



Women & Environments

international
magazine

GENDER & FOOD SECURITY

Beyond Gender and Food Security

MARTHA MCMAHON &
FATIMA JOHRA

Harvesting Hope in Northern Manitoba

SHIRLEY THOMPSON &
VANESSA LOZECZNIK

Price Hikes and The Feminization of Food Insecurity

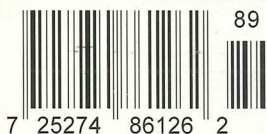
MANOJ MISRA

When a Mother's Love is Not Enough

YVONNE VOULGARIS SMYTHE



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ON THE COVER



Photograph: "Fish sale in Myanmar"

A woman sells fish in a local market in the township of Pindaya, in the southern Shan State, Myanmar.

Photographer: Shehzad Noorani

Shehzad Noorani is a documentary photographer from Bangladesh with a deep interest in

social issues that affect the lives of people in developing countries. He has covered major stories resulting from man-made and natural disasters in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. He has also engaged in a number of assignments for organizations such as UNICEF, WFP and UNAIDS through which he has travelled to more than 40 countries. His personal in-depth documentary work has been extensively exhibited and has been featured in major international magazines and publications around the world. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the Mother Jones International Fund for Documentary Photography for Daughters of Darkness, a project on women working in the sex trade in South Asia and has received honourable mentions by National Geographic.

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A Word from WEI

This issue of WEI, on the topic of gender and food security deals with the impact of the food crisis on women, particularly poor rural women, women farmers and workers. The underlying issue is women's empowerment as well as economic models that perpetuate existing gender inequality and climate injustice.

As established in the discourse outlined in some of this issue's content, the concerns over gender and food security are far reaching. These issues and a host of related concerns are taking centre stage at the Rio+20 conference in Brazil in June 2012, a conference that is taking place 20 years after the landmark 1992 Earth Summit which established United Nations conventions to protect biodiversity and to tackle climate change.

WEI is a supporter and contributor to the Global Women's Submission for the Rio+20 conference in June 2012. The Global Women's Submission establishes food security and food sovereignty as priorities by referencing, among others, the following key points:

Putting This Issue Together

Genevieve Drouin has a Masters in International Development and over nine years of experience in the non-governmental sector. She has worked with community-based organizations in South America and Africa, and with global and environmental education programs in Canada. Her interests include urban development, gender equality, food security, and environmental sustainability. She currently works as a Program Manager with Canadian Feed the Children.

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Alethea Spiridon Hopson is an editor and writer in Clarington, Ontario where she lives with her husband and kids. She has been an editor for over 13 years working in both books and magazines, and has been a freelance editor for the past five years (www.freelanceeditor.ca). Alethea recently developed a creative writing program for teen writers called Unleash Your Creativity (www.unleashurcreativity.ca).

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Sharmila Shewprasad works internationally on issues such as women's sexual and reproductive rights, human rights and refugee and migration issues. She has an MA in International Development Studies.

- Given that women constitute more than 50% of those who "go to bed hungry every night" (World Disasters Report on Hunger), food security systems need to address issues of equitable distribution of food, and need to address reasons behind crop failures, collapsing fish stocks and food price increases, including large-scale industrial bio-energy production.
- A review of the unfair legal framework for intellectual property in this field is needed to defend food security and food sovereignty, especially for women.
- Effective measures should be adopted at the global level to prevent speculation in the food market and maintain sustainable fishing practices both near shore and on the high seas.
- To increase the social and environmental resilience of communities and prevent loss of agricultural biodiversity, women's production needs to be supported, including through improved access to education, resources and markets.
- To defend food security and food sovereignty, the rights of women to choose what to plant, eat and sell, must also be ensured.

In addition, WEI has a full agenda for 2012 with themes looking at Asbestos and Women's Health for the Spring-Summer volume to Gender and Social Movements for the Fall-Winter volume.

As always, we thank all the contributors who shared their stories, ideas, poetry, art, perspectives and personal journeys with us for this issue. We also thank WEI's Managing Editor, Sharmila Shewprasad, who guided the framework for this issue, as well as the Editorial Team which included Genevieve Drouin, Erica Franklin, Alex Mokori, and Alethea Spiridon Hopson. A special thank you to Alethea for taking on the role of Lead Editor for this issue. ✨

Sybila Valdivieso
Editor-in-Chief



Editorial

By Sharmila Shewprasad, Managing Editor

Over the past year, the price of food has sparked popular protests around the world in countries ranging from China, Bolivia, Uganda, and throughout the 'Arab Spring' uprisings, and has been the topic of much debate. With the world's population rising past the 7 billion mark this year, food security — the access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food for maintaining a healthy and active life — is increasingly on the international agenda as both a political and policy issue and as a development and sustainability issue. President Obama's Feed the Future Initiative is one example of the renewed attention being given to global hunger and food security.

Too often, the role of women continues to be overlooked or inadequately analyzed in these debates. The objective of this issue of *Women and Environments International* is to critically examine issues related to women, gender and food security, and to apply a gender lens to questions of availability, access, and use of food.

Even as food security becomes a prominent point for grassroots protest and international action, the feminization of food insecurity remains little discussed. The affordability of basic commodities is an important aspect of food security, and poor women are the most vulnerable to sudden fluctuations in the price of staples. They are often the first to feel the impact of price increases, and the last to recover. Across the world, one coping strategy used by women is skipping meals so that others in the family have enough to eat. Another is consuming cheaper, less-nutritionally rich foods.

Yet, a majority of the world's farmers are women. Sustainable agriculture and access to land underpin issues of food security. Framed by these larger debates on food production and global economics, authors in this issue are asking critical questions

about gender and food and exploring the ways in which food insecurity affects women — What is the impact of the rise in global food prices on women? What are the best ways to support women subsistence farmers? How does gender affect access to food for women?

At the same time, our contributors weigh in on the question of whether recent food shortages are the result of lack of production or a reflection of an inequitable global economic system. Misra analyzes how the effects of market liberalization in Bangladesh are related to fluctuations in food prices leading to increased food security, the brunt of which is felt by women. McMahon

and Johra argue for a reconceptualization of food security into food sovereignty, where individuals and communities have ownership and rights over their systems of food production.

Other contributors discuss the lived experiences of particular communities' efforts to achieve food security. Thompson and Lozecznic look at Aboriginal communities in northern Canada, where achieving food security sometimes means going up against government regulations in order to access local sources of food. Tursunova examines the role of women's savings networks in ensuring food security in post-



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Soviet Uzbekistan, and Franklin looks at urban rooftop gardening in Canada.

In the face of an expanding global population, environmental degradation and climate change, food insecurity is here to stay. In addition to focusing on producing and distributing enough food to meet the needs of a continually expanding population, strong efforts to mitigate the negative implications of food insecurity for women are also needed. As the authors in this issue show, the intersections of gender and food security are complex and can involve social, economic, physical, ethical, and legal dimensions. ❧

Features

Beyond Gender and Food Security

Food Sovereignty

By Martha McMahon and Fatima Johra



A quick internet search shows that images of women farmers are increasingly used in major reports on global food security. This development may not be as promising as it first appears.

Despite years of talking, new promises of money, new projects, endless reports and all sorts of international commitments and expressions of good intentions, the number of hungry and malnourished people in the world is rising.

Roughly 15% of humanity (over one billion people) is considered hungry or malnourished. A disproportionate number of the hungry are women and children. The majority of the hungry (65%) are in India, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Ethiopia. Although most of the hungry and malnourished people live in rural and semi-rural areas, there has been growing urban-based public protest and political unrest around food prices.

This new unrest seems to come not from the most abject victims of absolute hunger that we often see in the media, but from the somewhat better off urban dwellers, many of whom are increasingly spending 40% or more of their incomes on food. The rising cost of food hits urban household budgets very hard, but unlike many of the rural powerless, the new food-insecure urbanites have the capacity to make their political protests visible. The political upheavals in Egypt and Libya, for example, were both initially connected to rising food prices.

Political unrest gives urgency to the new interest in food and agriculture in the

major organs of international and national governance. So too has the expectation that climate change will increase food-related conflict and scarcities. Many large investment corporations, and some national governments, are securing their own future control of food commodities and access to agricultural land.

Huge tracts of agricultural land, primarily in poor African countries, are being bought or acquired through what some call 'investments' and others call 'land grabs.'

Foreign national governments want to secure their own political stability vis-à-vis food security by acquiring control of other countries' farmland. Financial companies and agri-business corporations want to secure profits and growth. Both quests are leading to 'investment' in African agriculture and farmland. In many cases, peasant farmers are being dispossessed of their traditional means of life (Oxfam, Sept 2011). This problem is not exclusive to the Global South. The number of people relying on food banks in countries like Canada is increasing.

Feminists have worked to improve food security and agricultural policies by stressing that food security and food insecurity are gendered phenomena. The most food insecure people in the world are usually women and children. Here in Canada (as elsewhere) children go hungry or rely on food banks because their mothers are poor. In the Global South, given women's key role in farming, the dynamics are different. That is, small-scale women farmers often produce the food and thus create food security for their families and their communities.

Putting Gender in Talk of Food Security: Is this a good thing?

The World Bank World Development Report (2008) opens with a textual image of women small-scale farmers represented as the embodiment of the conflated problems of food insecurity, inadequate technology, large families, and poverty:

An African woman bent over under the sun weeding sorghum with a hoe, a child strapped to her back — a vivid image of rural poverty. For her large family and millions like her, the meager bounty of subsistence farming is the only chance to survive.

Impoverished, feminized, small-scale farmers are commonly the objects of a caring and gendered gaze widely found in texts produced by international governance organizations and some large NGOs. Readers are often assured that it is not women-farmers' fault, but a problem of neglect. Their problems, we learn, are created by years of lack of investment in agriculture. Predictably, the proposed solutions include private and public-private (PPPs) investment, modern technology, market participation and making credit available so that small-scale women farmers can modernize their farming. Typically, this means credit to buy the appropriate technical aids (fertilizer, irrigation equipment, GMO seeds, etc.) to allow these currently inefficient but potentially efficient female farmers into the mainstream market place — a market place that will be increasingly globalized. Vandana Shiva (2010) asks if this new

credit will only bring greater indebtedness. Can the foreign governments, PPPs, and corporations controlling this new debt be trusted to put the interests of these small farmers ahead of their own when the next crisis hits? What happens when the foreign markets disappear or global buyers find a cheaper source? And are the technologies of Northern industrial agriculture appropriate? And what of the surplus labour that is inevitably created by such "modernization"? What other employment and income sources will be available for surplus women farmers?

Although some may benefit, in reality the outcome of such dislocation of the peasantry has far too often been millions of dispossessed people, the growth of urban slums and/or, as Dolan's (2004) research on gender at the bottom of a global food value-chain shows, low-paid work in packing houses, part-time or migrant jobs in the fields, maybe even on the land that they themselves used to own.

The Gendered Face of Conventional Approaches to Food Security

A closer look at the gendering of food security raises concerns. Despite the picture of women small-scale farmers that adorns websites and reports, the 'woman' we meet is typically *the woman as victim* who, with the right *modern makeover* (aka investment), can become the solution. She is not recognized as the major source of local food security, but is the child-burdened purveyor of meager subsistence. She is a globalized future economic potential, a resource awaiting development, or reallocation, and relocation.

The concept of gender may give the impression of socially responsible analysis, but the concept of gender historically deployed without the intersection of class, racialization, or geo-politics tells a very different story. Far from being a gendered analysis, the woman we meet is constructed as an essential object of help and concern.

Despite corporate claims about feeding the world, most people are fed nationally, regionally, or locally. Small-scale women farmers *are often the real food security* in their communities. One of the world's largest social movements, that of

In reality the outcome of the dislocation of the peasantry has far too often been millions of dispossessed people, the growth of urban slums, and/or... low paid work in packing houses, part-time or migrant jobs in the fields, maybe even on land that they themselves used to own.

peasants, fishers, small-scale and women farmers and landless rural dwellers, called La Via Campesina has reframed the story of food security and agriculture as one of local peoples' multiple struggles for food sovereignty. This movement rejects the international governing elites' discourse of food security as being one that is too easily used by colonizing powers. Gender equality, dignity, collective self determination, ecology, the political role of women and their centrality in feeding their communities have all been at the core of the food sovereignty movement since its inception.

Four Questions

To help explain our caution about linking gender and food security we explore four questions:

- (a) who defines the problem and how it matters;
- (b) what are some political meanings of food security;
- (c) what are some of the proposed solutions; and
- (d) why should we explore the alternative concept of food sovereignty?

(a) Those who control the definition of the problem will own the solutions

There is an ideological battle being waged over the definition of the problems around food security. There is a lot at stake if one owns the proposed solutions. The influential publication *The Economist*, for example, recently explained that food security is basically a problem of supply and demand. Too much demand, not enough supply; a problem of market fundamentals. Supply problems include climate change, rising energy costs, and limited resources. *The Economist* article supports industrial

agriculture. Advocates of peasant agroecology (and organic farming) are represented not only as silly, but unethical. Other conventional approaches to food security generally agree with *The Economist*. Often additional specific causes of scarcity are added in, whether a drought in Russia, floods in Australia, rising oil and fertilizer prices, or bio-fuel production.

The underlying message we are given is the same: Food insecurity is caused by out-of-line market fundamentals. Too much demand, not enough market supply. Inefficiency causes under-supply. Solution? Produce more food. How? Modernize production and reduce the inefficiency in the system by making some peasant farmers a lot more efficient and 're-allocating' the rest. The strategy focuses on private, philanthropic or PPP capital investment to bring some small farmers into the market.

Although directing resources to support small-scale farming is not a bad idea, McMichael and Schneider (2011) carefully document how market solutions to food insecurity are intended to incorporate small farmers into the world marketplace. Here the expectation is that the private sector will drive 'the organization of value chains that bring the market to smallholders and commercial farms'. Private credit is proposed to allow small farmers to buy expensive fertilizer and new technologies, including GMO seeds.

The primary picture that emerges is not a domestically oriented production of local staple foods for local markets, but one of export agriculture produced for those with purchasing power in world markets. Export oriented agriculture, as Dolan's (2004) research on women in Kenya shows, often leads to low paid work in corporate dominated farms and

packing houses. This is not the revitalized peasant agriculture implicitly promised in the images on the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other food security related websites. It leaves vulnerable populations at the mercy of the vagaries of international markets for their products and for income to buy the kinds of food that they used to produce for themselves. If international markets, income or supplies fail to materialize, those who were formerly subsistence farmers now could become famine victims.

(b) The discourse of food security

Food security is conventionally defined as access to adequate quantities of nutritious and culturally appropriate food at all times. Mooney and Hunt (2009) explain the term actually conceals at least three distinct and politically incompatible frames of meaning: (1) an individual's or population's freedom from hunger or adequate food supply; (2) food security as part of community development; and (3) food security as minimizing risks with respect to the industrial food system's vulnerability.

Therefore the meaning of food security is generally not focused on the relationships that shape how food is produced.

In contrast, the concept of food sovereignty places social and ecological factors, including factors such as gender and geopolitical economic relationships at the national and local levels concerning food production, and food security of communities at its centre.

(c) What are the consequences of proposed solutions?

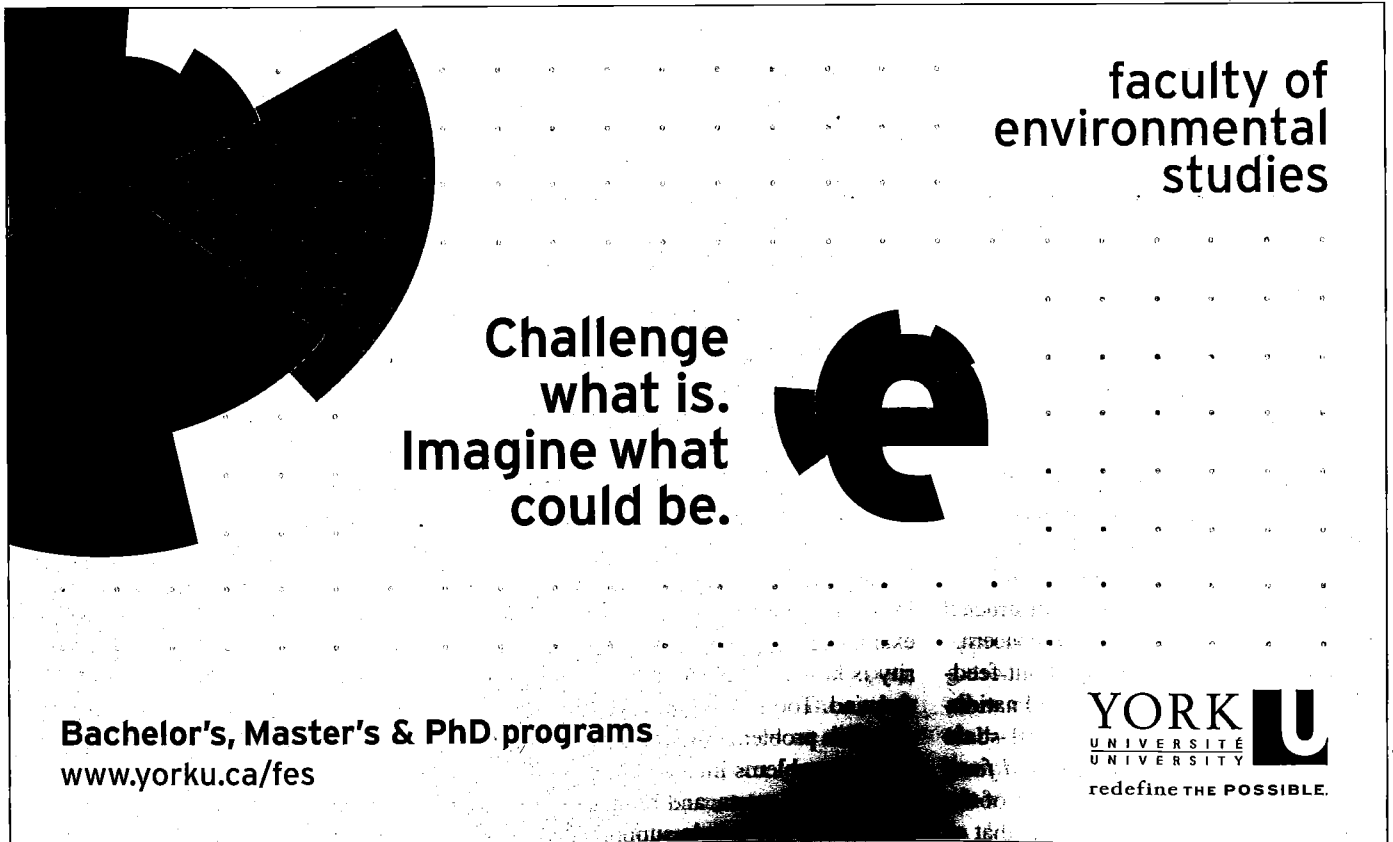
If food insecurity is caused by not enough food, it seems reasonable to think that the solution simply lies in producing more food. However, this reasoning does not stand up to empirical investigation. First, the temporary, but significant spikes in food prices in 2008 and 2011 were not simply caused by a lack of food supply. The shift to bio-fuels and specific climate related events affected the price of particular crops in particular places and what occurred in 2008 was not a global food shortage. There is considerable evidence that liberalization of the world food trade

system may have caused much of the price volatility of 2008.

