Gender perspectives in case studies across continents

Editors: Gloria Bonder & Brenda Gael McSweeney

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Foreword

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UNESCO's mandate is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. As a global priority of the Organization since January 2008, Gender Equality has a special place in UNESCO's efforts to contribute to these objectives and provides a specific focus for UNESCO's work in all its domains.

Several studies have shown that promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in sociocultural, economic and political processes can help address the root causes of poverty, violence and insecurity and consequently provide invaluable contributions to the reflections on and actions in support of sustainable development and peace at the national, regional and global levels.

The present E-book, the precious result of collaboration among UNESCO Chairs and Networks on gender equality, gives us hope for faster-paced progress in the coming years and decades by providing several case studies in different parts of the world which demonstrate real achievements and challenges at the grassroots levels.

The case study in Liberia describes the achievements and challenges of the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund in addressing market women's needs - from improved working conditions and human capital development to social services - despite the poor working conditions these women face because of the 14-year civil war. This theme of progress and achievement is echoed in the Burkina Faso photo essay, which challenges an often bleak view of West Africa in order to bring us images of optimism and positive change for the lives of women and girls in the region, especially through education and technology.

The case study from India describes an initiative of grassroots development in West Bengal and seeks to show how women and girls build up their self-confidence and collective voice and how they demonstrate these changes through their willingness to question their status within the family, community and larger society.

The study on the institution of marriage in Morocco aims at analyzing the ways in which Moroccan women writers try to reappraise traditional spaces and boundaries by raising their voices and pleading their own cases, while examining the breaking of the taboos by women writers and the uses they have made of the freedom to explore some areas of women's experiences.

In a case study from Cyprus, interviews with mothers who have experienced domestic violence demonstrate how these women's identities are affected by the conventional frames that simultaneously celebrate women who have escaped their abuse and stigmatize those who tolerate it.

Four national research projects on the impact of decentralization processes on women's rights were implemented in Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador/Honduras and Paraguay with specific focus areas in each case. These studies show that in most cases, decentralization of public policies did not have a real impact on the living conditions and positions of women and girls. However, in few cases, women were active participants in the creation of policies.

The case study from Spain, based upon fieldwork observations and interviews, explores the evolution of women's groups in Madrid from the 1980s associations of working class homemakers without a feminist focus, to vehicles of political and legislative change for Spanish women's rights.

Meanwhile, the case study from the United States serves as a reminder that struggles for gender equality persist worldwide, demonstrating how Boston University implemented an initiative to address the professional gender disparities faced by women working in the male-dominated fields of science and engineering.

I welcome this collection of case studies from the UNESCO Chairs. The collection provides an invaluable source to enrich our collective knowledge. It demonstrates once again that while there has been significant progress in addressing gender inequalities in certain areas, the fact remains that even in the 21st century and in all corners of the world, women and girls continue to experience systematic violations of their human rights and they are, by and large, excluded from critical policy and decision-making processes in every sphere.

UNESCO will continue to work on promoting women's rights, empowerment and gender equality with all its partners, and especially with its network of UNESCO Chairs, in the coming years. Gender Equality remains a global priority of the Organization for the next Medium-Term Strategy for 2014-2021 and UNESCO is committed more than ever to do its share in order to fulfill the promise made to women and girls in 1995 in Beijing and reiterated by the international community on several occasions since then. I am convinced that the case studies included in this E-Book will help us understand different realities and challenges better and provide us with the possibility to formulate reality based policies and initiatives.

Introduction

by Gloria Bonder and Brenda Gael McSweeney

The main aim of this ebook is putting into practice, in the field of gender research, the overall vision and purposes established by UNESCO in 1992 when it created the University Twinning and Networking Programme (UNITWIN): *"Advance research, training and programme development… by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through the transfer of knowledge across borders".* Since its foundation, UNESCO has made clear the dual function of the Chairs and UNITWIN Networks: to act as "**think tanks" and "bridge builders" between the academic world, civil society, local communities, research and policy-making. [1]**

Inspired by its innovative vision and purposes, a Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender was created in 2010 as an initiative of the [UNESCO Regional Chair Women, Science and Technology in Latin America](#) and coordinated by Gloria Bonder.

Fourteen Chairs participate actively in this Network, mobilized by their wish of fulfilling a longstanding desire: exchanging information with their peers on each others numerous respective projects, promoting enriching debates on topics of common interest, disseminating their productions to a wider audience as a way to enrich the results of research on gender issues, and to motivate other academic centers and social organizations to establish a collective dialogue, generating a spiral of action-oriented knowledge. Our first achievement was the production of two editions of a newsletter: the first one in December 2011 and the second one in November 2012.

With this publication we are moving forward with a more ambitious project: the production of this e-book, which compiles articles building on action based research projects from five Chairs and their collaborators on different topics related to our work.

This volume, co-edited by Gloria Bonder, coordinator of the Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender and Chairholder of the UNESCO Regional Chair Women, Science and Technology in Latin America, and Brenda Gael McSweeney, Initiator of the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network[2] on Gender,

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[1] http://www.unesco.org/en/university-twinning-and-networking/university-twinning-and-networking/

[2] The origins of the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network on Gender, Culture, & People-Centered Development, a Founding Member of the Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender, date back to 2004. UNESCO-Paris colleagues were enthusiastic about the work of a group of social activists across India, who were preparing gender case studies based on realities in rural areas. These were to be used to inform debates in university classes. The students' and faculty ideas were then in turn shared with the grassroots teams and villagers. This UNESCO interest led in 2007 to the initiation of a gender Network under the auspices of its University Twinning and Networking (UNITWIN) Programme, anchored at the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University. The idea also caught on with gender specialists in West Africa, who were thrilled that UNESCO wished to boost university links with practical development work. In 2011, this UNESCO/UNITWIN Network on Gender, Culture, & Development was invited to join the new Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender. The UNESCO/UNITWIN Network has prepared four of the case studies in this e-book on moving from action to research, and from the grassroots into universities – also aligned with UNESCO's objective to bolster

Culture, and People-Centered Development reflects the commitment of this Network to understanding and contributing to overcome obstacles that prevent the achievement of women's well being, their active participation in the development of their communities and their struggles for greater equality, empowerment, citizenship and gender justice.

The eight essays in this volume capture that spirit.[3]

The four case studies conducted in Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador/Honduras and Paraguay are part of a regional Research Project called "Decentralization and Women's Rights in Latin America", supported by IDRC (International Development Research Centre – Canada) and coordinated by Gloria Bonder. Its general aim was to analyze the impact on women's lives and exercise of their rights of the processes of decentralization of public policies that took place in Latin America during the 90s, within the framework of neoliberal policies, which sought to enhance the efficiency and transparency of public policies at a local level, as a means to improve citizen well-being and participation in governance.

In Bolivia, decentralization in policies related to access to water and irrigation systems were analyzed in eight municipalities. The results showed that the lack of coherent national policies and the intervention of multilateral credit agencies caused tensions between cultural patterns of community use and distribution of water, and the proprietary rights that were imposed. In regard to women, these reforms did not particularly favor their status and decision making power within the community. Ecuador's study analyzed four *alternative* or "*de facto"* municipalities that carried out a participatory strategy for planning and implementing local policies, sustained and supported by indigenous people, women and environmentalists. These strategies did in fact integrate a struggle against racism and discrimination, which made room for women´s active participation. The project in El Salvador and Honduras carried out a comparative analysis of processes that led to the creation of local governmental machineries that promote women´s rights and gender equality in six municipalities in both countries. It looks into political, institutional and cultural factors that favored a greater participation of women in and through those organizations. Paraguay analyzed in ten municipalities the dynamics of decentralization processes in the health care system between 1996 and 2008, its different facets and manifestations, and its implications in women's well-being, concluding that, in general, it did not show positive changes in terms of offering better health services to women. Women's needs and demands were not properly attended to in the design of policies or the provision of health services that ultimately focused on mother-child health. The methodologies used varied in all cases, but all of them state the importance of gathering women's testimonies and analyzing their experiences in their own voices and perspectives.

The following article, *Discourses emerging from the experiences of the women-mothers victims of violence,* is part of the VICTIMS project (2009-2011), conducted from 2009 to 2011 in four countries

[3] For two of them we have included the English and Spanish versions, while another is in English and French.

(Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Slovakia) co-funded by the European Commission - DAPHNE III programme (action grants 2007-2013), and coordinated by Mary Koutselini, from the University of Cyprus - UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Through seventeen in-depth interviews, the study analyzes the discourses of women who were or had been victims of violence and the influence of these narratives in their lives, attitudes and experiences, and their role as mothers. The results evidenced that the prevailing discourses were those of denial, self-blame, powerlessness, tolerance, compassion and dependency, many times coexisting or being interrelated.

The study *Women's organizations in Madrid: Socialization for empowerment in the Spanish democratic post-transition* was carried out by Virginia Maquieira, from the UNESCO Chair in "Policies on Gender and Equal rights between women and men", based in the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. It is the result of fieldwork research developed during 1993 and 1994, based on quantitative and qualitative data. It analyzes women workers and housewives' organizations that arose in Madrid in the 1980s, after the end of Franco's dictatorship. The study states that although these organizations did not have specific feminist purposes, they became aware of gender oppression, thus giving rise to personal, collective and far-reaching changes in the democratization of the Spanish society and the advancement of women, thanks to their associative actions. In this regard, these associations are considered new socialization grounds where women were able to empower themselves and move into other fields of political and social influence. The different sections of the article look into the context of these organizations, the meanings assigned to them by their participants, the obstacles they faced and the changes they went through, which allowed them to provide means for the empowerment of women and create a larger women's movement in Spain.

In *The violation of family spaces in some Moroccan women writers' fiction,* Fouzia Rhissassi, from the UNESCO Chair on Women's Rights, Ibn Tofail University, used Moroccan women's literature to analyze the way in which they perceive their own lives and the use their own voices as a means to reappraise traditional spaces and boundaries. Silenced for centuries, Moroccan women broke into a male dominated arena, slowly making their way and giving visibility to their experiences through artistic forms. The article states that Moroccan women did not suffer physical harm, but did experience verbal harassment. In their rejection of silence and exclusion, and their struggle for autonomy and authorship, they have managed to break taboos by making use of their freedom to explore women's experiences. Though their writing, they are now able to name the oppression they have suffered and place the blame in traditionally minded men. This essay is utilized in Gender and International Development seminars at the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University. Such analyses of women writers' fiction and short stories are studied to illuminate the themes of tackling persistent gender inequalities worldwide in education, livelihoods, and political voice, plus gender-based violence, which also figure in this volume.

Both of the following essays reflect the two global priorities of UNESCO: promoting gender equality, and Africa. The first is "Another View of Africa: A Photo Essay on Female Education and Empowerment in Burkina Faso" (also available in French: "*Un autre regard sur l'Afrique: Un essai photo sur l'éducation et l'autonomisation des femmes au Burkina Faso"*). This essay by former National Project Coordinator Scholastique Kompaoré and Brenda Gael McSweeney, then at UNDP-

Ouagadougou, with Cassandra Fox of Physicians for Haiti, captures the essence of Burkina Faso's Project for Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education, plus a successor Multi-Functional Platform initiative. The Burkina story is one of using technology to lighten mammoth female workloads, thus freeing up time and energy – and the desire – of women and girls to pursue educational and lucrative activities. The picture that emerges is a positive and hopeful contrast to the typical global media depiction of life on the African continent. As with the chapter from Spain, the theme of women's lack of access to the important resource of time plays a significant role here.

The second essay, "God First, Second the Market" – words of a Liberian marketer – presents a case study of the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (SMWF) of Liberia. The story depicts the courageous struggle of Liberia's market women, supported by the SMWF, to overcome adversity. This case study highlights candid profiles of several market women and explains their ongoing challenges, in addition to sharing SMWF's comprehensive approach to their achievements through revitalizing markets, and boosting literacy and credit. The Sirleaf Market Women's Fund, a Non-Governmental Organization, contributed this collectively authored chapter on its work addressing crucial needs of Liberian market women. Like the Burkina photo essay, the chapter on Spanish women's associations, and the West Bengal gender case study, the work of the SMWF emphasizes the importance of facilitating secure livelihoods for the communities. Video features on Liberia's market women have been launched by SMWF, portraying these remarkable women as they help reconstruct Liberia, its communities, and its economy. The Sirleaf Market Women's Fund is named for Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and the first woman elected Head of an African State.

The case study on *Srihaswani* or Creative Manual Skills for Self-Reliant Development goes to the heart of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme, bringing wisdom from the village into classroom discussions. This unique initiative – which invested exceptional time into dialogue between the villagers involved and the Project team, did not begin with a sole focus on women's participation. Village women came forward to take the lead in different initiatives and created a space for themselves in community leadership and development. The essay portrays a first-hand glimpse spanning fifteen years of the economic, societal, and individual benefits of local female leadership in bolstering the subsistence economy and solidarity in villages near Shantiniketan, West Bengal, India. The authors, who were themselves engaged in supporting the project for many years, are Krishno Dey and Chandana Dey of the *Bhab* Initiative in Shantiniketan, and Brenda Gael McSweeney, formerly heading the United Nations in India, now at Boston University (BU). Their earlier case studies on gender aspects of self-reliant development are also hosted on the website of the Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender, and used in courses at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, and at BU.

Professor Deborah Belle, Director of the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University (WGS/BU), and her BU colleague Sheryl Grace, shared findings on the impact of receiving a National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE programme grant, for which Professor Belle was Principal Investigator. The grant helped to develop systematic approaches to increasing

representation and advancement of women faculty in science and engineering careers at Boston University in Massachusetts, USA. An important goal of the NSF grant was to strengthen women's professional networks in science and engineering. This essay depicts practical realities at the university level, and the research led to discoveries relevant for other countries as well. Among the conclusions: "For participants in the BU Women in Networks program, the jump to a promising new research venture was facilitated … The awards helped women build key networks, removed research barriers and ultimately promoted a diverse science and engineering faculty at BU" (BU Women in Networks Report). This brings to mind Sylvia Walby's paper, "Is the Knowledge Society Gendered?": she approaches similar issues from a theoretical perspective (available on the website of the Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender). Boston University's Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program anchors the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network on Gender, Culture, and People-Centered Development, from which the Burkina, India, Liberia, and Women in Science and Engineering case studies were submitted.

