the government's \$1.20 allowance limited them to three or at most four a day, all of which had to be filled to the green 80% line before they could be changed. Will the government change its funding limit and LTC homes their saturation policies under the new Act? Regulations made under the new Act (see O. Reg. 79/10, s. 51 (2) (g)) provide that "residents who require continence care products have sufficient changes to remain clean, dry and comfortable". But who decides what actually constitutes compliance — the residents with dementia, their family members, front-line care staff, LTC home administrators, or bureaucrats?

For residents, especially those who need assistance toileting, the most important feature of LTC home legislation is whether the government is prepared to make a commitment to a minimum standard of care. Before the new Act, Ontario LTC homes provided about 2.5 to 2.8 hours of care per resident per day, which translated into only two personal support workers on duty overnight for upwards of 38 residents. Put differently, elderly immobile women in diapers who had to urinate more than twice a night risked soaking diapers, broken skin and bedsores. Not surprisingly, during the public hearings, a major controversy erupted between proponents of a legislated standard and the government's determination to omit any standards from the Bill.

Two provinces have legislated a minimum standard of care per resident per day: Alberta (1.9 hours) and Saskatchewan (2 hours). British Columbia's legislation does not specify minimum hours but does list the services that must be provided and that a sufficient number of employees must be on duty to provide these services. The remaining provinces have no legislated standard of care.

Ontario resisted on the grounds that legislation could freeze the standard below what might become necessary. Since the provinces with legislated standards already provide above the minimum

(Alberta provides 3.5 hours and Saskatchewan 3 hours), and since it is not a monumental task to amend ordinary legislation, this contention seems spurious. Under widespread pressure to adopt a legislated standard of 3.5 to 4.0 hours per resident per day, Ontario finally agreed to address this concern in the regulations that would follow and implement the proposed *Act*. Instead of referring to a minimum number of hours of care per resident, however, the regulations made under the new *Act* (see O. Reg. 79/10) contain more diffuse minimum standards and compliance requirements.

### Legislation Without Accountability

Acknowledging the impact of LTC homes legislation on women is not to deny the needs of male residents. Rather it is to ensure the legislation remains focused on and accountable to its actual beneficiaries.

Regrettably LTC legislation across the country makes little to no effort to be accountable to residents. In Ontario, despite its inclusion of a Bill of Rights for Residents, its listing of the services residents should receive, its description of the process of admission to long-term care, and its delineation of the organizational structures that should be found in LTC homes, its compliance and enforcement mechanisms are weak.

For instance, inspections are annual and not without exceptions. The Resident's Bill of Rights may turn out to be illusory if the inspection and/or complaint processes do not result in compliance with it because the only alternative enforcement mechanism involves suing the operator of the LTC home in court for breach of contract. And while the *Act* provides the Ministry with the authority to establish an administrator known modestly as the Office of the Long-Term Care Homes Resident and Family Advisor, the incumbent can only provide advice rather than acting as an ombudsperson with the power to advocate for residents and their families in the event of unresolved conflicts with LTC home operators and provincial bureaucrats.

### Enabling For-Profit LTC Facilities

The real objective of Ontario's law is

to serve as licensing legislation. It is licensing legislation masquerading as resident care. Don't get me wrong, we need to license long-term care homes. What we do not need is a licensing regime that encourages the already too few non-profit homes to convert to for-profit homes. Put simply, for-profit LTC homes make their profits at the expense of their residents and workers.

To explain: regulations provide that both non-profits and for-profits receive identical funding from the government and from resident fees. For-profits must make their profits from these sources, while non-profits can use them to provide better resident care and worker compensation.

In Kingston, for example, the evidence that non-profits offer better care and care-giving derives from Kingston General Hospital's crisis placement policy. This policy forces patients needing long-term care to select three homes, one of which may be on the Hospital's A-list which contains only non-profits. In contrast the Hospital's B- and C-lists, from which at least two homes must be chosen, consist of profit-making LTC homes.

By making it easier to convert non-profit homes into profit-making homes, the *Long-Term Care Homes Act* has a significant impact on caregivers, the vast majority of whom are women. These front-line workers are underpaid and poorly treated in terms of their employment conditions.

### Safeguarding Workers' Rights

To compound the problems these workers face, the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC) issued a report (Regulation of Health Professions in Ontario: New Directions) in 2006 recommending that Personal Support Workers (PSWs) should not be regulated as a profession under the *Regulated Health Professions Act*, and that a Personal Support Worker Registry should not be implemented. Rather, education and training of PSWs should be improved, as should their staffing and supervision. Accordingly, PSWs were not included in the recent revisions to that *Act*; and in 2010, the Minister of Health and Long-

Term Care bifurcated responsibility for the professional development of PSWs to the Ministries of Training, Colleges and Universities and Health and Long-Term Care. Neither HPRAC's recommendations nor the Minister's devolution of responsibility augur well for improving the status and credibility of this overwhelmingly female-dominated occupation that serves as the backbone of all LTC homes.

Ontario is not alone in devaluing the contributions of these women. British Columbia tried to diminish the collective bargaining rights of a number of unionized health care workers in that province, again predominantly women. It took a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada to establish that the legislation was unconstitutional, violating the Charter rights of the workers.

If women who work in LTC homes and the residents they service are not to be harmed by the kind of licensing legislation that Ontario has adopted, the government must resist the conversion of existing LTC homes and beds from non-profit to for-profit. Ideally, calls for adding more long-term care beds and building more LTC homes would be funded in such a way as to encourage more non-profit bids. Certainly there should be some form of incentive (or punishment?) to preclude municipalities where homes and beds are sorely needed from refusing to enter the bidding process, as just happened in Kingston. By facilitating conversion of non-profit homes and beds to profit-making corporations, by failing to adequately fund care-giving, and by subscribing to discretionary staffing standards, the *Ontario Long-Term Care Homes Act* is licensing regulation with a vengeance. It promises more harm than benefit to the women (and men) whose interests should be foremost in the revision of long-term care policy. ❧

**Bev Baines** is a Professor in the Faculty of Law and the Head of the Department of Women's Studies at Queen's University Kingston (currently on leave).

For more on women and long-term care facilities, visit the website of Women and Health Care Reform for forthcoming studies on this important topic: [www.womenandhealthcarereform.ca](http://www.womenandhealthcarereform.ca)

**Lady Finger**

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Picture your knuckles — wrinkled, more  
square than round, split nails, age-spotted claws

blue with cold . . . and now suppose you close  
one in a car door, gash a ragged crescent . . .

the stitches scab and fall, the skin peels, the fractured  
bone heals into a shapely half-almond,

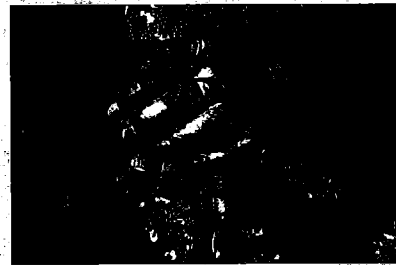
the newborn skin pinkly blossoms  
as though you prefer milk to scotch, and the nail

hardens, centered in its bed, a purple  
map shows the route from Canada to Guatemala,

and an ache arises — to stroke, to fondle . . .  
you retrieve your grandma's opals, her giant topaz,

the antique gold snake, its ruby eyes behold  
your model finger: adorable!

pointing, wiggling — her whole new life ahead.



Lee Gould's poems and reviews have appeared in **Quarterly West**, **The Gay and Lesbian Review**, **The Berkshire Review**, **Magma**, **Women and the Environment** and other journals. **Weeds**, her chapbook, was recently published by Finishing Line Press. She lives in the Hudson Valley in New York State, USA.



Laura Sky

# Women and Aging

A Feminist Documentary Filmmaker's Perspective

An Interview with Laura Sky by Reggie Modlich

**L**aura Sky is the award winning producer-director of Skyworks Charitable Foundation. Laura started Skyworks in 1983 with the mission: "Changing the World through Documentary." Before that she worked for almost 10 years at Canada's National Film Board. She has taught and lectured both in Canada and abroad and received an honorary doctorate from Laurentian University as one of Canada's most distinguished documentary film makers. She also won Toronto YWCA's Woman of Distinction Award.

Laura identifies herself as a feminist; she has directed and produced many films relevant to and about women. Several focus on the experiences of women as we grow old and face death. Skyworks is at this very time producing a documentary on palliative care. It is therefore opportune to talk to Laura, now in her 60's herself, about our issue theme, her films and her life.

Reggie Modlich: Do you feel that being a feminist woman filmmaker has affected the films you chose to make, and how you approach them?

Laura Sky: Yes, absolutely. I feel that feminist values are woven into every part of me. I didn't go to university. Most of my learning happened in the context of the peace movement, the anti-war movement and definitely the women's movement.

One of the most important things I learned in the women's movement was the experience of working in coalitions. In the International Women's Day Committee and later in my work with NAC, the National Action Committee, we were working with women with very different perspectives — from organized political groups, to faith and issue based groups. We came with our particular positions but we had to find what united us. This was very much an activist or action orientation rather than theoretical orientation. Although, there were often small tensions between women coming from a theoretical and those from a strategic perspective, all worked very hard and with good will to try and build unity.

In all our films, we work with groups and organizations that are involved with the issues that we are focusing the film on. We work with a diversity of groups; some are very mainstream; some are advocacy groups. We are trying to create films that all groups will find helpful in their strategic work. Our goal is to bring people who are living the issues to the

same table as the people who are strategizing around those issues. All of my previous work which was devoted to building common interest in the women's movement has helped me enormously. But I also think that being a feminist has changed and informed our hearts, our optimism, and our commitment, and has also taught us about the obstacles, the setbacks, and the resistance to change.

The challenge of being a feminist and artist is a struggle; we see with women's eyes and we hear with women's ears. If you can say that we achieved one change, it's the experience of affirmation and validation in the people we work with; and that in itself becomes a small "p" political act. This affirmation supports people to feel that they can do something about their situation; that they are not helpless. That was how we recognized each other as women in the women's movement, whether it was in our organizations, friendships or families. We affirmed our capacities to learn together and to take action together.

Reggie Modlich: Do you think documen-



Fighting the Invisibility of Aging Women from the documentary All Our Lives.

tary films, being so visual, conveying emotions and context, reach women more directly than they do men? Are there limitations to documentary films as they tend to be language and culture specific and very costly?

Laura Sky: It used to be the case. All of *Our Lives* about the lives of older women was funded by government departments through the National Film Board; and I remember test screening it for them. The men did not 'get it.' They would be very conflicted. Although, I think that they responded emotionally, as government people, they weren't supposed to show that in their work place. Yet, they inevitably would talk about their mothers. But the women in the room always got it 110% and took over the conversation, a big shift from what they were used to.

We recently did a series with families who experienced homelessness. In this context, I think that it's not so much a gender based difference anymore. We showed it to a group of people attending a Safe Schools conference and a group of Children's Aid workers. The men were equally responsive. It's a question of who they identified with in their work and where their allegiance was in their hearts and minds. Many are in positions of having to deal with some pretty tough policies. What we are trying to convey through our films is to show the consequences for people who are living these policies. I now find both male and female front line staff are conflicted and searching for ways to reconcile the disconnect between the policies and the people on the receiving end of those policies.

I think today's world demands of us different things. The evil in the world is very explicit now. With George Bush and even in our own country with Harper, evil is more explicit and we, the people, have to figure out where we stand in relation to justice. I think that this process is not as gender-based as it used to be. Maybe our experience of it is different. Although having said that, when working with women we never have to convince them of the legitimacy of these issues. There is a different sense of identification with people who are in need and people who



Two Performers in the play *Handle with Care* featured in the documentary *How Can We Love You*.

**All the gender-based issues that are in the economic framework are now coming back to bite us. But I still think we can have joy, eroticism, and pleasure and all of the things that are really not talked about with respect to aging lives.**

are suffering because of the way the system is structured. Yet I find it is possible to move men now.

Reggie Modlich: Laura, what do you think about *WEI* focusing on issues facing women as we age?

Laura Sky: I think it is really important; it is for all of us the elephant in the room. Most of the media that you see on women and aging focus on life style, cosmetics, and sex. Cashed as life style, media — especially media marketing their wares to women — aim to deny aging, rather than examine the systemic issues that aging women experience every day. We need to name the elephants in the room because there are a number of them. The issues related to women and aging, such as illness and our aging bodies, are often blamed on lifestyle or pathologized. We are at war with our bodies as our bodies "betray" us. We need to take the space we need for reaffirmation of what we have learned, of what we still are learning, for

connecting with each other and for understanding what the obstacles to that connection are, including economics. All the gender-based issues that are in the economic framework are now coming back to bite us. But I still think we can have joy, eroticism, and pleasure and all of the things that are really not talked about with respect to aging lives.