Several authors (Clapp, 2009; Bello & Baviera, 2009) have argued that because of trade deregulation in agri-food commodity futures and the meltdown of the US housing bubble, speculative financial investment shifted in and out of commodity futures, including agri-food commodities and agri-inputs, leading to extreme food price volatility.

The supply-demand explanation for food insecurity is also challenged by the work of Sen (1983), the Nobel prize winning economist, who shows that hunger is not caused by a lack of supply but by lack of access to food. According to Sen, people are not hungry because there is not enough food in the world but because they are too poor to buy food or are deprived of the resources to *feed themselves and their families or communities* and their capacity for generating their own livelihood has been undermined.

This is not to say that there are no supply side problems or that all the problems in food security are caused by financial



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speculators. Financial speculation and shifts to biofuels has no doubt contributed to market price volatility and to the food price spikes of 2008 and 2011. Yet it is also important to note that climate change will no doubt produce new problems.

But behind the food insecurity faced by the small-scale women farmers is a deeper *agrarian crisis*. Food sovereignty recognizes this. According to Van der Ploeg (2008) and others, depeasantization and the *agrarian crisis* have been caused by the industrialization and globalization of food production, by the rise of food empires, by the lack of protection for the vulnerable and by speculation, which have all undermined local subsistence economies that sustain traditional rural livelihoods. But these 'causes' of the problem seem to be embedded in the very remedies proposed by the World Bank, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (ACRA) and some of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation projects.

Lower prices for agricultural products from the Global South and dumping of subsidized agriculture products from the North have decimated peasant livelihoods and food security. From 1974 to 2005, food prices on world markets fell by three-quarters in real terms. Local farming has been unfairly undermined by subsidized imports. The debt-burdened Global South governments have starved the infrastructural support necessary for farming. With that decline, the rural-based livelihoods necessary for food security have disappeared. Africa has been transformed from a food exporting region to a food importer. As a continent, it now imports 25% of its food, and exports high-value crops such as green beans, coffee, flowers and bio-fuels to more affluent consumers (McMichael and Schneider, 2011).

(d) Beyond Food Security: Food Sovereignty

Food security projects often propose to bring the solutions of high bred (and GMO) seeds, fertilizers, credit and the market to small scale farmers, but critics argue such programs cannot work (Holt-Gimenez, et al 2006) because such projects primarily sustain the political stability of

consumer societies and open new avenues of capital accumulation for those who are already privileged. As a result, continued price volatility and peasant dispossession will be the likely outcome.

On the other hand, a global coalition of peasants, women small-scale farmers, fishers and landless rural dwellers have formed the 'food sovereignty' movement to protect peasant farming as a social and environmental necessity for real food security across the world. This movement (see Via Campesina) rejects the privatization of control over food, agriculture and nature through corporate investment, industrialized and export oriented agriculture and trade liberalization. While they do not reject all trade in food, they argue that real food security for the non-privileged majority of the world depends on the future of the world peasantry and on small scale, local ecological food production which is so often done by women. The coalition proposes food sovereignty rather than food security as the better framework to end poverty and hunger. ❧

Martha McMahon is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Victoria. She was a full time farmer before emigrating from Ireland and pursuing an academic career. She now farms part-time. Her current research interests include local food, agri-food governance, food sovereignty, environment and ecofeminist research. She has also published on issues related to motherhood, domestic violence and qualitative methods.

Fatima Johra is currently working on 'Sociology of Food Security: Role of Women in Middle and Low-Income Countries' as part of her MA project at the University of Victoria.

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Harvesting Hope in Northern Manitoba

Can Participatory Video Help Rebuild Aboriginal Food Sovereignty?

By Shirley Thompson and Vanessa Lozecznik

The video "Harvesting Hope in Northern Manitoba Communities" explores issues of food sovereignty in Canadian Aboriginal communities. Thompson and Lozecznik report on a participatory video project that empowered First Nations communities in northern Manitoba to articulate food security concerns and develop strategies for addressing these issues.

Community members in northern Manitoba collaborated with researchers on a participatory video to tell their story of the challenges to, and the possibilities for, food sovereignty. The story became richer and more accurate after repeated community showings. The iterative process ensured the participatory video valued local knowledge of traditional food harvesting, providing a rich history of food sovereignty in Manitoba. Feedback from community members was very positive — people loved sharing their stories and seeing northerners represented in media. They pushed to have it distributed to all schools. The result is a video that explores the challenges and solutions from grassroots experts and a video that teaches and inspires.

First Nations Food Security in Canada

People should be able to both make a living and eat according to the definition created at the Forum for Food Sovereignty: "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." This definition links food security with sustainable livelihoods.

Historically, First Nations food secu-

urity rested on people's relationship to the land and its productivity. Traditional economies, governments, social and spiritual practices of Aboriginal peoples were systematically disrupted by the imposition of the Indian Act, and the reserve and residential school systems by settlers.

In 1996, Canada rated first in the world on the United Nations Development Index; however, First Nations communities in Canada were rated 63rd. The same inequity exists today; many households in First Nations communities are food insecure, as well as lacking running water and sewer systems.

Researchers at the University of Manitoba conducted a survey in 14 First Nations communities in northern Manitoba in 2009 and found household food insecurity rates of 75% in northern Manitoba, which is eight times the Canadian rate. These findings were the impetus for a participatory video project.

Participatory Video

Participatory video is a set of techniques to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film to tell their own story. Participatory video is credited with enhancing individual and community confidence, self-esteem, creativity, and capacity to communicate with others. According to the Society for People's Education,

Empowerment and Development Trust, participatory video is able to amplify the voice of the underprivileged.

Production of "Harvesting Hope in Northern Manitoba"

Filming in northern Manitoba, we found video to be a door opener in most of the communities we visited, with many people, particularly elders, wanting to tell their stories. Participatory research and Aboriginal culture both focus on oral transmission of knowledge. One woman elder says in the video, "I am not going to go the grave with what I know." While we trained community members and provided cameras, most footage in the video was filmed by researchers who interviewed community members about their own stories and issues.

There were repeated community viewings of the footage at various stages of production as part of the participatory process. During these viewings, community members identified four key themes: 1) the importance of country foods; 2) factors undermining food sovereignty; 3) high rates of food insecurity; and 4) food-based community economic development.

1) The importance of country foods

In the past, fishing, hunting, gathering and gardening in Aboriginal communities provided an abundance of food. A female elder said, "Growing up as a child, my father and mother did a lot of gardening, and so did my grandparents... Dad did a lot of fishing and trapping and hunting, it was the way to feed the family... muskrat, beaver, ducks, chickens, moose, whatever he could get, and that's what we grew up on, and we were healthy!" Elders described diverse and plentiful food sources and lamented the fact that young people were no longer hunting,

fishing, and doing traditional activities to the same extent. A woman from South Indian Lake (SIL) said, "My big wish would be to see our young people doing the traditional ways of preparing meat and hunting, gardening and berry picking — everything to do with our food chain in the north."

In the video, past National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Ovide Mercredi points out that treaty rights stipulate food sovereignty with agriculture, hunting and fishing clauses and outline funding supports for sustainable livelihoods and food security. "We have a treaty right to agriculture," says Mercredi.

Mercredi continues, "When it comes to the idea of food sovereignty we do have that as treaty people. What is an obstacle is the perception that the treaty rights cannot be used for commercial purposes... These are not only curtailing our treaty rights but also restricting the sharing of that food with other communities." Regulation prevents the sale of wild meat, and commercial fishing is under restrictive quotas and regulations preventing public sale.

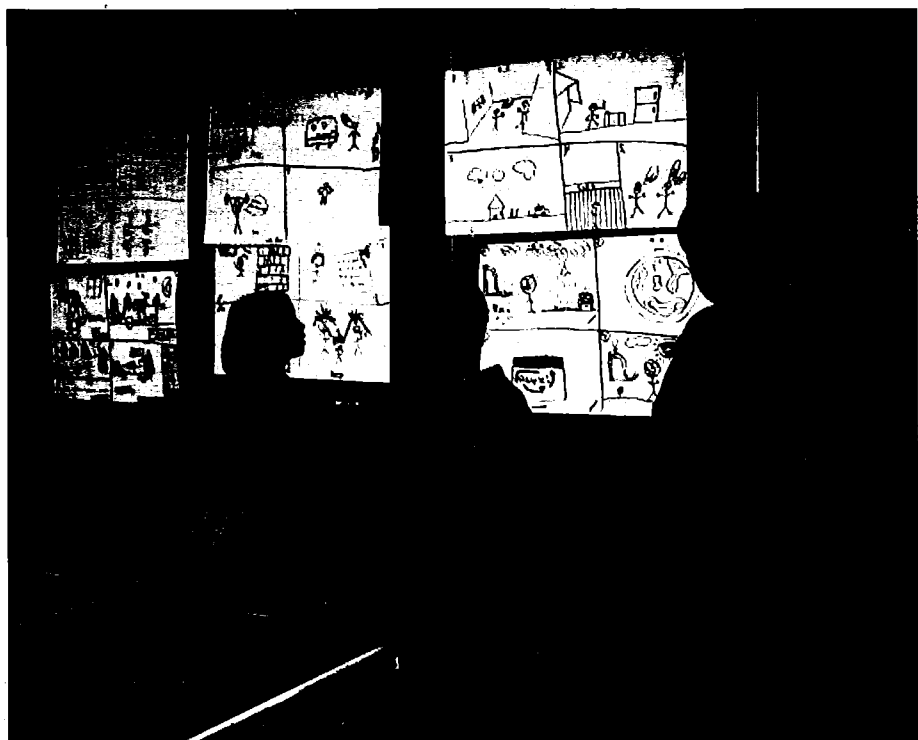
2) Factors undermining food sovereignty

Participants talked about environmental and regulatory issues that undermine food sovereignty. Many northern communities experience the impacts of water level regulation from hydro-electric damming, as well as the consequences of logging and mining activities.

Hydro-Electric Dams

The Nelson River now flows faster and in the opposite direction due to Manitoba Hydro's damming. After the displacement and relocation of the SIL First Nation due to the permanent flooding from the hydro-electric dam at their community site, the quantity and quality of fish fell and was no longer considered the highest grade for the best price.

"The flooding of the lake really affected us. It affects our food chain and everything that we get off the land. It really damaged a lot of our hunting areas and our fishing areas and even our berry pick-



Northern students learning participatory video storyboarding techniques.

ing areas. It's a terrible thing to live with on a day-to-day basis," explains one woman from SIL.

Hydro-electric damming decimated fish populations. "They now have to use forty nets to catch as much as in four nets before. It is a lot of hard work," says another woman from SIL.

Negative Impacts of Regulation

Fishers from SIL, Barren Lands First Nation and the Four Island Lake First Nation blamed the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC) monopoly for their poverty. Despite the high cost of gas for boats and freight, FFMC pays northern fishers a very low rate. In the mid-1970s, with the opening of the large FFMC processing plant and increased regulation, the local fish processing plants in most communities closed, which took jobs out of the communities and increased freight costs as whole frozen fish had to be shipped.

Now, fishers are not allowed to sell to local institutions. For food to be either given to the public, through a school, hospital or other institution, or sold locally, meat and fish must be inspected in a federal food

facility according to the Manitoba *Public Health Act's* Food and Food Handling Establishment Regulations; however, a federal food processing facility is unavailable in northern Manitoba.

A cook at St Theresa Point First Nation secondary school said that she would have preferred to serve moose stew or other wild game and fish to extend the limited food budget and provide culturally appropriate foods: "Our budget is limited to the \$15 students pay each month for lunch, making it difficult to serve healthy food at the expensive prices found here."

Government treaties signed between Canada and First Nations did promise hunting, trapping and fishing rights. However, Manitoba Conservation, a provincial government body, has jurisdiction of all waterways in Manitoba including those adjacent to First Nation reserves. Researchers videotaped a net being set by community health representatives at Garden Hill First Nation as part of a health program to feed 20 families or about 150 to 200 people. Later that day, the net was pulled up and confiscated by Manitoba Conservation. This heavy-handed regulation contributes to food insecurity.

3) Food security

In the food security survey conducted through the University of Manitoba, household food insecurity rates in northern Manitoba First Nations communities were highest typically in communities lacking road access. The lowest rates were in Nelson House First Nation (47%), which community members attributed to their country food program.

Many participants complained about lack of access to a healthy diet due to the cost and quality of food at the Northern Store, which is often the only grocery

store in First Nations communities. Thirteen of the 14 communities in this study have no store or only one store. A common complaint was: "The existing Northern Store selection is very limited and costly. After shipping, the produce is often damaged." A price survey of all the stores in these communities found that the cost of fruits and vegetables was two to three times higher in the northern communities than in southern communities.

The only grocery store serving both Wasagamack First Nation and Garden Hill First Nation, where several thousand

people reside, is located on adjacent islands. To reach their food store, community members take boats in the summer, skidoos in winter, and helicopters during ice break-up. As a result, transportation costs in accessing food are extremely high. Similarly, a number of very small communities along the Bayline Railroad, including Thicket-Portage, Ilford and War Lake First Nations have neither a grocery store nor all-weather roads. Without a commuter train, travel to the nearest grocery store in Thompson requires at least one night in a hotel, taxi and train expenses, which adds up to about \$250 in travel expenses per trip.

4) Community economic development

Nelson House Country Food program

The Nelson House Country Food Program is an innovative project that provides community members with access to healthy foods, while creating jobs and building community. The program employs seven community residents who hunt and fish year-round and distribute free food amongst community members, prioritizing elders, the sick, and low-income, and single-parent families.

Charlie Hart, the past program coordinator says, "We are providing food to 1500 people out of 2500 [people in the community] and all of them are happy getting fresh meat and fish. It's a good way to maintain traditional culture in a healthy manner and others should try to implement that too."

Ron Spence, a councillor with Nelson House First Nation was very aware of the need for wildlife conservation. "With the growing human population and industry we have to protect our own resources. By doing that we can regulate and govern ourselves internally and locally and still work with [Manitoba] Conservation. They are a part of setting up the policies," he said.

The program works around the many systems that restrict country food use, to create sustainable livelihoods and to build traditional cultural awareness in a way that is statistically significant and related to improved food security.

SHIRLEY THOMPSON



Interviewing Shirley Ducharme and her husband regarding smoking fish the traditional way.



Women taking a lead role in teaching children about gardening in Granville Lake First Nation.

Northern Healthy Food Initiative

The Northern Healthy Food Initiative (NHFI) is a provincial program that provides limited funding to NGOs to run workshops on gardening and cooking and to buy materials, including seeds, soil amendments, a rototiller and shovels.

“Definitely these folks for transportation reasons can’t go to town to a plant or grocery store because of economics,” says one resident. The gardening activities increased community cohesiveness, community capacity and healing. An elder says, “The program is really popular in the communities... I think that it brings a lot of community development.” However, without permanent policy, infrastructure change and capacity building NHFI’s impact could be transitory.

The video identifies policy as creating food insecurity. However, the video’s impact on policy is unknown. Invited showings and discussion were held at two Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs conferences, provincial and federal government offices and international conferences. The participatory video is not only a tool for community building but also sustainable change, as nobody should go hungry in a rich country like Canada.

The video may be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-dk2cuBCLo>.

Shirley Thompson is an associate professor at the University of Manitoba studying food sovereignty in northern Manitoba and the co-director of the video *Harvesting Hope* in Northern Manitoba.

Vanessa Lozecznik graduated from the Natural Resources Institute at the University of Manitoba and co-directed *Harvesting Hope* in Northern Manitoba.

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Alleviating the Double Burden

Women, Malnutrition and HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Kate Bruce-Lockhart

In 2003, Stephen Lewis, then the UN Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa, traveled to the southern region of the continent to study the intersection of HIV/AIDS and food insecurity. His team was “stunned” by their findings: not only was HIV/AIDS closely linked with malnutrition, it was also deeply intertwined with the status of women. The quote on the right, a reflection on that trip, captures the devastating reality of the interplay between gender inequality, food insecurity, and HIV/AIDS. For Lewis, addressing the convergence of these factors became one of the most urgent priorities in the fight against the epidemic: “the toll on women and girls is beyond imagining; it presents Africa and the world with a practical and moral challenge which places gender at the center of the human condition...” (Lewis, 2006)

Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS and malnutrition. To alleviate this double burden and address the pervasive gender inequality that is so central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, women must be at the crux of nutritional solutions to HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Malnutrition and HIV/AIDS: A Vicious Cycle

The synergistic relationship between HIV/AIDS and malnutrition has deadly consequences for many people living with AIDS at both the individual and household levels, as it intensifies malnutrition and food insecurity. As Stephen Lewis articulated, at a basic level “AIDS leads to hunger; hunger exacerbates AIDS.” (Lewis, 2006)

The intersection between HIV/AIDS and malnutrition has an adverse effect on

“There was hunger and starvation everywhere... there was no question that AIDS was playing havoc with agricultural productivity. So many farmers — overwhelmingly women — were sick, or had died, or were busy coping with the dying and orphaned, that they simply couldn't have tilled the fields, tended to the crops, or gone to market...”

Stephen Lewis, *Race Against Time*, 2006

health, operating in a vicious cyclical relationship. Malnutrition exacerbates HIV/AIDS through hastening the onset of opportunistic infections and reducing the effectiveness of anti-retroviral drugs. HIV/AIDS has a similarly negative impact on nutritional status. It increases energy requirements by 10% for asymptomatic individuals, and by 23% for symptomatic. (Colecraft, 2008) In Sub-Saharan Africa, where access to food is often limited, there can be devastating consequences for the nutritional status of people living with HIV/AIDS. The complications are numerous, including loss of appetite, gastrointestinal problems, diarrhea and malabsorption of nutrients. Not surprisingly, AIDS patients often display key indicators of malnutrition, such as micronutrient deficiencies and wasting.