Acknowledgements

Contributors

Deborah Belle is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University. She is a former Chair of the Women in Science and Engineering Committee (WISE) at Boston University and was Principal Investigator on the National Science Foundation (NSF) grant discussed in this volume. Her research interests include poverty and economic inequality, social networks, and the experiences of employed parents and their children. Her books include: *Lives in stress: Women and depression, Children's social networks and social supports*, and *The after-school lives of children: Alone and with others while parents work*. She has been William T. Grant Foundation Faculty Scholar in the Mental Health of Children, Evelyn Green Davis Fellow in Psychology at the Bunting Institute, and Fellow at the Radcliffe Public Policy Center; and is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. In addition to the NSF grant discussed in the chapter on women in science and engineering, she has received research funding from the National Institute of Mental Health and from private foundations.

Gloria Bonder is Director of the Gender, Society and Policies Area of FLACSO Argentina (Latin American School of Social Sciences). Coordinator of the UNESCO Regional Chair Women, Science and Technology in Latin America, the Master's Degree in Gender, Society and Policies, and the Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender. Consultant on Women, Science and Technology for several national, regional and international organizations such as: Ministry of Science and Technology in Argentina, DAW, United Nations, Women and Development Unit, ECLAC and the Office of Science and Technology, OAS, IDRC/CRDI, UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNDP and UNESCO. She has developed several research projects on gender issues and/in technology and science, education, communication, health and youth, and published books and articles both national and internationally. She has been distinguished by UNESCO as one of the 60 women worldwide who has helped accomplish the organization's goals throughout the 60 years of its existence, and is member of the regional advisory board of UN Women.

Chandana Dey studied History and International Relations in India and the United States. She has worked as Project Coordinator in West Bengal, India of the Ahimsa Trust since 2000, and earlier for the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Geneva, Switzerland. Committed to facilitating grassroots development change, she is co-founder of The *Bhab* Initiative. Her work covers almost all aspects of development in a number of villages in West Bengal; a particular focus in the past decade has been to raise nutrition levels among poor families through increasing multiple crop production on small farms and homesteads. She is keenly aware of the importance of women's contributions to development processes through her work on gender and self-reliance. She has a long-standing interest in education for underprivileged children, and is keen to facilitate their potential in creative ways. Presently, she also lives in Delhi and is searching for ways to make a difference for the poor and marginalized in cities.

Krishno Dey spent his early childhood in Kolkata, India. He developed his first interest in rural development traveling around villages with his father, then West Bengal's first Development

Commissioner. After studying economics in the United Kingdom at Oxford and Manchester Universities, he worked with a variety of different United Nations organizations (under Salvador Allende) with the UN Development Programme, and ending with the United Nations Volunteers in Geneva. His work has been concerned mostly with formulating and managing new programmes at the country level, and with evaluations and policy analysis at a global level, always with a focus on low-income households. He returned to India in 1995 to pursue his interest in development in a voluntary capacity, all the while being tapped to undertake assignments for a range of international organizations. He co-founded 'The *Bhab* Initiative' in Shantiniketan, West Bengal, and now also manages "*Mitali* Homestays" in Shantiniketan, which also hosts DesignAsia, thus promoting the livelihoods of local handloom artisans.

Cassandra Fox is a recent graduate of the International Relations program at Boston University, where she worked as a Teaching Assistant for Dr. McSweeney. She has spent time studying and working in Niger and France, focusing on international development and women's rights with *ONG Le Pélican* (a school for disabled children) in Niamey, and *Ni Putes Ni Soumises* (an organization focused on women's rights and ending domestic violence) in Paris. She has also worked in low-income neighborhoods in Boston with Health Leads, a program connecting low-income patients at hospitals and clinics with resources such as subsidized housing, food stamps, and daycare. She is currently the Executive Officer at Physicians for Haiti

Sheryl Grace is Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Boston University. She was instrumental in founding the Women in Science and Engineering Committee (WISE) at Boston University and was Co-Principal Investigator on the NSF grant discussed in this ebook. Her research interests lie in the fields of unsteady aerodynamics and aeroacoustics. She was invited twice to lecture at the von Karman Institute for Fluid Dynamics as part of the Aeroacoustics series. She made contributions to her field through work on inverse methods for source/disturbance identification and investigations of aperture and cavity flows. She received funding from both General Electric Aircraft Engines (GEAE) and Boeing for work related to aircraft and engine noise. Currently, she is funded by the Aeroacoustics Research Consortium to benchmark existing, and develop alternative, methods for utilizing Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) in the prediction of fan noise. Professor Grace was a faculty advisor for the student chapter of the American Institute of Astronautics and Aeronautics at BU, for which she won the National Faculty Advisor Award. She worked on numerous outreach activities for K-12 students. She earned her PhD in aerospace engineering at The University of Notre Dame, an MS in Applied Mathematics at Oklahoma State University, and a BS in mathematics at the University of Akron.

Lucia Hsiao is slated to receive her B.A. in 2013 at Brandeis University where she studies Sociology and Anthropology with a focus on gender. She has also attended City University, London, where she studied the social legacy of the London 2012 Olympics. Her primary interests are issues of work-family balance, gendered division of labor, and reproductive rights. She has worked in grassroots advocacy and as a research assistant and teaching assistant for the Department of Sociology at Brandeis, and is currently engaged in a Student-Scholar Partnership at the Women's Studies Research Center.

Scholastique Kompaoré was National Coordinator of the Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) pilot Project for Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education, and a pioneer of advocacy and action for female education and advancement. Mrs. Kompaoré directed the United Nations Development Programme's initiative, "Strengthening Civil Society Capacities to Combat Poverty" in Central Africa. She was also the Harare-based Coordinator of the UN Volunteers' Domestic Development Service, an exchange of community development workers in Africa south of the Sahara. She then served as the Ouagadougou-based President of the Burkina arm of the World March of Women. More information at: equalityburkina.blogspot.com

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Brenda Gael McSweeney is Visiting Faculty at Boston University's Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program where she teaches Gender & International Development, and is Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center (WSRC) at Brandeis University, both in Massachusetts, USA. She served with the United Nations for 30 years in executive positions including in West Africa and the Caribbean; in Europe heading the UN Volunteers programme; then in India as the United Nations Resident Coordinator and UN Development Programme Resident Representative. The Government of India with the UN System designated gender equality as the UN area focus. Brenda holds her Ph.D. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. She was the recipient of a Fulbright and awards from the Governments of Germany, Jamaica and Burkina Faso, as well as two honorary doctorates. Her research focuses on female education and empowerment in Burkina Faso, and a gender perspective on livelihoods in West Bengal, India (see related papers at The Global Network of UNESCO Chairs on Gender and at brendamcsweeney.com). She initiated the UNESCO/UNITWIN Network on Gender, Culture & Development.

The **Sirleaf Market Women's Fund** contributes a collectively authored chapter on its work addressing needs of Liberian market women. This case study was composed through the combined efforts and leadership of SMWF/US Co-President Thelma Awori, then Co-President Mina Mauerstein-Bail, and Vice President Margaret (Peg) Snyder. Mary Lynn Hanley (formerly of UNDP) was the editor, and developed this chapter from a recent comprehensive study. Both documents were designed by SMWF Board Member Libby Bassett. Pia Brown (then-SMWF Executive Director) coordinated the field work for the original study in Liberia. Additional review and preparation were contributed by Almaz Gebru (United Nations Development Programme), Marnia Lazreg (SMWF Board Member), and Saul Helfenbein (SMWF-Liberia).

Virginia Maquieira D´Angelo is Professor of Social Anthropology at University Autónoma of Madrid (UAM). She was Director of the Institute of Women´s Studies (UAM/2002-2006). She has served as vice- President of International University Menéndez Pelayo (UIMP- 2007-2011). Actually is Director of UNESCO Chair/ Unitwin Network in Gender Policies and Equal Rights between women and men. She has published on feminism and socio-anthropological theory; gender, culture and multiculturalism; local/global women´s organizations; globalization and Human Rights. Her major publications include *Feminist critiques on Social Anthropology* (1997); *Gender, Anthropology and Human Rights* (1999); *Feminisms, contemporary debates (*2001), *Women, Globalization and Human Rights* (2006/2010); *Women´s movements in a global world* (2007); *Gender systems: knowledge innovation for equality* (2010), She is member of the editorial board of *Gender & Society*. Currently is researching on elder women, human rights and risk society.

Floria Valanidou. Undergraduate studies (B.A. in Primary Education) and postgraduate studies (M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction) at the University of Cyprus. She is a PhD candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at the department of Education of the University of Cyprus. She has worked as a teacher both in the private and public sector and as a research assistant and a graduate assistant at the department of Education of the University of Cyprus for the last six years. Currently she is working as a Special Teaching Staff in the same department. Her research interests concern issues of learning and teaching, such as the design of learning environments aiming at the development of critical thinking, argumentation and visual literacy, as well as issues of gender and education, such as the effects of children's exposure to violence against mothers.   (valanidou.floria@ucy.ac.cy)

Decentralization and Women's Rights in Latin America

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Abstract

From 2006 to 2008 the Gender, Society and Policies Area of FLACSO Argentina acted as the focal point for Latin America in the project "Decentralization and Women's Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean" (January 2006 – December 2008), a global initiative led by IDRC. Within this framework, four national research projects were implemented in Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador/Honduras, and Paraguay.

The impact of decentralization of the National State and public services in women's rights was analyzed in each country with focus in specific topics. The research team in Bolivia studied how decentralization policies of accessing water and irrigating policies affected gender equality in rural areas and water security for indigenous people and vulnerable sectors; Ecuador's team examined women's participation in local governance in selected municipalities, and the exercise of their rights; in El Salvador and Honduras the research team investigated the process that led to the creation of local institutions for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in local communities, the role played by women's movements and their incidence in local policies. Finally, the research project in Paraguay analyzed how the process of decentralization of the health system affected women's wellbeing and gender equality.

The research project showed the dynamic rhythm and different processes and results of decentralization in Public Administration. In few cases, women were active participants in the institutional changes and creation of policies and participative governments; in most cases, they were merely the object of policies with almost no real impacts in their living conditions and in their position in the communities.

The studies described the conditions and actions that favor women's rights, and the necessary articulations that allow their emergence as actors in the public sphere and local politics, acknowledging and highlighting the importance of an interaction between the State and the civil society, forged in their common claim for autonomy and local identity, and the political commitment of male and female mayors in different municipalities.

Introduction

Has decentralization of State public policy contributed to promoting more participative, efficient and transparent local governments? Are local spheres more favorable to the recognition and exercise of women's rights? Do they favor women's participation in the social and political fields?
These are the main questions that motivated the development of the multi-focal regional project "Decentralization and Women's Human Rights", which was implemented in Africa, Asia and Latin America by the IDRC, Canada (International Development Research Center).

For Latin America, the coordination of this project was conducted by Gloria Bonder, Coordinator of the UNESCO Regional Chair Women, Science and Technology in Latin America, based at the Gender,

Society and Policies Area of the Latin American School of Social Science-Argentina (FLACSO by its acronym in Spanish).

Its main objective was to produce knowledge on the impact of the processes of decentralization of State public policy that prevailed in the 1980s and got intensified in the 1990s towards the expansion of women's rights and the active exercise of their civic role in local spheres.

Within this framework, four case studies were conducted: "Tension between collective and individual rights and gender relations in a context of cultural diversity: Effects of the decentralization process" in Bolivia[4]; "Women as social and political subjects in projects of local governance and decentralization in Ecuador"[5]; "Contributions to decentralization and democratic governance: municipal women-actors and local and national mechanisms for gender equity in El Salvador and Honduras"[6]; and "Decentralization of health care in Paraguay: A contribution to gender equality?"[7] [8]

Regional context

In the mid-1980s, after the crisis of the Welfare State, most Latin American countries began to put in place various forms of political-administrative and/or sectorial decentralization from central Governments towards sub-national territories (provinces, municipalities, departments, etc.). In general, these processes were defined and executed with a "top to bottom" logic by the central Government, many times allied or conditioned by multilateral credit agencies that employed different arguments for society's acceptance.[9]

Initially, decentralization policies took a strong privatization turn in the provision of basic services. This caused conflicts in some countries and places with indigenous and peasant communities whose access to such services were threatened; women explicitly voiced their precautions in that sense.

Indeed, despite the existence of different definitions and characterizations, in most cases decentralization was associated with the neoliberal model that prevailed in the 90's, one of whose basic features was the privatization of public services: "*when the drive for decentralization is efficiency rather than equity, gender interests are less likely to be taken into account*" (Cos-Montiel, 2006).

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[1] Institution Agricultural promoters - PROAGRO

[2] Institution Institute for Ecuadorian Studies (IEE by its acronym in Spanish)

[3] Institution National Foundation for Development (FUNDE by its acronym in Spanish)

[4] Institution Documentation and Studies Center (CDE by its acronym in Spanish)

[5] The "*Decentralization and Women's Rights in Latin America*" book, which compiles the final reports of the four studies carried out within the framework of this research, is in press.

[6] An example of this can be found in the World Bank report (1997), which stated that, in some cases, decentralization was a condition for granting loans for development.

Beall (2006) goes deeper into this aspect and argues, aligned with Cos-Montiel, that the close association between decentralization and neoliberal policies, particularly in terms of cost-sharing, weakened women's position and even ignored their interests. [10]

As the 1990s progressed, the discourse promoting decentralization moved towards the defense of institutions and governance at a local level: "The emphasis moved from an obsession with 'rolling back the state' to one concerned with 'bringing the state back in' but under a central condition, that of decentralization." (Beall, 2006).[11]

After 20 years - during which national (centralist) Governments, multi and bilateral cooperation agencies and other actors have been promoting, conditioning and implementing measures of political-administrative decentralization towards sub-national instances - this process is still discontinuous and incomplete (Cos-Montiel, 2006).

Most Governments in the region, anchored for centuries in a 'state-centered' logic, have acted erratically in the implementation and execution of decentralization policies. However, some of the experiences analyzed in the above-mentioned research projects show that -much before and simultaneously to these processes implemented 'top to bottom'- autonomous local governments emerged (Arocena, 2003) along with social (indigenous, local, women's) movements that demanded the recognition of their identity and greater participation in government decisions.

This drove to the emergence of new organizations created with a 'bottom to top' logic, such as assemblies, neighbor forums and basic units, participatory planning experiences and changes in the engineering of some local States.

The above shows that both forms of decentralization (as a prescription "from the top" and/ or as a demand "from the bottom") are the endpoints of an arc of varied and rich combinations, actors and socio-political initiatives. Shown below are the studies conducted in Latin America and their main results.

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[7] This argument was promoted by the World Bank and, to a greater or lesser extent, endorsed by United Nations agencies and national Governments.