There is also the issue of women as caregivers, and how the whole health and social service system depends on us to provide the labour, the family care, in spite of our own difficulties and disabilities. This morning there was a knock at our front door and an elderly neighbour came to the door and asked for help. Her husband, who is on a respirator at home, had fallen out of bed; he couldn't lift himself and she couldn't lift him. My husband, too, is recovering from very major surgery, and the home care nurses keep trying to convince me to do licensed nursing responsibilities, like changing his



Two participants in the documentary *Crying for Happiness*.

complex dressings. In this era of decreasing resources, we are again expected to do everything, and remain primary caregivers despite getting older too. I find that outrageous — we are expected to fill the gaps in the health care system — at great physical, emotional and social cost to us and our loved ones.

Reggie Modlich: You directed and produced three powerful documentaries that relate to women aging and facing the end of their lives.

1) *All Our Lives* shows how society fails to value or pay women for their traditional domestic and caregiving roles. Full time mothers and homemakers do not contribute to or receive Canada Pension Plan, leaving so many women desperately poor and alone in their old age. The film shows women fighting this fate through Canadian Pensioners Concerned and finding new solidarity and relationships.

2) *Crying for Happiness* is about a group of aging women who share their past and present in therapy sessions for depression (11% of seniors experience depression; women are twice as susceptible as men). This film looks at women's historical traumas, deprivation as systemic sources of their despair. The documentary also explores their strengths and connection with one another, and an alternative vision

to pathologizing their conditions.

3) *How Can we Love You?* a troupe of women with metastasized breast cancer put on a play about their experiences; they take their amazing play across the country in support of fellow women patients and their families.

These documentaries are not new. They are based on traditional Canadian experience. How applicable are they today, and to women around the world? Would you shoot these films differently today? Have we really come a long way? Laura Sky: No, I actually wouldn't shoot them differently today. I often wish today I was shooting the way I used to and on many different levels; because it has become increasingly difficult for me to integrate my talents as an artist and as an activist. I find myself struggling to hold on to my creative self, because it has become so much more difficult economically to sustain filmmaking work. Our organization has developed a wonderful community work space, but the demands of sustaining our organization as a charitable not-for-profit organization are very hard to meet in this economic environment. I find my artistic self-esteem depleted in this environment. I did *All of Our Lives* — which will always be one of my favorite films — with the woman who

Relationships give us courage, humour, hope and optimism when it is really tough, from the Home Safe Series



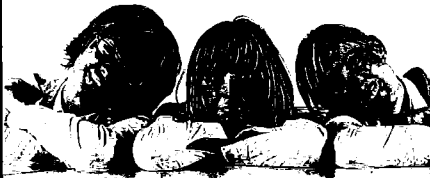
proved to be a very fine filmmaker, Helen Kladowski. We had the opportunity to develop our vision, to grow and to water it. I find that search for filmic poetry and beauty depleted for me in my current state of work.

In a way the global reality of the world makes us feel as if we were all next door, but economically we can't reach those audiences. Yet, we have diversity within our own city, our own country. So the question we always ask ourselves is: "how do we reach people, who are in different cultural, racial and ethnic communities, who may be 10 blocks away from us, but living very different lives from each other." We put a lot of energy into that. In our earlier films such as *All of Our Lives*, our effort was to cross the class divide to include working class women. More recently, through a lot of labour pains, working with women from different cultures and also Aboriginal women has become very important in all of our films. We make an effort to include Aboriginal lives lived and so there are more layers in the question of diversity for us now.

Reggie Modlich: Aging is almost synonymous with loss of partners, friends and relationships. Each documentary reveals relationships at many levels. How important are these as we age?

Laura Sky: The centres of all of our films are the layers of relationships. Especially in our Home Safe series, we meet women whose friendships are built on their shared roles as advocates. These relationships are informed by the recognition of the need for advocacy, and support our capacity and our ability to advocate. These friendships and relationships give us courage, humour, hope and optimism when it

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really tough. One of the most formidable challenges in all of my friendships and working relationships is the recognition of our responsibilities as advocates; we have to ensure that advocacy isn't something that is didactic or tedious, but that advocacy gives us joy, connection and hope. Every single film, even in a funny way (such as *My Son the Tattoo Artist*) gives us faith in the strength that we all can face tough situations in our private lives, as filmmakers or activists.

I also think that we are constantly helping each other to interpret the world and what's required; we do that here all the time in this organization as we work together on the projects. This carries over to how we relate to our families and friends. So, it is our relationships that we miss the most when they are gone.

I lost my mother in 2008. My mother was my political mentor. I don't know if she always knew that but here is what I mean: I went to a very powerful organization for funding one of our films dealing with homeless families and a very powerful corporate guy treated me very dismissively. I felt that he had a heart but his heart was buried and he was not very connected to it. I talked to my mother on the way to the hospital to get her yet another medical treatment and she said "Well you have to write to him, you have to tell him how you feel." So I did. It stopped him in his tracks and as a matter of fact in a subsequent speaking engagement he mentioned this conversation that he and I were then having by letter. But it was my mother who said: "Well, you just have to..." and before her, my grandmother whom you can see in *Home Safe Toronto*. She plays a very big role, because my grandmother was the person who introduced me to the union movement. My grandmother taught me about the need to strategize in the fight for justice. I think we all have inherited our mothers' and our grandmothers' historical desires and disappointments; but I think we also inherit their courage and their longing for a more just world. Their struggles and sadness inform our artistry, our activism and our actions. I give myself comfort because I know that my grandmother who died a

long time ago and my mother who died recently are still here, right with me. This is the continuity of love and the validation of their lives. And while your mother is still with you, you tell her that; she needs to know that. My mother said something very important to me while she was becoming ill. She said that she found it very difficult to experience my experience of the loss of her abilities. I could see that she found it hard to endure that. It is difficult too because it's not one sudden loss, but one in stages and steps, an increasing dependency and reversal of roles.

Reggie Modlich: How do you feel at this point of your life about getting older; what do you still want to achieve?

Laura Sky: I have got a lot of films in me still. Not surprisingly, I am ambivalent about getting older. I want to redefine "getting older." In *All of Our Lives*, Joyce, one of the women, said "all of a sudden I find that I am becoming invisible and I am angry about that." I really don't mean just physically invisible — but you know every time a younger woman says "you know that whole feminist debate you know — I am not a feminist. I don't need to be a feminist; that was then and this is now." I don't want our artistry to become invisible in that way. I realize that we grew up in a world dominated by men and we are now living in a world dominated by young people and the same kind of advocacy is as urgent and necessary as it was then. As women, we have so much to contribute. I plan to work and make films until I am 95, thank you very much; but I have the luxury of loving my work and I have been able to create a space where that work is honored. I don't want to become disconnected from my capacities and opportunities just because I am getting older. I want my work to be seen as something I have to contribute, something known as system of knowledge and at some level getting older is wonderful because we know so much.

Reggie Modlich: Thank you, Laura, for your time and inspiration. ✂

Additional information about the films of **Laura Sky** may be found at [www.skyworksfoundation.org](http://www.skyworksfoundation.org).



# Sexuality in Long-Term Care

By Judith Wahl

**D**o residents of long-term care homes, who are primarily older adults, have the right to engage in sexual expression, if they so choose? The simple answer is "yes" although there may be challenges in long-term care homes to find appropriate privacy. Residents should also have the expectation that if they do not want to engage in such activities, or if they are not mentally capable to consent or refuse consent to such activities, they will be protected from sexual exploitation and sexual assault as the long-term care home operator has a duty of care to protect residents. The challenge is how to support sexuality in this type of group living environment while ensuring protection for residents from unwanted activities, since a large proportion of the residents have a degree of dementia and may not be able to provide consent.

Lawyers at the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE) started looking at these issues after we were asked to review a sexuality policy that had been developed at a long-term care home. As well, ACE has been contacted by clients with respect to allegations of sexual assault of residents in long-term care homes. Since the new *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* which came into effect July 1, 2010, specifically defines "abuse" as including sexual abuse (section 2(1)) and places obligations on operators to develop written policies on abuse prevention, it seemed prudent to do legal research on this issue so that ACE would be in a position to review these new policies for the benefit of our clients who reside in long-term care and their families.

Credit must be given to many long-term care home operators who are trying to create a "normal" home environment although these homes are regulated health facilities. This is reflected in everything from changes in the physical environment

at the homes to include coffee shops, garden areas and internet café areas, to the presence of home "pets" (usually cats and birds), the dress of staff and encouraging residents to decorate their own rooms with pictures and personal mementos. There is also an increasing recognition of sexuality as a part of life of residents in long-term care and efforts to appreciate the individuality of residents with regards to their diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity. The privacy rights of residents are also acknowledged although they are living in a group environment.

To address sexuality and to comply with the legislative requirements for writ-

**There is also an increasing recognition of sexuality as a part of life of residents in long-term care and efforts to appreciate the individuality of residents with regards to their diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity. The privacy rights of residents are also acknowledged although they are living in a group environment.**

ten policies about abuse prevention, some home operators are looking to develop policies, as well as training and support for staff, to help them respond to the issue of sexuality with professionalism and acceptance. They also want to be able to identify and prevent possible sexual abuse or actions that may, if not addressed, develop into abuse.

While conducting legal research into these issues, it became clear that there are many "thorny" issues related to sexuality and the legal framework related to sexuality. It is easy, or easier, to find answers for some questions about sexuality than others. Home policies should state that there must be no sexual relations between staff and residents, as differentiated from "appropriate" touching and expressions of

affection that are non-sexual. As well, it is clear that home operators have a duty of care to its residents, which includes keeping residents safe from sexual exploitation, sexual assault and sexual abuse.

As well, it is easy to say that mentally capable residents in long-term care who so consent have the right to engage in sexual expression, including intimate sexual relationships. Family members of these residents cannot determine what mentally capable and consenting residents can or cannot do in way of sexual expression.

The law also does not allow people to "preconsent" to sexual activity. A person must give consent at the time of the activ-

ity. Therefore, it is not possible to express in a power of attorney for personal care that if a person should become mentally incapable to give consent to sexual intimacy, he or she would still want to engage in such activities.

Likewise, a "substitute decision maker," such as an attorney named in a power of attorney for personal care or a family member who is the health decision maker for an incapable person by reason of the *Health Care Consent Act*, cannot "consent" on behalf of the resident to sexual activity by that resident. There does not appear to be any "substitute consent" to sexual activity in the law.

Many issues related to sexuality, however, are more difficult and challenging. As consent is required, what is "mental

capacity to consent to sexual activity? Who determines this capacity? How is capacity determined? When does someone have the obligation to determine capacity for this purpose? Is there an obligation to determine capacity for sexuality in the long-term care home and why?

As a large number of people living in long-term care homes have dementia, can they consent to intimate sexual activity? Just because a person has dementia does not mean that person is "mentally incapable" for all purposes or at all times. How does this impact on intimacy and, from a legal perspective, on consent? What are the obligations of staff in long-term care homes to foster or discourage the sexuality of residents? When and how should staff intervene to support a relationship by providing privacy for two residents? How can staff divert incapable residents into safe expressions of sexuality or stop residents from particular sexual activities if they lack capacity to consent?

Sexual expression is a normal part of a healthy life. People that live in long-term

## Sexual expression is a normal part of a healthy life. People that live in long-term care homes should be able to engage in and participate in "normal" living which includes the right to sexual expression.

care homes should be able to engage in and participate in "normal" living which includes the right to sexual expression. What is the legal framework related to sexuality that will ensure that those persons who can consent to engage in intimate sexual relationships are provided with privacy and the appropriate supports? Conversely, what is the legal framework for those persons who cannot consent in order to protect them from sex-

ual exploitation and abuse? Through our legal research, ACE hopes to understand and find a way to articulate a legal framework that can be used to strike this important balance. ❧

This article was first published in ACE's Summer 2009 Newsletter available at [www.ancelaw.ca](http://www.ancelaw.ca)

**Judith Wahl, B.A., LL.B.**, has been the Executive Director of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly since its inception in 1984. Judith has been very active in advocating for the rights of older adults and in the development of elder law as an area of practice. Judith chaired the Canadian Bar Association's Elder Law Section (2007-2009) and is currently the Vice-Chair of the National Initiative for Care of the Elderly, a federal Centre of Excellence. She presently teaches a law and aging course in the Masters of Social Work program at the University of Toronto.