Food Security

In a household affected by HIV/AIDS, food insecurity often becomes a reality. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where over 70% of the population are farmers, the losses of human capital in the form of labour are at the heart of the HIV/AIDS-food insecurity connection. (Gillespie and Haddad, 2002) This reduction in the household labour capabilities severely decreases agricultural

output. The source of nourishment and income for the bulk of Sub-Saharan Africa's population, agricultural output, is further hurt by a loss in the transfer of intergenerational knowledge, as the productive adult population with experience in agricultural labour is the most severely affected by AIDS.

Losses in agricultural output lead to a decline in household income and food, resulting in the sale of productive assets such as livestock and farming inputs. The decline in income is further exacerbated by high medical and funeral costs associated with AIDS.

The potential consequences of these interrelated developments are worrisome for the future of food security in Sub-Saharan Africa because the agricultural labour force will likely be dramatically reduced. As a result, nutritional strategies must be at the heart of any attempts to mitigate the epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Women, HIV/AIDS and Malnutrition: Problems and Progress

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa are disproportionately impacted by malnutrition and HIV/AIDS — a double burden rooted in biology, socioeconomic realities, and the pervasive gender inequality. In 2010,

over half of the cases of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa were among women, while globally, women made up 60% of those suffering from hunger and malnutrition. (UNAIDS, 2010) Women are more susceptible to HIV infections because of biological differences in sexual transmission, practices of gender equality, and women's increased likelihood of malnutrition which exacerbate the effects of HIV/AIDS.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the effects of HIV/AIDS and malnutrition on women are particularly grave, as women are the pillars of food production and care in their communities. Women are integral to food security at the household level due to their role as the primary producers, preparers and purchasers of food. HIV/AIDS disrupts the relationship between productive and domestic labour, one that rests on the shoulders of rural women. When HIV/AIDS befalls a household, women's ability to engage in food production is limited. As caregivers, women are expected to attend to the sick, therefore reducing the time they can devote to food production.

HIV/AIDS, food insecurity and gender inequality are thus deeply intertwined. Therefore, development strategies in AIDS stricken regions must place stronger emphasis on gender-specific solutions.

In the policy world, this reality is becoming increasingly clear. As noted by Scanlan "gender inequality, access to adequate health care and nutrition, reduced vulnerability to mortality, and economic well-being are all closely connected to HIV/AIDS" (2010). The United Nations has recognized gender equality as the key to reaching all the other Millennium Development Goals — including the goals related to hunger, HIV/AIDS and poverty: "Every single goal is directly related to women's rights, and societies where women are not afforded equal rights as men can never achieve development in a sustainable manner." (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, 2011)

The 2011 Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Report on the State of Food and Agriculture made women the centerpiece of their work. The report's key

message, "Closing the gender gap in agriculture would produce significant gains for society by increasing agricultural productivity, reducing poverty and hunger and promoting economic growth" is an accurate assessment of women's roles, but it should also include reducing malnutrition related to HIV/AIDS. (2011)

The need to situate women as central in the fight against HIV/AIDS and malnutrition is not just reflected in policy rhetoric, but also through realities on the ground. A number of case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate the profound effect of women on lessening the negative hold of HIV/AIDS and malnutrition on their societies.

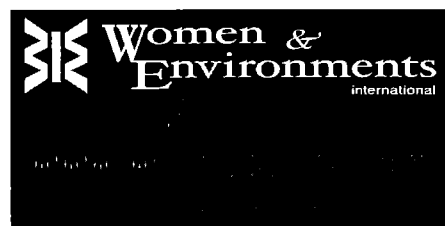
Moving Forward

Women are the linchpin of families, communities and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa. They must be both the prime recipients of nutrition interventions related to HIV/AIDS as well as the driving forces behind those interventions. Women can play a fundamental part in reducing the double burden of HIV/AIDS and malnutrition in their own lives and the lives of those around them. If policy makers utilize a gender-sensitive lens in addressing these two crippling health issues, real progress can be made in the battle against HIV/AIDS. ❖

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Kate Bruce-Lockhart is in the fourth year of an undergraduate degree in African Studies and History at the University of Toronto. Originally from Victoria, British Columbia, Kate's interest in development issues was sparked by her experiences in Kenya, Mexico and Nepal. She is the Director for Civil Society Studies at the G8 Research Group at the Munk School of Global Affairs.



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factory earth

I thought I would ask
 if my will
 for my body to be tossed
 into the ocean
 for the sea creatures
 just as they in their numbers
 have fed me
 but today I discovered
 my flesh can serve as
 no kind of atonement
 no organic treat
 my blood shows metals
 my hair mercury
 my toenail arsenic
 my breath solvent
 as if my body
 came from a factory
 factory earth

This poem was inspired by
 Christina Reese who wants
 to be fed to the sharks and the
 article "I am Polluted" by Mark
 Stevenson published in the
 Globe and Mail, March 5, 2005

Andrea Nicki's first poetry book, *Welcoming*,
 was published in April 2009, by Inanna Press. Her
 second book of poetry, *Beehive Love*, is currently
 under review. Her poems have been published or
 are forthcoming in *The Goose*, *The Brock Review*,
Philosophy Now, *Rampike*, *Eco Poetry 2009*,
*Women Write Thein Bodies: Stories of Illness
 and Healing* (Kent State University Press), and
She is Everywhere (Vermont). She is a faculty
 member in the department of Health Science and
 Research at Kent State University in the
 Summit Campus.

“Back then, you’ll eat, you’ll drink, and you’ll be full. There was enough and there were leftovers”

Women’s Changing Experiences of Urban Food Security in Ibadan, Nigeria

By Grace Adeniyi Ogunyankin and Samuel Chinedu Omenka

“Now, [food is] more expensive. As it is expensive now, may God provide money for us to be able to eat it...”

(Tayo, 42, a high-density resident)

About three decades ago, many urban dwellers in Ibadan, Nigeria did not worry about their daily meal. However, over the years, food security has gradually become more tenuous and food insecurity issues presently plague the majority of Ibadan’s populace, particularly the urban poor, and more specifically women.

This article examines women’s changing experiences of food security in Ibadan and argues that women’s experience of food insecurity can be attributed to the decline in purchasing power and high transaction costs combined with the rise in global food prices. While discussing women’s experiences of food insecurity, the paper briefly highlights how these women’s experiences differ based on age, income-level and gender of household head. In describing women’s experiences, their coping strategies are also examined. The article concludes by examining possible options for enhancing women’s food security in Ibadan.

Women and Food Security in Ibadan

Ibadan is located in South-Western Nigeria and it is the largest indigenous city in Sub-Saharan Africa. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 women, ages 18 to 83, in two Metropolitan areas of the city. Twenty-four women were interviewed in each

area between June and August of 2011.

In each local government district, three neighborhoods were selected based on their classification as low, medium or high density. Eight women were then chosen to represent each density area. Residential location in Ibadan is often a good indicator of income-levels; for example, high-density areas are often more slum-like in character and house a larger proportion of the urban poor.

The objective of the interviews was to understand women’s experiences in Ibadan and their aspiration for urban development. Food security emerged as a predominant theme during the interviews. Twenty-eight out of the 32 women living in medium and high-density neighborhoods complained about the change in their purchasing power in the food market and their growing sense of food insecurity in response to at least one of the following questions:

- Can you describe any changes that have taken place in Ibadan since you’ve been living here?
- What are the major challenges you face every day?
- What would make your daily life easier?
- If you were a city planner or a politician what would you think are the most important things to address in the city?

Of the 28 women who expressed alarm at the rise in food prices and their decreasing purchasing ability, 39.3% were head of households. Access to food was more of a struggle for these female-headed households and they also spent a larger proportion of their income on food. None of the 16 women residing in the low-density neighborhoods cited access to food as a concern during the interview. When asked to describe how they spend their income, in comparison to women living in the medium and high-density areas, low-density area dwellers spend a lower percentage of their income on food.

Women’s Perception of Food Availability in Ibadan

From the perspectives of some of the women interviewed, food availability does not appear to be a problem in Ibadan. In fact, the aggregate index of agricultural production, especially major staple crops, has been on the increase since 2004 (see Central Bank of Nigeria, 2009). Rather, the problem appears to be the affordability of the food and the availability of money to purchase it. For example, women food traders explained that the majority of Ibadan’s population does not have money to purchase food items because of the government’s failure to pay salaries on time.

Fatima, 60, a high-density resident, points out that, “If the government would release money and pay the salaries then we would be happy because that would affect us. Because we would put out our goods and it will sell. But since they are not paying, what will they spend...how



This photo illustrates major food staple items for sale at Bodija market in Ibadan.

can they buy from us who are selling?"

Echoing this sentiment, Ayesha, 50, a high-density resident, said, "I don't like the way the whole city is. There's no market. We're not selling. [The government] should bring out money."

High unemployment rates were commonly cited as contributing to food insecurity. "In Ibadan, there is not enough employment ... If our children have food to eat and things to drink there won't be so much thieving and we won't have as many problems," said Janet, 65, a medium-density resident.

Adeola, 47, a medium-density resident, claimed that, "the government [should] provide more job employment — those who now don't have jobs, will look for any means to eat and feed their

children, that's why you find some doing some very demeaning jobs."

Clearly, having money to purchase food is an important aspect of food security. However, it can also be argued that access to food in Ibadan is also dependent on how the food is made available (that is, the source of food production). Ibadan city used to be very active in agricultural activities (Fourchard, 2003), but now most of Ibadan's food is imported, either from outside the country or from other agriculturally active parts of Nigeria (mainly Northern Nigeria). This has implications on the cost of food as the dearth of support infrastructure, particularly the inefficient transportation system and the high cost of energy, constrains the movement of farm produce across the

country. In addition, poor weather conditions, experienced occasionally in the Northern states, negatively impact food production. Thus, the fact that the majority of the available food in Ibadan is imported contributes to high food prices.

Rising Food Prices, Declining Purchasing Power

Across all age groups, women consistently emphasized that the price of food in Ibadan has gone up and that they are experiencing difficulty in getting enough to eat. Mojisola, 24, a high-density resident, said, "The money we were spending back then let's say if we had two naira, we would eat and there would still be leftovers (food) and there'll also be money remaining to spend on other things..."

There was plenty back then, but now, everything is expensive.”

Similarly, Aanu, 52, a medium-density resident, adds, “There have been changes [in Ibadan]. From around 1973 to 1979, Ibadan was good to the extent that you could go to the market with 20 naira and you would buy lots of different types of food. But now, if you bring 5000 naira to the market, you can barely buy anything.”

Ayobami, 50, a high-density resident, remembers, “When I first came to Ibadan, things were easier then. Things were easier. To eat and to drink, there was no difficulty. Everything was enough to the extent that you can’t say that you don’t have anything.”

Older women expressed more shock that the time of abundance of their childhood and youth (1950s-1970s) is a sharp contrast to present day Ibadan. As highlighted by Sike, 63, medium-density resident, “[The] period of 1950 to 1960 the life we were living [in Ibadan] then is not like now. The little money we had then we could manage it but we can’t manage it now.”

More disconcerting for some women is their anxiety about where their next meal is coming from and working menial and precarious jobs to provide for themselves in their old age. Fatima, 60, a high-density resident, clearly describes her difficult experience of finding money to feed herself: “When we were younger, we weren’t struggling to find money. Ibadan was good when I was younger. We didn’t struggle to find money and we didn’t struggle to spend money. We had money when we were younger. Yes, we weren’t sweating before we found money.”

The women’s stories of food abundance and their declining purchasing power accurately reflect the precarious situation of Nigeria’s economy combined with the rise in global food prices. Since the early 1980s, due to the country’s excessive dependence on petroleum export earnings, the global oil-price shocks have adversely affected Nigeria.

Consequently, living conditions have deteriorated, public wage increases were undertaken periodically and they became wholly unrelated to productivity due to inflation which eroded real purchasing

power. Concurrently with the decline in real wages, there was a steady incline in food prices. Food in Nigeria is predominantly imported and since import prices are affected by the oil shocks, food security has been threatened.

Another possible explanation for women’s changing experiences of food security in Ibadan is the fact that most women are net food consumers. Had they been net food producers they probably would have gained from rising food prices depending on the structure of their crop production and marketing, and the particular crop whose prices increased. Food costs almost doubled between March 2004 and December 2009.

Women’s Coping Strategies

One key coping mechanism that low-income women in Ibadan resort to — especially low-income female-headed households — is buying prepared food from street food vendors. There are two major reasons why the women do this:

1) Economies of scale of street food production

Most low-income women do not purchase food in bulk which means that they will face higher per-unit costs. However, because street food vendors do not face per-unit costs, street food is cheaper and therefore a more affordable option for some of the women.

2) Other factors affecting food preparation

Most of the women interviewed in the medium and high-density areas use kerosene stoves to cook. Kerosene has become more expensive over the years which affects women’s ability to cook. In comparison, street vendors are able to cook in large volumes and often use firewood, which costs less to operate than kerosene stoves.

Another common and frequent coping strategy for some women is eating fewer meals or foregoing eating altogether. This coping strategy was more common among female household heads. Aanu, 52, a high-density resident poignantly explains, “Sometimes, I’m unable to eat

breakfast. Sometimes I only eat once a day. I make sure my children eat though but me sometimes, I do not eat. I search for something for my children to eat. But me, I find a way to manage the hunger.”

The third common coping strategy most women employ is purchasing particular foods based on their level of affordability instead of preference. Tola, 35, a high-density resident, lamented the fact that even when she has money to go to the market, “there are particular things you end up having to buy, it’s not necessarily what you desire to eat that you end up buying.”

A major implication of these coping strategies is low nutrient-intake as skipping meals or foregoing the purchase of preferred food (often with richer nutritional values) for cheaper food with less nutrients and micronutrients means not meeting food energy requirements. This further undermines the women’s overall productivity.

The women are certainly aware of the nutritional implications of not having adequate money to purchase what they want. Janet, 65, a medium-density resident, cogently explained, “I want to have enough to eat. You know there are various types of food. If one has money, one will eat what is good. They will eat what they want. All those things they are selling like those nutritious drinks that go well with an elderly person’s body ... and other things elderly people should eat, I desire to have money to be buying those things.”

Enhancing Women’s Food Security

“If we had more women in top positions, they would understand the food situation. A woman would know what we need... I desire to be a politician... I would first focus on reducing the price of food”

(Tola, 35, a high-density resident)

The Nigerian government has not turned a blind eye to food insecurity issues. In recent years, the government has taken policy measures such as the release and distribution of grains from the national grain reserves at subsidized prices; the removal of tariff (2006) and import duty (2008) on imported rice; and technological investments to increase

domestic production of rice.

However, an understanding of the experiences of women in Ibadan reveals that beyond the aforementioned efforts by the government there is the need to do more. Some policy responses could focus on strengthening social safety nets; formulating more sound monetary policy for the control of inflation which has eroded the purchasing power of many; increasing access to low-interest or no-interest credit for women; stimulating the economy with more job creation; and conscious attention to the transformation of the transport system (the Nigerian railway modernization project was suspended in 2008 and resumed in 2009 yet the amount of cargo transported has not increased) as this would facilitate the bulk movement of food from production centres to the markets, and thereby decrease food costs.

Some of these policy responses align with women's aspirations for urban development in Ibadan. These policy options suggest that solutions are possible; food access can become less precarious. If

there can be more political will, there can be a way paved towards enhanced food security in Ibadan.

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

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Price Hikes and The Feminization of Food Insecurity in Bangladesh

By Manoj Misra

Holding her nine-month-old baby in one arm, Salma Khanam braved the chilly morning breeze to buy subsidised rice at the Open Market Sales (OMS) point... She had to wait for more than four hours for her turn. 'I am here for the first time. I dared not come here carrying my baby. But I had to change my mind for the soaring prices of rice,' said Salma wife of a bus helper, who earns Tk 5,000 [CAD 70] a month. (Parvez, 2011)

The *Daily Star*, one of the leading newspapers in Bangladesh, recently carried this story along with a photograph showing hundreds of poor people, a large number of them women, queuing up in front one of the government-initiated sales outlets for buying coarse rice at a subsidized price.

The current rice price increases came on the heels of the 2007-8 food crisis, which according to a 2008 Food and Agriculture Organization/World Food Program (FAO/WFP) study, rendered an additional 7.5 million Bangladeshis as food insecure. Since the crisis, rice prices have been extremely unstable in the domestic markets. This poses a serious threat to the food security of the 56 million absolute poor in the country. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimates, rice accounts for nearly 70% of the total calorie intake and 50% of the protein intake in the country. This means that a stable rice market is a precondition for maintaining food security in Bangladesh.

The situation is particularly dire for women who bear the heavy brunt of the wild swings in food prices. The FAO/WFP study that was conducted during the peak of the crisis found that many women at that time skipped meals so that other

members of the family could eat properly. It revealed that in 58% of the total surveyed households, the women skipped more meals than the others.

This is hardly surprising in the context of Bangladesh where women continue to shoulder the responsibility of preparing and serving food. Although many women have recently entered the labour market to support their families, they are still expected to perform their traditional roles as cooks. It is a social custom, especially among rural Bangladeshis, that women eat after the male members have consumed their meal. Women are thus left with little choice but to skip their meal in case of a food shortage.

Another important finding of the FAO/WFP study is that female-headed households are more vulnerable to food insecurity threats. The study reports more than one-third of female-headed households consume two meals a day as compared to less than one-fifth of male-headed households.

One factor that may explain this high incidence of food insecurity among female-headed households is that, in most cases, women become the head of the household through divorce or desertion, or because of an absentee husband.

Ironically, it is a common practice in Bangladesh to divorce or desert the wife, leaving the children in her custody without the husband extending any childcare support. Very few divorce cases are legally settled through the courts of law. This allows the husband to escape with no settlement payments toward his family.

When men migrate to cities in search of better work and wage opportunities, the responsibility to raise the children falls squarely on the women in the households. The added responsibility of childcare, in addition to regular household work, limits the ability of the female household head to spend sufficient time at the workplace, thus lowering her income opportunities. The fact that most of these women possess little or no formal education or skills training also makes them more vulnerable to workplace discrimination. Fortunately, female enrolment in schools has been steadily increasing over the past two decades.