[8] In its World Development Report (1997), the World Bank admitted that in the previous stage there was "an excessive withdrawal of the State" and that, to some extent, Governments should "get re-territorialized" at the local level so that local governments gain greater efficiency and effectiveness, promoting a better quality democracy, based on social participation, transparency and accountability.

Bolivia: "Tension between collective and individual rights and gender relations in a context of cultural diversity: Effects of the decentralization process"

Objective

To research (i) how the policies of decentralization and intervention in irrigation affected equity and security in access to water and (ii) the differential meaning and strategies of access to water for men and women in diverse socio-economic, cultural and agro-ecological contexts in the country.

Methodology

The project included eight case studies located in different agro-ecological and cultural areas, taking into account the relation with the market, the presence of indigenous populations and the different water systems and forms of management.

It combined the application of qualitative and quantitative methods. The first allowed exploring and interpreting the cultural perceptions regarding water, the conceptions and exercise of the rights to water access and its uses, and the changes as a result of the intervention process. The second was applied to conduct an opinion poll and fundamentally collate data corresponding to the main thematic axes of the research: decentralization, popular participation, gender and right to water.

Results

During the period of time covered by the research, Bolivia went through its re-foundation as a Plurinational State, based on the premise of "vivir bien" ("living well") that promotes a harmonious relationship with nature and the recognition and respect for diversity and interculturality. With this reform, the State took on the challenge of deepening the decentralization and reterritorialization processes, expanding the indigenous peoples' administrative divisions and regional autonomies. It led to a very complex map of power relations in the territories and competences (described below) meant to be transferred from central to regional and local levels.

In Bolivia - as in other Andean countries - water management for community, family and personal life has historically been in hands of peasant and indigenous organizations and based on 'custom and practice´. The relation with water and nature is part of their different worldviews that give it both a 'sacred' character and value as a community resource. Research shows, among other results, the absence of decentralized State policies regarding irrigation (service, regulation and clear competences). It also shows that the interventions of international organizations and development cooperation agencies, with their own agendas and technical perceptions, have had a strong impact

on irrigation systems management and on the beneficiary communities' weave of cooperation and solidarity. In many cases, these interventions even prevailed over local State policy decisions, and yet they do not seem to have improved women's position in their communities.

It was proven that -regardless of the predominant worldview- the planning, construction and organization of the systems management were discussed and arranged between international funding agencies and the men of the beneficiary communities. **Women were scarcely called** to participate, losing the opportunity to integrate their voices, rationalities, and interests into the organization. In spite of it, and even though there has not been **a power democratization process**, there has been a slow feminization of the organizations in charge of the systems management and maintenance. *"...they come out of obligation, because if no one represents their farms, they risk losing their irrigation turn. They speak little..." (Vice-President of the Aguayrenda irrigation system).*

The context of the eight case studies showed internal and international migratory flows of young men and women and that the eight irrigation systems are related to the rural and urban (local and regional) markets through the supply and demand of goods and labor. This leads to mutual influences with other towns and urban centers, producing economic and cultural hybridization. Traditional forms of social and community organization for irrigation management have been transformed due to these factors, as well as to the modernization of the State and the adoption of new technologies that facilitate conditions of access to, and distribution of water for irrigation and household use. All this has had an impact on the division of labor according to gender and other socio-cultural aspects that do not always affect women's positions in their community in a positive way.

In that sense, women's roles and conditions in irrigation management and rights to water proved to be very different. This relates to the different conceptions or worldviews in force, which covers an arc that goes from the notion of "natural and collective right" to "hydraulic ownership rights" (whose correlation is the assessment of individual rights and, in general terms, the individuation of social subjects). In systems in which "natural law" prevails, there are more supportive and inclusive behaviors, for example in poor families, especially the ones with female leadership.[12]

However, it became clear that this situation of greater inclusion and equality does not extend to the bundle of rights that should be enjoyed by the women of these communities, which many times are neither recognized nor respected.

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[9] A fact of great interest is that the Equal Opportunity Plan (PIO by its acronym in Spanish) recognizes women's rights to land ownership and access to water for domestic use, curiously ignoring their right to irrigation water. It thus confirms gender stereotypes, locating men in the productive sphere and women in the one of domestic and reproductive tasks.

Women as social and political subjects in local governance and decentralization projects in Ecuador

Objective

To strengthen, through new conceptual resources, women's local actorship and the exercise of their rights, and to contribute to the elaboration of projects for territorial governance with and for gender equity.

Methodology

The research focused on four *alternative* municipalities: Cotacachi, Nabón, Cayambé and Esmeralds.

Questionnaires were developed and applied to local female leaders, as well as a survey of local governmental and non-governmental actors and activists, to identify their assessment of the local governments' capacities to improve women's life conditions. Workshops and focus groups with women from various sectors (indigenous and young people, for example), interviews and participant observation activities were carried out.

An analytical guide was developed and applied to collect secondary data on cases with human development indicators and a gender approach.

Results

With the decentralization model that began in the 1990s, new discourses and protests emerged, claiming "local" identity and the recognition of male and female subjects, whereas national political institutions started suffering a "crisis of representation". This process expressed the capacity of grassroots organizations to transform the State.

Local alternative governments have been supported by grassroots social actors, particularly indigenous, environmental, women's and middle-class mestizo organizations. Their essential demands are rooted in matters of justice, equity, participation, democratization of decision making, nature care or protection, endogenous economic development, and, to a large extent, in fighting poverty, racism and the various forms of discrimination. These actors have found support in some international cooperation development agencies that allowed them to strengthen their levels of participation and autonomy. However, it is notable that it was male and female leaders of local movements who had the vision, the ideas and the political conviction.

These experiences contrast with the "official" decentralization, which took place after the serious crisis undergone by Ecuador in 1999. In the latter case the process was based on the increasing

transfer of social care responsibilities to municipalities, which assumed them by implementing social investment projects, under the coordination of the central State. Thus, the role assigned to the municipality was the one of executor of interventions – determined at a central level (favoring the execution of projects over public policy) (Torres, 2003).

Both models –*alternative* and *official decentralization*- support different standards and values on the reform of the State and on the characterization of the public sphere. They also take different approaches to women's social and political role, their citizenship, the exercise of their rights and the integration of their demands and agendas into public policies. According to this study, the social current that led to the *alternative decentralization* integrates in its political proposal the fight against racism and discrimination -remnants of colonialism- raising a wider scope for democratic change, as well as a proposal of a "different" development for localities (Grove, 2009).

In regard to decentralization and gender equity

The keys to understanding the *alternative decentralizations* of the four cases analyzed lie in the forms of Government of an assembly kind, rooted in demands that emerged in "the local sphere" as neo-liberalism was progressing in Ecuador. At a very early stage, these participatory experiences incorporated in the scenario the presence and voices of the ones who had been historically excluded.

Civic participation spaces, generated by local governments and at the same time taken over by the citizenship, established the conditions for the emergence of new social actors in the public sphere, who, in at least three of the cases, have lasted in time.[13]

With varying intensity and methods, in the four cases these initiatives opened new paths for women in the public sphere.

Not only were these *alternative* Governments fair and restorative to poorer populations, but also efficient in management and effective in implementing policies co-elaborated with the population. At the same time, their mayors started gaining credibility and the population's trust, as well as national and international recognition, due to their good governance.

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[10] In **Esmeraldas,** for two years 22 successive assemblies were opened and brought the demands of the Afro people to the core of the debates and to policy decision-making. In **Nabón**, popular assemblies had been held once a year for 10 years, in order to respond to the interests of the communities. In **Cotacachi**, for 12 years, the cantonal Assembly, made up of representatives of social organizations of women, environmentalists, indigenous and Afro people, co-managed the participatory budget, which was distributed according to the needs and priorities surveyed in the communities. In both municipalities, the indigenous communities entered the decision-making sphere. On the other hand, in **Cayambé** the socialist Mayor's management also started with participatory forms. But shortly after, their political options and partnerships started sliding towards more conservative sectors.

In sum, the research shows that, among others, the conditions favoring women's greater participation and exercise of rights are:

- Local Governments willing to rethink the municipality's engineering to accommodate new forms of decision-making and the commitment to improve people's lives.
- The creation of new institutions -assemblies, basic units, local councils-, to co-manage policies and decisions.
- The presence and/or strengthening of social and women's organizations with their own agendas and a political conviction about the need to maintain a somewhat precarious balance – between the alliance with the local power and their own autonomy.

Contributions to decentralization and democratic governance: municipal actors and local and national mechanisms for gender equity and women's rights in El Salvador and Honduras

Objective

To examine the political, social and technical conditions that contributed to promoting processes of civic participation of women at the local level. To also look into their link with the national institutional mechanisms responsible for gender equity policies.

Methodology

A comparative analysis between 6 case studies (3 in El Salvador and 3 in Honduras) was conducted to examine, in both countries, the processes that led to the creation of local institutionalities dedicated to promoting women's rights and gender equity, the role played by women's movements and their organizations in the emergence and development of these processes and their influence on local policies.

The strategy deployed for the gathering of information combined sectorial meetings with female officials at the National Offices for Women, officials responsible for Women's Municipal Organizations (OMM by its acronym in Spanish), as well as with local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other Executive and legislative officials at the local level. A guide to institutional research on the OMMs was put into practice.

Results

El Salvador and Honduras are highly centralized States, with weak, recent democracies and many years of conservative governments. In both countries, and in most cases, it was national and local women's organizations who promoted institutional changes in municipal governments in favor of their rights. This was not so much due to the belief in "the local sphere" as the most suitable for asserting claims, but to a somewhat "obliged" choice based on the lack of spaces for real and effective dialog with the national Government, including the National Offices for Women, which are described as weak and very limited in resources.

In general, these gender actorships did not participate in the debates on the decentralization of the State and in the design of local policies, with the exception of the cases in which these changes were perceived as a threat to their rights: the possible privatization of public services.

One of the strategies deployed by the most excluded women in this scenario consisted of channeling their demands to the municipality, proposing to remove bureaucratic rules and procedures and to establish more fluid institutional mechanisms capable of acknowledging and responding to their demands and of allowing to move forward towards a democratic governance.

The creation of Women's Municipal Offices was made possible by the convergence of the following factors:

• some local authorities' conviction and will to give answers to women's demands;
• the Mayor's permeability when facing demands of local and/or national women's organizations;
• the intervention of national women's mechanisms that have chosen to decentralize their programs in their territories (such as the Women's Institute in Honduras or its counterpart in El Salvador). The support of international cooperation agencies was decisive. So was the interpellation and dialog capacity of women's actorship.

It is a well-known fact that the possibilities of construction and sustainability of a local gender equity policy depends, to a large extent, on an adequate budget for the agencies in charge. With some exceptions, this was not the case of the studied communities. This is not an exceptional phenomenon; it is observed in many other areas where tensions between party and electoral interests and between the distribution and audit of budgetary allocations prevail.

Another factor that limited the actions of gender institutions was the lack or weakness of local human resources trained to carry out these policies, and this is the case for most countries in the Region.

Decentralization of health care in Paraguay: A contribution to gender equality?

Objective

To understand the dynamics of the processes of decentralization of health services carried out between 1996 and 2008 and their impact on women's well-being and gender equity.

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used in 10 case studies, which were analyzed using the *Decision Space-Principal Agent* model proposed by Bossert (1998).

Results

In Paraguay, health care was one of the sectors that was most expanded towards local spaces. This was due to the increasing demands of a constantly growing population, but also to the interests of some local governments that took the decentralization of health services as an opportunity to deal with delayed and critical needs of their communities.

This process was anchored in the Local Health Councils (LHC), devices designed for public health management, with the participation of civil society. The LHC were empowered to promote inter-agency partnerships, manage resources and guide actions jointly with the authorities of health establishments and the municipality. Representatives of local institutions, indigenous and women's organizations were integrated in the process.

Participation in the LHC was implemented without further methodological guidelines or protocols to facilitate the inclusion of historically excluded sectors, such as women.

Considering that a great part of their members were women, it was assumed that this would be an opportunity to discuss their health related rights. This assumption was not observed in all cases and, oddly enough, in those cases in which there were initiatives proposed in this regard, it was not women who drove them - at least not deliberately.

The case studies showed that the decentralized system reported to the central level, with little margin for the LHC, local health staff and inhabitants to play a part in the local service supply. Any possible innovations that they could implement depended on the increase in their own resources, derived from charges to the community, which led to patients' greater out-of-pocket expenses, with the subsequent constraints to reversing the system's exclusion gaps.

In general, the applied decentralization model did not provide greater opportunities for women's needs and demands to be considered in the design and provision of services. In its evolution, it reinforced the critical shortage of health personnel, particularly in rural areas, compromising the quality of services and their problem-solving capacity.

In regards to the rules of access to human resources and the inclusion of the gender approach, the results were the following:

• Decentralized health facilities reproduced criteria laid down at the central level for the main programs, giving almost exclusive priority to maternal and child health care.
• Innovations were strongly conditioned by the collection methods applied by the decentralized entities. Apart from the ministerial policy specifications, this discouraged large women sectors' attendance at the services.
• Regarding rules of management and gender equality, it was observed that the LHC were an opportunity for the participation of local agents, but this did not include women to the same extent and therefore it was not reflected in an inclusion of their perspectives and demands.

In sum, although specific actions that were very important and valuable for the female population's health were undertaken -such as the elaboration of a Violence Victims Attention Protocol, awareness-raising and training activities in terms of women's rights and the opening of shelters for pregnant women-, these particular interventions have not been sufficient to deploy a comprehensive gender strategy in health care, nor an equitable allocation of resources.

At the end of this research, the national political scene had changed dramatically. The Government that started its term in 2008 implemented the "Life Quality and Health Equity" policy, which perceives health as a human right based on the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, equity and participation. The first measure taken was the gratuitousness of the service provision, removing the previously required tariffs. Women's human rights were included in the new regulations centered in the promotion of gender equality, acknowledging the existence of different needs of men and women.

Conclusions: Invisibility-visibility of gender inequality at the local level

There is very low recognition of gender inequalities at local levels, which contradicts the most optimistic discourses on decentralization, and their predictions of greater democratization, face-to-face relations, transparency and security -- a model which women, used to comfortably handling close (physical and symbolic) relationships, could supposedly take advantage of, to increase their chances to participate in the public sphere.
On the contrary, analysis shows that, in many cases, decentralization can reproduce situations of subordination (Cos-Montiel, 2006) and lead to the capture of local power by elites that do not recognize or commit to the progress towards gender equity (Beall, J. 2006, Kabeer, N. 2003, Massolo, A. 2005).

