

Partnerships WIRE



PARTNERSHIPS
for **SUSTAINABLE**
DEVELOPMENT

5 May 2008

CSD-16 Partnerships Fair

UNHQ, New York

THEMATIC DISCUSSION: PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PARTNERSHIPS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The CSD-16 Partnerships Fair opened with a discussion on promoting and supporting the role of women in partnerships for Rural Development (L-R) Lesha (B.M.) Witmer, Women for Water Partnership; Patricia Chaves (Chair), Partnerships Team/ DSD; Sabina Mensah, GRATIS Foundation; Rebecca Pearl, WOCAN.



Patricia Chaves, Head of the Partnerships Team at UNDESA opened the first thematic discussion of the 16th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Partnerships Fair. She introduced three distinguished women advocates who would later discuss what methods and practices can be used to promote and support the role of women in partnerships towards meeting rural development goals.

Opening the discussion, **Sabina Mensah**, representing the Gratis Foundation of Ghana, provided an important background to her presentation, highlighting the importance of Ghanaian women's contribution to economic development in Ghana. Women make up 52% of the agricultural workforce and are increasingly occupying the farm roles that have traditionally been assumed by men. As women have become significant actors in the agricultural sector, they have come to account for 70% of the total food production, which includes post harvesting activities such as shelling of grains, storage, processing and marketing.

Ms. Mensah opined that in Northern Ghana, up to 60% of rural women's income is derived from gathering shea nuts. Critically, the Foundation transfers appropriate

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3pm - 5.30pm

Why partnerships are critical in addressing desertification and drought?

- ◆ **Marc Paquin**, Médiaterre and Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and the Institut de l'Énergie et de l'Environnement de la Francophonie (IEPF)
- ◆ **Michael Madjera**, COMPETE
- ◆ **Elisabeth Barsk-Rundquist**, The Global Mechanism of the UNCCD
- ◆ **Friederike Knabe**, UNISFÉRA



technologies to women working in small scale industries, and in completing this task, it has significantly improved the quality of life for local women and their families. Ms. Mensah underscored the main activities of the Gratis Foundation, which can be viewed in Table 1.

While advancing the manufacturing activities of the Gratis Foundation, Ms. Mensah talked at length about the health benefits attributed to the ovens

Table 1: Main activities of the Gratis Foundation, Sabina Mensah, 2008

- Manufacturing with focus on agriculture/agro processing, environment and sanitation equipment;
- Gender and Technology Based Training; and
- The Gender and Development Unit, which mainstreams gender as a sustainable approach to development.



Ms. Sabina Mensah, representing the Gratis Foundation (centre) making her presentation on “Promoting and Supporting the Role of Women in Partnerships for Rural Development”

Over 2,100 people have been trained by the Foundation in batik, tie and dye/ screen printing

Sabina Mensah

and stoves the Foundation manufactured, and that are increasingly used by women in Ghana. The use of such stoves has resulted in a decrease in the use of firewood as an energy source, which has been linked to adverse health conditions experienced by Ghanaian women and their families. Ms. Mensah also highlighted how the Foundation had given technical support to community based projects focusing on food processing, and specifically, hot pepper sauce production called “shitor”. Ms. Mensah emphasized that “shitor” is viewed as a cost effective meal, owing to its long storage shelf life of six months, and thus, is particularly patronized by students in Ghana.

Lastly, Ms. Mensah outlined the various Gender and Technology Based Training programmes that the Foundation offers, which are aimed at both men and women and offer vocational, technical and entrepreneurial skills for self-employment. The success of the training programmes were evidenced by Ms. Mensah’s statement that some small scale

enterprises have blossomed into medium size enterprises. For example, in Ghana, over 2,100 people have been trained by the Foundation in batik, tie and dye/ screen printing, leading to over 55% of all participants subsequently pursuing their own business. While success can be measured, the Foundation has had to overcome significant challenges, in particular, working with illiterate groups, inadequate infrastructure, and in some cases, weak managerial capacity. In conclusion, Ms. Mensah offered some views on lessons learned, emphasizing that there should be more efforts to tap into indigenous knowledge, and small scale farmers should be given incentives to enhance their transition to more ecologically sustainable practices. Incentives could take many forms, including; credit, guaranteed markets, and technology assistance. In addition, it was advanced that there should be a greater push towards empowering women, especially in decision/ policy-making positions.



Llesha (B.M.) Witmer, representing Women for Water Partnership (left) presenting "Partners: from the margin to the mainstream"

Llesha B.M Witmer, began her presentation by explaining the Women for Water (WFW) partnership’s mandate and composition. Working in partnership with 90 women’s organizations and networks, the Women for Water Partnership brings together over 2 million women from around the world, to specifically work on gender-sensitive and pro-poor Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) issues. Framing its work, the Partnership observes the Dublin Principles for participatory gender sensitive IWRM, and makes sure that a rights based approach to their developmental work is adopted. Ms. Witmer informed participants that the WFW partnership pursues “functional networking” which is a form of networking that

brings together all relevant parties concerned with, and working on, water resource management issues, for example, engineers, rural women and interest groups. Ms. Witmer advanced that “functional networking” was critical to ensuring that the issues are approached in a comprehensive manner, and bringing together such diverse stakeholders ensured that the partnership became stronger and addressed all constituents’ needs. Intending to show how partnerships had moved from the margin to the mainstream, and using the WFW partnership as an example, Ms. Witmer identified four main constraints pertaining to water related partnerships. Table 2 below highlights the four constraints. Exploring constraint one, Ms. Witmer expressed that water was essential for life and therefore, concluded that all governments are responsible for establishing a basic service for their population.