The gender wage gap is significant. A 2008 International Labour Organization working paper authored by Steven Kapsos revealed that women earn 21% less per hour than their male counterparts. Most of the jobs available for poor women are in the informal sectors, which are predominantly controlled by men. The underlying patriarchal social structure has managed to perpetuate the myth that women are less capable of carrying out skilled jobs, and their hourly output is relatively lower in comparison to men.

Government policies have largely failed to address the growing trend of feminization of food insecurity. There are a number of government-run social safety net programs directed towards addressing food insecurity among low-income groups; however, the size of the programs is too small to make any tangible and sustainable

impact. Budgetary allocations show that less than 2% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is spent on safety net programs where almost half of the population is food insecure. Only a few of these programs are especially targeted towards women. Moreover, these programs are tailored to serve mainly the rural population, thus they exclude a large number of women who live in the slums of major cities.

In the face of frequent public demonstrations and constant media coverage over heightened food insecurity problems as a result of excessive food prices, the government initiated open market sales (OMS) of rice, wheat, oil, pulses and a few other essential food grains. Though OMS commodities are subsidized, prices are still higher compared to the pre-crisis period.

The OMS program negatively impacts the needs of poor working women living in the cities. The higher prices make it difficult for poor women in urban areas to purchase food since their income generally lags behind the inflation rates. Also, since budgetary allocation is limited, the government is only able to operate a small number of

sales outlets which results in long line-ups in front of outlets throughout the day.

As a majority of urban poor women work in the garment sector or as domestic workers six to seven days per week, it becomes impossible for them to queue for three or more hours during the day to buy food from the OMS centers. Since any unscheduled leave from the workplace would invariably result in pay cuts or other consequences, they prefer to skip meals rather than wait in the lines.

The liberalization of Bangladesh's economy has created this new phenomenon of perpetual market turbulence. Before liberalization, the fluctuating food market only had a seasonal dimension. Earlier, price fluctuations were associated with poor harvests due to natural disasters like floods, droughts, and cyclones. These days even a bumper harvest is no guarantee of a stable price regime.

Women's structural vulnerabilities and socially disadvantaged positions make them the worst victims of liberalization and of the resulting price hikes. Bangladesh needs to implement corrective and targeted

policy measures to address the feminization of food insecurity, otherwise, the problems will become a permanent strain on the country's economic well-being and impede growth. ❧

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Climate Change, Livelihoods, and Food Security in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

By Zulfiya Tursunova

The transition from a Soviet centrally planned economy to a market oriented economy posed new opportunities but also limitations in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1990s. Post-Soviet land reforms in Uzbekistan affected middle and low income women's ability to make a living from producing food as well as their ability to ensure their own food security.

In a study which I conducted in Uzbekistan in 2009, my focus was on women's income-generating activities in response to the impact of privatized farming activities that are now a part of land tenure changes in rural development in the post-Soviet period. The study consisted of 91 interviews carried out in rural areas of Uzbekistan to explore how social and savings networks, such as *gap* (indigenous social rotating and economic savings network of women or men), influence women's engagement in income-generating activities. The study's findings concluded that environmental and economic changes in post-Soviet Uzbekistan are curtailing women's livelihoods by limiting their access to land and crops, therefore compromising their food security (Tursunova, 2011).

Effects of climate change on livelihood strategies

Various environmental factors, most of which were associated with climate change, impacted women's livelihood strategies and their access to food security. Peasants observed that growing garlic became difficult because of ecological problems which began three years prior to the beginning of the study. Garlic is an important cash crop for the livelihood strategies that women engage in.



A woman farming in Uzbekistan.

Strawberries were also a particularly vulnerable crop as they were exposed directly to acid rain which frequently ruined crops. A woman who plants strawberries described her experience with the crop: "Now we have acid rains. When acid rain falls, the strawberry looks okay, but it is impossible to eat. The leaves become dark. The crops are spoiled. It happens from time to time, more often than every two years. As a result, we have losses." Women's income generating strategies are hindered when strawberry production is compromised because strawberries are a cash crop that draw a high price in the market. Climate change in recent years has threatened agricultural productivity, therefore limiting women's income-generating activities and their well-being.

People in Uzbekistan also expressed concern about the reduction of local biodiversity as it has had a direct effect on one's ability to secure a livelihood. New foreign seeds for crops that have not been

previously grown in Uzbekistan, affordable for a few rich peasants, intensified class hierarchies and increased a gap between rich and poor peasants. These new foreign seeds have economically empowered the highest strata of peasants.

However, these peasants could not reproduce seeds and were therefore dependent on foreign distributors' supply of seeds. This relationship between local peasants and foreign markets created a neo-colonial dependency between foreign and local producers in post-Soviet Uzbekistan.

Effects of land reforms on food security

After Uzbekistan declared independence in 1991 new land reforms had an impact on food security. State and collective farms established in Soviet times were gradually transformed into cooperative enterprises (*shirkats*) and later on into private farms.

ZULFIYA TURSUANOVA

In the rural area examined in my study, these land restructuring reforms had a specific effect on women's lives as well as the members of their households. Women have witnessed reduced access to land, due to population growth, growing scarcity of available agricultural land and increasing prices to rent farm land. Low-income households were particularly vulnerable as they had difficulty renting land, buying seeds, and hiring labour to plant crops.

Families had difficulties diversifying livelihood activities into agricultural, informal, and formal economic sectors in order to survive. They usually experienced problems getting employment and had to sell off their assets to cope with economic challenges. Low-income families often used household plots of land to ensure food security; they planted corn, tomatoes, potatoes, pepper, and radish for household consumption and sale. Households' abilities to access land depended on land reforms and people's capital to access farm lands.

Women's Economic Savings Networks

Gap, an indigenous social rotating and economic savings network of women or men is instrumental in creating and maintaining food security for women in Uzbekistan. *Gaps* are sometimes called *gashtak*, *tukma*, *ziyofat*, or *ziefat* and are locally organized through recreational networks. They are local structures of power and authority of socio-economic communal life in Uzbekistan. *Gaps* are homosocial networks; approximately twelve or more women meet at least once per month at these social gatherings. Each *gap* is headed by an accountant who sets rules with members, solves conflicts, and takes care of accounting matters. These social groups operate as indigenous economic networks wherein all participants contribute fixed funds, given to the host of the event, which they will receive as a lump sum payment at a future event. Each member takes a turn hosting the event at her home until the full rotation is complete.

The research revealed that *gap* and livelihood activities were also instrumental in the purchase of seeds, cattle, agricultural supplies, construction materials, and covering tuition fees. These networks assist

women to run their livelihood activities and thus, function as a livelihood resilience mechanism in a new post-socialist context.

In the study, women who participated in *gap* networks who could not draw in money had to withdraw from these networks. *Gap* is a space where knowledge about crops, market prices, community events, and socio-economic challenges are shared. The inability to participate in these social and economic networks due to low income disadvantages women's economic opportunities. Some women participated in multiple *gap* networks and

In spite of different livelihood strategies, many women used their social networks, knowledge of seeds, markets and economic powers to strengthen their livelihood resources to maximize profit and improve their well-being.

invested *gap* money into social and livelihood activities. Women highlighted the opportunity to earn money by sewing, baking and opening shops, activities that were discouraged under the Soviet regime. *Gap* networks are vital in empowering women to cope and overcome financial difficulties and achieve food security.

Women's Resilience Strategies

The driver of women's resilience in post-Soviet Uzbekistan has been experimentation, innovation of knowledge, and income-generating practices. Many families built greenhouses in their courtyards and had great expenses during the fall but high income during the winter and at the beginning of spring.

Many women quit their teaching jobs because of low wages. They realized that working in schools did not enable them to engage in other more effective livelihood strategies such as growing tomatoes, cucumbers and spinach in greenhouses. Some of them acquired new knowledge

from agricultural workers trained in former Soviet universities and in current universities specializing in scientific agricultural knowledge. Women innovated and experimented in planting tomatoes and cucumbers using scientific and traditional knowledge.

Women's participation in several *gap* and other informal networks strengthened their social safety nets. Women's resilience demonstrates their choices, decision-making, and ability to negotiate with households and markets in this complex socio-economic situation in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. Women and their household members improved their well-being and were able to gain symbolic power by acquiring a high income, accumulating resources, and securing employment.

My research on gender and food security in post-Soviet Uzbekistan demonstrates that the individual and collective agency of women was expressed in maintaining and accumulating financial resources and social capital. Climate change constrained women's choices to plant specific crops and gain income from harvest. In spite of different livelihood strategies, many women used their social networks, knowledge of seeds, markets, and economic powers to strengthen their livelihood resources to maximize profit and improve their well-being. Women became the purveyors of food security as they built a solution to the new post-communist reality by building greenhouses, participating in social and economic networks, planting, and planning harvesting to take advantage of market conditions.

The author would like to thank the International Development Research Centre for their support of this project. ❧

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When a Mother's Love is Not Enough

Nutritional Wellness is Everyone's Right

By Yvonne Voulgaris Smythe

Single mothers living in poverty are highly susceptible to malnourishment. While they are often doing their best to provide healthy food to their children, the research suggests their options are limited. As a result, single mothers may compromise their own nutrition to ensure their children are well-fed. As poverty and illness are inherently linked, single mothers end up in a vicious cycle of illness and poor health.

On the simplest level, the human body is a composite of cells that survive on the nourishment provided by whole foods — foods that have not been refined or processed. It is everyone's fundamental right to have access to healthy, whole foods for survival. Yet, Canada has made these foods the least accessible to those who are at the highest risk for disease: single mothers on social assistance and their children.

According to Statistics Canada, 80% of lone parent households in 2006 were headed by women. As well, single mothers fall statistically into the lowest income category (Statistics Canada, 2006). Food Banks Canada (2011) links child poverty to household income and lists 38% of their recipients as children. Although the correlation between hungry mothers and hungry children has been the focus of many studies over the years, the problem still persists.

The cost of healthy, unadulterated foods, free of pesticides and organophosphates and rich in vitamins and minerals is beyond the means of families with limited budgets. Anderson et al (2003) support the theory that mothers sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide proper amounts and quality foods to their children. They found that dispensing the

Canadian Child Tax Benefit Credit and the Goods and Services Tax Credit correlated to a time when "children experienced some improvement in nutritional intake."

Although mothers want to provide proper nourishment to their children, the Canadian government continues to reduce funding that contributes to buying healthy foods that stave off poverty and illnesses associated with higher risk families. As a result, children in low income families, particularly those headed by single mothers, are vulnerable to a number of diseases (chronic and acute) and learning disorders which are linked to food insecurity. Kirkpatrick et al (2010) found that, "Children and youth who experience hunger are more likely to have poorer health, and repeated exposure appears to be particularly toxic." These researchers and scientists found "food insecurity in childhood to be a marker of vulnerability."

As sole providers, most single mothers give themselves completely, emotionally and physically, to their children. They get very little help and suffer personal losses beyond just food. They often lose their health and as sole providers, the fear of leaving their children alone causes greater anxiety. In comparison to partnered mothers, results showed that, "Lone mothers were more likely to be current smokers, over-

weight or obese. Those with clinical risk for CVD, including diabetes, elevated C-reactive protein, hypercholesterolemia, or hypertension, or all of these, were more likely to be lone mothers" (Buis DS, et al, 2005).

Nutrition is also a vital component in managing mental illness, which is another threat to single mothers. The lack of certain vitamins found in whole grains like millet, spelt, and brown rice—for example B Complex, folic acid, and inositol—contributes to depression; and the lack of good fats, as found in fish, avocados, and cold pressed extra virgin olive oil, leads to diminished brain capacity and nervous system disorders. The food options available to low-income mothers are the cheaper options, like white, refined pastas that lack fiber and nutrients found in the outer husks of the grains. They are also more likely to eat cold cuts that have higher sodium and toxicity levels rather than properly fed, non-preserved butcher meats; and high sugar cereals rather than whole grain cereals with fresh berries that have immune-building antioxidants.

Many of these physical and mental issues could be managed or prevented with government assistance. However, in November 2005, the government of Ontario also lowered the amount of money given to people on social assistance for certain illnesses listed under the Special Diet Allowance. And, in April 2011, there were further reductions. For struggling single mothers, this was another blow to the challenge of providing both for their own needs and their children's needs.

Single, low-income mothers are doing the best they can with the little they have. To only be able to offer their children foods that will either lead to illnesses, or to receive the Special Diet Allowance only when their children have already fallen ill, is a vicious cycle of illness and poor health.

The behavioural problems associated with diets high in food dyes and refined sugars are a further strain on single mothers who have their hands full trying to juggle the hardships that they face.

Statistics Canada measures financial strain on a family based on its requirements to spend a greater portion than an average family on the necessities (food, clothing, shelter) using the low-income cut-offs (LICO) (Statistics Canada, 2006). A mother's main duty is the well-being of her children. When she lacks the money to take care of her children as best as possible, especially when there are illnesses and extenuating health concerns, there is a fundamental flaw in the way governments distribute money. There is no "food security" for this vulnerable group of individuals and their families. There is only stress compounded by more stress.

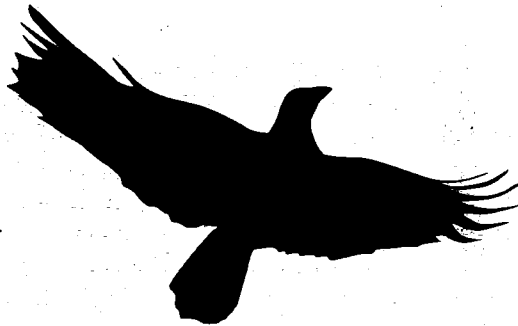
The government can save significantly on long-term health care if it spends money now on proper nutrition for the women and children at the greatest risk for diseases and disorders.

The government can save significantly on long-term health care if it spends money now on proper nutrition for the women and children at the greatest risk for diseases and disorders. With an emphasis on whole foods, high in nutrients for brain function and physical wellness, mothers would be more able to improve their own lives and to break the cycle of poverty and perpetual desperation. And their children could grow up feeling secure. ❧

Yvonne Voulgaris Smythe is a certified nutritional practitioner, a freelance writer, and an adult literacy instructor. She believes that education and compassion are the keys to a brighter tomorrow and that proper food and nutrition are essential for that purpose. She lives in Toronto with her husband and dog, their three cats, and a turtle.

The Crow

A trickster somersaulting in the air
Caw cawing for our attention
Full of the demand for laughter
When it ought to cry for us
It demands a joke, a smile
As if pain were but a lie
Its dark eye upon us
Waiting for our leftovers
As we take one more step
On that thin pane of glass that is life
It swoops above us, black and sleek
And caws for more lightness of being



Gabriele Mehaffey is a graduate of York University where she majored in psychology. She was born in Germany, raised in Canada, but currently lives in Italy. She is a photographer and an artist, but her passion is writing. She has had poems published in **Kalliope** and in **Lust**.

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In the Field

Food Leadership for Youth

A Cooking Adventure with Teen Girls at The Stop Community Food Centre

By Kamla Ross McGregor

Teaching high school girls how to cook in a commercial kitchen requires patience and an ability to handle controlled chaos. During the first few weeks at the Food Leadership for Youth program, many questions and trepidations arise as teenage girls with very little cooking or food knowledge are put to work making healthy recipes.

The FLY program is one of many offered at The Stop. Food security has been said to occur when people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (World Food Summit 1996). The City of Toronto's Food and Hunger Action Committee (2000) developed a more detailed list of seven conditions that were said to lead to food security. They include the following:

- (1) the availability of a variety of foods at reasonable cost;
- (2) ready access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternative food sources;
- (3) sufficient personal income to buy adequate foods for each household member each day;
- (4) the freedom to choose personally, and culturally, acceptable foods;
- (5) legitimate confidence in the quality of the foods available;
- (6) easy access to understandable, accurate information about food and nutrition; and
- (7) the assurance of a viable and sustainable food production system.

The Food Leadership for Youth (FLY) program is one of many offered at The Stop Community Food Centre (The Stop), a non-profit organization located in Davenport West, a low-income community in the city of Toronto, Canada. The Stop started as a food bank in the late 1970s and has grown to provide educational programs to help neighbourhood participants build food knowledge, skills and a sense of community. It started out providing access to good food for people in poverty, but over the years The Stop's concept of food security has grown and expanded.



Iron Chef winning recipe. Chocolate zucchini cake with fruit and roasted almonds.

KAMLA ROSS MCGREGOR

While these conditions and the checklist seem comprehensive, they are heavily geared towards food access and do not include factors such as ensuring people have opportunities to learn skills to ensure food security.

It may be easy to assume that people agree on what good quality food tastes like or that they understand how sustainability affects their access to good food. There are different types of knowledge about food that are present in communities, but without a space to share this knowledge, it is not necessarily disseminated or validated. And, even if there is an understanding about food security issues, do people have the skills to advocate as a collective to ensure their neighbourhood is food secure?

In recognition of these factors, over a period of many years The Stop has expanded to include a drop-in eating space, a farmers' market, various community kitchens, community action, sustainable food systems education in schools and urban agriculture programs. All of this helps community members to uncover

knowledge about food and to share it with each other while at the same time creating a place to forge a collective response to the political, economic, and environmental causes of food insecurity.

The FLY program, like other community kitchen programs at The Stop, started with a desire to provide a welcoming space where youth could learn about and develop agency around food issues through cooking and sharing meals. High school youth are at an age where they are learning to develop their own values and goals and defining who they are as individuals.

Developing skills that will allow them to become leaders in community issues requires practice and a certain level of confidence. Young girls, more than boys, may lack confidence, and therefore may not take part in activities. Teenage girls are three times as likely to suffer from mental illness, specifically depression, due to low self-esteem, negative body image, feelings of helplessness, and psychological distress (Girls Action Research Review, 2009). Girls sometimes exhibit a desire for control by attempting to manage



CHRISTINA PALASSIO

Christmas baking.

their body through diet and food intake. This can be even more complicated for teenage girls of colour or new immigrants who do not feel that they fit into the White middle-class notions of femininity portrayed in mainstream media.

Through the FLY program, the staff and I wanted to provide a space where girls could have the necessary social support to develop cooking and nutrition skills while learning about food issues as a whole. With these newfound skills and knowledge, along with the experience of demonstrating that knowledge and gaining recognition, we hoped they would

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gain confidence to think of themselves as leaders on food issues within their social group and beyond.