However, exceptions that should serve as inspiring experiences have also been found, such as in municipalities in which women have been assuming leading roles in the public space, demonstrating their strategic capacity to expand democracy and strengthen it. Of course these achievements are not a direct consequence of the decentralization processes; they respond to a series of political strategies and decisions that favored the conditions that made them possible.

The set of studies included in this publication shows that the experiences that most favored the exercise of civic rights and women's active participation were those that virtuously put together (i) a management open to listening to all voices and demands and in favor of citizens' empowerment (needs, ideas, proposals), (ii) the presence of social and women's organizations that are active and alert to opportunity conditions opened by local public policies, (iii) the existence and sustainability of participation spaces, with deliberate actions for women's equal integration, iv) the capacity and implementation of mechanisms that can ensure the civic participation in the accountability of local management.[14]

Achieving these conditions is a complex but not impossible goal. Heading towards it first requires a greater recognition of women's rights and their active participation in local governance, as well as of the manifest and latent obstacles that persist in each community beyond changes in policies and "politically correct" discourses on equity between men and women.

The successes and failures in the relationship between local policies, women's rights and their full participation described in this article provide clues to both identify new research topics in this field of study, and design policies and programs that, based on more solid information, may be projected towards medium and long term responses to the peculiar characteristics of each context.

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[11] According to Cos-Montiel, this transforms the representation of the inhabitants of a community, changing "assistance beneficiaries" into "rights owners and development directors".

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Discourses emerging from the experiences of the women-mothers victims of violence

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Abstract

The paper discusses the main discourses emerging from the experiences of women mothers who have suffered violence. It challenges the several conventional frames used to describe victims, such as the heroine model of a woman victim who has the courage to leave the abusive relationship and, conversely, the blameworthy model of a woman victim who, as research points out, prefers to remain in the marriage (or relationship) and tolerate violence. Findings concern the first phase results of the VICTIMS project (2009-2011), which was designed and conducted in four European countries with co-funding obtained by the DAPHNE III programme. The paper particularly discusses the findings that have emerged from a series of seventeen in-depth interviews that were conducted with mothers from Cyprus, who have been victims of violence. All these seventeen case studies are explanatory, since they aimed to explore causation in order to find major thematic elements and underlying discourses shaping the identities of the women victims. Data have been analyzed mainly qualitatively. Results indicate that the woman's attitude as a victim of violence is mainly determined by the discourses of powerlessness, tolerance, denial, blaming of self, compassion, and dependency.

Introduction

Three years ago, when we came up with the idea of the VICTIMS project on violence against women and its effects on children, and first started to think about it, it seemed to us logical enough to say that 'no tolerance' would be the only solution for women mothers who suffer violence. At that time though, we didn't realize as researchers that the attitude and the identity of a woman who suffers any form of violence is a more complex construct than it looks to be and can be determined by a lot of factors, specifically, personal, emotional, psychological or even societal factors.

Thus, adopting the view that making sense of domestic violence is different for victims and non victims (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007), that is, researchers, we aimed to examine the attitude of women who have suffered violence within the abusive relationship and how they respond to this violence in order to cope with the physical and psychological damage caused both to them and their children by being exposed. In this article, we argue that the prism of discourses surrounding the attitude of a woman suffering violence incorporates a range of approaches, all subject to each woman's experiences. Therefore, the study described in this article aims to develop a picture of the discourses that mainly shape the identity of a woman who suffers violence, and to uncover the woman's attitude as a victim in relation to her mothering role, through a series of seventeen in-depth interviews with mothers, victims of violence, from Cyprus.

Theoretical Background

There is a large body of research on how women mothers who are victims of violence behave, how they respond within the abusive relationship and what coping strategies they adopt in order to cope with the problem of violence. What is accepted as a fact is that women mothers who experience intimate partner violence in the family setting are under duress, either due to their circumstances, their relationships, or even their social and biological conditions (Greaves, Varcoe, Poole, Morrow,

Johnson, Pederson & Irwin, 2002). So, the different women's experiences with violence usually determine their attitude as victims and also their coping strategies. Accordingly, coping strategies and strengths may have a greater effect on women's emotional responses to violence (Parker & Lee, 2007).

Several studies have shown a number of coping and resistance strategies adopted by women, victims of violence (i.e., Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998). The most effective ones are the active, engaged, and behavioral coping strategies since, as Zakar, Zakria Zakar and Krämer (2012) have suggested, women who use them try to address the real causes of abusive relationship. Moreover, women victims of violence, who consciously and purposefully decide to react, can make active attempts to cope with their problematic situation (Campbell et al., 1998).

According to Buchbinder and Birnbaum (2010) there are two contradictory narratives for understanding women who suffer violence: a) the narrative of victimhood, and b) the narrative of survivorship. Both of these narratives explain abused women's reality. Still, violence against women mostly results in the adoption of a survivor behaviour focused only on ensuring survival (Baker & Jaffe, 2007). This behavioural characteristic greatly determines the woman's tolerant attitude as a victim of violence, which, as Berns (2004) maintains, is learned within a given cultural and social context. That is the reason why many women in abusive relationships may come to evince a learned behaviour of helplessness towards violence, thus actually reflecting the traditional views on abuse against women (Alexander, Moore, & Alexander III, 1991) with which they were raised. Therefore, it looks like these women mostly use emotion-focused strategies, that are usually considered to be ineffective, since it seems that by doing so women deny the problem, or avoid the stress (Zakar et al., 2012).

Some women's attitude as victims of violence may also be defined by feelings of fear along with denial. Accordingly, more than half of the abused women respondents in a study conducted by Caralis and Musialowski (1997), did not tell anyone about the violence they were suffering and did not go to a doctor because of fear or ignorance. So, women may use private strategies, such as relying on their own resources to appease or resist the perpetrator (Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt, & Cook, 2003). Still, they do have the choice to use more public strategies, such as involving significant others - family and friends - to change the abuser's behaviour or have more options for escape, as they attempt to deal with the abuse (Goodman et al., 2003; Zakar et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, the woman victim may indeed see herself as highly assertive in the violent relationship in reaction to a violent partner or husband. Nevertheless, this liberal view of herself may paradoxically help her justify her staying in the relationship even though it is abusive (Alexander et al., 1991). Still, there are cases of women victims who choose to stay and fight for their family without adopting a "leaving" attitude. Others may feel so desperate that they choose to deny the whole problematic situation and act as powerless and helpless victims (Alexander et al., 1991). This powerlessness and helplessness a woman feels within the abusive relationship gets more irrational when she starts blaming herself for the situation she is involved in. As a consequence, intimate violence is normalized (Berns, 2001). That is, women feel that this is how it must be.

But, what happens in the cases where women have children, who are also exposed to violence against them? Is their attitude as victims affected by their mothering role? According to various studies, there are women mothers, victims of violence, who do not even recognize that their children's exposure to violence against them has negative effects on their children (Baker & Jaffe, 2007; Osofsky, 1999). Thereby, the woman's attitude as a victim of violence cannot be one-dimensional, since women's behavioral characteristics at the time of suffering violence, which define their attitude as victims, are controversial (Berns, 2004). However, these behavioral characteristics can be affected by various factors, such as tolerant attitudes towards violence (Grama, 2000), learned within a given cultural and social context.

As Berns (2004) asserts, there are several frames which are used by the popular media to present victims, and which have become a part of the social context. Such may be, for example, the celebrated model of a woman victim who has the courage to leave the problematic relationship and, conversely, the blameworthy model of a woman victim who prefers to stay and tolerate violence (Berns, 2004). The way mass media present abusers and victims may affect women's attitude as victims of violence. For example, many women victims of violence blame themselves for the violence they suffer from their partners. This blameworthy model can be explained by the way mass media are trying to gender the blame by holding women victims responsible for their role in their own victimization (Berns, 2001). Although, irrespective of the attempt of degendering the problem and gendering the blame (Berns, 2001), when suffering is considered, violence is primarily a problem of victimized women. Studying various media stories about domestic violence, Berns (2004) concluded that through these, victims were held responsible for getting in the abusive relationship in the first place and for provoking the abuse. Thus, the mass media often challenge whether a woman is completely blameless for the violent incidents; the women victims are often criticized for not leaving the abusive relationship; there are even suggestions that the women may actually enjoy such relationships, since they deny their own role in the destructive relationship and fail to protect others (Berns, 2001), such as their children.

Apart from the media, the women's constructions of violence and abusive relationships can be influenced by wider social and cultural discourses (Baly, 2010). For example, denial, minimization, and victim-blaming, which seem to be common attitudes among domestic violence perpetrators who have undergone treatment (Levesque, Velicer, Castle & Greene, 2008), can affect public opinion and consequently the way women choose to respond within the abusive relationship. In addition to that, the general public, who mostly rely on media frames for victims to form an opinion, can be distanced, and not emotionally involved, when trying to understand violence against women (Berns & Schweingruber, 2007) and the discourses shaping victims' attitude. In addition, there are also societies, like Pakistan, with harshly patriarchal regimes, where violence against women is embedded in the social, political, and legal structures of society and where women cannot effectively resist violence by themselves (Zakar et al., 2012).

The Study

The present study is part of the European project VICTIMS on violence against women and its effects upon their children when exposed, titled *"An indirect harmful effect of violence: Victimizing the child and Re-victimizing the woman-mother through her child's exposure to violence against herself"*. The project VICTIMS was designed and conducted in four countries (Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Slovakia) with co-funding obtained by the European Commission - DAPHNE III programme (action grants 2007-2013), and coordinated by the University of Cyprus - UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment from 2009 to 2011. The project mainly aimed to address the problem of the indirect harmful effect of violence against women mothers upon their children, if exposed, as well as the mothers' consciousness of that effect.

In particular, this study concentrates on discussing the findings that have emerged from a series of seventeen in-depth interviews that were conducted with mothers from Cyprus, who have been victims of various forms of violence. The study aims to challenge the framework of the woman, victim of violence by, a) developing a portrait of discourses that mainly shape the identity of the woman who suffers violence, and b) uncovering the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation to her mothering role.

Research Questions

This study intended to give answers to the following questions:
a) What are the main discourses shaping the identity of the woman mother who suffers violence?
b) How do women respond to violence in relation to their mothering role?

Methodology

For this study, data were drawn from 17 in-depth interviews with women mothers, who were currently or had been victims of violence by their partners. Women were selected through the purposive sampling method from different districts all over Cyprus, in both rural and urban areas, with the help of two regional organizations specializing on domestic violence.

For the recruitment of participants, women were firstly identified by the Police Criminal Investigation Department and specifically by the Domestic Violence and Child Abuse Office (Nicosia, Cyprus), and by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence (Nicosia, Cyprus) that made the first contact with women via telephone, informing them about the project and asking them if they wanted to participate in the interviews. After that, the research team communicated with all the potential women participants so as to arrange the date, the hour and the place for the interviews. Interview organization took a lot of effort, since the date and time of the interviews had to be customized to participant convenience and preference (e.g., some of the interviews took place during the weekend or in the evening hours). What is worth mentioning is that access to women-mother victims of violence willing to participate in the interviews was a difficult task, given the fact that Cyprus is a very small society, where most people consider the subject of violence as taboo and deal

with it almost superstitiously. According to the information provided, the women who eventually agreed to be interviewed represented less than 50% of the women contacted, with the percentage of refusal being very high.

All seventeen audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim into written form. Discourse analysis was employed for the identification of both the situated meanings and discourses, and important words/phrases in the transcripts had been underlined: a) verbs and actions indicating forms of violence, b) adjectives describing the perpetrator's profile, c) phrases indicating the causes of violence, d) phrases indicating the effects of violence, e) phrases indicating the woman's reactions and coping strategies, f) phrases indicating the woman's feelings, g) verbs indicating reactions of the children been exposed, h) phrases indicating mother's conscience and awareness on the indirect impact of violence upon her children, when exposed. Emphasis was given both to the form and content of discourses emerging in the women's narrations; the functions and effects of each discourse were also sought (Gee, 2005), whereas logical contradictions, correlations, included and excluded words were also taken in mind and interpreted.

Data Collection Procedures

The seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted during an 8-week period from June to July 2010. The place that the interviews were carried out was neutral so as to avoid the problem of data reliability. At any rate, the research team did not visit women for interview in their homes, neither were the interviews carried out in the presence of others, e.g., the women's children and friends. Twelve interviews were carried out in a private room in the Education department of the University of Cyprus, and five were conducted in a private place at a central hotel. During the interviews, women participants were informed regarding the project's aims, their voluntary participation and the scientific, anonymous and confidential use of data. The written and informed consent of each participant was also obtained. In addition, women were interviewed in private, and the interview was conducted in a confidential manner.

A semi-structured interview guide was used that allowed the researchers to follow certain themes and open up new lines of inquiry. Open-ended questions were formulated on the basis of data obtained by 28 written testimonies from women, which were analyzed before the interviews, and of a review of the existing literature on the topic. Questions were formulated under four main themes, which were: a) violence against the woman, b) the child's exposure and reactions, c) mother and child, and d) child and school. At the beginning of the interviews, socio-demographic characteristics were obtained. The questions then moved to more specific themes of inquiry, that is, women's personal experiences of any form of violence from their husbands, their feelings, their coping strategies, their resources of support, their consciousness of the effects of violence on their children and their methods of managing the problem. Women participants were encouraged to express their views sincerely. Taking into consideration that violence is a sensitive issue, questions about women's experiences, feelings and coping strategies were asked politely and in a nonjudgmental manner. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 1.5 hour; some were audio-recorded whereas written notes were taken during all the interviews.

Data Analysis

During the in-depth interviews, audio-recording was used, though not in all cases; some women refused to have audio-recording, so written notes were taken instead. All audio-recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim into written form. Transcripts were then analyzed. The constant comparative analysis method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used through the systematic examination of similarities between the women's views in order to identify emergent thematic units (categories) within and across the transcripts. In addition, content and discourse analysis techniques were used in order to elicit situated meanings and main discourses determining the woman's attitude as a victim of violence.

Participants

Age, education, family situation and financial wellbeing varied for the women. With regard to the interviewee sample, there were both Cypriot (n=13) and foreign women participants (n=4) -- that is, women from Cuba, Russia, Greece and Romania, who have all lived in Cyprus for many years. Five of the women (4 Cypriots and 1 Russian) were still married with the abuser at the time of being interviewed, ten out of them were divorced, and twelve out of them were in a phase of separation from the abuser and waiting for divorce.