1 Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, S.O. 2007, CHAPTER 8

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**Advice on the Arts of Seduction**

---

Suppose at least  
one passionate lover  
Embody the passion  
in the turn of wrist  
the cast of an eye  
a sidelong glance  
shy or bold

Intoxicate  
with smooth skin  
Wrinkles a downer  
secreted, laughable:  
passion requires juices  
and juices never  
have a crepey butt

Reveal desire in details:  
breasts are useful — high  
round firm peaches  
not wall-eyed  
nor mango-long  
though these may be  
redeemable, perhaps  
by artful posturing  
high colour.

Flatter lovers  
extravagantly — the fall  
of chestnut hair  
ripple of calf  
avoid calling attention to  
a marbled thigh  
like mine  
even as its shudder  
speaks.

Sonja Greckol's first book, **Gravity Matters**, launched from Inanna Press in 2009. Her work has appeared in a number of Canadian literary journals and her long poem, *Emilie Explains Newton to Voltaire*, was short-listed for the CBC Poetry Prize in 2008. In her next poetry project, **Skin of Days**, she uses language harvested from newspaper headlines and magazine titles as well as lines from Governor-General's Award-winning poetry and from articles in **Review of Modern Physics**. She edits poetry for **Women and Environments International Magazine** and works on the web-based magazine **Influency Salon** at [www.influencysalon.ca](http://www.influencysalon.ca)

# WE Research

## Climate Change, Globalisation and Changing Social Relations

### Impact on Senior Women in Small Rural Community Farming in Kenya

Linda Chebichii

#### Introduction

In rural Africa, 60 to 80 per cent of food is produced by women through rain-fed farming. Due to the vulnerability of the African continent climate change, exacerbated by poverty, heavy reliance on subsistence rain-fed agriculture and poor governance could potentially affect livelihoods. This article explores the changing social relations and the impacts of globalisation and climate change on senior women in a rural smallholder farming community in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya. The research addressed overall livelihood strategies in the rural community. Senior women were interviewed on their life experiences and perceptions of changing climatic, environmental, economic and social relations.

In Africa, women contribute substantially to the management of natural resources including forests, land and water. Their day to day interaction with the environment involves tasks such as herding cattle, collecting fuel wood and small scale farming. Although they contribute to the socio-economic demands of the household, women have often not been fully involved in household economic decision making. Men tend to determine the utilization of income from the farm, and marketing of farm products. Globalisation has also impacted costs and farmers' inaccessibility to markets, exacerbating poverty, and contributing to livelihood challenges among senior women.

In Chebarus, in Nandi East District, Kenya high rainfall increases the suscep-



Anna Chepkurgat and Helen Kurgat.

tibility of the area to landslides and soil erosion due to unsustainable farming practices and deforestation. The majority of the population is poor. Mixed farming (livestock and crops) is the main livelihood. However, the harsh terrain constrains food production, coupled with the lack of access to markets, and poor infrastructure. Furthermore, the reliance of the population on fuel wood in Chebarus has contributed to extensive deforestation.

The oral narratives gathered from both young and senior women noted their views, observations and experiences of the changing climatic, economic, and environmental situation, and the changing social interactions.

There is limited literature and research

exploring the impact of climate change and globalisation on senior rural and urban women in Africa and specifically in Kenya. The senior women are an important resource to the climate change discourse; their valuable indigenous knowledge and practices on sustainable livelihoods provide linkages to the environment, and the changes within it.

Visits to different villages in Chebarus provided a holistic and inclusive view on the changing climatic, as well as social and environmental concerns of the senior women. The following excerpts present their perspectives, perceptions, experiences, and observations:

Paulina Bett, a 65-year old woman residing in Kapinder village (Chebarus

LINDA CHEBICHII

area) narrated her experiences. According to Paulina,

*"The land is changed... a long time ago, people grew millet and sorghum. These crops required simple maintenance in terms of weed control... the weeds were manually pulled out with the assistance of a special type of hoe (Kipterurit)... some indigenous vegetables like the Spider Plant (Sakyat) were grown. The children respected their elders... they slept at their grandmothers and did not wander around like it happens these days... these are some of the changes we have witnessed that we consider retrogressive... the rains have become erratic and unpredictable... in the past, the rains would come at regular intervals and we knew for example that the rains would start in February and that happened without fail. These days, it is no longer predictable... and usually rains are delayed by up to three months... that is bad..."*

*"The trees have been cut... we hardly have any left, and even the water catchment areas along the river have been cleared of trees... a long time ago, we never cultivated right down to the river side, to allow the trees to utilize the water.. However, this does not happen at the present as a result of which we are losing our rivers..."*

According to an indigenous senior medicine woman, Helen Kurgat of Cheboin Village (Chebarus community),

*"So many things have changed... and this is a result of new introductions into the system like tractors, motor-vehicles, helicopters, and mobile phones. These have caused changes that we now witness. In terms of medicine, we have lost what we had originally... medicine that would treat meningitis, handle polio, and medicine that would cure tetanus... all of these have been lost. We had these diseases in the past. Things have changed since the advent of the modern hospitals. Indigenous medicinal practices were useful. Indigenous medicines did not have any negative impact on the body.*

*They did not affect the blood circulatory system and they were effective against polio and other diseases that we witness now including HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is not a new phenomenon... it was there and it was known as Burasta (Anthrax). There are many medicine men and women, including me...these people received some form of assistance, they would be of help."*

Anna Chepkurgat, a resident of Kipkimba Village narrated that

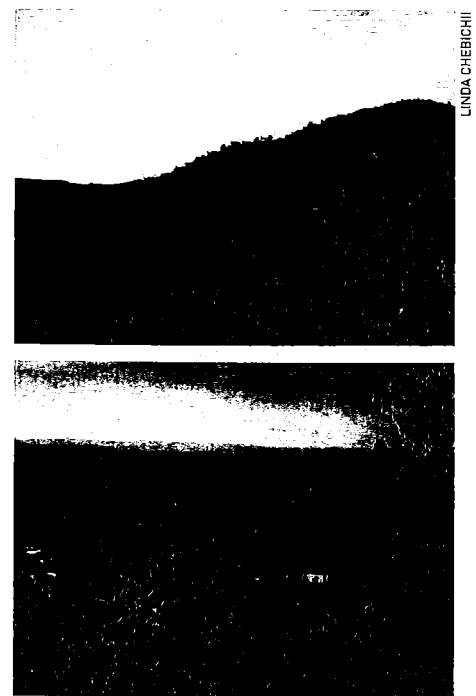
*"The social relations have changed for the worst... when an elder said that something was forbidden, it was forbidden. When an elderly mother provided guidance, it was followed. These days, children do not want to listen... so, we are left helpless and reduced to spectator-status which is very wrong."*

A 70 year old woman, Esther Choge of Cheboin Village narrated her experience as well:

*"We had a lot of forest cover and plentiful rainfall in the past, and the young men were well behaved as well. Nowadays, the young men have become disrespectful, as well as the young women, and they no longer listen to the advice and counsel of the elders in the community. They have adopted immoral behaviours and substance abuse."*

*"The water catchment areas were well protected and not degraded as we witness at the present period. Indigenous tree species were found near the rivers and streams. These trees are no longer growing as they were all cut down. "*

The women told of the degradation of the water catchment areas and travelling long distances to fetch water for domestic use. Some of the senior women, with old age and frail health, have been impacted by the long treks to the water points. The diminished knowledge and practice of indigenous medicine has resulted from the adoption of modern medical interventions.



LINDA CHEBICHI

Government subsidies on health care (cheaper cost of medication) have further contributed to the loss of indigenous medicinal knowledge.

Meanings and words of the Nandi ethnic language spoken by the majority of the community members has also undergone transformation. Some of the words used to describe useful indigenous plant species and cultural practices are no longer understood by many and the Nandi ethnic language has lost part of its richness over time.

The senior women observe the changed behaviour and attitude of the youth; increased rebellion and disregard of advice from their seniors. They argue for meetings between the youth and elders to share their wisdom and useful insight from their experiences. In a community meeting, however, some senior women complained that cultural practices including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) had been discarded, and this had resulted in the adoption of inappropriate behaviours by the young women in the community including early pregnancies. Awareness of the consequence of this harmful practice is lacking in the community, especially among the senior women. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) acknowledges FGM as a practice that violates human rights. The Kenyan government as well has made the



practice illegal although it is still secretly practiced by some Kenyan communities. Therefore public awareness and education that is “culturally sensitive” is necessary. According to the United Nations Report, a higher proportion of senior women are illiterate compared to their male counterparts in the developing countries. This gender disparity calls for targeted literacy and

## Senior women’s voices in the developing countries need to be heard as efforts towards poverty reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable development cannot progress without incorporating their expertise and knowledge.

awareness programs and initiatives that will promote an understanding of the cultural practices that oppress women in the community. The contribution of the senior women to the socio-economic development of the Chebarus community should be recognised. According to the United Nations, Africa has the highest proportion of the population aged over 65 years that are engaged in economic activities as compared to other major areas at a global scale. The Nandi District Strategic Plan recognises the need to provide socio-economic assistance to the seniors in the community.

The recognition of women in the management of natural resources has been downplayed by their lack of land ownership rights in Kenya. On a positive note, the revised national constitution has men-

tioned the inherent inequality of policies, plans, practices and culture with regard to women’s involvement in land ownership. Land ownership would enable senior women in the community to maximize the productivity of their farms and improve their livelihoods. The Draft National Climate Change Response Strategy (Republic of Kenya, 2009) has acknowledged effects of climate change in the country, including increased intensity of floods and droughts, unreliable rainfall, and increase vector-borne diseases, among others. However, the specific contribution of senior women towards climate change adaptation and mitigation has not been outlined in the document.

There is a need to recognise the contribution of indigenous knowledge and practice to sustainable livelihood strategies and development in the African continent. As cited by a senior woman in the field, “indigenous crops varieties such as miller and sorghum are drought resistant, supporting food security in my house-

hold.” Professor Wangari Maathai from Kenya, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner and the author of *Unbowed: A Memoir* has strongly advocated the involvement of rural women in environmental management as it empowers them to make decisions and fight for their rights through community projects and capacity building.

In the African continent, the existence of local technologies, local institutions and sustainable practices have attracted minimum attention from local governments and international developers. The influence of senior women in local politics and community decision making is lacking, and therefore needs to be recognized. Senior women’s voices in the developing countries need to be heard as

efforts towards poverty reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable development cannot progress without incorporating their expertise and knowledge.



This article is based on a research project for Linda Chebichi’s Master in Environmental Studies at York University.

### Further Resources:

Boko et al. (2007) *Africa. Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Parry, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK.

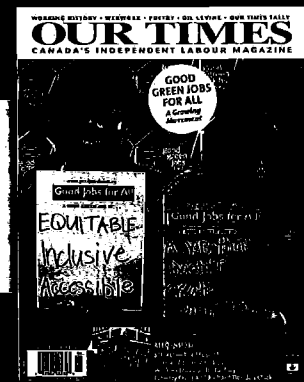
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James, V.U. (1995) *Women and sustainable development in Africa*. Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT.

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# Information Brings Progress to Vietnam's Communes

By Michelle Hibler

*In Vietnam, a community-based monitoring system builds on existing official poverty surveys to better target the poor. The additional data has led to improvements in communities, and in the lives of women in particular.*

**A**dozen or so young women concentrate on guiding silky fabric under the foot and needle of modern sewing machines in a classroom at the head office of the Women's Union in Ninh Binh (WUNB). They are training: training to be seamstresses and training for a better life.

This is one of many programs offered by the WUNB to prepare women for employment. The organization is nothing if not dynamic. With more than 2,000 local units in all of the province's 147 communes, the WUNB works to advance women's equality and protect their rights. Among these activities are education programs on gender issues, vocational and job creation programs, and microcredit and business development programs. The WUNB also leads maternal and child health research and programs, among many others.

The WUNB is the provincial branch of the Vietnam Women's Union, a unique country-wide non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 1930 to create conditions for women to take part in national development and to improve their position in society. In Ninh Binh, the women's union counts more than 200,000 members. Membership is voluntary and paid: the fee is 6,000 dong (US\$0.34) annually, a not-negligible amount in a country where the poverty line is fixed at US\$0.50 a day.

This article does not focus on older women however WEI thought it important to include it to inform readers of an initiative that is assisting the poor and improving the lives of all women in Vietnam.