To help identify girls who could truly benefit from this type of program, we used the assistance of principals and guidance counsellors to identify and recruit participants from three local high schools. We then conducted phone interviews with students and parents. Through the initial recruitment process, we ended up with fourteen girls from homes that represented the largest ethnic groups in the neighbourhood. The representation was as follows: seven girls from Portuguese households; two girls from Mexican households; two girls from Ecuadorian households and three girls from Filipino households.

At a later date, two girls, one from a Jamaican household and one from a St. Lucian, household joined the group. Half of the girls in the group were born in Canada, while the rest had been living in Toronto for at least three years. An average of eight to thirteen participants attended the two hour weekly session during the 2010-11 school year.

In the beginning, as girls were introduced to new cooking methods and ways of combining foods, they realized that meat does not have to be part of every meal and that a salad can be tasty and filling if you add fruits, seeds, or beans. On alternate weeks, we hosted workshops on food security, sustainability, factory farming, nutrition, and stress management all while using fun ice breakers that helped the girls slowly let their guard down enough to share stories about themselves and their lives.

As we spent more time together, we learned that some of the students regularly skipped school and had family troubles. One girl was on medication for depression, and two had physical health problems. From others we heard stories of stress brought on by teachers, how much they hated the food at the school's cafeteria, and how powerless they felt to do anything about it. As we cooked, we did our best to talk about how to use what they were learning to deal with some of the issues they faced, and how to find allies to work with to try to address their problems.

As the girls' confidence and ability in the kitchen increased, the initial chaotic environment of learning how to cook as a group turned into a relaxed working atmosphere. It was around this time, during the second phase of the program, that we started talking about what it meant to be a leader in one's school and community. Because leadership is often viewed in a traditional sense, one that is authoritative, competitive, or for a person who is fully confident (Hoyt, Kennedy, 2008), it was important that the program activities showed that leadership can include people with a diversity of styles and personalities.

We thought of various projects that could help the girls gain a voice and reflect on their experience while improving such skills as planning, public speaking, cooperation and encouragement. To begin, we proposed cultural food days where the girls could submit recipes for the group to prepare and then present information on the dish while we ate. Everyone signed on, especially after the program chef modelled an example by hosting her own 'St. Lucia day.'

social conscience? co-operative ethics?
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As the year progressed, most of the girls hosted their own cultural food day, volunteered in our food bank and for other The Stop related events, attended a March Break camp where they produced food videos, gave presentations at two high schools for over 100 students about healthy eating, and participated in an Iron Chef competition that showed family, friends, and teachers how far they had come.

When we proposed the idea of doing a magazine about cooking and learning about healthy food, the girls volunteered to write articles, to edit, to draw, and or to provide comments about their experiences. It was challenging to fit all these activities into the two hours of the program each week, but we were flexible and worked around the girls' schedules, and gave them an opportunity to finish projects, such as the magazine and videos, outside of our allotted program time.

Based on literature reviewed on youth programs in Toronto, there is some consensus that similar programs are effective at helping youth see themselves as assets that can enrich the life of a community. Successful programs should focus on enhancing the strengths and skills of youth, have supportive adults, and an effective plan with a clear mission and measures for evaluating achievements and building partnership with other organizations (Bonnell & Zizys, 2005).

In the end, did we increase the girls' understanding of food security while helping them build their confidence to become advocates in the community? Despite the limited amount of time we had with them each week, we believe we made progress based on their comments.

According to Ali (names have been changed to protect program participants), "at the iron chef [competition] my dad said my burgers turned out so great that I should cook for the family every day!" Maria said that "knowing what's really in our food and where it comes from or what it was made with has changed my opinion about eating in a lot of different ways." According to Gabriela, "the presentations and the videos we made could seriously change people's minds about the food they eat. It's changed my perception about

food for sure. This makes me feel good about teaching others something new."

These comments show that participants not only improved their food knowledge, but some showed an increased realization about themselves and their capabilities. Many participants towards the end of the program also displayed increased cooperation skills and offered support to one another through to the completion of their projects.

When asked about their eating habits, most girls said they still liked eating junk food but were making a daily effort to increase their fresh fruit and vegetable intake and practicing their new cooking skills with their families. The FLY program has helped them exert increased agency at home, but there are still factors that come between the girls' knowledge about good food and their ability integrate it into their daily life.

In the end, a program like FLY cannot, on its own, increase or assure food security for young girls in a community like Davenport West. What programs like FLY can do is to help young girls improve their self-awareness, to help them uncover what is valuable or important to them with regards to what they eat, and ultimately to help them figure it out for themselves.

Information about the program may be found at <http://thestop.org/food-leadership-for-youth-fly>.

Kamla Ross McGregor has more than seven years of experience in environmental education and community development. She has worked with a number of non-profit organizations, school boards and community agencies to develop programs focused on increasing civic action. Kamla holds a degree in Environmental Studies and a Masters in Political Science from York University.

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Understanding the Gendered Fields of The Gambia for Food Security Programming

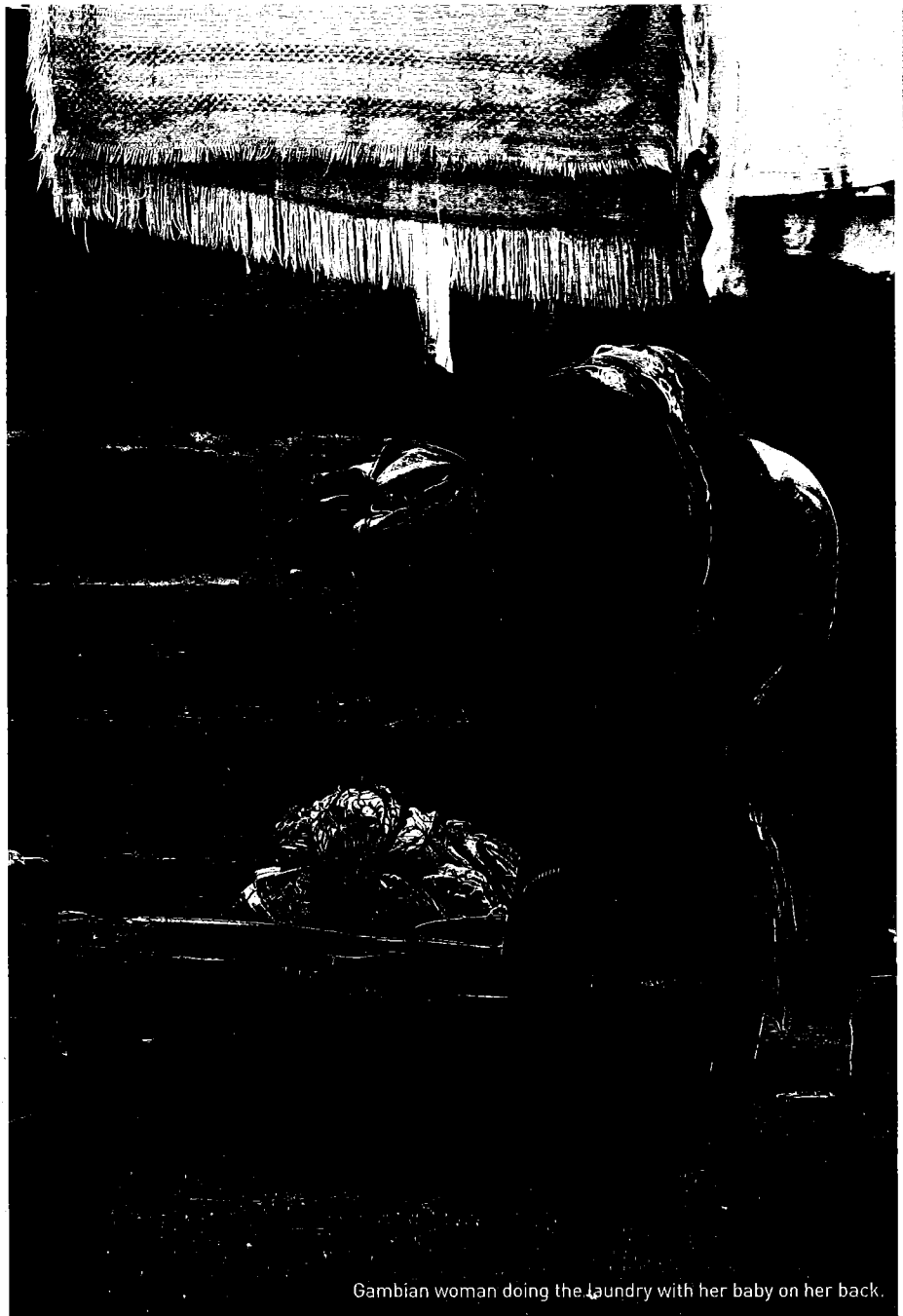
By Meredith Kushnir

"You, Mother Cassava,
You deserve recognition
You are no cash crop,
But you deserve recognition.
You don't fetch
the All-Mighty foreign exchange
But you feed
All your children"
- Nigerian poet Flora Nwapa, 1986

This poem by Flora Nwapa sets the tone for exploring the intersections between gender, sustainable agriculture and food security in The Gambia, West Africa. Since 2008, Resource Efficient Agricultural Production, (REAP-Canada) and its local partners have been implementing an Agroecological Village (AEV) approach to sustainable rural agricultural development in The Gambia.

The AEV is a participatory approach that addresses social development, gender inequality, poverty, food insecurity, and the environment in West African communities. Throughout the time that REAP-Canada and its partners have been working in rural Gambia, they have learned that understanding local gender relations is a prerequisite for improving food security, and that food security and gender equality are intimately linked.

In most rural communities in The Gambia, a highly polarized division of labour exists, although the extent and characteristics of the division differ by ethnicity. This division is visible in many activities, including agriculture and the

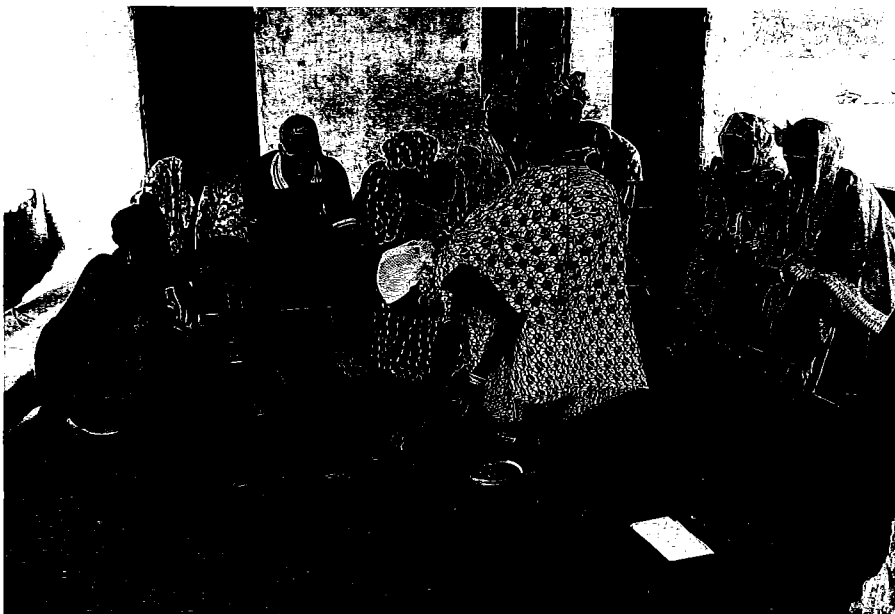


Gambian woman doing the laundry with her baby on her back.

MEREDITH KUSHNIR



TOP: Women teaching women about food-processing and preservation techniques.



LEFT: Woman leading a village situational analysis for AEV project design and implementation.



This woman is cooking dinner on a Mayon Turbo Stove (MTS), which was designed by REAP-Canada and its partners to cleanly burn agricultural waste residues like rice hull and ground nut shells in order decrease women's exposure to smoke and the amount of time spent collecting firewood.

associated cultural and social affairs. It is common, though not universal, for men to be responsible for growing groundnut and grain crops, such as millet and maize, for income. In contrast, women's main role is to grow millet, rice and other foods for family consumption as well as for the related activities of food processing and preparation (Carney and Watts, 1990).

In addition to farming and gardening, many women spend a significant amount of their time in providing food — cooking, processing foods, fetching water in buckets, gathering fuel wood for fuel and stoking fires. Their role in providing food works in conjunction with men's 'bread-winning' role to maintain household food security. As many African feminists remind us, it is important to understand African gender relations between men and women both in terms of cooperation and complementarity as well as through the lens of struggle and oppression.

Women's struggles take place not only at the national and international level where processes like racism and economic exploitation that disadvantage women also disadvantage men (Johnson-Odim, 1991; Oyewumi, 2002; Arndt, 2002), but also within the family structure at the 'household level'. While both women and men play important roles in Gambian households, there are fundamental differences in the nature of their work, the way it is valued, the allocation of financial and social power, and the access to, and control over, resources. All of these tend to disadvantage women.

Access to resources is strongly gendered in rural Gambia. Men tend to have precedence over available household inputs while women tend to have little access to, or control over, money or agricultural inputs. Women, then, tend to engage more with sustainable, low-impact 'hoe' agriculture not because, as some ecofeminists suggest, there is a natural connection between women and their environments, but rather, because they face structural barriers in accessing 'modern inputs' and practicing 'modern' agriculture (Schroeder, 2011; Bryceson, 1995).

In the Mandinka language, industrial and monocrop agriculture is referred to as

toubab jamando, or white man's 'modern' agriculture, whereas the indigenous form of low-input agriculture is called *moofing jamando*, or black man's 'organic' agriculture. This binary language, although historically illustrating a racial division in agriculture, also exposes a gender division since men predominantly practice *toubab* agriculture while women practice *moofing*.

Importantly, while women may be better versed in sustainable agriculture, a project such as the AEV, which is geared towards sustainable 'organic' agriculture, does not necessarily translate into benefits for women since power dynamics and local practices influence their distribution.



A grandmother and her grandchild pose in front of her high yielding NERICA rice variety.

Therefore, while the AEV approach promotes a form of traditionally feminized agriculture, this does not intrinsically benefit Gambian women without the recognition and incorporation of locally appropriate and explicit notions of gender sensitivity.

For this reason, the AEV involves women as key contributors in project design and implementation in order to increase their participation in community based organizations, the AEV approach is better able to address women's practical needs and to help increase their access to appropriate training and improved agricultural inputs (improve seeds and vari-

eties, organic fertilizers, labour saving devices).

The AEV encourages diversified farming systems and consequently, opens new opportunities for women to participate in different aspects of food production including planting, marketing, and value-added processing. Thus, through implementing this approach, REAP-Canada has also learned the importance of viewing gender roles as dynamic and constantly evolving.

Donna Perry (2005) has described a recent 'crisis of masculinity' in rural West Africa characterized by men's increasing inability to provide for their families. In

The Gambia, this crisis could be related to the declining value of groundnuts coupled with increasing prices for staple foods like rice and millet. Both these changes negatively affect men's income. As groundnut values have fallen, total growing area has expanded to maintain income levels. However, in this process, new obstacles such as increased labour and fertilizer requirements have been created. Many men have also enlarged their millet production in addition to groundnuts for cash sale. However, millet is also vulnerable to price fluctuations and erratic rainfall.

Changing patterns of production and the challenges for men in providing for

their families can be contrasted with women's increasing role as cash income earners. On average, individual women contribute 25% of household income. Since there are usually at least two or three females living in any given compound, collective female cash income is, in many cases, superseding male income.

The manner in which this income is generated is diverse. Some women have begun to farm groundnuts and millet for cash, although these are also subject to the price squeeze experienced by men. Some women have become engaged in market garden production of vegetables while others have begun communal small-scale businesses such as soap-making or tie-dyeing. However, the right to sell agricultural commodities is determined both by gender and on a crop-by-crop basis.

A key distinction between different income generation activities is the ability to control the use of the money generated. While field crops grown by women like groundnut and millet are either destined for joint household consumption or their husband's wallet, most vegetables are sold in weekly rural markets called *lumos* and earn cash considered private individual income (Schroeder, 1999). As a consistent source of private cash flow, vegetable gardening has become commonplace for women. Richard Schroeder (2001) has described how Gambian women when they head-out to hoe their gardens have "gone to their second husbands." Accordingly, several women recognize vegetable gardening as an important way to reduce both their children's poverty and their own.

For many Gambian women, the decision to begin generating income is one of necessity. Effectively, it is a way for women to fulfill their own role and to offset their husbands' inability to meet their household financial obligations. Many women view their novel income-earning role pragmatically—as a component of the teamwork commonly found between husband and wife.

Yet, not all women feel at ease with their financial role or share such a sense of cooperation with their husbands. Some women joke that their husbands are now 'useless' because they have had to take on

their husbands' duties in addition to their own. In some cases, then, female responsibility to maintain household food security is being reinvented through adopting traditionally male roles.

Despite their increased role as cash earners in the household, women's non-financial obligations have not diminished. Intra-household distribution of resources and power continue to disadvantage women in their ability to pursue alternative income generation, in their responsibility to produce food for household consumption, and in the project's aim to help them produce better quality and quantities of food.

Men in project communities continue to control the main factors of production (seeds, land, and labour) in contrast to women who have limited decision-making power, both in the home and on the farm. The power or opportunity that women do have operates under gendered practices that favour men. Thus, rural Gambian women seem to have the cards stacked against them - arduous workload and difficulty accessing and controlling inputs. The results of these shifting gender relations are decreasing roles for men and increasing negotiation between husbands and wives over resources and power.

Gender equality should be the starting point for successfully bringing about food security. To address inequality, it is necessary to understand gender relations and how they maintain and define women's material conditions and their roles. It is

also necessary to consider how development programs affect resource control and domestic power, and vice-versa.

REAP-Canada and its partners have learned through the AEV approach in The Gambia that it is not enough to simply hand over resources to women farmers because intra-household structures will dictate their use. Moreover, in targeting women, projects should be aware of how this could affect men and the relations between men and women. It should also not be the role of any project to determine what gender 'equality' should look like. Progress towards gender equality is an incremental process that must be negotiated at a household and at a community level through dialogue between women and men, through respecting both everyone's contributions to food security and through steadily strengthening women's capacity for and engagement in community organization and decision-making. ❧

Meredith Kushnir is the International Program Coordinator at REAP-Canada. Since 2009 Meredith has supported REAP's international AEV programs through project management and fund development. She has an M.A. in Development Studies and her areas of expertise include participatory development, food security, sovereignty and sustainability, gender issues, sustainable agriculture, and international food system analysis. Her extensive travel and volunteer experiences have helped inform her worldview and sustain her passion for equality.