Findings

The analysis of the interviews' data was an ongoing process, open to the researchers' interpretations, with the main directions given by the research questions.

Our data showed that women responded to violence in a number of ways, which were determined mainly by the discourses of denying, blaming self, powerlessness, tolerance, compassion, and dependency. In the women's narrations, some discourses coexist and/or become interrelated; thus, they do not stand on any clear hierarchical order. For example, all seventeen women admitted being tolerant for a number of reasons, that is, because of feeling powerless, feeling blameworthy, still being in love with the perpetrator, being unable to perceive violence as a problem, or even because of being dependent on their husband both emotionally and economically.

Main Discourses Shaping the Identity of the Woman Victim of Violence

Analysis of data allowed the researchers to develop a picture of the discourses that mainly shape the identity of the woman suffering violence.

a. Discourse of denying. In seven cases, women frankly confessed that, when suffering violence, especially at the start, they were unable to react in any way, denying what was happening to them (e.g., *"…when you are suffering violence, it is very hard to talk to someone about it… I can remember that I also couldn't, I denied what was happening…"* [I.14], *"…I was doing what I had to do without*

expecting anything from him. For example, I could have a shower only the time he would take the girls at the park. I had accepted that this would be our reality…" [I.8], *"…I was acting like a robot, I didn't know what life is, what it means to be a human being with feelings, needs and beliefs. I kept telling myself that what I live, is reality…"* [I.11]). The same seven women stated that they tried to rationalize violence, since they could not even realize that they were involved in a problematic, abusive relationship, thinking that this was normal and ordinary (e.g., *"…I had a hope that things would change with time, but years pass, you get into a routine and you move on. But the situation was wrong from the first years of our relationship… I couldn't see it. I should have taken a divorce…"* [I.11], *"…I wondered whether this was normal or not and for what reason was this happening…"* [I.14]).

b. Discourse of blaming self. A fewer number of women reported that they were blaming themselves for the abusive relationship they were involved in (e.g., *"…I was blaming myself; I was trying not to irritate him, thinking that I gained something…"* [I.14], *"…I thought it was my fault, that I provoked him…"* [I.5]). One of these women also said that she felt she had to take the blame for her husband's abusive behaviour, since her husband made her feel that way (e.g., *"…My husband was always accusing me. I had it always in my mind that all this violence was my fault; I didn't know though how to stop the fights; I was the black sheep…"* [I.13])

c. Discourse of powerlessness. Eight women stressed that they felt powerless to react dynamically, that is, to actively fight back or call the police or even someone else for help when suffering violence, especially severe forms of violence, that is, beating (e.g., *"…I was afraid, I was trying to keep a balance at home so as not to irritate him…"* [I.11], *"…I was very afraid of my husband. I slept with my kids, locking the door every night…"* [I.7], *"…Most of the times, I was trying to have people at home so as to be protected since this would stop him from yelling and making trouble. At other times though, when I was home alone, I have suffered enormous violence…"* [I.8]). The emergent feeling of fear and powerlessness in the narrations of women who have suffered violence is justified by the threatening behaviour of the abuser, that is, the threats he would make against theirs and their children's lives (e.g., *"…What can I do? He is threatening me that if I leave, he will take my children away from me…"* [I.4], *"…I was afraid of his reactions in front of the children. I had to give a meaning to my daughters' lives…"* [I.9], *"…I felt that at the end he would hurt me, I had a strange feeling that he would kill me if I kept sustaining this situation…"* [I.14]). In addition, the data made obvious that some women felt powerless to react due to social constraints (e.g., *"…I was constantly afraid and insecure. I obeyed him. I wouldn't dare to say anything; this would be a shame…"* [I.10], *"…What could I do? I would go to the police and tell them what? That he was violent? That he was threatening me? I thought the policeman would think that I was crazy. This is the reason I didn't go. And also the social environment prevented me from going…"* [I14], *"…The first time I went to the police, the policemen kept asking me about my husband's job. When I told them that he was a professor, they discouraged me from pressing charges against him; they even told me to feel sorry for him because he might lose his job…"* [I.8]). For women who came from other countries to Cyprus and were married to Cypriot men, the discourse of powerlessness was more evident in their words (e.g., *"…I was alone in Cyprus. Creating a family was a dream for me. So, I had to get through…"* [I13], *"…Because I am alone in Cyprus and my family lives in Africa, I said to myself that every man is unfaithful and behaves that way, so I accepted him back…"* [I.16]).

d. Discourse of tolerance. All seventeen women stated that, at the beginning, they were very tolerant with the abusive behaviour of their husband, whereas some of them demonstrated increasingly passive behaviour and apathy. Women's narrations showed that they behaved that way because of many reasons, that is, because of feeling powerless, feeling blameworthy, still being in love with the perpetrator, being unable to perceive violence as a problem, or even being dependent on their husband (e.g., *"…No, I didn't react to his violence… only lately when I took pills for depression, I could see the bad situation at home. I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't react. I wanted to kick him out of the house but I couldn't…"* [I.1], *"…I was withdrawing into myself, in my room or even in the bathroom and I was crying. I would leave the house to go for a walk…"* [I.14], *"I was always tolerant without saying anything. I talked to my priest confessor and he kept telling me that I had to stay in my marriage, that this situation is my cross that I have to carry…"* [I.15], *"…I kept crying, I would tell him that I fell in love with a person who was someone else, and that now he has become a stranger I have to live with, but he wouldn't heed me… I could do nothing…"* [I.4], *"…I thought I should save my marriage, thus I wouldn't react…"* [I.7]). The majority of the women, reflecting upon their experiences, admitted that being tolerant towards violence didn't help them after all, but rather devastated both theirs and their children's lives (e.g., *"…I came to a point where I was acting like a robot, I didn't know what life is, I didn't know what it means to be a human being with feelings, desires, beliefs. I cleaned the house, did the cooking, I would do everything I had to do, but I was afraid to try and do something else, to change the situation with my husband. I was just tolerant…"* [I.11]). Nevertheless, five women, who were still married with the perpetrator at the time of being interviewed, admitted that they were trying to save their marriage for the sake of their children; they kept being tolerant and did not dynamically react (e.g., *"…I need to be very careful with him because I do know that he could send me to the hospital with a broken head…"* [I.4], *"…I need to save my marriage to prove to my parents that I am happy, because my father didn't agree with my marriage in the first place…"* [I.10], *"…I don't want to get a divorce, what will the people think and say?"* [I.15]). Therefore, these five women remained victims because they were not yet convinced that there was a way out.

e. Discourse of compassion. Many of the women confessed that they felt sorry for the perpetrator and would repeatedly give him second chances, hoping that he would change his violent behaviour (e.g., *"…I kept compromising. I even took him to a psychologist to help him. To my mind, family was everything…"* [I.9], *"…I felt sorry for him, hoping he would change in the end…"* [I.1]). Women seem to express their compassion for the abuser in two ways: i) by protecting him from suffering negative consequences, such as receiving a jail sentence (e.g., *"…I was still in love with him and I didn't want to him to be hurt"* [I.16]), and ii) by "protecting" the abuser's image as a paternal model for his children (e.g., *"…I don't say anything negative to the children about their father; they love him a lot. So, I tolerate his violence for the sake of my children…"* [I.4], *"…I kept giving him chances for the sake of our daughter. I didn't want to separate her from her father. She loved him a lot…"* [I.12]). Thereby, the emotional complexity of the relationship between victim and abuser was evident in the interviews.

f. Discourse of dependency. The discourse of dependency was the less frequent in the data since only four women stated that they felt dependent on their husband and thus couldn't abandon him from the start of the violent incidents (e.g., *"…I was waiting to find a good job and then leave. I couldn't do*

it right away; I wanted to be economically independent…" [I.3], *"…I was alone in Cyprus, having a family was always my dream, I had to hold on…"* [I.13], *"…I depend on him, he threatened me that he would take away my children…"* [I.4], *"…We had a relationship based on dependence, both economically and emotionally. I asked for love because I didn't have love during childhood. I was asking for his love…"* [I.14]). Therefore, for the women who feel dependent on their husband either economically or emotionally, leaving the abusive relationship is not that easy.

The data analysis shows that women's feelings stand on a common emotional axis in terms of how they felt at the beginning of the abusive relationship: desperate and depressed, incapable of reacting, afraid and tolerant, obliged to sustain the violent relationship for the sake of marriage and children and by hoping that something would change in the future (e.g., *"…I always lived in fear, I didn't have a voice, I was in silence…"* [I.14], *"…he was beating me, I was trying to get away to ask for help, but I couldn't…"* [I.16]). During the interviews, the twelve women who left the abusive relationship, stated that they felt hopeful and that they were determined to take their lives into their own hands. These women took the decision to get a divorce so as to ensure a peaceful life both for them and for their children. They also noted that they were conscious of what they have been through, felt lucky to have coped with it but also guilty for the traumas they caused to their children, who were exposed to violence (e.g., *"…Now I am decided; there are days that I am not but I say to myself that I have to win…"* [I.16], *"…The trauma I caused to my daughter was enormous; I feel responsible… but when you are hurt, you cannot understand that you are hurting the others around you too…"* [I.7]).

Regarding the woman's attitude as a victim of violence in relation to her mothering role, ten of the women participants stated that at the beginning they couldn't realize that violence did not victimize only them but also their children, when they were exposed. Their first concern was to think how to cope with the problem and what strategies to adopt in order to ensure their survival, especially in cases where there was intense physical violence (e.g., *"…He was beating me all day, he was offending me with offensive words, he was never happy with anything I was doing and he was always judging me… I couldn't react; I was acting like a robot…"* [I.11], *"…Most of the times, I was trying to have people at home so as to be protected since this would stop him from yelling and making troubles. Other times though when I was home alone, I have suffered enormous violence…"* [I.8]). Many of these women stated that they needed time, even years, to realize that violence against them was also affecting their children, both emotionally and psychologically (e.g., *"…children are not in the room where we are fighting…sometimes they are in their own room. They are just sitting in their room scared but still, they continue with their studying…"* [I.4], *"…My daughter does not participate in class and she doesn't have a lot of friends. My son beats her and she accepts it. He is jealous of her…"* [I.7], *"…I could see that my daughter did not smile. She totally withdrew into herself, she didn't want to make friends at school and during breaks she preferred to be alone…"* [I.12]).

During the interviews, women have been purposefully asked to reflect upon the indirect impact of violence against them upon their children when exposed. Therefore, all women had de facto stressed some negative effects which they observed in their children's behaviour. Some of these negative effects were: a) their child's adoption of antisocial and violent behaviour both at school and at home (e.g., *"…my son is very aggressive at school, he always had trouble with the school headmaster…"* [I.16]), b) their child's low school performance (e.g., *"…my son doesn't care about his lessons or his homework, he has many difficulties and all he cares about is football…"* [I.10]), c) their child's

adoption of tolerant behaviour towards violence (e.g., *"…I suddenly went to school and I saw my son to be beaten by some of his classmates without reacting, I was shocked…"* [I.17]), d) their child's low self-esteem (e.g., *"…she is always complaining about herself, she doesn't love herself…"* [I.1], *"…she was very self-contained, you could see the sadness in her eyes…"* [I.8]), e) their child's feelings of depression and isolation (e.g., *"…my daughter was isolated, she wanted to take pills so as to kill herself…"* [I.15], *"…I started to realize that my daughter wasn't smiling, she was feeling lonely, she didn't want anyone else to approach her, and she didn't have any friends…"* [I.1]), and f) the child's alteration of feelings towards mother (e.g., *"…my daughter is more closed with her father, she always blames me for being separated from her father, she doesn't want me…"* [I.16], *"…my son wants to know where I go and he always tries to be with me feeling that he needs to protect me…"* [I.13], *"…my daughter tries to do all her homework at school so as to spend all her free time with me at home…"* [I.12]).

Conclusions

This study aimed to examine the various discourses surrounding the attitude of a woman suffering violence and the ways these are subjected to each woman's experiences, while also uncovering the woman's attitude as a victim in relation to her mothering role.

Findings showed that the woman's attitude as a victim of violence is mainly determined by the discourses of powerlessness, tolerance, denying, blaming self, compassion, and dependency. All seventeen women interviewed stated that they adopted several coping strategies to prevent or deal with the abusive behaviour of their husband. The majority of the women participants said that at the beginning of the occurrence of violence they could not admit that they were involved in a problematic and abusive relationship; they would deny what was happening to them by trying to rationalize violence, thus making themselves the legitimate victims of that violence. Also, most of the women could not react in any dynamic way, for example, actively fight back or call the police, because of several reasons, such as social constraints. From the data, we also noted that some women, especially the ones who were still married with the perpetrator at the time of being interviewed, felt sympathy and compassion for the abuser whereas others could not leave the abusive relationship since they had at the time been emotionally, socially and economically dependent on the abuser.

At the same time, all women participants reported that they would make attempts to minimize the psychological effects of violence firstly on themselves and secondly on their children, when being conscious about the emotional and psychological pain a child is going through when exposed to violence. As the women argued, however, it was harder to realize that their children were also victimized when exposed to violence than it was to perceive themselves as victims.

It is worth mentioning that there are limitations to this study that must be taken into account. Firstly, the data obtained by the interviews were self-reported and partly retrospective, since some women had already left the abusive relationship at the time of being interviewed. Therefore, some time had passed since the suffering from violence, thus many other life experiences could have affected women's current views. Secondly, women participants did not suffer the same forms of violence and to the same extent; thus, women's experiences were different, something that may prevent the

generalization of results. Future research in the field of discourses emerging from the experiences of the women mothers, victims of violence, could benefit from longitudinal analyses to compare attitudes and feelings of the women victims during the time they suffer violence and after they leave the abusive relationship.

The findings do, however, identify the main discourses surrounding the attitude of a woman who suffers violence in relation to her mothering role and provide clear indications as to how women respond within the abusive relationship. Findings also provide a foundation for further empirical work on the identity(ies) of the women victims of violence in relation to the coping strategies they adopt in order to respond within a situation of violence.

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Women's organizations in Madrid: Socialization for empowerment in the Spanish democratic post-transition

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Abstract

The activity of women's organizations that arose in Madrid in the 1980s and its impact on the post-constitutional period, that is, the period which takes place once the democratic Constitution of 1978 was passed after forty years of dictatorship under Franco will be analysed in this text. The analysis will concentrate particularly on those organizations that were not devoted to feminist purposes but which, thanks to their associative actions, became aware of their oppression giving rise to personal, collective and far-reaching changes in the democratization of the Spanish society and the advancement of women. In this regard, these associations are considered new socialization grounds where women were able to empower their lives and move into other fields of political and social influence.