## About CBMS: Fighting Poverty with Facts

The Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) is an organized way of collecting, analyzing, and verifying information at the local level to be used by local governments, national government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society for planning, budgeting, and implementing local development programs. It also serves to monitor and evaluate their performance. Piloted in the Philippines in 1994, it is now being implemented in 14 countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

### Identifying the Poor

As WUNB President Vu Thi Tan explains, detailed information is needed for the union to carry out its work. But, she says, there is not enough data on life in the communities, on households, and on individuals — particularly women. To fill this gap, the WUNB collaborated in implementing a community-based poverty monitoring system (CBMS) in Nho Quan, the province's poorest district, in 2007. CBMS was developed as part of research initially supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to determine micro impacts of macroeconomic and adjustment policies.

Gia Son is one of the 27 Nho Quan communes that participated. Le Thanh Trinh, chairman of the Gia Son Commune Administration, explains that the data gathered is used to implement policies, such as tax exemptions for the poor, free education, and preferred credit rates. "We consider CBMS a very important socio-economic survey," he says. "It's very basic information to be collected on our households and communities, but it's very comprehensive because we know the

development process in our communes."

They found, for instance, that 20% of commune households were poor — 179 of them. "It's most important that the information serve poverty reduction in the communes," he adds. The goal for 2008 was to reduce that rate by 3%, and to continue to do so every year until poverty was eliminated.

Collecting data for identifying the poor is not new in Vietnam. "We've been doing it since 1995 when benefits were provided," says Le Thanh Trinh. But as Vu Tuan Anh, Director of the Socio-Economic Development Centre (SEDEC) in Hanoi and CBMS project leader, explains, existing surveys covered only limited samples so did not serve local needs. At that level, governments were mandated to annually identify poor households so that services could be targeted to them, but because income was the sole criteria used, that survey was not adequate for poverty analysis and development planning.

### The Gender Dimension of Poverty

In 1997 Vu Tuan Anh began working on the problems of data availability, the



Mountainous Nho Quan district is Ninh Binh province's poorest district.

needs of local communities for socioeconomic data, and the capacity of communities to produce and use data, with support from IDRC. A pilot project to introduce a community-based monitoring system showed that it was both feasible and helpful to local officers and NGOs. Since then, the system has been refined and is now used at the central level by the Managing Office of Vietnam's National Program of Poverty Reduction, at the provincial and district levels in five provinces in four different regions, and at the project level by the Poverty Reduction Project in two districts of Thanh Hoa province.

In Ninh Binh, says Vu Thi Thanh, WUNB Vice-President, CBMS began when the commune chairman gathered commune officers to talk about the survey objectives and to solicit their support. He asked the WUNB's activists to act as enumerators. District personnel served as

resource persons.

The questionnaire was very simple and clear, she says. And the results were good, and useful for their work. Until now, she says "we haven't had a census of the commune, just sample surveys. Now in every village, we can identify poor households. And we know why they are poor, whether it is because of unemployment or poor knowledge of technologies or another reason."

From the WUNB's point of view, they also know how many households are headed by women — 2,000 in Nho Quan district alone — and how many are poor. "We know about educational levels, information we never had before. Also, how many lack safe water and sanitation facilities. Based on this information the commune can develop plans to solve the problems."

According to Le Thanh Trinh, to reach their goal they encourage house-

holds to use new crop varieties and technologies, and to engage in non-agricultural activities. "We will also organize training to raise educational levels," he says. "And local governments have to cooperate with NGOs, like the Women's Union, to provide assistance to poor households."

But he's all too aware that there are also many people near the poverty line who could easily slip under. "Our achievements are fragile," he says. "If we have flooding again this year, many more may become poor." The strategy, he says, is to concentrate assistance on vulnerable groups, like women-headed households, widows, and invalids. There are 41 such deprived households in Gia Son.

### Same Data, Many Uses

The Women's Union has its own use for the data. "We use the data to prepare programs to support women, especially in



areas like health care," says MsThanh. "We use it especially for education programs, to increase the educational level of women."

The information also has political uses. "It led the Secretary of the Party to issue a decision to improve women's lives. Our recommendation to focus support first on women-headed households was accepted by the province," she says. "We also recommended a focus on indigent women who have no house or land. The province accepted this: the commune is responsible for providing them with land or assistance to build a house. Our third recommendation was that the government support them through cash transfers to improve the household economy — provide them with agricultural tools, for example, or chickens that they can use to generate income."

But, she adds, when they receive this assistance the WUNB helps them build pens for the chickens and pigs and vaccinate the animals, and trains them to use the tools.

And the data is useful when disaster strikes. Nho Quan district is the poorest in the province, says MsThanh. When it suffered from flooding in 2007, the government provided assistance. The CBMS data was used to identify communes and people who should benefit from the assistance.

### Facing Challenges

While the commune authorities and Women's Union are convinced of the usefulness of CBMS, they also point to some of the difficulties in carrying out the survey. One is physical: in the very mountainous Nho Quan district, it was costly and time-consuming to visit and interview every household. The population's low educational level made selecting interviewers challenging: because those in administrative positions did not want to do the surveying, Women's Union activists were selected. As the 700 enumerators carried out their duties, their training proved to be inadequate to fully equip them for the work.

The questionnaire itself, although modified to reflect local needs, posed some problems since farmers' measurement units did not correspond to interna-



Vocational training, particularly for women, is a priority in Vietnam's Ninh Binh province.

tional measures and could not easily be converted. Some figures were impossible to obtain — farmers who grow cassava only for household consumption never calculate their production, for instance. Some standard animals like buffaloes were listed on the forms, but not those that villagers usually keep — rabbits, for instance, and ducks and wild animals that have a high economic value.

Encoding also caused a bottleneck. In Ninh Binh, this was done by WUNB officers when they had some spare time, as well as by students. Processing was done by SEDEC as the capacity did not exist in the commune.

### Positive Changes in Ha Tay

Ha Tay, formerly a province in the Red River Delta close to Hanoi and a part of Hanoi since August 2008, faced similar challenges: a shortage of human and financial resources.

Here the CBMS was implemented by the Social Protection section of the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA), the province's main poverty reduction and social welfare agency.

Two survey rounds have been carried out and used by local partners to analyze the poverty rate and different dimensions

of poverty. The goals: to evaluate poverty reduction measures and readjust poverty reduction policies. "Overcoming poverty is a big challenge for the administration," says Le Van Hoang of Ha Tay's DOLISA. While Ha Tay's economic development is higher than other Red River Delta provinces, its per capita income is half that of Hanoi.

The two CBMS surveys were carried out in 10 Ha Tay communes in 2006 and 2007 — a total of more than 8,000 households. The goal, says Hoang, was to evaluate the results of the normal identification of poor households surveys done by the communes — based mainly on income — and to collect additional data. For instance, is this a woman-headed household? A veteran? What is their occupation? Age?

As in Ninh Binh, the questionnaire was modified to meet local needs. Housing is different here, for instance, and the animals kept by farmers are different. "We also collect data on land use and the reasons why they are poor — lack of training, or labour, or land. When we know the reasons for poverty, we know about their needs, and what to support," says Le Van Hoang.

In Ha Tay, the longer CBMS questionnaire was compressed to focus on



From left: Vu Thi Thanh, WUNB Vice-President; Celia Reyes, CBMS Network Coordinator; Le Thanh Trinh, chairman of Gia Son Commune Administration; Vu Tuan Anh, CBMS project leader in Vietnam.

areas the commune had responsibility to address — for instance, the question on asset ownership was dropped. “Goods ownership is not always directly related to poverty levels and it does not change annually,” explains Le Van Hoang. The survey was also limited to low-income households because DOLISA did not have the resources to cover all households.

The survey results have led to positive changes in Ha Tay. “We have made recommendations to provincial officials and

they have accepted them,” he says. For instance, based on the data on the housing situation, they recommended that a budget be allocated to help resolve the situation. “Our recommendation for training for the poor was accepted at the national level,” he says. “We need to provide technical training to farmers who have lost their lands.”

The data has also led to programs to extend the activities of a traditional handicrafts village and involve more people in

the activities. The provincial government allocated D5 million (US\$282) for vocational training for the poor, and D1 billion (US\$56,400) for animal husbandry projects.

For more information on community-based poverty monitoring: [www.idrc.ca/in\\_focus\\_poverty](http://www.idrc.ca/in_focus_poverty).

**Michelle Hibler** is Chief, Writing, Translation, and Publishing at the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa.



Women &  
Environments  
international

**How to Slice a Mango**

---

*for Ann*

How to slice a mango  
is something I learned  
from my father's first cousin, the one  
with piano-player's hands  
and a Japanese surname with four syllables,  
Yasuhara, like origami.

She folds notes into books she mails to me  
and writes letters about sitting silent  
and holding the light  
at Quaker House meetings,  
about her travels in Asia, about concerts  
and the refugee boys she teaches.

When I ate her mango salad  
with lime and a drizzle of sesame oil  
at the Grand Haven beach house last summer,  
the mango's peach-musk  
fed a crowd of sun-parched cousins.

I asked her how she cut  
the mango into tiny matchsticks.  
But since the mangos were already cut  
she had to show me how to do it  
with words —  
how to slice off both soft cheeks  
and score them with a sharp knife  
grazing the fibrous heart —  
how to fold them gently inside out,  
push up and pluck the juicy green-orange flesh.

And how in a ceramic bowl  
she catches the nectar.

**Kate Marshall Flaherty** has participated in the Applegrove Community Centre's "Seniors Writing from Within" workshops, and National random Acts of Poetry. Her poem "Far Away," which meditates on Alzheimer's, and is set to music and situated in the Guild Inn grounds, can be found on YouTube. She lives in Toronto with her spirited family of five. Her fourth book of poetry is entitled "where we are going" Piquant Press.

# Age-Friendly Communities — A Women's Issue

Reggie Modlich

The notions of “active aging,” “aging in place” and “age-friendly cities,” are becoming increasingly popular topics in response to the so-called “Tsunami of the Aged” — the global rise in people over age 65 from half a billion in 2010 to 1.5 billion in 2050 (see Figure 1). The suggestion is that if older adults stay healthy and active longer and have access to age-friendly environments, then as the population ages, the anticipated demands on social and health care systems will not be as insurmountable as many policy makers currently fear. And while the ratio of roughly 80 men to 100 women over age 65 is not projected to change much, women will outnumber men by 166 million in 2050, compared to 62 million in 2010 (see Table 1). Thus, aging is and will become even more a women's issue.

Regardless of gender, how we age is determined by genes, economics, physical and mental health, support from family and the community, medical advances and the nature and culture of society. While the privileged almost everywhere can afford to “age in place” women are often at less of an advantage in terms of economics and access to support.

In spite of the lip service governments around the world have paid to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), women still receive only a fraction of men's earnings. Men still do not share equitably or equally in the unpaid nurturing and domestic responsibilities. This forces many women to accept part-time, temporary and low wage jobs which lack the benefits and pensions of full-time jobs. Many women end up sandwiched between unpaid caring for their children as well as their aging parents. When women, especially “illegal” immi-

grants, are paid for nurturing and domestic work, they receive minimum wage at best, mostly without benefits or pensions. In many countries, grandmothers have to raise grandchildren because mothers have to earn an income — often abroad or because mothers are dying of HIV Aids. In many countries, gender discrimination prevents women from inheriting family assets and property, if not by law, then by tradition. Girls are often denied access to the same level of education as boys, thus having the cards stacked against them from the start. Older women, often widowed, often with some health issues, are unable to compete in the job market with

younger people. All these social factors render women everywhere, poorer than men, a fact which gets magnified as women get old and increasingly more vulnerable.