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Indonesia's Food Policy and Women's Rights

Recognizing Women's Roles in Food Production, Distribution, Processing, and Consumption

By Tini Sastra

Despite the implementation of Food Act No.7/1996 in Indonesia fifteen years ago, concerns remain respecting women's food insecurity in regions such as Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi, Papua and Kupang.

In order to address these concerns, the Women's Solidarity for Human Rights (Solidaritas Perempuan), an Indonesian civil society organization working to promote gender equality, non-violence, non-discrimination and ecological justice for groups of marginalized women, worked with the Indonesian Human Rights Committee for Social Justice and with the Civil Society Coalition to pressure the government to amend the Act so as to ensure that the rights of women to food were protected and accommodated. A draft of the bill to amend the Act is currently being considered by the Indonesian parliament.

Background — Achieving Food Self-Sufficiency

In Indonesia, about half of the population makes a living in the agricultural sector. In the 1980s, during the Suharto era, Indonesia achieved self-sufficiency in rice as part of the Green Revolution which led to the implementation of agricultural intensification such as the use of crop varieties with increased yield, fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation expansion.

However, this self-sufficiency did not last long. By 1995 there were rice shortages.

This was also the year when Indonesia joined the WTO. Three important points in the agreement with the WTO were market access, reduction of domestic subsidies and the reduction of export subsidies. Instead of seeing the rice shortages as an

In the 1990s, Indonesia pursued a number of food security policies, including a new Food Act, membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and various free trade agreements for food imports and exports. Fifteen years later, Tini Sastra argues that the impact of these policies has been detrimental to women's food security.

impetus to invest in the increase of food production, by improving farming systems and empowering farmers, the government focused on the shortages as an opportunity to promote rice-importing companies.

This focus on trade liberalization and an increasing number of bilateral free trade agreements with countries in the region led to a fast pace of industrialization in large cities, requiring a lot of labour. As a result of this, many villagers no longer see a bright future working as farmers, and many farming families have migrated to the cities in order to work as factory workers, construction workers, retail workers, and domestic workers.

The Food Act No. 7/1996

The Food Act No. 7/1996 was enacted in November 1996, two months after the World Food Summit held in Rome that same year. The Act came about in response to the food crisis that occurred in Indonesia in 1994. In order to deal with the 1994 crisis, the government imported food (rice) to stabilize domestic food reserves and from 1994 onwards food imports continued to rise reaching a peak in 1999 with annual imports of 4.7 million tons of rice. The government's primary

reason for importing rice was to secure food stocks and to stabilize food prices. These policies benefited the import-export companies and were a direct result of Indonesia's entry into the WTO and of the free trade agreements.

The substance of the Act did not address the right to food but supported the food industry. The majority of the provisions in the Act related to technical aspects such as packaging, food safety certification and licensing and did not address the right to food, or the obligations of the government to fulfill protect and respect food security as a right. In addition, the Act did not provide for the protection of the sources of production owned by the people and, therefore, land could be converted for development purposes.

The Act and the Role of Women in the Agricultural Sector Role of Women

In Indonesia, women play an important role in the agricultural sector. Women in families of rice farmers are usually involved in the nursery, caring, harvesting, storage, and marketing of rice. Women in sharecropper families work in planting, weeding, harvesting, and threshing of the

rice paddy until it is ready to be stored or milled. Women are also involved in the fields in activities that range from planting to harvesting.

Village women who do not work in the agricultural fields are usually involved in the food sector as merchants, sellers and buyers. Some women may be vegetable and fruit merchants, while others may sell processed foods like tempeh (traditional soybean), tofu, and other foods. It may be argued that traditional folk markets in Indonesia are women's markets since the sellers and the buyers are women, and since the participation of men is limited to 'helping' their wives or families. Indonesian customs dictate that women are the consumers in these markets since they are the ones who shop for food for their families.

While this important role of women is clear, they still face difficulties. First, women encounter barriers with respect to land ownership because land, and therefore paddy fields, is typically owned by the male head of a family and this means women play a smaller role in decision-making within the family. Second, women farmers are often marginalized by government policy makers with respect to decision-making on food policies. Policy makers do not recognize the important role of women in the chain of production, in distribution and processing, and in providing food for their families. For example, while women and men are involved in agriculture, policy makers only invite men to village meetings to discuss government programs in agriculture. In many cases women are not able to access information respecting agricultural practices and all decisions in this arena whether related to land, seed, fertilizers, eradication of pests using pesticides, or agricultural assistance, are made by the male head of the family.

Impact of the Act

As previously stated, the *Act* — combined with trade liberalization policies — created changes in the food production system which favoured the private sector and large companies. The changes were of particular benefit to large agribusinesses.

Formal regulation of the food industry

within the *Act*, such as the certification of processed food has complicated the livelihoods of women who work in the informal sectors of the domestic food industry. For example, since Indonesia embraced free market policies not only have staple foods begun to be imported into Indonesia but fruits and vegetables have also been imported. It is not unusual to find grapes from Australia, oranges from China and apples from the United States being sold alongside, and competing for sales, with local produce.

Free market policies have led food prices to rise on a continual basis and the impact is most acutely felt by the poor, in particular poor women who may limit their own food consumption in favour of other family members.

In addition, the marketing of food imports has led to Indonesian upper and middle classes showing a preference for imported foods and a preference for shopping in supermarket chains rather than in traditional women's markets. The result has been devastating for women who make their living in these markets and many have migrated to urban centres in search of work.

Moreover, the *Act* has not outlined the government's obligation to stabilize food prices in Indonesia. Free market policies have led food prices to rise on a continual basis and the impact of this outcome is most acutely felt by the poor and in particular by poor women who may limit their own food consumption in favour of other family members.

Amendments to the Food Act

Solidaritas Perempuan has been working to ensure the recognition of women's important roles in food security, at the levels of the family, community, and country. In the field we can say that women are food

authorities. There should be an effort to make women aware that they actually have that power.

Solidaritas Perempuan carries out many advocacy activities on women's food security. We began with critical reviews of the *Act* to conduct a dialogue with Parliament. Solidaritas Perempuan and the Civil Society Coalition also hold public consultations in some regions in Indonesia to increase input from various communities.

In respect of the concerns stated above, the Coalition drafted a bill to amend the *Act* and submitted the bill to Commission IV (the Commission responsible for agriculture, plantations, maritime affairs, fisheries and food) within the House of Representatives, a chamber of Parliament. The bill was successfully included in the National Legislation Programme for 2010-2014 and discussions on the bill continue in Parliament.

Solidaritas Perempuan and the Civil Society Coalition are continuing to monitor the process of the revision in Parliament to ensure that the Commission adopts the input that has been presented by the Coalition. Women must demand to have their rights and roles recognized respecting the issue of food security otherwise they will continue to experience food injustice. Women produce, distribute, process, prepare and provide food in Indonesia but they must also be afforded the benefits, and rights, to have those roles recognized and to be able to control their own food security. ❧

Tini Sastra is Head of the Women and Food Sovereignty Division at Solidaritas Perempuan in Jakarta, Indonesia. She studied in the Faculty of Cultural Science Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, and graduated as Indonesian LEAD Fellow in 2009.

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Fiction

The Main Course

By Janine Manning

“Where do ya think you’re going?” Grandma asked. “Partridge hunting with the boys!” I yell as I fly past her, grabbing my coat, taking the steps two at a time so that I wouldn’t get left behind.

“Ah! Go on den,” she waved in disgust, “but I ain’t cleaning dem damn birds!” she hollered.

I was so excited, despite my great grandmother’s obvious lack of approval, because my reserve cousin, Fred, promised to show us city Indian kids how to snare partridge. However, it didn’t take long before my enthusiasm wore as thin as the designer blue jeans he told me weren’t warm enough to wear.

Once the enthusiasm wore off, the cold, the boredom, and the hunger came on. My cousin set in place the snare, the end of which we held in waiting for the unsuspecting feathered feast. We each took cover under the low-lying Christmas-type trees and waited, and waited, and waited.

Afraid my fingers were going to fall off, I rolled out from under my tree a few hours later, declared defeat, and told them I was heading back to the house before I got frost bite.

“Yeah, yeah, just follow the tracks back,” Fred said, and off I went back to Grandma’s house with the sound of machismo snickering lashing at my heels, my older cousin’s influence apparent on my younger brother.

.....

“Well, did you bring dinner, den?” Grandma asked without looking up from her knitting, socks of course.

“Nah, I almost froze to death before we even saw one bird!” I plopped down

on her old faded couch.

“Now you know,” Grandma said, concentrating on her purl stitch.

“Yeah, I’ll know too dress warmer next time!” I exclaimed.

“What next time? Didn’t you learn your lesson?” Grandma asked me.

“Huh?” I asked.

“Put the kettle on, girl, we gonna talk while you thaw out.”

Grandma finishes the sock she was working on as I steep our tea, the heat soothing my red fingers, bringing them back to life. She waves me over, which means she needs help out of her rocking chair. I comply. In her worn out moccasins, she shuffles to her spot at the head of the worn oak table where our tea sits.

“Mmm, good tea,” she said. “You know, it didn’t taste any different than when I used to grow and pick the mint myself,” she says with a smirk, her eyes meeting mine for the first time since I dragged my frozen butt through the door.

“Oh,” I say, “you’d think the fresher the better.”

“I said different, not better.” I was puzzled.

“You know, I didn’t want you going out looking for partridge today because if you had too, you wouldn’t want too,” she said, with a hint of nostalgia in her voice.

“Want too what?” I asked before thinking.

“If you HAD too hunt and gather your own food, you wouldn’t WANT too,” she explained shaking her head ever so slightly before sipping her tea. “You see dem drumsticks over dere on that counter top thawing?” She pointed with her lips, as only an Ojibway woman can. “That is dinner, or at least it will be once you get to it. And I didn’t have to lie, ears deep, in snow, under a tree to get it. In less than

the time it took you kids to plan your meal, let alone kill it, I was out to town and back, and I ain’t freezing neither,” she said, proud of herself.

“I know Grandma, but it’s just chicken. The boys are going to bring home fresh partridge!” I said as if I knew the difference, while silently hoping Fred and Jesse didn’t make a liar of me.

“If they do happen upon a partridge, what do you think needs to be done with it before we can eat?” she asked rhetorically. “I’ll tell you. Its neck needs to be wrung and its feather plucked before it can be gutted and pieced. And you know what all that hard work is gonna taste like? Chicken, of course!” she declared.

“But, Grandma, shouldn’t we be traditional, I mean we are Indians. Why not hunt and stuff?” I asked innocently.

“Because it’s a waste of time, girl. If you want food nowadays, you have to earn a living to buy it. That’s why I keep telling you to stay in school so you don’t have to depend on a man to snare partridge for you. You finish school, get a good job, and buy your own damn chicken. This land isn’t like it used to be. When I was a girl, the men would go out hunting and fishing; we always had enough to eat. Now there are more people than animals, more farms than forests. I remember when my grandparents started farming because game was scarce. My grandpa put me in charge of the chicken coop. You know what that meant?” she asked earnestly.

“Cleaning and feeding,” I replied.

“And killing,” she said solemnly. “The first time I killed a chicken, I was eight years old. That poor bird went running one way, headless and squirting blood while I went the other way, ballin’ my eyes out. My grandpa was so mad at me for the

mess and the scene I made that I was sent to bed with nothing to eat. He said if I couldn't help put the food on the table I couldn't put it in my belly neither," said Grandma with a half smile on her face.

"What happened after that?" I asked in between sips of peppermint tea.

"What do you think? The next day, after breakfast of course, I marched over to the chicken coop and did what I was told, just as I was shown!" she exclaimed as she sipped her tea. "Grandma made chicken and dumpling soup that night, and scone," she said proudly.

"So you'd rather chop a chicken's head of than snare a partridge," I asked playfully.

"No! I'd rather you'd do neither. I'd rather you not waste your time rolling around in the snow looking for something that ain't there or won't be in a few years. I'd rather you keep your head in dem books and out of the Western movies that make believe us Indians should act this way or that," she said earnestly as she put her empty mug on the table.

"Come on, let's get dinner started, those boys are gonna be hungry when they get home, and I know you are," she said.

Grandma went to wash up for dinner and I watched the bannock cook in the cast iron skillet as the smell of bacon grease filled the air. Then BANG, the screen door flung open, size 10 men's shoes pounded up the steps. It was cousin Fred, and my brother Jesse, roaring with triumphant laughter

"Well, did you bring dinner, den?" I asked, playfully mimicking Grandma.

"Of course we did!" declared Fred as he thumped a partridge down on the table.

"Yuck, get that outta here! We gotta eat there, ya know. Besides, Grandma said you still have to pluck it, clean it, and piece it... OUTSIDE," I said pointing to the door.

"Ah, what would a city girl like you know about it anyways?" he asked.

"More than you'd think," I said, remembering my conversation with Grandma.

Because our dinner was finished cook-

ing long before the boys finished cleaning their catch, it was too late to put it into the pot of chicken and dumplings. Instead, Fred and Jesse fried theirs up separately in the bacon grease that had not yet cooled.

Later, when I reached over the table for a piece of fried partridge, Fred said, "What do you think yer doin', eh? Since you didn't put it on the table, you can't put it in your belly neither," he scoffed as Jesse giggled

Grandma, seeing my disappointment, asked my brother Jesse, "Sooo, what do the partridge taste like?"

"Chicken!" Jesse says.

"Of course," Grandma said as she winked at me. ❧

Janine Manning is of the Ojibway Nation and an active member in Toronto's Aboriginal community, who comes from Neyaashiingmiing, Ontario. She is currently majoring in Environmental Studies at York University and plans to attend law school. Most importantly, she is the proud mother of two year old Tarquinius.

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Drip irrigation networks and “grey water” treatment units ensure fruit and vegetable production even during water scarcities of the hot summer months.

FAO

Agriculture plays an important role in the Palestinian economy and household food security in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In 2005, the agriculture sector supported some 14,000 private enterprises and provided employment for more than 135,000 people.

Recently, however, a combination of factors — tighter restrictions on the movement of people and goods, more restricted access to land, economic recession, the financial crisis faced by the Palestinian Authority and rising prices of agricultural inputs — has seriously threatened food security and led to increased levels of unemployment and poverty.

Because nearly 65% of agricultural work is done by women, a recently-completed FAO project funded by Norway aimed at enabling women to initiate and conduct entrepreneurial activities in agriculture as a means of promoting their participation in the social and economic life of their communities. The strategy was to assist some 550 low-income women farmers, who had lost their productive assets and means of supporting their livelihoods, in establishing backyard vegetable gardens or cottage industries.

The project recruited six field extension agents — five women and one man — to work with 10 women’s associations in each project site. Over a six month period, the project team helped 140 female-headed households establish backyard gardens. The women themselves selected and purchased the vegetable seeds and fruit tree seedlings they wanted to plant.

To ensure the sustainability of the

home gardens, farmers who lacked a reliable source of water in the summer months were provided with cisterns or had their existing cisterns rehabilitated. In all, 33 new cisterns were built and 12 were rehabilitated. All 140 gardens were provided with a drip irrigation network.

To relieve water shortages, the project also provided 25 farmers with units that allowed them to treat and reuse on their gardens “grey waste water” — water used in the kitchen, laundry and for bathing that is relatively clean but, owing to the presence of soap, causes problems if used directly to irrigate plants.

FAO says the home gardens have enabled the beneficiaries to grow their own fruit and vegetables, which is of particular importance since local market prices for fresh produce are extremely high. The water cisterns have enabled female-headed households to have productive home gardens even in the summer, when water is scarce and expensive.

The project also provided 135 sheep, selected for optimal compatibility with the local environment, to 50 women farmers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The sheep supply the beneficiaries with milk for drinking and processing (into cheese, yoghurt and labaneh) and lambs for sale. FAO says that since the home gardens and small livestock activities are conducted close to the home, the women have been able to improve their household food security and income, while still looking after their children.

In addition, the project recruited two food processing technology consultants to



Beneficiary Fida Mohammad Dababsi and children in her home garden.

train women’s groups in food preservation and packaging methods. During the course, the beneficiaries were provided with the necessary tools for food processing, including kitchenware, ovens, glass jars, labels and other equipment. To demonstrate the skills acquired during the course — and to provide a marketing opportunity — a four-day exhibition was held in Ramallah, with the participation of 30 women’s associations. FAO says improved coordination between women’s groups will allow them to market better their products and harness their collective power when purchasing inputs and selling processed goods.

Skills acquired by the beneficiaries in food processing and preservation have also led to improved household food security and income. The women now buy fruit and vegetables when they are at their cheapest — at the end of the season — and preserve them for consumption at other times of the year. ❧

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A Rooftop Gardening Project in Toronto with the About Face Collective

Interview with Natalie Boustead by Erica Franklin

The **About Face Collective** is a Toronto-based grassroots arts and environmental collective that collaborates and connects with artists, environmentalists, entrepreneurs, organizations and community members seeking to work collectively and seeking to integrate approaches to urban sustainability. Led by Natalie Boustead, a teacher and urban farmer, and by Lauren Pirie, an artist and graphic designer, the collective brings together these two distinct worlds and aims to combine them to create environmentally conscious and artistically inspired projects that benefit the community.

The Collective's current project is the creation of a community rooftop garden and learning space on top of the new Centre for Social Innovation, at their new Annex neighbourhood location in Toronto, Canada. The creative structural elements of the garden will be designed and built by local artists using recycled and reclaimed materials. The project is set to start in January of 2012 and I recently had a chance to talk with Natalie Boustead and ask her some questions about the project.

EF: About Face's current project is an initiative to build a rooftop garden and learning space on top of the Centre for Social Innovation in the Annex neighbourhood in Toronto. Can you discuss this project in relation to urban food security?

NB: This project, like most urban farming projects, has both immediate and long-term effects on the surrounding community. In terms of environmental impact, urban rooftop gardens such as this will help to reduce smog emissions, storm water run-off, and, because it is replacing black tar roof with green space, it also helps to reduce what is known as the 'heat island effect', which causes urban centres to experience higher than average temperatures. Growing food locally also reduces the emissions from trucks, planes and other transportation needed to import our food from elsewhere.

Since we are also going to function as an educational hub for urban farming, the knowledge we have will be spread outwards into our communities. We under-

stand that we cannot produce as much food as a farmer who has access to acres and acres of land outside of the city; but sharing the knowledge of how to grow food will increase Toronto residents' access to local, healthy food, because hopefully they'll be inspired to grow it right in their own backyard or balcony!