Introduction

In the 1980s, a large number of women's associations were formed in Madrid as a consequence of the demands and aspirations of many women who wished to overcome their lack of education and who became involved in the public affairs in the quest for solutions to their problems affecting their neighbourhoods and towns. This emergence was facilitated by the creation of the Institute of Women as a political body in 1983 whose aim was to promote the equality between men and women within the framework of the recent Spanish democracy after forty years of dictatorship under Franco.

Most of these associations had no feminist purposes as an end in itself, nor were they designated as such. The women who belonged to them were housewives and working-class women. Until then they had been unaware of the underground struggle taking place for women's rights during the Spanish post-transitional period which ended with the passing of the Spanish Constitution in 1978.

This chapter aims to analyse the different types of organizations, as well as the purpose, discourse and practices in these women's organizations. Women's discourses revolving around personal and social changes which were brought about by collective participation will be the focus of particular attention. In this respect, I consider that these associations were new socialization grounds for the empowerment of women. At the same time, they contributed to the creation of a large movement of women, which thanks to networking, integrated new social sectors and increasingly larger strata of female population, weaving a social fabric which was able to support the new democratic processes based on equality.

This text is the result of fieldwork research which, based on quantitative and qualitative data, was carried out during 1993 and 1994[15]. This time frame is relevant as ten years had already gone by since the emergence of these associations. This was a sufficient amount of time to make relevant reflections on the origins, development and changes in people, institutions and also on the effects on the larger Spanish society. In the first section of this paper, I will be dealing with the ethnographic context in the Community of Madrid as well as with the classification of associations into several typologies which have enabled us to embark upon this study. The second section focuses on the meanings that the informants themselves have assigned to their involvement in these associations. The third section analyses the obstacles identified by these women in such involvement. The change processes that these women have undergone will be dealt with in the fourth section. Although these changes are also present in the previous sections, the activities developed by the organizations and

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[15] This text is part of a publication by Virginia Maquieira (1995)

their ability to trigger an open process of change and new opportunities will be considered here. Finally, the fifth section examines the different networks and links created, both formal and informal, as a way to overcome the fragmentation and to increase the efficiency of their proposals and demands.

Ethnographic context and typology of associations

Map of Spain. In red, the Community of Madrid.

Madrid is an Autonomous Community within the democratic Spanish State consisting of a single province which includes 179 counties of very different sizes in its 7,995 square kilometres. Its population increases as we get closer to the city of Madrid. A fact worth noting in the population register from 1991 is that the number of women between the ages of 25 and 60 was larger than men, a tendency that grew as the age increased. The authoritarian regime of General Franco was based on a politically, administratively and economically centralized government which prompted an industrial development model in the 1970s and which attracted a large number of immigrants from other parts of Spanish geography to the capital. This phenomenon favoured, on the one hand, an inflow of immigrant population into Madrid and, on the other, and outflow of workers from the centre to the outskirts of the city. As a result, a disorganized transformation of Madrid's outlying areas was shaped, creating new neighbourhoods with a serious lack of amenities and facilities. This was the origin of the formation of a metropolitan area as a socially and spatially segmented periphery. It is also the reason why the citizens' movements consolidated and expanded their demands within the framework of the new democratic conquests during the 70s and 80s.

The industrial crisis of the metropolitan area in the 70s meant the collapse of a substantial part of the production system with a subsequent loss of employment, particularly male employment, turning certain areas into grounds of marginalization, unemployment and environmental degradation. The sharpening of social inequalities posed new problems of exclusion which were built on old and unresolved problems such as those derived from gender inequality. This was one of the pillars of the predominant Catholic regime led by Franco. The dictatorship's heritage was very powerful as regards the traditional family model based on the hierarchization of roles between men and women. Some results of this hierarchy strategy on women included: the assignment of housework given almost exclusively to women, a low participation of women in the labour market and a severe lack of

education. Women's job demands occur in the context of the aforementioned crisis in the 70s with negative consequences on job insecurity, instability and low wages. Even in the times of economic recovery, the female unemployment rate continued to be twice that of the male rate.

In relation to levels of education, according to the official data from 1993, the illiteracy rate of women older than fifty years of age in Madrid was more than double the rate of men. With respect to other levels of education, 32% of adult women from the Community of Madrid were included in levels classified as deficient. It was stated that as women rose in age, their educational deficiencies rose as well. These deficiencies notably decreased in ages ranging from 25 to 34 and they were practically residual in the population between the ages of 16 and 24.

In this context, an emergence of a large number of citizens' organizations and, more significantly, of female associations under the protection of the conquered freedoms took place in the late 70s and especially in the 80s. One of the first problems in the research was to verify the inexistence of a reliable data base of active female associations and not those that were merely registered for official purposes. In the National Register of Associations of the Ministry of Interior, a total number of 487 in the Community of Madrid and 1,650 in the whole Spanish State were grouped under the heading of women's associations. Other institutional sources devoted to the intervention in social and inequality policies, as well as the Regional Federation of Women's Associations, agreed that the number of active associations was only 178.

Based on this data, a questionnaire was devised to know directly from the very same associations their aims, their field of action, their date of incorporation, their number of members, their planned activities, their own resources and financial sources. This information created the first database, which did not exist up to that moment, and the possibility to draw up a territorial distribution map with the different types of associations, the contents and activities of their programmes to be developed. From this data, a sample of organizations that had been ethnographically studied through the association's participant observation and development of its activities was selected, and those interviews conducted with significant informants were elaborated in detail.

In order to deal with the object of study, I will proceed to elaborate a typology of associations from the self-definitions expressed by the informants in their answers. This classification responds to the nature of activities and to the goals they pursued. The typology was the following:

- ASSISTANCE: Associations whose activity was aimed at the care, assistance and guidance of women who find themselves in a vulnerable situation with personal or social hardships were classified within this group.
- FEMINIST: Associations which gathered around political, social and vindicating aims of the feminist movement and that were expressly self-defined as such.
- IMMIGRANTS: Associations with the aim of informing, guiding and empowering immigrant women to achieve their social and labour integration into the Spanish society as well as to make public opinion sensitive to these communities' problems.
- LABOUR PROMOTION: Associations whose aim was the empowerment of women for their incorporation into the labour market.
- SOCIO-CULTURAL PROMOTION: Associations that focused on aims concerning the personal development, the educational-cultural promotion, the participation in group tasks and further training.
- HEALTH PROMOTION: Associations with the aim of informing and raising awareness of women's health problems were included.

- PROFESSIONAL: Associations grouped around the defence of a labour activity or a specific professional field.
- UNION: Those associations that focus their activity on the information, defence and training of women as workers within a trade union framework.
- NEIGHBOURHOOD: Associations that are grouped in order to encourage the political and social participation of women in the local and community field and to demand improvements to their environments within a neighbourhood movement framework.
- SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL: Those that have aims such as the development of sports activities and the participation in cultural and recreational activities.

Quantitatively speaking, the largest associations were those of Socio-cultural Promotion and also the ones that brought together a larger number of active and beneficiary members, followed by the Neighbourhood and Feminist associations. For the purpose of this text and as it has been set out in the introduction, I will pay close attention to Socio-cultural Promotion and Neighbourhood associations to account for the processes I have already pointed out.

The meanings of participation: to gain knowledge and new grounds

As Arturo Escobar has claimed, the domination moves forward through strategies that organize knowledge and grounds colonizing the physical, social and cultural environments (1992:398). From this perspective, there is a close relationship between the usurpation of grounds and the distortion or the silenced word of excluded sectors. Nevertheless, the subordinated sectors are not passive victims of structural conditions and try to carry out questioning, negotiation and transformation processes in order to challenge dominant structures. For this reason, one of the aims of this research was to investigate women's strategies to overcome *"knowledge and ground assignments"* (Amorós, 1991:135) that confined them to a situation of structural disadvantage.

In this regard, the close link that appears in the informants' discourse between the need to transcend the limits of the domestic sphere and the acquisition of new knowledge to project their lives into new dimensions is very meaningful. When they express the reasons by which they started to be involved in their organizations, the most common expressions are: *"to go out of my house"*, *"to learn things"*, *"to overcome the humiliation of knowing nothing"*, *"to be useful"*, *"to get rid of monotony and solitude"*, *"to know more"*, *"to meet other people and discover many things about your own life and society"*.

One of the pioneers from the women's association of her neighbourhood in the outskirts of Madrid told us the importance of her experience:

"…the most important thing for me was to talk to other people: I remember that women started talking about our things in those times. To get together with a group and see that we had common problems was a discovery for me. It was also an incentive for me to say: 'Well, I am not alone, this can be sorted out or not but here we are...'."

The members of a Socio-cultural Promotion association who define themselves as housewives summarize the meanings of this participation in the following way:

"…when you participate, you awake to new interests and you feel alive. It is important to make a woman who is very confined at home aware by bringing her closer to culture, to her neighbourhood and world problems…"

A woman responsible for a neighbourhood association devoted to improve the deficiencies of her neighbourhood environment expressed herself in a similar way:

"You meet people and you are aware of other people's problems you haven't seen before in the neighbourhood. By going out, meeting with people, listening and struggling (…) because in the struggle to solve things, you learn so much. One learns how to organize, to speak in public, to protest…"

Thus, what we see when we get out of the house's physical environment and we discover how to share and to act collectively is a new grounds for personal development processes and to break down blocking obstacles. The idea of participating and learning is showed as the antithesis of isolation in the domestic field and this, at the same time, is understood as the synonym of personal stagnation: *"…a woman who stays at home doesn't know much, she doesn't make any progress, she is limited and she even ends getting ill because she is alone, she works hard and nobody appreciates her"*.

In many cases, there is a close relationship between the reasons that gave rise to their involvement in associations and their needs and familiar responsibilities: *"I went to the association because I wanted to learn things that help me to change the relationship with my children"*. Other informants also insist on this aspect but at the same time, they express that those questionings and personal redefinitions have taken place in the course of time and work in the association: *"many of us started to participate in the association because we felt humiliated before our children; it was a thorn in the flesh we had to solve but you keep on learning and wonder: Why do women have to be always the most ignorant?"*. Some women with an extensive justified experience in their neighbourhoods say: *"It has been always us who have mobilized the neighbourhood because we know families' needs and because we are here. Men go to work and they don't know what is happening daily. That's why we want more prominence to be recognised because we also are citizens and neighbours"*.

The processes described until now can be performed within the framework of *"new socializations for power"* analysed by the anthropologist Teresa del Valle (1993). The author points out the importance for women to consider socialization as a process that covers their whole life and that brings about questions of the orientations received. The gender inequality produces a differential socialization for men and women from their early stages of life and affects women in a preparation for "non-power". In her opinion, the new socializations for power require an insertion into groups and associations with specific characteristics that serve as a base to develop new structures, identities and social relationships that are the key to overcome gender inequality. As we have seen through the stories collected, this phenomenon of active groups generates new cultural meanings that are the support for new personal elaborations that women perceived as important achievements. However, these new social practices are not exempt from contradictions and obstacles both subjective as well as structural, that women themselves identify and that we will see in the following section.

Obstacles for their involvement

Some of the women interviewed link the associative work with a new experience of freedom: *"For many of us, there is a conviction that we have more freedom from the time we develop the idea to associate as women".* Similar confessions are repeated in the discourses collected and coincide with those who are the most active sectors in their respective associations. With these opinions, they intend to inform others about the discovery of new feelings and experiences which make possible to conquer other goals.

One of the aspects more often mentioned refers to the lack of women's time as a result of their familiar responsibilities: *"…many women can't actively participate because they have much work at home and it is worse for those who also have to care of her parents and her parents-in-law…"*. The generic division of work has other consequences as well: *"We have time constraints to attend meetings and participate in activities, while they don't have such problems because we resolve their lives"*. The lack of time is even more pressing among those who face a heavy double working day: *"…It is very difficult for many members to come to a meeting or to be responsible for the activities because they arrive home exhausted from work and have to cook supper, iron and prepare the meal for the next day."* A reference to the conflicts that arise with their partners also appears in the discourses: *"There are husbands and husbands, but there are still many who ask: what do you want?, why do you have to go to the association?, there are many disagreements because of this matter."*

But by recalling what they lived when they started to work in the association, they also remember those conflicts and pressures which were not only inside their homes but among neighbours from their neighbourhood as well. Different ways of social pressure were expressed in their comments, gestures and insults:

"…We have heard a lot of things here, in the neighbourhood. People who saw us in the street and said: Look at them walking around! Instead of being at home to take care of their children, I don't know how their husbands allow them that. We keep on going but it is hard, very hard, at first it upset me that people said that I left my children or even worse things. But we talked about it. It helped me a lot to talk to the other members about this".

Those women, who opted to incorporate themselves into mixed organizations in different social movements, also describe social pressures and patriarchal prejudices: *"Male chauvinism doesn't only come from husbands; it is in everywhere, because the struggle to get access to a Board of Directors is very tough, they made things really difficult for us, sometimes in a subtle way but sometimes not. But we have to lose the fear and to organize ourselves because we are changing many things together."* In order to go deeper into this question, another informant with a relevant position in a union organization tells us her personal experience in the political field:

"The political leap is very hard because there is much competence and discrimination in the leaderships of organizations. Women have many difficulties due to a lack of knowledge of the mechanisms and power relations which are established in those fields. We face many personal fears, little support and the complex to always be raising questions about women's rights which seem a secondary issue that is trivialized many times. To accomplish specific jobs for women in a mixed organization is difficult, that's why is so important the solidarity among us, the capacity for collective pressure from all the fields and to promote and support women for management and responsibility jobs".

It is very meaningful, in all these opinions from so different associative fields, the allusion to *fear* and *guilt* as threatening feelings that stop the incorporation of women in the political sphere and in the public decision-making. At the same time of the creation of these associations, the power of collective action and solidarity appear as a support and reference, as a source of positive elaboration to cope with exclusions. The solidarity among women appears not only as an abstract and idealized sisterhood but also as a lived experience and as an efficient component of collective action that link different groups through time. The power of solidarity is also perceived as a process of *learning*:

"We have learnt a lot throughout all these years which have not been easy at all. We have also learnt to create solidarity, confidence and respect among women. We think that this work is like a chain of solidarity that has to be increasingly stronger. What others do and have done for us before is what we are doing now for others and what these women at the same time will do for others".