Given that over half of today's world population is urban, a focus on cities is justified. In 2007 the World Health Organization published a guide for “Global Age-friendly Cities,” focus groups with almost 1,500 older adults were held in 33 cities around the globe. Caregivers and service providers were also consulted. Strangely only one of the cities consulted is in Africa and a gender-based analysis is sadly lacking through-

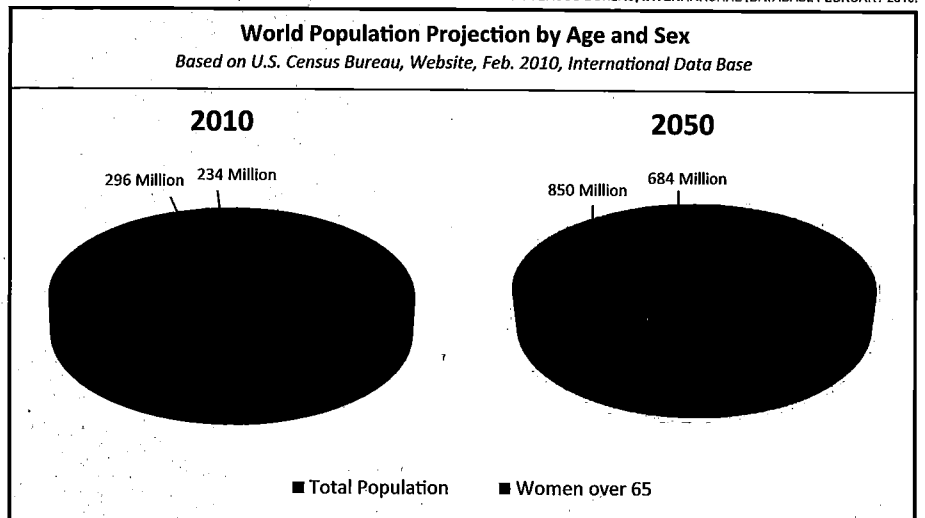
Figure 1

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, INTERNATIONAL DATABASE FEBRUARY 2010.

World Population Projection by Age and Sex						
Based on U.S. Census Bureau, Website, February 2010, International Data Base						
	Total Population	Male	Female	Difference	Ratio	Fem % of Total
2010	6,830,586,985	3,440,026,139	3,390,560,846	49465293 fewer women	101.5	49.6
65+	530,579,722	234,274,339	296,305,383	62031044 more women	79.1	55.8
% of total	7.8	6.8	8.7			
2050	9,202,458,484	4,594,891,545	4,607,566,939	12675394 more women	99.7	50.1
65+	1,533,954,731	684,044,079	849,910,652	165866573 more women	80.5	55.4
% of total	16.7	14.9	18.4			

Table 1

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, INTERNATIONAL IDATABASE FEBRUARY 2010.



out. Despite these limitations, there was an amazing agreement about what constitutes an age-friendly city.

This vision of an age-friendly city reflects a strong desire for “active aging” and “aging in (one’s own) place.” The focus groups developed a valuable checklist of criteria around housing, public spaces, social inclusion, services and economic security. Women’s longevity and substantially inferior economic status makes attaining this ideal much more challenging for women than for men. The criteria included:

- **Quality housing** — sufficient, affordable, appropriate for the various stages of dependence, near family and in familiar neighbourhoods, but not necessarily with family; “aging in place” was strongly preferred;
- **Services** — health, social and recreational programs, including intergenerational and intercultural programs to prevent isolation, and accessible shopping within walking distance;
- **The ability to enjoy the beauty of nature** — clean air, streets, green spaces and parks, with places to sit and rest;
- **Age-friendly sidewalks** — smooth, non-slip pavement, wide enough for all activities, availability of ramps instead of stairs, separation from bicycles;
- **Safety/security** — sense of eyes on the streets, lighting, surveillance, public order; protection from abuse; (throughout their lives women are more vulnerable to and fearful of all types of abuse); building and construction standards that minimize dangers, including those caused by natural disasters;
- **Public toilets** — accessible, clean and safe public facilities;
- **Transportation** — safe, affordable, reliable and accessible to all destinations, especially those important to elderly;
- **Right to be informed/included** — clear, enlarged signage in public and private spheres (on labels and appliances) and all other forms of communication; in format and style that older adults can understand;
- **Ability to earn a living** — if needed



Older Women's Network Cooperative Housing Project in Toronto.

and desired;

- **Attitudes** — understanding, tolerance and appreciation for aging and the aged, enabling the participation of and contribution by older adults;
- **Economic security** — adequate pensions and affordable healthcare services to ensure dignified aging;
- **Nursing homes** — quality nursing home care, close to family when in-home health care is no longer feasible.

It is instructive, even inspiring, to visu-

alize such age-friendly cities. Supportive urban planning documents abound. A patchwork of age-friendly housing projects, street sections, bus services, elder abuse help-lines exist. Nowhere, however, are the above criteria set as a comprehensive standard, let alone implemented. Some Scandinavian countries and some exclusive enclaves for the very wealthy have come close. This is disturbing, especially considering the fact that all the criteria for “age-friendly” cities coincide with those for child-friendly — especially

This vision of an age-friendly city reflects a strong desire for "active aging" and "aging in (one's own) place." The focus groups developed a valuable checklist of criteria around housing, public spaces, social inclusion, services and economic security. Women's longevity and substantially inferior economic status makes attaining this ideal much more challenging for women than for men.

young children — women-friendly and environment-friendly cities.

The built environment of "modern" communities still reflects "segregated land use planning" sanctified in the 1930's even though urban planners have largely re-converted to "mixed use" planning. Large, low density single use development is still the preferred style of developers and real estate holders who shy away from the complex standards, financing, construction and administration of

mixed use development. Ironically, older, dense, mixed use cities and towns in Europe and Asia are far more liveable for the elderly. The small scale stores, services and workshops under several floors of residential dwellings, along narrow streets, cater far more effectively to the needs of the elderly. Often, when older adults join their children in the western diaspora, these modern cities are so alien to the culture and needs of aging parents that they are torn between being with their

children and with the comfort of a familiar environment.

"Neo-liberal" economics are an important reason why age-friendly cities are not being built. Such economics strive to minimize, monetize and privatize most public or government responsibilities and turn them into profit making corporations followed by the demand for tax cuts in tandem with "smaller" government. This ideology, where implemented, has privatized and increased the cost of utilities such as hydro, water and public transportation and reduced, if not eliminated, public health, education, recreation, social services and affordable housing. The loan conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank often include cut backs and or privatisation of governments' public and social services. All these services are desperately needed by low income and/or vulnerable citizens such as elderly women. Jarvis, Kantor and Cloke in *Cities and Gender* address the effects of this corporate, andro-centered and "care-less" ideology.

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The recent economic crisis with the collapse of major financial institutions has further undermined the economic security of the elderly. Especially in the US where many older adults had entrusted such firms with their assets and pensions. When the companies dissipated into thin air, many older adults lost their entire life savings and their ability to pay their mortgages. Many became homeless and are no longer able to do anything about it. In addition, the eligible pension age is being raised in country after country.

This mind set has also led senior levels of government to download their responsibilities to lower levels, especially to municipalities which are less able to raise funds for these services. Cities are forced to cut back on programs that cannot be rolled over to "users (too poor to pay)." The "fee for service" municipal financing model has turned much of urban planning into a reaction to development pressures, paid by developers, rather than a system of proactive, socially-minded forethought. In most countries, urban planning doesn't even

consider planning for social services as part of their responsibility, be that child, senior or health care. Under the illusion that "bigger is better" — and presumably more efficient — amalgamation has created many more mega-cities. Decision making becomes remote, impersonal, and more difficult to access especially for those with mobility problems; local solutions become more difficult.

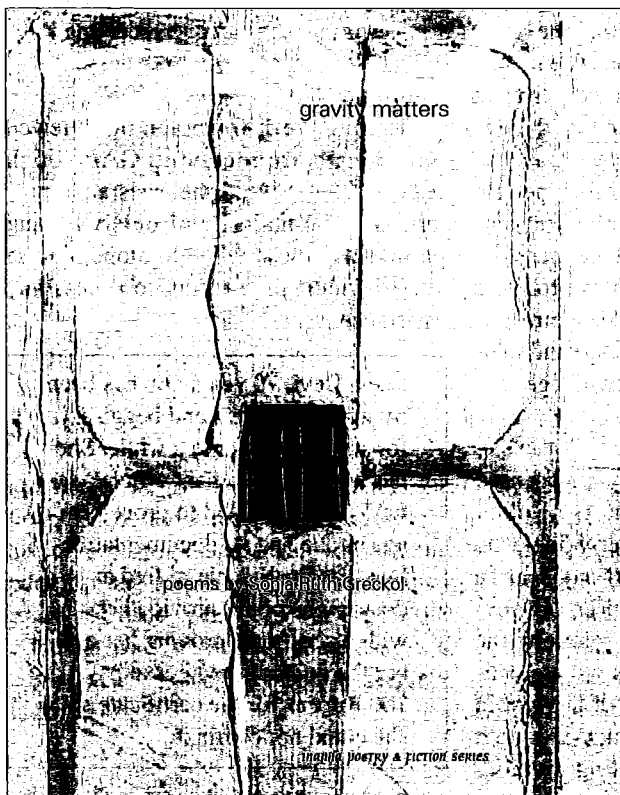
### Conclusion

Precedents such as pedestrian oriented transit models in Bogota, senior friendly neighbourhoods in Scandinavian countries, public health programs in Canada give hope. Only where human needs are seen as community/public responsibility, supported by taxes, and transcending the profit-making business model, is there any chance that the comprehensive package of housing, transportation, health and social services for age-friendly cities will be realized. Until then, such communities will remain a vision most women will be merely dreaming of. ❧

**Regula Modlich** is a retired urban planner, feminist activist and pioneer in gendered urban planning; her 103 year old mother still lives independently — near by.

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—MARGARET CHRISTAKOS

*History and personal history, defiant elegy and hymns to the warmly embodied self, Gravity Matters manages to find the charged moment, goes to work there, 'offer[ing] whiskey with poppy seed cake'. These poems are honest, unafraid of the mistakes in a life, the missteps of memory.*

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# Older Destitute Women Struggling for Existence

## A Case Study from India

Dr. Archana Kaushik

**S**hahina Begum, 65 years old, is a widow who appears weak and looks much older than her age. She lives alone in a hut and keeps on thinking about her only son who left her in the evening of her life. She works as a house cleaner, a maid, and earns 300 Rupees per month. She has severe arthritis and poor eyesight. She feels particularly vulnerable in the winter. Shahina does not get an Old Age Pension (OAP) from the state although she is genuinely indigent. She wants to go into an Old Age Home because she feels insecure living alone.

Rama Bai, 70 years old, is a widow who lives in a small village. She is thin and frail and she cannot walk without support. She lives in a kutchra house (a house constructed of mud and hay with a tin roof that cannot withstand severe weather). Her son stays in a nearby brick house but she is not allowed entry into his house. She used to receive OAP but she has not been eligible to receive it for the last three years because close relatives and her son are in the vicinity. She has approached the village elected representative to restart her OAP but nothing has been done.

These two cases, among numerous others, depict the faces of the stark reality that destitute older women face in India.

The socio-cultural context in India, with respect to the majority of older women, is characterized by patriarchal social norms that place women at a disadvantage in nearly every walk of life. Educational, health and skill development needs as well as holistic needs for the well-being of women are often sidelined. As women get older these needs exacer-

bate and the circumstances women face become more difficult. The situation faced by older women who are poor is even more precarious as they often face discrimination on account of being poor, older and female.

India is home to nearly 80 million older people. The overall population of India is 120 billion people. After China, India is the most populous country in the world. The demographic scenario shows a steep rise in the number and proportion of older people in the next few decades. In 2001, there were 77 million older people in India. By 2013, this number will rise to 100 million and by 2025 the number will be nearly 177 million. The majority of the older population in India lives in rural areas. Statistics indicate that there is mounting pressure on the government to provide social security to older people because nearly 66% live below or very close to the poverty line and are therefore economically vulnerable. These problems are most acutely felt by older women as they are often socially excluded and their vulnerability is accentuated with age.

### Objectives

In this context, this study has focused on the lives and circumstances of older women living below the poverty line, who are eligible for the social assistance scheme, the OAP and Annapurna (a government sponsored scheme whereby the destitute older than 65 years old are entitled to receive 10 kilograms of food grain per month). Using a case study approach through a purposive sampling method, 100 older women were interviewed in two districts of Uttar Pradesh (Aligarh and

Barielly), India.

The social assistance programme, the National OAP scheme provides 200 Rupees per month to destitute older people through various state mechanisms. In order to qualify people must meet what may be considered stringent conditions when people are destitute. They must prove their age, their domicile, and to establish they are destitute requires that they have no means of livelihood and no family support. The Annapurna provides 10 kilograms of food grains, wheat or rice, per person per month to only 10% of older people who are eligible for OAP but who for various reasons are not receiving it.

### Findings

Among the 100 women interviewed only 13% were receiving OAP which reflects how limited the assistance program is. The majority of older women, particularly those who are alone, have a very difficult time trying to access any assistance.

Leela Devi, 70 years old, has been living on the street and begging for survival for quite a while. She has asked government officials for OAP but was asked to prove her age as she had no documentation. She was finally able to find a doctor who could provide her with a certificate proving her age but the doctor asked her to pay 100 Rupees for the certificate so she could not obtain it.