Fresh water is essential for life, development and the environment

Llesha (B.M.) Witmer

Table 2: Main constraints pertaining to water related partnerships - Llesha Witmer, 2008

1. Fresh water is a limited and vulnerable resource;
2. Development and management of water and sanitation should be based on a participatory approach involving users, planners and policy makers at the lowest appropriate level;
3. Women should play a central role in the supply, management and safeguarding of water;
4. Water is an economic good.

She noted that it was imperative to strive for equity mainstreaming when designing and managing water policies, and lamented that often partnerships did not exhibit equality between partners. Commenting on the third constraint, Ms. Witmer opined that women were frequently viewed as the target group by policy makers, and rather, they should be seen as experts and managers, owing to their in-depth understanding of the problems. Lastly, Ms. Witmer expressed that investors should prioritize investment in appropriate technology rather than generic water related technologies that are advanced in Northern countries. Drawing on the WFW Partnership, Ms. Witmer ended by highlighting various lessons learned.



She noted that it was important to create partnerships that bridge the local and global divide, ensuring that actors at both levels are linked and work towards correcting any imbalances that may arise. She maintained that giving local women a voice was also imperative to a women's partnership, as they are the most affected by any top-down policy decisions.

Ms. Witmer stated that any partnership's survival was also dependent on having an enabling environment, and noted that this took various forms, including; the provision of seed money, knowledge and experience exchange, and the need to "translate" policy jargon, in order to influence policy, and ultimately, improve the partnership's visibility.



Rebecca Pearl (right) representing Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN)

Strong leadership is needed to overcome barriers to gender equality

Rebecca Pearl

Rebecca Pearl, representing Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) opened her presentation by explaining how WOCAN had placed organizational change at the heart of its mandate, in order to carry out gender equality initiatives. Drawing on a case study in Nepal, she advanced how gender interests had been incorporated into a forest project in Nepal, which led to a change in the attitudes and behaviours in not only local women, but also the Department of Forestry in Nepal.

Commencing in 1993, the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP) brought together the government of Nepal and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with the aim to:

- 1) raise the incomes of families in the hills who were below the poverty line; and
- 2) improve the ecological conditions.

The modus operandi of the project was based on leasing areas of degraded forestlands to groups of poor households, who would be encouraged and assisted in regenerating the

land. In seeking to provide context, Ms. Pearl briefly outlined the cultural and political situation unique to Nepal, commenting that the project was situated in a society where men are dominant, and relationships between government officials and community workers are often hierarchical. In particular, the forestry profession was predominately male oriented and consequently, the few women that did exist masked their femininity in an attempt to gain respect from their male peers. Aware of this cultural environment, the project overcame these barriers through the strong leadership displayed by two male project leaders from the Department of Forestry in Nepal, and the Food and Agricultural Organization. Following the appointment of three women who made up the Gender Team, the women began to recruit Gender Promoters (GP) from the local rural communities. These GP were encouraged to bring awareness of the

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needs of local women to their local communities especially the men. Commenting on the lessons learned, Ms. Pearl noted that many GP faced ignorance and initial resistance from the Department of Forestry in Nepal and other government workers such as forest guards. She expressed that following training and newly developed leadership qualities, and combined with the perseverance and professionalism exhibited by the GP, they were able to gain respect from the local men. Summing up the success of the project, Ms. Pearl noted that a change in attitude was witnessed by the District Forest Officers of the Department of Forestry in Nepal.

In concluding her presentation, Ms. Pearl offered a number of lessons learned from the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project, which is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Lessons learned from the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project*

- Conceptual leadership and support of Project co-managers and senior officials to the Gender Team;
- Synergies amongst four collaborating agencies;
- A dedicated Gender Fund;
- Qualities of the team of Gender Advisors - spirit, experience and commitment;
- Autonomy of the Gender Team;
- High quality, simple and relevant training curricula;
- Support and follow-up activities for GPs based on a relationship of trust with the team of Gender Advisors;
- Development of Gender Focal Persons who perceived positive gains from their participation;
- Interdependent nature of the work of the line agency staff and the GPs;
- Consistent good performance by the GPs;
- The perception that women are key to the project's success and not just an add-on.

*Taken from the **Empowered Women and the Men behind Them: A Study of Change within the Forestry Department of Nepal (WOCAN)**

Participation up-date:

49 participants attended today's thematic discussion.

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Key points highlighted during the session

- ◆ Partnerships should strive to ensure that all partners contribute equally;
- ◆ Partnerships based on rural development should tap into indigenous knowledge;
- ◆ Small-scale farmers should be given incentives to enhance their transition to ecologically sustainable practices;
- ◆ Greater efforts should be made towards achieving women empowerment, and involving women in decision/ policy-making positions;
- ◆ Clear leadership is required in order to change attitudes and behaviours towards women's involvement in policy areas.