Associations' activities and processes of change

The associations studied promote and make known publicly many women's sectors as new social agents within the framework of political, legal and social change in a Spain arisen from the new democratic Constitution. As we have previously seen, these associations promoted an intersubjective reality that generates a communicative and group effort that started from the concrete experiences of women who were involved in these actions. Most of these associative practices were set in the world's daily life developing new social relationships that shape processes of women's politicization. From this active group, they became aware of oppression and gave rise to specific motivations to work for a change of their situations in the contexts where they lived. Likewise, women as active subjects constituted themselves like a diffused power or non-power that eroded the surface of the formal power and generated social, political and economic alternatives from this active network.

In this section, I am interested in accounting for those processes of change through the activities developed by the associations but to show in particular how through those activities, even those that did not pretend to develop explicitly feminist purposes, developed open processes of decision-making, of new possibilities and of active citizenship. From the information gathered about 178 associations studied, the different types of activities can be known and be classified as follows:

1. Permanent Services: legal advice centres, information and guidance services, documentation services.
2. Continuing Proceedings of training: courses, workshops, development of social intervention programmes, self-help groups.
3. Specific campaigns: organization and participation in social awareness and/or in claiming women's rights campaigns.
4. Meetings and Conferences on monographic subjects.
5. Studies and investigations.
6. Edition of publications.
7. Occasional activities: conferences, book presentations, round table discussions, excursions, cultural visits, competitions, exhibitions.

It is necessary to highlight that the designations of "permanent", "continuing" and "occasional" are just a classification referring to the characteristics of the action developed in its temporal dimension, that is, if it develops for a few days, weeks or covers many months. From the quantified data about different types of activity and its development in time, the higher percentages corresponded to continuing proceedings. However, they are quite similar to the percentages of those activities classified as "occasional" but they had an annual recurrence which allowed valuing the capacity of planning and continuity of activities as well as their capacity of projection and influence on the social fabric beyond the limits of the organization itself.

The ethnography makes possible to grasp the meaning and the impact of different activities from women's experience and to analyse the processes of questioning and change that such activities produced in them. As in every social action, the same activity led to ways of different appropriation depending on the personal story and the needs of each subject. Through field observations and

informants' interviews, I was able to check that the activities accomplished by them produced as many processes of change deliberately searched through clear goals as subtle processes of personal transformations, small breaks and actions of self-affirmation that triggered new experiences and redefinitions of their behaviour patterns. In this respect, the story of a member from a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Madrid, illustrates how an occasional activity of a cultural nature caused in her a change process which projected her into new possibilities because it meant overcoming of the limits of the internalized physical and symbolic spaces:

"When I think about it, it cannot be true…because everything started going out to the theatre. At first, I didn't want to go, I had never gone to the theatre before nor had I gone out without my husband and even less to Madrid's centre. I, with other women, going to the theatre at night …But I don't know how I had the courage to go and that decision led me to make others and I think I am not the same now".

A working woman in a textile factory, with a rural background, who settled together with her husband and children in a neighbourhood of Madrid's outskirts in the 70s, tells us her experience of educational deficiencies and her process of empowerment as a result of the activities developed in her association:

"I started to go to the association to improve my reading and writing because I hardly went to school. I was awakening with the lessons; I learnt a lot of things and above all, to stop being embarrassed, to assert myself. I was doing other things little by little and also learning a lot of things that happen to women and why these things happen to us…now, some people ask me: won't you be one of those feminists?...Well, I don't know but what I want is to fight for women not to be subjected as we were before".

Networks and Interconnections

The historian Geraldine Scanlon analyzes the emergence and development of the second feminist wave in Spain as a path "*from the unity to fragmentation"* (1990: 96), A path, in her opinion, similar to others feminist movements in Europe and United States, but in the Spanish case, they had specific political and social circumstances. The author points out, as a crucial aspect of this situation, the unfavourable starting point of the feminist movement that began as a consequence of the dictatorship, and the special circumstances of the democratic transition that led the movement to tackle problems and urgent discussions such as the conflicting membership. The relationship with political parties and the question of priorities arose: the priority of the political struggle for the country's democratization or the priority of the feminist struggle whose primordial aims were to put an end to the situation of disadvantage and marginalization endured by women. Despite this ideological fragmentation, the author considers that there were unequivocal signs of tolerance, agreement and consensus action in the 80s -- for instance, unitary campaigns in favour of abortion's legalization and the struggle against criminal trials of women who had aborted, or the different actions undertaken to enlarge the number of female candidates for Congress and Senate in the elections of 1996.

The diagnosis of the crisis and fragmentation of social movements in Spain is present in that period's records. The causes are very varied, but among them, the fulfilment of the logic-temporal cycle of new social movements that arose in the 60s covering a path apparently similar to the counter-institutionalization to institutionalization, is mentioned. The fact that their proposals and demands are totally or partially considered by the institutional policy leads to a change of scenery which

necessarily implies a crisis situation and a redefinition of the collective action (Alonso, 1992, 1993, Jelín, 1987; Offe, 1992).

With respect to women's collective action in Spanish society during the 80s and 90s, the panorama became even more complex given the emergence of a diversity of associative initiatives that apparently seemed self-isolated according to sectorial and thematic interests and aims. In this regard, the words "atomization" and "fragmentation" were repeated in very different fields in the course of the research. For example, a public administration's civil servant, with responsibilities for the implementation of equality policies, expressed the importance of diversity among women and the diversity of active associations but, at the same time, pointed out the fear of atomization and dispersion with the resulting loss of collective power and transformative capacity:

"I believe that it is a very new and interesting situation which is being worked very well, there are many associations and very varied. Something that was unthinkable a few years ago. But in my opinion, the problem is that they are dispersed, atomized and you wonder if all of this is effective".

An outstanding activist of the 60s feminist movement expressed herself in similar terms:

"There is no doubt that changes are being achieved, but they are temporary, local and also personal. I am not saying that personal changes aren't important, but I wonder whether all that energy flowing, all this effort lead us to a bigger change or to the fragmentation of groups and associations that make those collective changes unviable".

As we have just seen in these last statements, the phenomenon or perception of atomization is lived as a threat to the efficacy in the achievement of goals for larger and global changes. Many experts from urban social movements in Madrid and other cities were involved in this discussion in those years. Therefore, the difference, in addition to other things, between creating associations and social movement lies precisely in the distinction between atomization and coordination and communication system among groups. An association can find itself isolated in its social context by impotence or will. Whereas a social movement is such a movement because it is a communication system in action, that is, because it establishes a flow of messages through a network structure, where different formal groups in consonance serve, at the same time, as connection points of exit and entry of information which develop attitudes and practices expressed positively in crucial moments of mobilization and/or in processes of community development.

Thus, the concept of network appears as an improvement over isolation and atomization and as an organizational and strategic characteristic of social movements. When we talk about the network, we are referring to a horizontal way to organize aimed at achieving common goals through institutions, localities and territorial frontiers. As the history of social movements has pointed out, these have been more effective when they have been consciously organized on the basis of these horizontal networks without rejecting the practical need of an organizational hierarchy in the implementation of a particular operation (Wainwright, 1994; Beck, 2004).

The concept of *social network* has an assessed history in anthropology, and networks studies have revealed the importance of informal organizations in social life as channels that allow the flow of information and resources creating conditions of mutual help, of reciprocity and adaptation to different socio-cultural contexts. On large scale societies in urban situations of great heterogeneity, social networks can be an analytic instrument to show the way in which individuals are linked to institutions and these are produced through social actors (Bott, 1990; Lommitz, 1978; Mitchell, 1969; Wolf, 1980).

The feminist research has developed a great erudition in the analysis of women's movements in very diverse contexts through a network organization and its efficiency to arrange actions to achieve common goals to be fulfilled and the enlargement of its actions (among others, Caplan & Burja, 1978; Jaquette,1989; Morgen & Bookman, 1988; Molyneux & Ravazi, 2002). In this particular case, the study of networks was a key feature to clarify whether that associative heterogeneous and plural universe was a manner of creation and participation in a large movement of women with far-reaching purposes of change, or we were simply before an associative, atomized and particularized panorama.

Nowadays, these questions would also have to be resolved by analysing other social relation fields and in particular, the use and impact of New Technologies of Information and Communication (NTICs). When the research was carried out at that time, virtual networks had not reconfigured Spanish society and citizens' organizations yet.

It was proved throughout the research that the most relevant aspects that were developing to enhance interconnections among groups and network organization were the following:

a) Federations of Associations, Coordinators and Platforms for Action centre on a specific subject. For example, the most active and powerful platform was, then and now, the one that brought together the struggle against violence. One of its inescapable achievements was the passing of Integral Law against Gender Violence in December of 2004. Despite this advancement, the persistence of violence against women makes its coordinated action still necessary.
b) International Networks
c) Local Coordination
d) Publications
e) Interconnection with other social movements

These different intervention levels were not exclusive; they connected different associations' activities, aspirations and claims by uniting actions, enlarging their links and effects and giving intercommunication more fluidity. Likewise, the intensity of their connections and effectiveness depended on specific circumstances which had to be faced. These action networks were crucial to the law reforms that were passed in the 80s in different issues of the legal system aimed at implementing the principle of equality between men and women that has been established in the Constitution. Women's different organizational enclaves, the activities developed, the researches and publications promoted and the interconnections established, weaved a political, social and spatial network distributed within the whole territorial fabric linking the centre and the outskirts of the city. Through this organization -that in many moments had a great public visibility and in many others worked silently, though no less effective- many people, knowledge, mutual collaboration, provision of services and an increase in feminist awareness circulated and undoubtedly were essential for the country's modernization, the Spanish society's democratization and women's advancement.

Conclusions

With this report, we have examined the world of women's activism in Madrid in post-constitutional Spain. Their study allowed us to grasp the richness of the social and political processes performed by women that have been frequently invisible in the prevailing analyses of the Spanish political transition and post-constitutional period. Women's activism, which strongly emerged in the 80s, shaped a large movement of women through a network organization that enlarged its social impact because it made possible the circulation of information, knowledge and the concerted action of claims and proposals of change in the legal, economic and social system which enabled women's advancement.

The voices of the protagonists, which are incorporated in this text, show the importance of the collective activity in the questioning of grounds traditionally assigned to women and the conquest of new knowledge, skills and behaviour patterns that led to a social and political commitment. I have characterized these processes of change as socializations for empowerment, following the proposal set forth by the anthropologist Teresa del Valle. Raising awareness of oppression and gender inequality through the organizational enclaves has a vital importance to redefine women's lives and their incorporation into larger grounds of social and political impact. I have particularly focused on those associations that had feminist purposes in their explicit ends and on women who were part of them: working-class women from rural and urban fields, immigrants or housewives, so far unaware of the underground struggle for women's rights that had been pioneered by feminist organizations in the years of political transition. However, through the analysis of discourses and social associative practices, personal and collective conquests that are difficult to be excluded from various feminist purposes as an emancipating movement have been proven.

In the last thirty years, the situation of Spanish women has significantly changed in relation to education at all levels, employment, sexual and reproductive autonomy, the struggle against violence and the creation of a favourable public opinion of equality. These achievements have been possible due to the work sustained by hundreds of women's organizations coordinated among them. Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress that the current financial and economic crisis that started in 2008 threatens the achievements gained in previous decades. These circumstances make the strengthening of organization and their interconnections necessary and also include the necessity of encouraging research to make it possible to develop new types of organizations, their members' profiles, new demands and alternative proposals.

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The violation of family spaces in some Moroccan women writers' fiction

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Abstract

In this paper I seek to present an analysis of the ways in which Moroccan women writers try to reappraise traditional spaces and boundaries by raising their voices, telling their tales and pleading their own cases. I also wish to examine the breaking of the taboos by women writers and the uses they have made of the freedom to explore some areas of women's experiences. What follows is at best a prelude to more in depth research, but I hope that such studies might benefit from bearing in mind some of the observations which I offer below.

Part I. Women's silence and anger

Literature has long possessed a predominantly male character. Moroccan literature is no exception. Conspicuously absent from it has been the presence of women as writers, critics, and as makers of literary tradition. Until recently, little has been heard of women writers. The achievements of Muslim women, who, against all odds, have managed to produce artistic forms have remained for the most part invisible.

For several centuries, the written literary potential of Moroccan women has been repressed. Access to the power of the written word was denied to them. If Moroccan women writers and their silenced and muted ancestors are to be understood fully, if the true impact of their writing is to be appreciated, then the conditions out of which Moroccan literary tradition was born have to be examined and understood.

The Muslim world has, for a long time, kept men and women apart, believing in the ideal of feminine silence and invisibility. As a consequence, women writers found it difficult to develop and flourish.

In Fatima Mernissi's voice, we can hear the pioneer feminism of women who know that although the Harem cannot be viewed as the only obstacle to women's efforts to become writers, it has been a major one for centuries.

Women experience their confinement spacially, physically and verbally in their social segregation, cultural confinement and forced silence. In Mernissi's work we have a sustained account of how the Harem was a major barrier to a woman's struggle for autonomy and authorship. The Harem, argues Mernissi, muted her voice and curtailed her access to the public domain in more ways than one. It not only curtailed women's bodily expression, but it also inhibited her verbal expression.

The Harem protected women's bodies, sources of fascination and terror for all patriarchal societies. Needless to point out that women's bodies have always been concealed, mutilated and objectified. A case in point is China where thousands of women had their feet bound over several centuries. Large numbers of women were burnt as widows in India and as witches in Europe and America and countless numbers were subjected to various forms of mutilation in the Muslim world. Luckily, the bodies of Moroccan women have not undergone any form of such maiming. Not surprisingly, Mernissi observes :

> « Notre étrange virus "harem" n'a pas de symptômes physiques… chez certains, le malicieux virus pousse à des rêveries insidieuses … Chez d'autres il donne envie d'avoir

une compagne passive, éternellement soumise et silencieuse, même lorsque celle-ci possède une armoire de diplômes (…) »[16]

However, silence has been their main mutilation; not a physical maiming or amputation, but a verbal one.

Moroccan women's silence, like that of Muslim women elsewhere, was spiritualised and idealised; their social self-effacement, their public inertia were considered among other things, key criteria of their beauty. According to Ghita El Khayat "la femme… comme il faut ne parle pas, n'exprime pas sa pensée, … n'inscrit pas sa pensée à côté de celle des hommes »[17]. The paramount assumption is that silence is a woman's most distinctive and desirable attribute. Not only her charm but also the peace and the stability of the entire community depend to a large extent on the woman's silence.

It is not surprising that, given the religious, social, and aesthetic constraints on women's self-expression in public, only a few women could or perhaps even wanted to break this silence.