A big problem is the rampant corruption present at various stages of service



delivery. The expectation that an older woman who is destitute and living on the street would be in a position to provide an age certificate signifies a serious need to change the manner in which people are screened for eligibility respecting social assistance programmes.

Many of the women interviewed stated that they have applied for OAP many times and that they have made various attempts to have government authorities pay attention to the problem but that nothing is being done. Red-tapism (used to reference hard-and-fast procedures and formalities causing unnecessary delays in decision making) is widespread in the welfare administration system leading to delays that make the conditions for older women who are destitute worse.

Mania Devi, 70-year-old, is a widow and illiterate. Her family has a house where she used to live with her son and daughter. Years ago, over a small issue, her son beat her and chased her away. Now she lives in a kutchra house in the same village. Her son and other family members do not help her with food or clothing. She sleeps on a wooden bed where she spreads a dirty old sheet. She has no proper clothes to wear. Mania begs for alms in the neighbourhood and in nearby villages. She was receiving OAP but three years ago it stopped and although she tried to get it renewed she has had no success.

There are no guarantees with respect to OAP. It could be stopped at anytime and there are no formal mechanisms for people to obtain further assistance. There are also serious constraints at various points in the implementation of the program for older people. In addition the concern and sensitivity regarding the administration of the program is severely lacking.

Rahima Khatun is 65 years old. She is an illiterate Muslim widow. She lives in perpetual destitution. She has no close relatives and lives alone in a dilapidated thatched hut. Her main problem is isolation. Her sons left her after getting married and forgot about her. She works as a maid-servant and gets OAP of 100 Rupees a month. She somehow manages to scrape by but finds it difficult to get medical assistance.

The OAP amounts need to be increased and to be linked to the national price index. In addition, the OAP amounts need to be revised on a regular basis to ensure that the spirit of the policy scheme meets its goals. The current eligibility criteria of destitution which requires no kith and no kin should be abolished. Many families do not look after their older family members and the government does not create programs and develop policy believing that families will take on this responsibility.

Ashiya is 70 years old and sustains herself by begging. Her husband was a daily wage worker and died almost 30 years ago. Once she became a widow her in-laws threw her out of the house and she returned to her parents' home with her only daughter. All her relatives ignored and neglected her and her daughter. Ten years ago her daughter died. She was left all alone. She is sometimes able to stay with a cousin but has to cook in a separate area. She has several health problems, a cataract, blood pressure, digestive upsets and bronchitis. The people in her village collect fitra & Zakat (an amount of money that adult Muslims give to help the poor) and give them to her. This is her source of income.

There are places in rural India where people help the poor as seen in Ashiya's case but in many areas, particularly in

urban areas, the importance of community is missing. Additional efforts need to be made to enhance the sense of social responsibility in communities as well as the cohesiveness around community based responses to assist older people. There is a strong need for the government and civil society organizations to assist older poor people.

Munni Devi, 68 years old, is a widow who lives in the city with her son, her daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. She lives in the barsati (small rooftop room) of the one-room flat, which her son rents. Munni Devi gets 10 Kgs of wheat every month from the nearby ration shop under the Annapurna scheme. However, her son sells off the grains to meet his expenses. She often sleeps on an empty stomach by tying a Duppatta (a long scarf) tightly around her waist so as to suppress her hunger. She does not have the courage to question her son. She worries that her family will throw her out to the street and that she will have nowhere to go.

The Annapurna scheme is another policy scheme that needs to be revised. It does not provide sufficient food grain to older people.

### **Social Assistance for Older People: An Analysis**

The government of India allots nearly two percent of the financial resources from GDP to the social safety net (Weigand and Grosh, 2008). This includes subsidized food, through the Public Distribution System and public works programs through the National Rural Employment Guarantee. The targeted, unconditional cash transfers (called social pensions) provided to specific social groups — such as older people, widows and the disabled, make up less than four percent of the total spending, compared to almost half for subsidized food and approximately one third for public works (Dutta, 2008). This provides an indication

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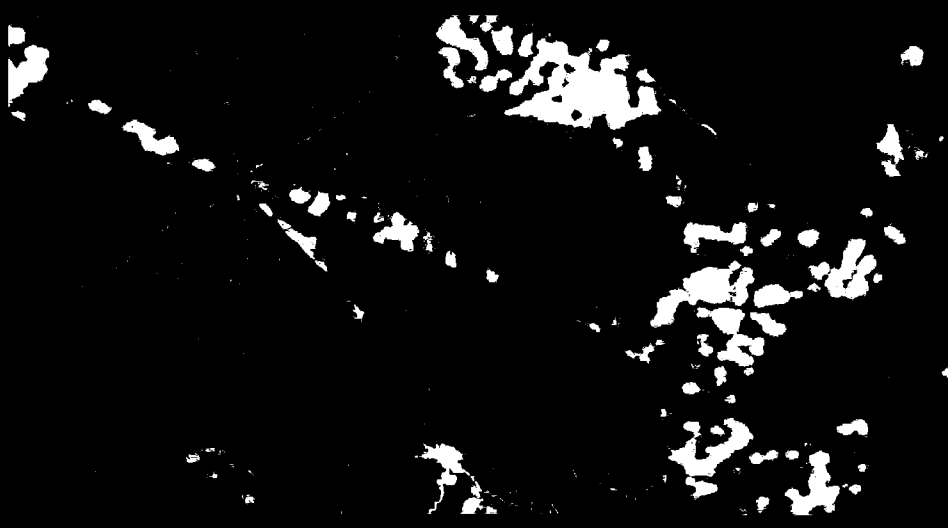


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of the lack of availability of resources that older poor people encounter.

There are a variety of loopholes that need to be considered. In this study, many poor older women were refused OAP because their kith/kin were in the vicinity. This ignores the fact that in many cases families have deserted older women and that they are now destitute. Also, while destitution is a criteria for OAP, poverty is the criteria for all other benefits. Therefore, similar criteria to that established for the poverty line needs to be adopted for the National OAP Scheme. All older people living below the poverty line should be entitled to OAP. Some states require proof of domicile as a condition to receive OAP. Given that OAP is now admissible under a national scheme there is no justification to exclude any older person from the benefits on grounds of not being able to provide proof of domicile.

With respect to implementation of the OAP scheme it has also been found that there are cumbersome administrative procedures leading to red-tapism. There is corruption at many levels which results in delays and abrupt discontinuation of OAP for poor older women. There appears to be regularity respecting payments and there is no fixed pattern for the disbursement of OAP.

In addition, there are serious constraints with respect to the selection of beneficiaries for social pension. There is a need to simplify procedures and to place the responsibility on the right stakeholders in order to identify the legitimate needs of older people. In rural India, village panchayats (assembly of respected elders) should be entrusted with the complete responsibility of selecting the beneficiaries and disbursing the OAP amounts. The selection of persons as beneficiaries under a given set of criteria is best left to be voted on by the Gram Sabha (the entire community consisting of all men and women 18 years and older) at an open meeting and to have the lists revised once or twice a year. This would curtail unnecessary delays and red-tapism in implementing the OAP scheme.

The piece-meal approach currently used in India is doing nothing to assist

poor older people in India. There are urgent needs to integrate various poverty alleviation programmes and schemes to make the most from limited resources. Economists and social scientists often debate about the 'direct cash' facility provided to the 'beneficiaries' in many poverty alleviation programmes but due to a lack of adequate support systems there is little 'capability building' for people who live below the poverty line. Similarly, the case of destitute older women receiving OAP or 10 kilograms of food grain under Annapurna. An older woman without shelter cannot get much benefit from the cash or the grains. Instead, linking destitute older people with other integrated services such as meal and social assistance programs would be an alternative that would provide better and more appropriate results.

Lastly, with the greying of nations and the feminization of aging, the care and support of older women needs to be a matter of concern for most families, communities and nations. Policies and programmes should not only be gender-sensitive but also geared to include the future challenges and concerns that the aging process will pose on women and aim to develop holistic, sustainable and rights-based development programs for older women. ❧

**Dr. Archana Kaushik** is an associate professor in the Department of Social Work at the University of Delhi where she specializes in gerontology. Her research focuses on older women and social adjustment and on reducing the vulnerability of older women in poverty in India. Among others, her work has been published in the Quarterly Journal of the International Institute on Ageing at the United Nations and she has undertaken a project on the study of media representation of the elderly in India. She is also involved in curricula development related to gerontological social work and is a member of the Gerontological Association of India.

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Real names have been altered to protect the identities of participants.

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 **Women &  
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## December with Dog

We cross a pristine sheen of frostfield,  
walking in silence,  
finding comfort in the untracked whiteness  
which is ours  
by default.

I imagine the road ahead — No Stopping,  
No U-turn, No Way Out

and I can't stop thinking,  
how swiftly each day shrivels to slivers of cold light,  
how life drifts to dust, divorce and  
who gets the Bang & Olufsen,  
who keeps Dog, who  
cares

if I can't sleep, if  
I'm not a good-enough mother, if he  
drinks himself into believing  
he isn't a bastard. Looking back

I can see where I came from, the gap  
between the neighbour's lot  
and where I used to belong — but Dog

is only dog  
and runs to cross the frozen grass  
before me.

K. V. Skene's recent publications include **Edith** (a series of poems on Nurse Edith Cavell) from Flarestack Publishing (UK), **Love in the (Irrational) Imperfect** from Hidden Brook Press (Canada) and **You Can Almost Hear Their Voices** due this year from Indigo Dreams Press (UK). A long-term expat Canadian, she currently resides in Oxford, England.

# In the Field

## A "Selfish" Impulse Turned Invitation: Older and Reckless is Ten

By Carol Anderson

Older and Reckless, started by Toronto-based dancer/choreographer Claudia Moore, is celebrating its tenth anniversary season in 2009/10. During its first decade, a remarkable roster of "older" artists has participated in the series.

Who'd be a dance artist, where ripeness is already "past it"? Big-spirited Moore saw a way forward. What about a series that would stage the work of senior artists? In an interview, she recalled that the idea was "selfish... I was a performer but I wasn't getting to perform enough. It's so expensive to produce work, I thought it was a good idea to start a studio series where we could perform — some of my friends could perform too. There was a need for it. So I started it very selfishly, but opened it to others with similar needs."

Moore envisioned Older and Reckless as a situation in which dance artists over forty could try out new work in front of an audience, without the financial and artistic risks — and the scrutiny — that often dog established artists. She is community-minded always, and conceived the series as an opportunity for performance practice, observation and exchange among artists and audience members.

Peggy Baker, one of Canada's foremost modern dancers, introduced the inaugural O&R performance, on June 26th, 2000, with a gracious and philosophical musing on the importance of older artists to the integrity and beauty of the art of dance. She spoke to an eager audience, who braved extraordinary heat and airlessness at Dancemakers' old studio above the auto shop, and Moore danced in her unique version of "Rite of Spring". This self-described "one-woman warrior dance against the Toronto District

School Board" was Moore's expression, as the mother of two school-age children, of her rage against recent education funding cuts by the provincial government. She danced, some of Stravinsky's score played, and bits of an angry parent's letter were read. It's hard to say no to Moore — she also invited me to take part in that very first O&R, and I performed a nostalgic dance called "Summer Pudding", reminiscing about being a young dance student in London.

Older and Reckless caught on right away. For a time, it was an annual event; then Moore's company MOonhORsE Dance Theatre, which produces O&R, began to support two editions per year. As part of the series' continuing evolution, it became a weeklong event, expanding to include an outside eye and offering a more formalized opportunity for artistic exchange through a forum for discussion about creative process and other creative issues.

Now, artists are welcome to show new pieces, but Older and Reckless is not exclusively for premieres; some previously performed dances are also presented. Over time, Moore has shaped the series to welcome audiences into experiencing dance in several ways. Performances are introduced and animated by Christine Moynihan, executive director of DUO, who manages MOonhORsE. The cast and the outside eye participate in the post-show chats that always follow performances. The notion of an audience warm-up was introduced several years ago. Moore laughs, "At first just one or two brave souls would go onstage for the warm-up, now the whole audience takes their shoes off and gets down."

While Older and Reckless artists,



Claudia Moore



Claudia Moore

including Moore, are many and varied, one consistent element is the affection of the audiences, who come to watch, stay to question and linger to party. In true Moore fashion, as if by magic, tables laden with food and drink appear moments after the post-show discussion, and people hang out to eat, drink and commingle. It's festive. Everyone has a good time at an Older and Reckless show. Says, Moore, "Performances are always intimate affairs."