EF: How substantial is rooftop gardening in urban food security initiatives in Toronto?

NB: Rooftop gardening *could* be a substantial contribution to urban food security, were it to be a widely adopted process. This is especially true for newer buildings, which have higher load capacities on their rooftops and could therefore produce more food. Although one rooftop only represents a sliver of farmland, if we combined all the useable rooftop space in Toronto, our reliance on imported food would drop significantly. However, getting away from imported food also means that people have to be willing to eat seasonally and locally, which requires an ide-

ological shift in what is actually "available" at any given time. That said, there are many local crops which we are still importing from places as far away as China, which we could stop importing immediately and begin to grow and purchase exclusively within our own province and city.

EF: How can current urban food security initiatives in Toronto be contextualized within agricultural history in Canada?

NB: An interesting experiment was performed by a professor at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. He asked his class, "How many of you had grandparents that grew up and worked on a farm". Most of the class raised their hands. "Now," he said, "how many of your parents grew up and/or worked on a farm?" This time, only 40% raised their hands. "Ok, now, how many of YOU live and/or work on a farm?" Only two or three people out of the entire class raised their hands. This small exercise is indicative of just how distant Canadians have become from their agricultural roots. Farming has traditionally been seen as a layman type of job, not one that has warranted a lot of respect or aspiration. Many of our grandparents tried to get away from farming after the war and moved off farms and into suburbs, finding new jobs in a booming economy, and getting away from the hard and labour intensive world of farming. As small family farms failed or closed up, those trying to survive in the farming industry had to "go big or go home", and over time, we have wound up with these giant factory farms, full of chemicals and pesticides, terrible monocrop practices, and an overall disgraceful state of affairs in the agricultural industry.

After all that time trying to escape the farming profession in search of "good"

WE Resources

jobs, our generation is now trying to salvage and respect the beauty of farming. Not only that, we are trying to save the very Earth that we depend on for every aspect of our lives. Urban farming allows those interested in farming and also those interested in the arts and culture who come from urban settings to achieve balance in their lives and to make use of "dead" space in the city, such as rooftops.

Presently in Canada and the U.S. more WOMEN than ever before are becoming involved in organic agriculture. Farming has traditionally been a male dominated culture, and commercial agriculture continues to be. However, organic agriculture represents a more characteristically "feminine" approach to farming, in that it represents a nurturing and a very intimate relationship with the Earth and with the food that is produced.

From this point forward, I believe that over time, the farming profession will need to adopt this feminine approach to farming in order to sustain life on this planet, and this will give women a chance to be at the forefront of the organic farming movement.

Information about the project may be found at www.aboutfacecollective.com.

Erica Franklin is a member of the Editorial Team for this issue of WEI Magazine on Gender and Food Security.

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In Film

The Catherine Ferguson Academy — Spirit of Detroit

By Sybila Valdivieso

Despite the many struggles the people of Detroit have faced and continue to face, they are developing solutions. In the 2009 film documentary "Grown in Detroit" Dutch filmmakers, Mascha and Manfred Poppenk describe the city as "blooming from within." The film shows various images demonstrating that more than one third of the city has become green again creating new opportunities for city residents. The filmmakers cite an interesting example of how the bee population, which is nearly extinct in the United States, is blossoming in Detroit. "The extensive variety of native and cultivated flowers on the now flourishing lots and the lack of pesticides make Detroit's unique environment perfect for a healthy honey bee population and prolific honey production."

While the film addresses this urban green renewal in Detroit, its focus is on the urban gardening efforts of the Catherine Ferguson Academy, a public school of nearly 400 students, most of whom are young African American women. The academy was started in the 1960s as a school for young pregnant women and teenage mothers. It was named after Catherine Ferguson, an African American woman educator and social worker born into slavery. (Hartvick, 1996)

The academy is both a school and an urban farm rolled into one where students learn to harvest vegetables and to care for city livestock. The curriculum focuses on agricultural skills, knowledge of the importance of nutritious foods, the process by which these foods arrive at their plates, and ultimately, on empowering young women to become independent through the process of learning to farm.



Catherine Ferguson Academy Student.

"Farming is pretty amazing in that it requires so much science and reasoning and thinking and even writing," says the school's principal, Asenath Andrews. The farm has nearly 200 garden plots and each class is required to maintain a garden plot for students to conduct research and determine what crops to grow and when to harvest. During the fall, the students use the food they have grown to host a "Plant a Feast" celebration. Ninety-nine percent of its students graduate, and 90% of them attend a two or a four year college program in a district where few students expect to graduate at all.

However, in spite of its successes and of being a one of kind institution in early 2011 the academy was added to a list of schools to be closed in Detroit as part of the *Renaissance 2012 Plan*, a plan that has seen hundreds of Detroit public schools closed and that has led to thousands of public school teachers layoffs. It was only through the strong resistance to the closure shown by students, teachers, former students, their children and the community that a decision was made, in June 2011, to allow the academy to remain open as a for profit charter school.

While the news of the academy remaining open was celebrated, concerns remain as to whether the academy will continue to place the needs of its students, for education and social programs, at the

Mascha and Manfred Poppenk.



Downtown Detroit.

forefront given that in any for-profit institution social outcomes are always subordinate to commercial results.

For information about the film, please visit www.grownindetroitmovie.com.

Sybila Valdivieso is the Editor of WEI. She feels fortunate to have visited the Catherine Ferguson Academy and to have witnessed the great work of the academy prior to its conversion to a for-profit charter school.

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In the News

Beyond BPA

We Need to Get Tough on Toxics

By Dayna Nadine Scott

Did you breathe a sigh of relief when Canada became the first jurisdiction in the world to declare bisphenol A (commonly known as BPA) toxic in 2010? Or when it banned the chemical in baby bottles, prompting many manufacturers to remove it from their products?

If only that were the full story. The truth is that federal regulation of toxic substances in this country needs a serious overhaul, and new research underlines how critical that is.

We inhale, ingest and absorb a litany of synthetic chemicals into our bodies every day, and improving scientific detection methods are making our toxic “body burdens” increasingly obvious.

Environmental health experts believe the rising incidence of many cancers, developmental syndromes, reproductive disorders and autoimmune diseases can be tied to our exposures to chemicals. An emerging body of research demonstrates that even low levels of exposure to certain chemicals, at certain key times, can have dramatic effects.

In 2006, the Harper government introduced the Chemicals Management Plan, saying it was going to get “tough on toxics.” But recent research finds that, even though it added BPA to the list of toxic substances, the chemical’s still turning up in foods that Canadians commonly consume. Even though we know it leaches into foods such as tomato soup, it continues to be used as an additive in the linings of tin cans.

The critical flaw in our law is that finding a substance “toxic” doesn’t automatically mean the government must actually restrict its use. It “may” regulate, as it did by prohibiting BPA in baby bottles, but it may also choose to keep the substance on the market

for economic reasons, or to avoid stigmatizing a particular company’s product.

So although BPA was a high-profile “win” for environmentalists, the limited regulatory action that followed clearly disappoints. Breast-fed babies and fetuses continue to be exposed to BPA as nursing mothers and pregnant women pass on their exposures through canned foods. Indeed, last year, Statistics Canada reported that measurable levels of BPA were found in the urine of 91% of Canadians.

Industry argues that these levels, on their own, shouldn’t worry us, because they demonstrate that the body is constantly eliminating BPA in urine. It points out that the evidence that BPA harms our health is uncertain. Just last month, for example, the U.S. Institute of Medicine acknowledged that common chemicals, including BPA and phthalates, have “biological plausibility” for causing breast cancer, but it declined to declare a causal relationship because the bulk of research has been done on animals, not humans.

As you read this, you’re probably starting to think about strategies for what’s being called “precautionary consumption” — green shopping practices undertaken to try to compensate for the fact that the regulatory system is broken.

Sure enough, social science research finds that, by and large, women bear the

burden of this regulatory failure, because they’re the ones doing the household shopping and making most of their families’ consumption choices. The most privileged might even be able to buy the right containers and the fresh produce to make their own soups from scratch, but we need a system that protects everyone — not just those with the resources, time, education and knowledge to be “savvy” green shoppers.

Canadians deserve a strict law on toxic substances that requires the government to reduce exposure when substances are found to be toxic. We need a truly precautionary policy that puts people first. Although individual consumption choices are important, our control over these everyday exposures is constrained by legislation, political institutions and power relations. These are remade through collective citizen action, not individual consumer behaviour. It’s time we demanded that government get tough on toxics, for real.

This article was published in the *Globe and Mail* on January 4, 2012. ☞

Dayna Nadine Scott is an associate professor at York University’s Osgoode Hall Law School and director of the National Network on Environments and Women’s Health (which recently released the report *Sex, Gender & Chemicals: Factoring Women into Canada’s Chemicals Management Plan*). She also sits on the Board of Directors of WEI magazine.



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Rwandan Widows Mobilize for Positive Change

By Aneesa Walji

In October 2011, WEI was invited to the Gruber Foundation awards ceremony to recognize the work done by AVEGA Agahozo, an association created by widows of the Rwandan genocide. AVEGA has worked for the last 17 years to attain legal reforms that would provide women in Rwanda with inheritance rights, establish rape as an act of genocide and establish crimes of sexual violence as serious crimes. AVEGA was awarded the 2011 Women's Rights Prize by the Gruber Foundation, which recognizes significant contributions to human rights that advance the rights of women and girls around the world. In addition to the award, the Gruber Foundation has created the Gruber Program for Global Justice and Women's Rights at Yale University beginning in 2012.

Aneesa Walji, attended the ceremony on behalf of WEI, and shares the following account of the event and the work being carried out by AVEGA.

When approximately 800,000 people are murdered in the span of 100 days, a nation's population is left in tragedy and disorder. This was Rwanda's experience after the 1994 genocide, and the effects continue to reverberate, among women in particular. In the aftermath of the genocide, there were 10 times more widows than widowers. Many of the women that survived were victims of the extreme violence, including sexual violence that they witnessed or experienced. In fact, the number of women who were raped during the genocide is estimated to be between 250,000 to 500,000.

Devoted to supporting these widow survivors is an organization called AVEGA Agahozo. AVEGA is an acronym for the Association des Veuves du Génocide, which translates to the Association of the Widows of Genocide. "Agahozo" means "dry one's tears" in Kinyarwanda. AVEGA's work was honoured and celebrated this past September when it received the 2011 Gruber Women's Rights Prize at the Yale Club in New York City. Patricia Gruber, President of the Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation, presented the award. AVEGA was granted a gold medal and an unre-

stricted cash prize of \$500,000. Chantal Kabasinga, the organization's National President, and Odette Kayirere, the Executive Secretary, accepted the award on behalf of AVEGA.

During the ceremony's opening remarks, Patricia Gruber explained that the Gruber Foundation "recognizes fundamental shifts in human values and culture." The Chair of the Selection Advisory Board added that the Women's Rights Prize is typically awarded to organizations that operate in exceptionally challenging contexts. Sakena Yacoobi, a member of the Selection Advisory Board and previous recipient of the prize on behalf of the Afghan Institute for Learning (AIL), applauded AVEGA's work, specifically mentioning the support that it provided to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in the collection of evidence concerning rape. The Tribunal is well-known for establishing rape as a crime of genocide, an important precedent and advancement for women's rights in international criminal law.

Just how much AVEGA's work has grown over the years became clear during the moderated discussion that took place after the award was formally granted. The

discussion focused on the formation and work of AVEGA as well as the role of women in post-conflict peace-building more generally. AVEGA was formed in 1995 as widow survivors stumbled across each other post-genocide. Fifty widows eventually formed an association to help each other address common challenges. Today, AVEGA is based in Kigali, and has a membership of approximately 20,000 widows. It provides support services to widows and orphans, who are often sole heads of households. Since AVEGA's activities are broadly focused on promoting overall societal reconstruction, its activities are necessarily diverse and complementary. Among other things, it supports female participation in politics, income generation activities and psycho-social counseling as a response to the trauma that many women experienced.

During the discussion, it was acknowledged that the role of women in post-conflict reconstruction is often not given sufficient importance. Akua Kuenyehia, a member of the Selection Advisory Board and Judge at the International Criminal Court, emphatically stated that, "sustained peace cannot come if it excludes 50 percent of the population." Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, another member of the Selection Advisory Board and Professor of International Affairs at the New School, noted that AVEGA is an excellent example of the potential role that women can play in post-conflict reconstruction. The organization not only highlights the victimization of women during violent conflict but also demonstrates that women are valuable agents of change in society.

It is expected that the financial component of the Prize will provide support for the organization's work into the future, as it continues to respond to the suffering of widow survivors in Rwanda as well as the accompanying wide-ranging social effects. ❧

Aneesa Walji is a lawyer with experience working on issues related to gender, equity and diversity. She holds a B.A. in International Development and a J.D. from the University of Toronto. She is currently pursuing a LL.M. at NYU Law School.

World Development Report 2012

Gender Equality and Development — An Opportunity Both Welcome and Missed

By Shahra Razavi

That the World Bank has devoted its 2012 flagship publication to the topic of gender equality is a welcome opportunity for widening the intellectual space. However, it is also a missed opportunity. By failing to engage seriously with the gender biases of macroeconomic policy agendas that define contemporary globalization, and by reducing social policy to a narrow focus on conditional cash transfers, the report is unable to provide a credible and even-handed analysis of the challenges that confront gender equality in the 21st century and appropriate policy responses for creating more equal societies. This is the first time the World Bank has devoted its annual flagship publication to the topic of gender equality. Given the stature of the *World Development Report* and its influence on development debates, the 2012 edition is likely to attract the attention of numerous actors, both governmental and non-governmental. So what are we to make of the analysis and the messages that emerge from this report? Does it provide useful policy insights that can further the cause of gender justice, especially the interests of those women who find themselves on the lower rungs of our increasingly unequal and polarized societies?

To start with, a number of significant messages emerge from the report — significant because they are coming from the World Bank, and more specifically from the organization's annual flagship publication, rather than being novel or cutting-edge in a more general sense.

First, those who have heard the World Bank always make the instrumental argument for gender equality will be pleased to know that this report underlines the intrinsic value of gender equality (without forgetting that it is also "smart economics"). Second, the attention to the intrinsic value of gender

equality seems also to have triggered some interest in gender equality as a political project. Third, and importantly, going against the "growth is good for gender equality" — type of argument put forward by World Bank economists in the past, the report acknowledges that gender equality will not occur automatically as countries get richer. Fourth, attention is paid to the unequal division of unpaid domestic and care work between women and men.

Despite these positive features, which take the World Bank's work on gender equality forward in important ways, there are a number of major gaps and problematic policy implications that require critical scrutiny.

First, despite the welcome attention to labour markets, employment issues and persistent gender-based segregation (chapter 5), the analysis of these timely issues falls short in several important respects.

Informality. Although WDR 2012 makes occasional reference to "the important challenges [that] remain for those outside formal employment" (p.267), there seems to be little recognition of the tremendous changes that have swept labour markets throughout the world, adversely affecting the security of workers. As research by the ILO and others has shown, informal employment tends to be a greater source of employment for women than for men in most developing regions, with women often concentrated in the most casual and exploitative segments. As women have increased their participation in the labour force — which WDR 2012 celebrates — the structure of the labour market has also changed, making informal/unprotected types of work the norm.

Gender wage gaps. Women's disproportionate care responsibility, as the report points out, is one of the factors that limits and shapes their access to paid work. The failure of labour markets to acknowledge the contribution of unpaid reproductive work to the functioning of any economy is not, however, seen by the Bank as a reflection of the fact that labour markets, as social and political institutions, are "bearers of gender". Labour markets are gendered institutions also by operating on the basis of formal rules and informal practices that value male and female labour differently, regardless of the levels of "human capital" they embody. *WDR 2012* acknowledges that with the closing of the education gap it is difficult to explain the observed gap between women's and men's wages in terms of educational attainments (p.203), but then cautions that the remaining gender wage gap may reflect "additional unobserved or unmeasured differences in worker and job characteristics between women and men" (p.205). The problem with this reasoning — as with the human capital "explanation" — is that differences between female and male workers are themselves very often the outcome of structural and discriminatory forces, such as fewer years of labour market experience due to care-related reasons, and gendered definitions of skill that are saturated with sexual bias.

Moreover, the report provides a rosy assessment of employment generation for women in the export-oriented sectors. There is no mention of employer strategies in these sectors to manage risk by creating a dual labour market, consisting of a "nucleus" of largely male, skilled, permanent workers and a periphery of "flexible" relatively "unskilled" female workers. Nor is there any mention of the health hazards of being exposed to pesticides and other harmful substances (in the horticultural sector, for example), or the intense "burnout" suffered by workers in garments and electronic manufacturing, who are predominantly women. There is also complete silence about job losses in the context of trade liberalization (i.e., trade liberalization is a two-way process: cheap imports displace local manufacturing employment).

The report's policy recommendations in the area of employment more broadly — facilitating “part-time work” for women (despite its well-known disadvantages in terms of earnings and social benefits) and “labour activation policies” to better connect labour supply and demand — are very weak. How such steps are going to tackle the problem of structural unemployment and underemployment that grips the global economy is far from obvious. Nor is there mention of the deleterious effects of the “deflationary bias” of macroeconomic policy on employment generation. As far as *WDR 2012* is concerned, employment remains an issue for micro policies, completely detached from macroeconomic policy.

Second, moving to the analysis of unpaid work, the recommendations about the critical importance of public investment in infrastructure, especially the provision of clean water and sanitation, are perhaps among the more strategic elements emerging from the report. Yet the fiscal constraints that are likely to shape such investments and the policies that are needed for mobilizing or safeguarding revenues, especially in the current climate of fiscal austerity, are either not examined at all, or given short shrift. When it comes to the provision of services, for health and child care, the analysis is equally vague and problematic. Maternal mortality, a major concern of the report, can be reduced by providing skilled birth attendants (p.293). This can be through either public or private providers, the private option deemed to be “a cost-effective [cost-effective for whom?] alternative to the public provision of maternal health services” (p.293), or by providing “poor women with cash transfers conditional on their seeking health-care services known to reduce maternal mortality” (p.294). One would have thought that this would be the place for a much stronger emphasis on the critical importance of accessible public health services. A missed opportunity indeed!