MOonhORsE's artistic statement describes the series so: "Older and Reckless unites senior artists with people from all walks of life. Revealing creative process, practicing performance, investigating the development of new work, reaching out to emerging artists and stimulating the public, 'older and reckless' artists continue to passionately contribute with their own distinctive voices to dance."

Older and Reckless has evolved into a series that helps impart a sense of longevity to dance artists, and has become a staple on Toronto's dance calendar.

Carol Anderson has enjoyed a diverse career as a dancer, teacher, choreographer, consultant and dance writer. Her most recent book "Unfold: A Portrait of Peggy Baker" was published by Dance Collection Danse (2008). Anderson is an associate professor in the York University dance department.

This article was first published in *The Dance Current*: Online in December 2009. [www.thedancecurrent.com](http://www.thedancecurrent.com)

# Older Women's Network (OWN) Housing Co-op

By Erin Harris

"Decent affordable housing has a direct relationship to healthy people, and, it is in everyone's interest to have a healthy stable population". These words were uttered by Bea Levis on Sept 28, 1997, during the 10th anniversary celebration of the OWN Housing Co-op.

The project was spearheaded by the Older Women's Network Ontario, a feminist equality-seeking non-profit formed in 1988, to address issues related to poverty, related to low wages, marriage breakdown, inadequate pensions and poor housing.

Right from the beginning, the OWN Network was determined to address the severe housing plights of older women. It was the second such project in Canada. In the late '80's, Mature Women's Housing Co-op was established in Vancouver and continues to thrive.

OWN approached a female architect to draw up the plans for the 142-unit building on the Esplanade in Toronto, and worked with a non-profit development corporation and construction firm to commence the construction in 1995. The land it's built on is owned by the City of Toronto. It was a nine year struggle for the OWN Planning committee, to cope with funding cuts to non-profits, and diversion of funding streams to assist low-income tenants, by offering shelter allowances.

OWN members, supported by then Mayor Barbara Hall, and fuelled by seniors' concerns about the Conservatives' cutbacks of services to older adults, staged a protest and put pressure on the government to back down.

In July 1997, the first residents moved in. OWN members were given first choice of suites; then other men, women, children and families were accepted, regard-



OWN Doors — door handles sculpted by Ingrid Cry.

less of age, gender, cultural diversity, status or religious affiliation.

Seventy percent of the rental units are subsidized for persons on fixed income or low incomes, with thirty percent occupancy paying market value rents.

The complex is designed with good-sized one and two bedroom units, some with solariums or balconies; it has central air conditioning, a ninth floor lounge with walkout to an award-winning roof garden, and meeting rooms for members and community use. Seven units are fitted for persons with disabilities, with 20 apartments that can be made wheelchair accessible in the future.

Building features include bronze-winged front door handles sculpted by Ingrid Cry, a quilted wall hanging created by OWN's Stitches group, sculptor Ann Brown's arresting homage to older

women, and artist Kate Jackson's painting in the back lobby.

Members of the Co-op participate in the operation and management of the building by attending members' meetings, serving on a committee or in a variety of other ways. Applicants must be willing and able to make a commitment to participation.

The residents continue to enjoy a safe, comfortable, inter-generational mix of neighbors, building and contributing to the communities of Toronto. ❧

**Erin Harris** is dedicated to advancing women's equality, through poverty reduction, restorative justice, health, housing and financial literacy, and has engaged in personal, issues and systems advocacy for over 25 years. Since 1998, she has been committed to the Older Women's Network, in many roles, in creating a new Women's Enterprise.

# In Community

## A Win Win Solution — Housing for Help (“Wohnen für Hilfe”)

Reggie Modlich

Aging and empty-nesting senior citizens often have surplus living space which they no longer need or can maintain, yet are reluctant to leave. Meanwhile many students cannot find affordable housing.

Pro Senectute is the lead agency of a 2 year pilot project matching elderly residents with spare dwelling space with students of the ETH (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule) the University in Zürich, Switzerland under the heading “Wohnen für Hilfe” (Housing for Help). Pro Senectute, a charitable foundation representing the interests of the aging and elderly is supported by several other agencies.

The goals of “Housing for Help” address both social and financial needs. The elderly can continue to live in their trusted environment full of memories and improve their quality of life through the help and contact with a younger person, they would otherwise not receive or afford. Students, in turn, find affordable housing and can improve their social skills by getting to understand and appreciate the older generation. The pilot project will evaluate goals, processes and costs of the program and recommend modifications where appropriate.

The rental value of the space used by the student is matched by the wage value of services. This relationship is individually negotiated and contained in a written contract. Services may include domestic chores, gardening, shopping, correspondence, support during medical or social outings, assistance with communication (technology, phones, etc.) or even teaching. Both sides keep a monthly log and submit it to the liaising agency which, matches applicants through questionnaires and “getting to know each other” encounters, helps negotiate the contracts, monitors,

consults and if need be mediates conflicts all under the motto: “the chemistry has to work.”

For more info see [www.zh.pro-senectute.ch](http://www.zh.pro-senectute.ch) and contact [dc.zuerich@zh.pro-senectute.ch](mailto:dc.zuerich@zh.pro-senectute.ch)



BILD: URSULA MARCUS / PRO SENECTUTE KANTON ZÜRICH

### POEM by Joanne Osborne-Paulson

#### Menopause

who would have guessed  
that just when the streets were dry  
& littered with coarse sand

& the great snow drifts peppered  
& half melted

& the grass quickening

& the first bird singing  
for a mate at dawn

& dark seeds swelling  
with melt-water

& every tip of every branch  
was pregnant

who would have guessed  
that so much would be lost  
& I would be stranded here  
in the future

Joanne Osborne-Paulson is an Associate Member of the League of Canadian Poets. She holds a BA Special with Distinction in English. Her work has been published in *Dandelion, Grain, The Canadian Theatre Review*, and in an anthology called “Words Like Ashes.”

# In the News

## EU Member States to Take Affirmative Action for Older Women

European Union member states shall undertake affirmative action measures to improve the lives of older women. A request to this effect was adopted by the majority of EU delegates. The parliament in Strassburg, announced further, that within the next five years, they will declare a "Year against Violence against Women." Also to be voted upon was a resolution against the death sentence by stoning of the Iranian woman, Mohammadi-Ashtiani. (Source: ZWD, Sept 10 2010 (a German press service on Politics and Women.)

## UN Women — An Important Step for Women Around The World

A single UN agency to deal with women's issues! How can the vested interests in the four existing agencies subsume their self-interest? How much negotiating power do women at the UN have to get all the patriarchal governments, many of them dominated by even more patriarchal religions to agree to one strong pro-women agency? No way, I thought when I first heard about the GEAR (Gender Equality Architecture Reform) campaign, at the 2006 UN Habitat Forum in Vancouver. GEAR is a network of over 300 women's groups across the world. They fought for 4 years for the formation of UN Women. Canadian Women have an additional reason to feel good. Stephen Lewis, Canada's former Ambassador to the UN and subsequent UN special repre-

sentative on AIDS in Africa, was a strong and clear voice in support of UN Women, when most influential male politicians kept silent. It never felt so good to be wrong and to be able to witness such a positive change for women — it must have been my age-related cynicism.

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General commented:

*"UN Women is a recognition of a simple truth: Equality for women and girls is not only a basic human right, it is a social and economic imperative. Where women are educated and empowered, economies are more productive and strong. Where women are fully represented, societies are more peaceful and stable."*

On Friday, July 2, 2010, the UN formally adopted the formation of UN Women, the UN entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. UN Women merges UNIFEM, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW); the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) and International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). In a joint statement these agencies declared: "UN Women will work with the entire UN system, and will forge effective partnerships with all stakeholders, including the civil society and women's organizations." UN Women will start working, January 1, 2011 with a budget of 500 million dollars, double the com-

bined budgets of the four agencies it replaces.

UN Women will operate as part of the resident coordinator system within UN country teams. An Under-Secretary-General and an Executive Board of 41 members from all continents including six from "contributing" countries will run the "entity." Its mission is to realize the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as additional national and international commitments. It will report annually to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council and will be accountable to Member States. Joint executive board meetings with the UN Development Programme, the UN Population Fund, the UN Children's Fund and the World Food Programme will mutually strengthen the work of UN Women on gender issues and the efforts of these UN programmes. However, governments have to "request" UN Women's assistance before the agency can embark on its mission.

Michelle Bachelet's appointment as UN Women's first head is most promising. As such she also becomes a UN under secretary-general. Bachelet, a socialist pediatrician and epidemiologist, has just completed a term (constitutionally limited to one) as one of Chile's most popular presidents. Under her presidency, Chile had the first cabinet with gender parity in the Western hemisphere. She also achieved pension reform which provided a basic pension for poor homemak-

The Underground, one of the best restaurants at York University, has taken a leading role towards being environmentally responsible. Our efforts have included:

### REDUCING

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### RECYCLING

Wherever possible we recycle. The Underground uses recyclable materials and composts approximately 95% of its food waste daily.

Berwin Sumilang, Executive Chef  
Liz Dexter, General Manager  
myunderground.ca



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ers who had never earned wages outside their homes.

Ban Ki-moon stated in his announcement: "I am confident that under her strong leadership, we can improve the lives of millions of women and girls throughout the world."

### LAUNCH of the Motherhood Institute for Research and Community Involvement

WEI was thrilled to hear about the newly launched Motherhood Institute for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI), a feminist scholarly and activist organization on mothering-motherhood, developed from the former Association for Research on Mothering at York University (1998-2010).

The institute houses the Journal of the Motherhood Institute (formerly the Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering), Mother Outlaws, The International Mothers Network ([www.internationalmothersnetwork.org](http://www.internationalmothersnetwork.org)), The Young Mothers Empowerment Project, The Motherhood Studies Forum and is partnered with Demeter Press. ([www.demeterpress.org](http://www.demeterpress.org))

Membership to the Institute began on May 1, 2010. Additional information as well as opportunities to support this great institute may be found at [www.motherhoodinsite.org](http://www.motherhoodinsite.org).

### Launch of Feminist History Society Documenting feminism in Canada and Quebec from 1960 to 2010

The Feminist History Society is a project of the Women's Education and Research Foundation of Ontario Incorporated (WERF), a registered charitable organization in Canada. It was created to publish a multi-volume collection of books showcasing and documenting feminist activity in Canada and Quebec between 1960 and 2010. There will be many different authors, as individuals and organizations who participated in the movement are encouraged to contribute. There will be a variety of formats, including autobiographies, biographies, single- and multi-themed volumes, edited collections, plays and novels. The long term

goal is to ensure that feminist ideas and experiences are as widely accessible as possible, their publication and distribution made possible by the community's participation in the Feminist History Society. The members of the volunteer steering committee for the project are: Beth Atcheson, Constance Backhouse, Shari Graydon, Lorraine Greaves, Diana Majury and Beth Symes.

In order to succeed, the Feminist History Society and its publishing project must be membership-based. Membership dues will create a modest pool to support outreach to contributors and members, book publication costs and informal events to bring people together to enjoy and celebrate the feminist community and its efforts. Every member of the Feminist

History Society will receive a hardcover book every year, bound with uniform covers and spines that mark each one as part of a larger "collection."

Additional information and the opportunity to support the Society by becoming a member is available at <http://feministhistories.ca>. At this site you may also find the highly coveted section on Buttons from the Women's movement.

The Society has just published *Feminist Journeys/Voies féministes*, a collection of personal stories written by more than 90 women across Canada about what drew them to feminism.



collection of personal stories written by more than 90 women across Canada about what drew them to feminism.

❧

## Towards a Human Rights Convention on Aging

According to a coalition of eight NGOs<sup>1</sup> (the Coalition), the aging of the world's population is one of humanity's greatest triumphs and at the same time one of its greatest challenges. Worldwide, the proportion of people aged 60 years and over is growing and will continue to grow faster than any other age group due to declining fertility and rising longevity.

The number of older people over 60 years is expected to increase from about 600 million in 2000 to over 2 billion in 2050. This increase will be greatest and most rapid in developing countries, where the number of older people is expected to triple during the next 40 years. By 2050, over 80 per cent of older people worldwide will be living in developing countries. At the same time, the number of 'older old' persons (here defined as 80 years and over) in the developed world will reach unprecedented levels.<sup>2</sup>

Older people need adequate income support as they age, opportunities to engage in decent employment should they wish to remain active, and access to

appropriate health and social services, including long-term care. The fact that there is a higher percentage of women living into very old age presents a challenge for policy-makers. The lack of policies to address these issues is condemning millions of older people to a life of poverty instead of recognizing the active economic and social contributions they can make to their families, communities and society as a whole.

In spite of the above figures, older people's rights are mostly invisible under international law. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*<sup>3</sup> does not explicitly recognize older people under human rights law in order to ensure that governments look after those rights. There is only one international human rights convention that carries a mandate against age discrimination, the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families*.<sup>4</sup> There are commitments to the rights of older people such as the Madrid International Plan of

Action on Aging (MIPAA), however, this plan is not legally binding and therefore only imposes a moral obligation on governments to implement its terms.

The Coalition argues that a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is necessary to ensure that older women and men can realize their rights. They state that with a new UN convention, and the assistance of a Special Rapporteur, governments can have an explicit legal framework, guidance and support that would enable them to ensure that older people's rights are realized in our increasingly aging societies. For example, the demographic changes that have resulted in unprecedented numbers of older people worldwide means that a larger number of people will be affected directly by age discrimination and ageism and this, they say, means that governments and society as a whole must respond.

It seems their voices are being heard as the United Nations and like-minded governments are moving towards such a Convention and taking steps to create a momentum, to widen participation and to help to create local, national and international support for the idea. Here are some important signs of progress:

#### 2010

The Coalition prepared a report titled *Strengthening Older People's Rights: Towards a UN Convention* and the UN Commission for Social Development adopted during its 48th session a resolution on older persons. With this step member states are being encouraged "to consider how best the international framework of norms and standards can ensure the full enjoyment of the rights of older persons" and to look at the "possibility of instituting new policies, instruments or measures to further improve the situation of older persons."

#### 2009

The Third Committee adopted its resolution on aging on October 22, 2009. In it, Member States request the Secretary-General to "submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session, [...], a

comprehensive report on the current status of the social situation, well being, development and rights of older persons at the national and regional levels."

The Government of Chile hosted the Third Follow Up Meeting to the Brasilia Declaration in Santiago in October 2009.

The Division for Social Policy and

Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) organized an Expert Group Meeting on "Rights of Older Persons" on 5-7 May, 2009, in Bonn, Germany.

The Government of Argentina hosted the Second Follow Up Meeting to the Brasilia Declaration in Buenos Aires in

## POEM by Itzela Sosa

### Days

Translated by Glenna Iuschei

Days like a necklace of grey pearls  
that stretch learning marks and signs on the body.

Days of two faces  
where one is the world and nobody at the same time.

Nothing there  
no judgement  
no prayer  
accompanies the void  
the multitude that guards this reflection.

Days walled by mystery  
and death ripples in every corner  
in each contraction and redoubling  
as in a fish recently slumbering.

Days in which there is no one offering up a surprise  
the desecration of  
the coldness of the watch  
days in which chaos resounds and explodes in the  
mirror.

April, 2009, to continue work on an aging Convention for the region.

An NGO Symposium in London, organized to consider a Convention, took place in January, 2009.

The NGO Committee on Aging set up a subcommittee to promote a Convention in January, 2009.

## 2008

The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in late 2008 instructing the Department for Economic and Social Affairs to prepare a study of Older Persons' Rights.

The NGO Committee on Aging (New York) celebrated the International Day of

Older Persons, in October, 2008, with a day-long program, "Toward a Human Rights Convention on Aging."

Brazil called a strategy meeting in mid-September 2008 of governments and NGOs from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Committee to Eliminate Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) began considering inclusion of "older women" as a category for monitoring in 2008.

# POEM de Itzela Sosa

## Variación de las revelaciones del verano

Días como collar de perlas agnadas  
que se estiran dejando marcas y señales en el cuerpo

Días muralla  
en los que se hurga en el misterio

y se madura la muerte en cada esquina  
en cada encogerse y replegarse hacia adentro

Días en los que no hay a quien ofrendarle  
la sorpresa

el frío

en los que el mundo retumba y astilla en el espejo

Originally published in Memorias del Imperio (2010), Instituto de Cultura y  
Morelos, colección la hoguera.

Itzela Sosa is a poet, translator and social researcher. She has published two  
books of poetry Memorias del Imperio (2010), Instituto de Cultura y  
Morelos, colección la hoguera and Estándar (2010), CONACULTA, Itz'at  
Malabares-Ayuntamiento de Quezaltenango.

## 2007

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in its Brasilia Declaration of December 2007, urged the UN to adopt a Human Rights Convention and to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Aging.

Social Watch, an important global NGO network, published an article in its 2007 annual report calling for a Convention on the rights of older persons.

UNFPA addressed the human rights of older persons in a resolution adopted at its meeting in Istanbul in 2007.

Further information including copies of resolutions may be found at Global Action on Aging [www.globalaging.org](http://www.globalaging.org).

i HelpAge International, International Longevity Center, American Association of Retired Persons, The Global Aging Network, International Federation on Aging, Global Action on Aging, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse.

ii Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, **World Population Prospects: the 2008 Revision**: <http://esa.un.org/unpp>.

iii The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, established in 1948, is now recognized as customary law that is binding on every country in the world. The UN has compiled translations of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in over 300 languages and dialects: [www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/SearchByLang.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/SearchByLang.aspx)

iv <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cmw.htm>

# Announcements & Other

## **WEI Welcomes New Graduate Student Assistant!**

Kristy Kilbourne joined the **WEI** office as a Graduate Student Assistant in September 2010. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Environmental Studies with a focus on Eco-Consciousness. Kristy worked with **WEI** on a variety of issues around the launch of the Women & Water issue as well as on this issue focusing on Women, Aging, Poverty & Other Constraints.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Environmental and Resource Studies from Trent University and brings her experience in municipal sustainability and social housing. Kristy decided to pursue further education so that she could put her knowledge to work for environmental justice causes.

Kristy brings wonderful enthusiasm and sensitivity to her work, and **WEI** is thrilled to have her in the office. She believes that "issues around environmental justice especially those involving women, both in local contexts and on an international scale, are critical issues that need to be examined and addressed in order to ensure access to a good quality of life for women everywhere" and when asked about her position with **WEI** she said "I am so happy to have the opportunity to work with Women & Environments International Magazine, a magazine that is so dedicated to this cause."

We hope she enjoys her year and gains practical experience that will help her help others in the future!

## **The irritants that plague us as we age and the humbling things no one tells you about aging<sup>1</sup>**

- takes forever to finish when going to the bathroom;
- more ear wax keeps clunking up your ears;
- nose and sinuses keep continually clogging up;
- humidity gets stuck in windpipe and makes annoying high sounds, beeping, wheezing and chirping when breathing;
- you can't reach your toes to cut the nails, just as little as you can see them;
- it takes 10 steps before you can walk with ease after you get up from the bed or chair;
- you get clumsy, need to bend down 5 times to pick something up, you bump into everything and often lose your balance;
- loss of sense of smell;
- can't get appliances or TV remotes you can actually read or without multiple choices that only confuse;
- impurities in skin, warts;
- biting one's cheek and tongue when chewing — adding insult to injury;

- restaurants which never consider acoustics in their design and make it impossible for elderly to follow any conversation;
- servings in restaurants meant for one could feed at least two, and require you to take doggy bags

<sup>i</sup> These are meant to give you a new perspective on getting old or to bring forth the finer nuances of growing up and aging and to help you see the lighter side of life and make you love it even more.

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**CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS 2011**  
**WOMEN, GENDER AND FOOD SECURITY**  
**DEADLINE: MAY 15, 2011**

*Women and Environments International Magazine* (WEI) is seeking submissions for its upcoming issue on Women, Gender and Food Security for publication in Fall 2011/Winter 2012. **The objective of this issue is to critically examine issues related to women, gender and food security.** Food security is often considered access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food for maintaining a healthy and active life. Gender is a critical lens for examining the availability, access and use of food, both physically and economically. Contributors are invited to explore gender perspectives including, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Climate and environmental change and its impact on women's food security
- Changes in women's food security resulting from natural disasters, environmental degradation and other major environmental events
- Impact of international agreements on agriculture (e.g. by World Trade Organization) on women's food security
- Gender and planning for food land preservation
- Gender and agricultural policies
- Local, national, or regional level perspectives on economic crises and fiscal austerity measures in relation to women and food security
- Food security as a social and environmental determinant of women's health
- Intersections of gender and food security in particular marginalized communities, such as indigenous communities
- Environmental racism, gender and food security
- Distribution and management of food within households and implications for women's food security
- Gender and local community projects to increase food security, e.g. community gardening, neighbourhood food co-ops
- Gendered perspectives on food and/or agricultural co-ops
- Women's activism on food security issues (local, national and/or transnational)
- Critical examination of gender and organic/local food movements
- Gendered examinations of fair trade programs in the context of food security
- Gendered perspectives on food security in resource-poor settings, such as refugee or internally-displaced persons (IDP) environments
- Migration — urban, rural, economic, conflict-related, other — and its impact on women's food security
- Environmental laws and practices relating to women and food security

WEI aims to gather content from both the North and the South. Submissions may be in the form of critical studies, essays, case studies, book or film reviews, poetry, photography, and or visual art. While we appreciate every submission to WEI, only contributors whose work has been selected will be contacted.

**Submissions:** Send submission(s) electronically to [weimag@yorku.ca](mailto:weimag@yorku.ca) using "Women, Gender and Food Security" as your subject heading. Please refer to the Editorial guidelines at <http://www.weimag.com>

**General Information:** WEI is a magazine that examines women's relations to their natural, built, and social environments from feminist and anti-racist perspectives. It has provided a forum for academic research and theory, professional practice and community experience since 1976. Like most scholarly publications, WEI does not pay for contributions but retains a high-quality wide readership so your contribution will reach a wide audience. Upon publication, WEI assumes a non-exclusive, worldwide, and perpetual right to publish and reproduce contributions in any format in and outside the magazine context. This does not preclude contributors from granting permission to publish their materials after publication in WEI provided WEI is acknowledged as the original publisher.

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4700 Keele Street, Toronto ON Canada M3J 1P3 Email: [weimag@yorku.ca](mailto:weimag@yorku.ca) Website: [www.weimag.com](http://www.weimag.com)

**Modern Times**

---

Three Bosnian girls smoking in the stair well  
outside Life Drawing class  
all legs as I go up, and their eyes  
bored, not bored — stuck,  
turned once too tight like fuses in a fuse box  
two years here and they can't speak Danish.  
Natasha Svetlana Amandra  
at a loss for more than words.

We believed we were living in modern times  
that this present war was an accident, not inevitable, that the long  
negotiations could affect its outcome we believed  
the weapons were not curious but ordinary we saw  
as through a glass, red blood fresh on fresh snow,  
we believed what occurred was uncertain, qualified,  
that the brother who climbed the hill  
could have lived, it took years  
before we realized our mistake  
before we could see  
this day, this worn white stair,  
this half-dark February, rain on the skylight, smoke  
spiralling upward from the cigarettes  
the eyes, the stammered words  
were no more capable of other endings  
than the wire embedded in the uniform in a brown  
1914 textbook photo, or the flint,  
or the spear at the museum.

Svendborg, February 1995

Published in **Poems Selected** and **New Wolsak and Wynn 1998**.

**Heather Spears**, Vancouver-born writer and artist, has lived in Denmark since 1962. She has published 14 collections of poetry, four novels, and three books of drawings. Poetry awards include Governor-General's 1988, 3x winner of Pat Lowther Memorial Award.



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Stasis

### **Artist Background**

Karen currently teaches drawing at the School of Art, University of Manitoba. She completed a Masters of Fine Art from Concordia University in 2000.

Karen participates wholly in her arts community and is a member of Martha Street Studio as well as acontinc. She is not only active as a contemporary artist but also as an illustrator.

Karen has consistently shown work all over Canada with some exposure in the United States, Europe and Japan. In the past 3 years, she has completed challenging residencies in Denmark and Iceland and is open to new experiences. The goal for her is to share these experiences and make work that instigates perceptual change.

Her work comments upon and reinterprets society's views. She is interested in issues of aging, addiction, gender roles and community. Often imagery is delivered with a sense of absurdity. Looking for discrepancies within the work is a key to understanding its meaning.

Karen is in many public collections, including Loto-Québec and La banque nationale du Canada, as well as private collections.

### **Name of Piece: Stasis**

This illustration includes images of people from Latin America. There is a sense that they are imprisoned by poverty. Their only economic lifeline is the water from where they get nourishment and perhaps income. I put the aged woman and children together, separate from the fisherman. He is more physically capable and has an advantage over them. This could lead to an uncomfortable power dynamic. The colour palette is very grounded.