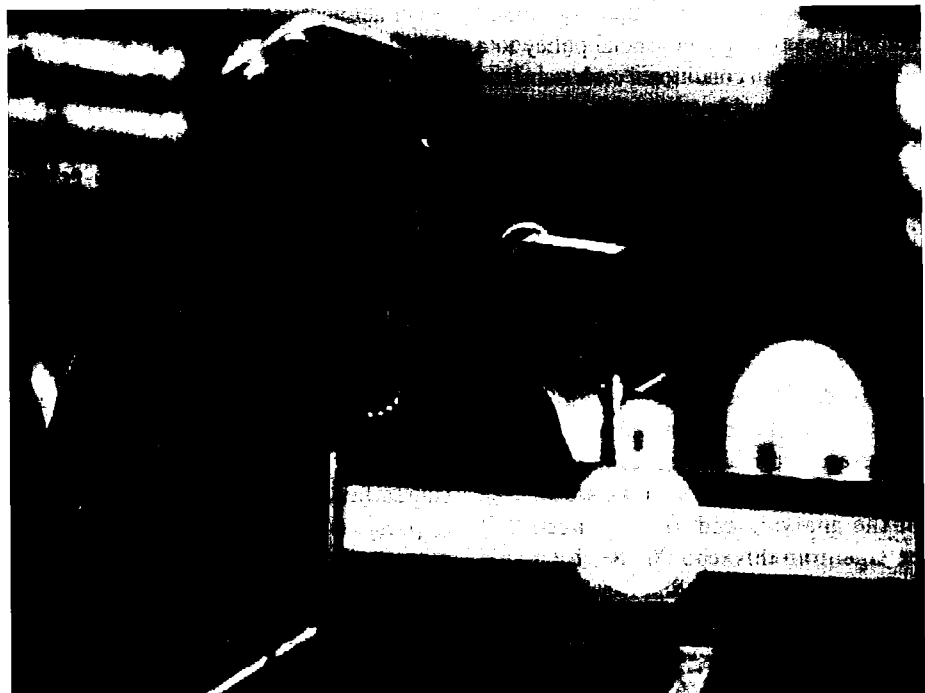
This commentary was published on the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development website on October 7, 2011 at www.unrisd.org where the extended commentary on the *WDR 2012* is also available. ❧

Shahra Razavi is research co-ordinator at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. She has led research on gender, including Gender, Poverty and Well-Being; Agrarian Change, Gender and Land Rights; Globalization, Export-Oriented Employment for Women and Social Policy; and work on Gender Justice, Development

and Rights. She coordinated the preparation of the UNRISD flagship report, *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (2005). Her most recent research projects have been on *The Political and Social Economy of Care*, and *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality*.

Investing in Gender Equality at The Heart of Food Security

FAO



FAO/G. NAPOLITANO

Gender equality was discussed as a prominent factor of food security at FAO's celebration of World Food Day 2011 and throughout the 37th session of the United Nations Committee on Global Food Security (CFS), held at headquarters 17-22 October.

24 October 2011, Rome – Gender equality was discussed as a prominent factor of food security at FAO's celebration of World Food Day 2011 and throughout the 37th session of the United Nations Committee on Global Food Security (CFS), held at headquarters 17-22 October. The week-long event kicked off with a launching ceremony headlined by Michele Bachelet, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, and featured a round table policy

discussion on gender, food and security and a presentation of the recently released World Bank World Development Report 2012 (WDR), dedicated to gender equality and development.

“Food prices — from crisis to stability,” was chosen as the World Food Day theme for 2011 following five consecutive years of unstable and rising food prices that have pushed millions of people into hunger and threaten to affect millions more.

In attendance at the launching cere-

mony were the Heads of the United Nations Rome-based agencies, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) and high level dignitaries including Michelle Bachelet and Franco Frattini, Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Discussions were opened by FAO president Jacques Diouf who offered an overview of the current state of global food insecurity and its causes, including low levels of food stocks, greater demand for food in emerging economies, the growing use of biofuels, climate change and speculative trading, and underlined that despite these factors, with the right measures “the world has the knowledge and resources to ensure food security for all.”

In her keynote address, Michelle Bachelet emphasized that unleashing women’s potential to better contribute to agricultural production is key to achieving food security. She deplored the fact that only 5.6% of aid is currently targeted to women in agriculture even as women make up the bulk of smallholder agricultural workers in the world and produce about half of its food, and reminded the audience that, as stated in *The State of Food and Agriculture 2011 (SOFA)*, if women farmers had the same access to productive resources as men, the resulting gains in agricultural productivity could lift as many as 150 million people out of hunger. “Since women are in the frontline of food security, we need to put their rights and needs at the forefront of trade and agricultural policies, an investment to move from crisis to stability,” she said. “It is time to make sure that women are at the table where decisions are made, where policies are crafted, and funds are disbursed.”

WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran added that the world should not forget the picture is not all bleak and that the tables can be turned on hunger as number of countries including Ghana, Chile, India, Mexico and Brazil have demonstrated. She also concurred with Ms. Bachelet that “women are the secret weapon in the fight against hunger.”



Panelists discuss the findings of the World Bank’s World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development during the 37th session of the United Nations Committee on Global Food Security (CFS) at FAO.

The World Development Report 2012: Progress and Gaps in Gender Equality

The CFS featured a presentation and panel discussion around the findings of the World Bank’s recently launched flagship publication, *The World Development Report 2012 (WDR)* dedicated to gender equality and development with the participation of Ana Revenga, World Bank Poverty Reduction Group Director, World Bank Senior Economist Markus Goldstein, FAO Assistant Director-General Hafez Ghanem, IFAD Director for Latin America and the Caribbean Region Josefina Stubbs, Dame Barbara Stocking, Chief Executive of Oxfam GB, Marcela Villarreal, Director of FAO’s Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division, Isatou Jallow, Chief of the World Food Programme’s Gender Unit and Esther Penunia, Secretary General of the Asian Farmers’ Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA).

The WDR 2012 takes stock of the state of gender equality, and demonstrates that in some aspects, gender equality has evolved positively over the past 25 years with gender gaps having significantly decreased in education and health services, leading to better outcomes for women and girls. However, women’s economic opportunities continue to lag behind men’s, with women still largely segregated in lower paying, more precarious occupations with less access to

What is the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)?

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is an intergovernmental body that was established in 1974 to serve as a forum in the United Nations System for review and follow-up of policies on world food security. The CFS strives to be the most inclusive international and intergovernmental platform and brings together UN Agencies, Civil Society and NGOs, research and financial institutions and the private sector to work together to ensure food security and nutrition for all. For more information, visit CFS Home.

resources and less decision making powers at all levels of society.

Ms. Revenga acknowledged the close collaboration with FAO and the SOFA team to produce the WDR and explained that the report, which articulates itself around three main questions—Why do gender gaps matter, why do they persist and what can be done to eliminate them?—analyzes the different ways in which formal institutions, social norms and markets treat men and women and how these differences lead to gender inequalities.

"The cost of gender inequality to societies is getting larger," explained Ms. Revenga. "And economic growth will not solve the problem. We need actors and initiatives." She added that implementing gender equality was rarely a question of increasing resources, but of redistributing them more equally among men and women, and that the relatively low costs incurred in doing so would be amply covered by the long-term benefits.

Among other pressing measures, the WDR cites the need to relax time constraints on women through better access to childcare and other facilities as paramount to enabling their greater participation in economic activities, as well as the need to implement legal reforms to improve their access to land and credit.

Mr. Ghanem underlined the importance of gender equality as a means to improve life for everyone: "I think that it is very important that men enter this discussion because what the World Development Report does, and what we try to do in our State of Food and Agriculture Report, is to show that bridging the gender gap, achieving gender equality, is not an issue just to improve women's lives, it is an issue to improve everybody's lives," he explained. "As the WDR shows, when you end discrimination against women, you increase growth, you increase development, and as we have argued in the SOFA, if you end discrimination against women, you will increase agricultural production and reduce the number of hungry people in the world by about 150 million. What FAO, the World Bank, IFAD, WFP and others are saying is that gender equality is central to development and that anybody who is interested in fighting poverty and hunger has to address the issue of gender equality."

Ms Stubbs added that IFAD saluted the WDR as a benchmark and emphasized the need to not focus exclusively on rural women's agricultural activities but also to support their non-farm economic activities, and Ms. Penunia and Ms. Stocking both underlined the importance of supporting women to organize in order to gain leadership skills, claim their rights and become increasingly empowered at the economic,

political, cultural and social level.

Ms. Villareal added that the fact that the latest editions of the WDR and the SOFA focus on gender equality will change "The way many countries, many institutions, many ministers of finance appreciate gender issues within development. We need these reports to land on the desks of the decision makers, the people who allocate budgets — I am confident that these reports will help bring the issue of gender equality back on countries' agendas."

Placing Women at the Heart of the Global Food System

Also part of the CFS programme was a multi-stake holder round table policy discussion on gender, food and security that brought together development experts from the UN and other entities and FAO's Member Country Representatives. The Roundtable furthered the discussion on the role of women in ensuring food security and in guaranteeing adequate levels of nutrition for their families and communities.

Ms. Sheeran opened the discussion by sharing the latest findings on nutrition and the particularly crucial importance of good nutrition during the first two years of life, without which a child runs considerable chances of long lasting health problems, including brain damage and stunting. "This is the burden of knowledge," she explained. "We know that the damage of malnutrition in the first two years of life cannot be repaired."

Elisabeth Atangana, President of Pan-African Farmers Forum (PAFFO) and of the Regional Platform of Farmers Organizations of Central Africa (PROPAC) reminded the audience of the many crucial roles women play in the provision of food, from cultivation to food processing and marketing, and the panelists discussed the recognized fact that when women have greater decision making power and greater access to resources in their households and communities, investments in children's nutrition and education increase, leading to better life chances for future generations.

Ms. Stocking spoke of the resourcefulness of women in the face of food insecurity to ensure good nutrition of their

children and of their ability to instigate many positive changes when empowered. "In a village in Ethiopia, the women managed to create a cooperative of savings and loans," she explained. "They were successful and started diversifying. Thanks to the greater power they had gained through this activity, they managed to stop the practice of excision and that of polygamy, successfully curtailing the spread of HIV in the community."

Mark Cackler, Manager of the Agriculture and Rural Development Department of the World Bank, explained that when women have a greater voice in decision making at the higher levels including in parliament, policies are shaped differently with better outcomes for women and children, and Ms. Stocking added that if women were more amply consulted in the creation of policies to remediate price volatility and to prepare for disasters, they would have much say and would contribute valuable new ideas.

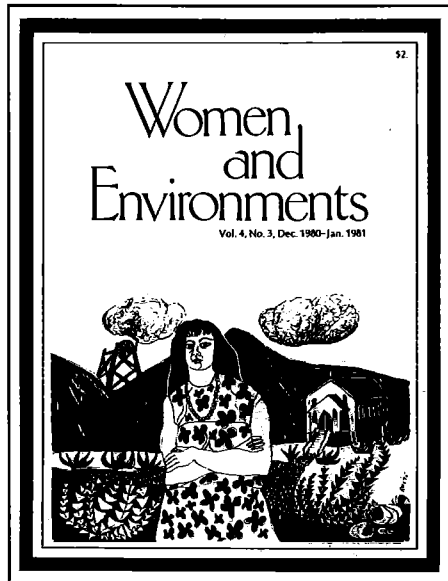
All the speakers reiterated the need to support women's better access to resources across the board, to facilitate their greater participation in decision making, to free up their time through technologies and services, and to support their organization into networks to improve global food security, and called for greater action on the part of governments and a stronger application of their commitments to gender equality.

"Is there the political will to place women at the heart of the food security system?" asked Ms. Stocking — a question indeed at the heart of the future of global food security. ❧

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35 Years of Women and Environments International

By Anne Wordsworth



Since 2007, the year that WEI returned to the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University (FES), we have had the opportunity to receive the assistance of a graduate student. Graduate students at FES join a vibrant intellectual community and each student's participation with WEI allows us to engage in the many conversations that define WEI's work as collaborative.

For the 2011-2012 year, WEI is happy to have the assistance of Anne Wordsworth. Anne is a researcher and writer specializing in environmental health issues. She has worked as a television producer for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, as a political advisor to former Ontario Ministers of the Environment, and as an environmental advocate. She is currently working on her Masters in Environmental Studies at York University.

During 2011, WEI has been celebrating its 35 year anniversary and since WEI's roots are based at FES, Anne explored the birth of WEI and its connection to FES in the following piece. Enjoy.

It was 35 years ago, and history was being made. In 1976, Pierre Trudeau was our dashing intellectual Prime Minister. The world's tallest freestanding structure in the world — the CN Tower — was just finished in Toronto. Montreal played host to a brilliant Summer Olympics. And in Vancouver, the UN was having their groundbreaking conference on Human Settlements — Habitat.

Against this exciting backdrop, three professors from the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University travelled across the country to Vancouver to be part of this wave. At the UN Habitat Conference, Gerda Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson and David Morley organized a workshop on a new topic of special concern to them — 'women and environments'. The three of them had already been teaching a course in this area prior to the conference, and looked forward to sharing their ideas.

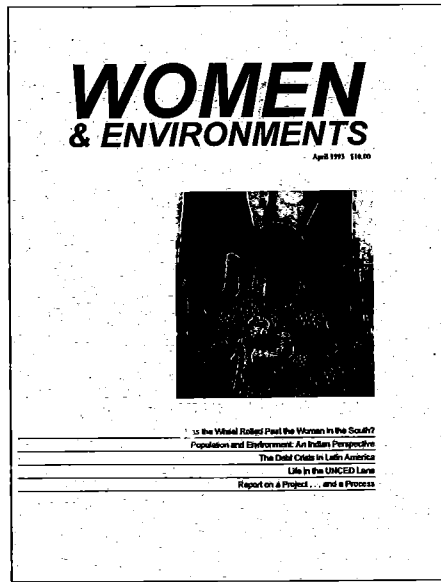
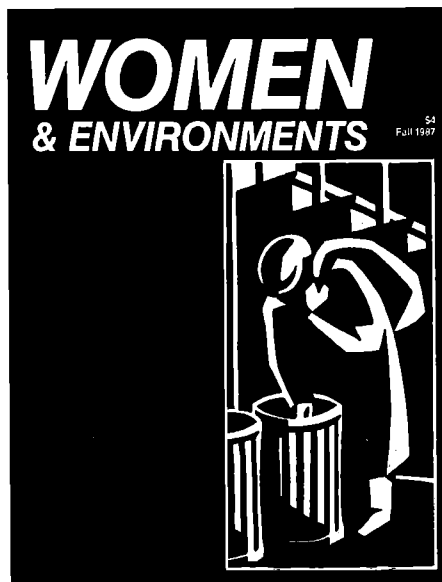
To their delight, almost 100 enthusias-

tic people from around the world came to talk about it and exchange ideas. This workshop inspired a lively discussion from an audience of dedicated researchers studying the relationship between women and their environments and community activists trying to match the environment to women's needs. The participants talked about the segregation of environments by sex, the extent to which women were involved in the conscious design and modification of environments, and the priorities for women in human settlements in terms of environmental needs. To keep the discussion going beyond the initial workshop and to link the people who were pioneering this new field, Wekerle, Peterson and Morley decided that a newsletter was needed to keep the conversation going.

This small informal newsletter became the first issue of *Women and Environments*. Their original objectives were: to increase the level of awareness that women are a separate group of users

of any given environment with specific needs; to demonstrate the inequality and inefficiency associated with many human environments in relation to the needs of women; to increase the extent to which women intervene directly in the planning, design and management of environments of particular concern to them; and, to increase women's access to those environments in which they are commonly discouraged or excluded — all of which are still relevant today.

As Gerda Wekerle has pointed out, *Women and Environments* was unusual "in that it anticipated and indeed helped create the development of a new field of study" (WEI, Fall 1986). It bridged two disciplines — the study of women and the study of urban planning and the environment, which up until that time had been regarded as separate disciplines and studied in isolation from one another. Following on the birth of *Women and Environments* in 1976, conference ses-



sions began to feature discussions that linked women and environments, new courses were created in university curricula and new spaces opened up dedicated to allowing women to control their own environments.

Wekerle and Peterson took on the daunting task of publishing a regular typed newsletter featuring cutting edge issues, lists of people participating in the network, reviews of relevant publications, upcoming conferences, courses, jobs — all the vital information needed to build a strong foundation for the acceptance of women and environments as a legitimate field of academic study and political interest. They saw their work publishing the newsletter and writing their books and articles as “laying out a map for how segregated the world was and how powerless women were beyond their homes and neighbourhoods”, according to Rebecca Peterson. But she added that at the same time, women were becoming more conscious of their own power and ability to bring about change. “We never viewed women as victims only. We saw them also as powerful agents in creating and changing environments, often not acknowledged by the official decision makers who worked in the planning and political arenas.”

York University’s Faculty of Environmental Studies became the incubator for the growing discipline of ‘women and environments’ and the

newsletter that fostered it. For 10 years, in addition to their responsibilities as university professors, Wekerle and Peterson, with the aid of graduate assistants, learned the skills of publishing and design, published numerous issues and stayed true to their vision of a network serving the needs of women, not only in North America, but throughout the world. The network provided moral support for its members, provided information about initiatives that could inspire similar interventions, and ultimately had ripple effects around the world.

As Rebecca Peterson remembers it, there was sometimes tension about the purpose of the magazine between its role as a networking tool and its identity as a magazine. In 1981, the mimeographed copies of *Women and Environments International* were transformed into a journal, and with more formality came more responsibility. Not only were Wekerle and Peterson concerned about the professional look of the magazine, but they were also ambitious in their coverage — giving attention to urban and rural issues of interest to women, to the built and natural environments, and to how these problems played themselves out internationally. And not only did the articles have to be written, but the magazine had to look better, come out on time and compete with other publications.

The story of the struggles to keep the

magazine going as other feminist publications fell by the wayside is epic. What sustained it were the efforts of dedicated women and volunteers who gave selflessly of their time and energy to fundraise, market, manage and edit the ambitious magazine over 35 years of uninterrupted service. Rebecca Peterson, interviewed for this article, credits women like Reggie Modlich, Barbara Rahder, Judith Bell, Gaye Francis Alexander, and many others, with holding it together through some very difficult years, calling it a “labour of love for so many women”. *Women and Environments* eventually became *Women and Environments International*. Peterson sees its existence today after 35 years of constant publication as a tribute to the Toronto women who valued it and made it thrive. “I could never have imagined that the small newsletter we started would blossom into such a vehicle for supporting the efforts of women working to change environments around the globe”, a force that continues to link the efforts of women in academia, and in the community in improving the lives of women in all the environments they occupy. ❧

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