Part II. Women's writing as transgression

Significantly, Moroccan women writers had to transgress feminine proprieties that shut them out of the public sphere. Indeed, Farzaneh, a pioneering woman writer, rightly says: "Unveiled both their bodies and their voices ... they lifted the veil of secrecy to show the many faces underneath"[18].

Therefore, despite the various obstacles presented by a culture that idealises women's silence, despite accusations of shamelessness and "manque de pudeur', many women chose to write. Women had to write to expose their voices because literature translates the voice to the printed page. As F. Milani points out "writing with its potential for communication, for entering into the world of others, could be considered no less a transgression than unveiling"[19]. In both, she adds, a woman expresses / exposes herself publicly. Through both, an absence becomes a presence. Writing, like unveiling, makes woman publicly visible and mobile.

Moroccan women writers' sense of alienation from Moroccan patriarchal culture is so intense that they are filled with terror and determination as they write.

Recent developments are becoming harder and harder to sweep away, and they are attended too by encouraging signs that women are now freer than they have ever been historically to write what they want in the way they want. Any and every woman who finds herself out of step with her situation and society can now use her writing as a form of resistance to whatever constrains her and more particularly to the impositions of a male constructed society.

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[16] F. Mernissi, « Etes-vous vacciné contre le « Harem » Editions Le FENNEC, p.12. « Etes-vous vacciné contre le Harem? Fatima Mernissi, P. 18. Mernissi goes on to say that 'les Arabes ne sont pas les papas du harem, les Romains et les Grecs avant eux l'avaient inauguré', p. 79

[17] Ghita El Khayat, le Monde Arabe au Feminin, Editions l'Harmattan, Paris, p. 307.
   Fouzia Rhissassi, Images de Femmes : Regards de Société, Editions : La Croisée des Chemins, 2005. It is one of the publications of Unesco Chair/Woman and her Rights.

[18] [4]Farzaneh Milani. Veils and words : The Emerging voices of Iranian women writers. N.Y: Syracuse university Press, 1992,p. 7 .

[19] Ibid, p. 6.

A genuine revolution is, in fact, shaking the foundations of Moroccan society, a revolution with women writers at its very centre. Moroccan women writers are reappraising traditional spaces, limits and boundaries and are renegotiating old sanctions and sanctuaries. It is precisely in this context of the negotiation of boundaries that women break into print as writers.

I started studying Moroccan women writers in the late eighties out of a sense of enthusiasm for, and fascination by, a woman writer of Arabic expression, Khenata Bennouna. Although my reading of her novels has changed over the years, then as now, I found in her work a refusal of silence and exclusion.

Although Khenata Bennouna's novels delighted and encouraged me, I was astonished, not to say disturbed, to find no detailed treatment of the issues raised by her writing. One of the exceptionally few critical books devoted entirely to her work was published by the University Women's Studies Group in 1996.

No full–length study of women's literature in contemporary Morocco had ever been undertaken despite the popular attention women writers have received. Major studies of literature dealt almost exclusively with the works of men. The enormous gap between the time, quality and space of critical attention devoted to male writers and that devoted to women writers was profoundly disturbing. Soon, I came to realize that women's silence could be seen and practiced on several levels. Literary attention or criticism was one such arena. In conventional approaches to literature, I noticed a failure to chronicle and capture women writers' "unveiled" voices and the many kinds of internal and external hardships faced in their attempt to fight and counter marginalization and exclusion verbally and spacially.

My main premise is that close attention should be paid to what women writers are saying. I am perfectly aware of the fact that close attention to the narrative codes inscribed in the texts help form a more balanced view of the diverse elements at play and the inherent emphases of meaning. I am equally aware of the fact that a preoccupation with Moroccan women writers' personal family experience to the exclusion of other considerations such as the use of narrative strategies is very reductive.

The Moroccan women writers I have researched—Bennouna, Yacoubi, Trabelsi, Oumassia, F. Mernissi and Hadraoui—have all produced literary works exhibiting complex structural patterns and themes that reproduce and subvert the rigidly patriarchal gender systems of their society. These patterns and themes, despite their individual specificities, reveal similarities with each other and strong relations with external power structures.

Perhaps the subject of women writers' unveiled voices would not have preoccupied me so long and so intensely had it not been for the several connections that I gradually came to see between writing and the violence of family spaces. Although there are many ways of approaching and studying the writings of Moroccan women, I focus on one aspect: the relationship between women's literature and violence in all its manifestations.

That the formulated Moroccan moral code the heroines fight against is typically represented by men in these novels is significant. For all their sympathy with the under-privileged men in their work, there is no doubt that for Moroccan writers it is woman's cultural condition which requires reassessment and revision. Male censors – the pedagogical husband, the spying neighbour, the

policing brother: each as moral watchdog partakes of a world of male domination bordering upon absurdity, a world violent and tyrannical. This tyrannical world manifests itself most forcibly in the following statement:Le « censeur » qui pouvait être un parent, ou même un inconnu était gardien de l'ordre social et un farouche défenseur des valeurs répressives [20].

All women writers are now beginning to number and name the oppression they have suffered. One by one are the oppressors   hauled out into the light of day. And the name women writers most frequently answer to is Man, and more particularly traditionally minded men.

The man, the male, the important person, "the only person who matters". This sentence is taken straight from the pages of any of the feminist works. Women writers' work is informed by the terrific, almost lurid passion for stating the case of women. The majority of women live on that shabby fringe of society where the need for money, for release, for some assertion of the self as a necessity to survival leads to several kinds of financial and social offences and hence into conflict with the organised sections of the community.

Women writers describe a society in which honour relations prevail with a great deal of clarity. In their books the transgression of boundaries often results in acts of brutality and violence. No matter how hard women work on their relations to society and to its major thematic preoccupations, sooner or later they necessarily return to the question of virginity. The theme has received attention from many of this period's most distinctive women writers; it is, of course, hardly new. The concept of honour is indeed built around women's virginity.

Books about the importance of women's virginity before marriage in the Arab world are not lacking. N. Saadawi's The Hidden Face of Eve is case in point [21]. Muslim women according to the ideal model are expected to abstain from any kind of sexual practice before marriage. The wedding night is a turning point in a woman's life, since it is that crucial time when society is about to make a judgment on her propriety

> The discourse on gender and the discourse on virginity in Moroccan culture are hardly distinguishable. To be brought up as a woman, to be a Moroccan woman, is to a great extent to be a virgin. To be a Moroccan woman means that the performance of femaleness is inseparable from the performance of virginity

This, indeed, is what distinguishes the female body from the male one since the latter does not have any mark of virginity. The idea is that men are not virgins in the biological sense (men do not have a hymen »), but in the cultural sense. Again and again we see how Moroccan culture has no way of marking the male body as virginal.

It is impossible to list the daily activities and practices that are described as essential for the construction of the Virgin/female body in Moroccan culture. The reader is informed that women find themselves at odds with a society that constructs them as women and as virgins.

The rationale behind these prohibitive demands is not only the preservation of physical virginity, the physical attachment of virginity to the body, but also the public effect of virginity. As a

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[20] TouriaHadraoui, une Enfance Marocaine, Editions le Fennec, p. 74.
[21] Nawal.Saadawi, The Hidden Face of Eve, Boston: Beacon, 1981.

result the physical mark of virginity is displaced from its biological place into the body and produced as a body called female. This physical mark is displaced onto the social space where the female body is permitted to move surrounded by a social virginity that marks its borders. As a result Moroccan women characters' performance covers all three meanings together, so that Moroccan women are expected to bleed on their marriage night and they are supposed to perform a "public virginity", as Yamani right says: "with a certain body style, the body moving within a defined social space" [22].

Each border mentioned above is enforced through a set of regulations that the woman is not supposed to violate. As a result, crimes of honour are committed, according to Moroccan women writers, when the above borders are crossed. In almost all novels women are beaten because they are spotted talking to men. In this case, a woman moves with a body and in a space where she is not supposed to be.

Through a very elaborate system of prohibitions, girls learn their limits/hudud[*] at a very young age. Moroccan culture, women writers remind us, guards itself against possible violations by devising sanctions less violent than death such as physical abuse, spatial entrapment, the institution of gossip and reputation.

"Because you are a girl, and people will talk if you do this", is rhetorically how women came to acquire their gender.

With the sweep of history in mind, writers like Trabelsi and Hadraoui raise questions and reach some conclusions about the attitudes which society holds towards women, their role, and their status. As a result generations of children have been socialized to accept inequalities and double standards. With Hadraoui, it becomes particularly important to present a revisionary analysis of *pudeur*– a concept that sheds light on the plight of women curbed and bound to fit the world of men: "les hommes, says Maïlouda, n'utilisent le mot pudeur que pour les femmes".[23] (p. 11).

Moroccan women writers do not evade their feelings. Their writings reveal all the problems of modern Moroccan women with their pains, conflicts and contradictions. They shed light on the lives of those women who seek self expression, self affirmation and social options in a male cultural world that does not accept them. They explore the vulnerability of those women who refuse to conform to traditional roles and who suffer from the uncertainties of the future.

Women are presented, as freed from feminine stereotypes and clichés, but have a strong physical presence. No longer prisoners of silence and invisibility, constricted in their emotional expression, they are given a new life and a new focus. After centuries of being the beloved, woman becomes the lover. In many cases, an interesting reversal of gender-bound representations occurs. As a matter of fact, women writers violate many codes and subvert power and *pudeur.* They openly address sexual issues and violate the linguistic or language norms that are politically correct or proper language for a woman.

It is worth pointing out that Moroccan women writers of Arabic expression also treat sensual and sexual themes, but they do it through metaphors or symbols to avoid going too far from the

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[22] Yamani, p. 150.
[*] Hudud means frontiers in Arabic.
[23] "Men, says Mailouda, always associate the concept of propriety with women"

virtuousness of the ideal Muslim woman. But women writers of French expression do not try to camouflage sexuality by allusions, symbols and metaphors.

The overwhelming fact which we must confront is that Moroccan women's work is extravagantly marked by its changed attitude towards sexuality and marriage. Because the writers between 1960 and 1980 have been men for whom marriage was seen as the central fact of the social universe, the degree to which women's novels have come to question marriage in all its ramifications has gone unnoticed.

I lay stress upon the physicality of Moroccan women writers for two reasons. The first has to do with Moroccan critics' discomfiture with women, which none perceived as an embarrassment with or fear of, the female body, and which most couched in terms of moral censure. The second has to do with Moroccan women writers' less than typical cultural view of female sexuality: their complete faith in the healthy, life giving force of free, unrepressed sexual activity. The majority of women writers begin where the majority of men writers left off, with real, flesh-and blood-women.

In the same radical spirit, women writers not only acknowledge, or give due recognition to female emotions, female sensations, but they also treat them with the same devotion to physical detail as they give to men. Hence the potential for the physically active life (as opposed to passive), the active experience is not reserved exclusively for men; and the life of the senses is not, therefore, rendered invisible, or beyond the bounds of common experience.

Moroccan women writers experience their bodies in ways that surely draw shudders from some conservative critics, which the most outspoken of them do not try to hide. In L'Arganier des Femmes, Maïlouda's feelings run high about Raïss :

> « Son corps vibre au contact des lèvres sur sa peau … Les sens flattés, jusqu'au paroxisme, elle s'était abandonnée entre ses mains expertes dans un gémissement (…) »[24] [25]

Similarly, Trabelsi firmly keeps to the practice of celebrating the life of the senses and, most important, of presenting the voluptuous woman, the sexy woman, as neither dumb nor loose in morals. To bring moral seriousness and sexiness together in the single female figure is not only to fly in the face of current conventions, codes and beliefs, it is also subversive.

The Moroccan conceptual bifurcation of woman ('bintennass' and "salgota", in Arabic, madonna and whore) may seem to the modern mind to be primarily iconographical, but it carries sufficient influence within society to generate its likeness in form: notably, the concept of two types of women, one fit for sex and the other for wife. The social usefulness of this bifurcation in a male-dominated society is that it consolidates division between men and women, for there is no equivalent among men of the Madonna / whore polarisation – but between women themselves because they are divided against their own kind. Moroccan women writers, then, in presenting Moroccans with women who do not conform to the stereotypes, not only offend against proprieties but also threaten the status quo, hitting at the very structure and foundation of society itself.

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[24] "Her body quivers with excitement as his kisses are planted on her skin. She abandons herself to his expert hands in a paroxism of pleasure"

[25] Dania, Oumassine, l'Arganier des Femmes Egarées, editions le Fennec, 1998, p. 45.

It is not simply that moral seriousness and sexiness come together, subversely, in some novels, where current beliefs uphold the view that the latter negates the former, where the prevailing cultural conviction that the voluptuous woman is morally degenerate. More substantially, as the writers try to demonstrate, the fusion of these traits in the single female figure brings forth in the novels a set of brave, dauntless and remarkably strong women. The sexual vitality which infuses their life generates vigour of both body and mind: from these spring strength, courage, and that capacity so many heroines possess for self-exposure expressing both daring and intimacy – the ultimate intimacy which demands facing the demands of ego – loss in those moments which calls for abandon.

In terms of presenting Moroccan women writers' works within the specific context of female sexuality, one has to begin, I think, with the reaction of Moroccan critics speaking today in academia. Aside from fears of, or embarrassments by, confrontations with the physical, flesh and blood reality of women's lives it seems to me that even while shuddering at the voluptuousness of Moroccan writers' women, Moroccan critics shielded their eyes or, at any rate, did not fully expose the picture they had before them. In Une Femme Tout simplement, women such as Laïla convey a great deal to readers, of their erotic ecstasy and organismic rapture – as for instance in those scenes where Laïla sinks blissfully in the throes of ecstasy, and undulates on her orgasmic plateau, beyond consciousness of time and space, in 'exaltation':

> Omar n'avait révélé mon corps, ma féminité. Il m'avait fait découvrir ma sexualité, le plaisir, l'impudeur. Avec, lui, j'étais devenue une femme et j'avais l'impression que toute ma jouissance s'affichait sur mon visage[26] [27].

Surely, in an age that places a high value on reticence, self-restraint, and certain feminine qualities such as pudeur or "Hshouma", in Arabic[28] a retiring disposition, a physical and intellectual timidity, and so forth, Moroccan women writers do certainly confuse certain readers caught with mixed feelings of admiration and alarm. Indeed, for removing the paragon from her pedestal, for presenting what some would call humanly imperfect women, Trabelsi, to her hurt and indignation, was charged with misrepresenting womankind. This particular charge is unanswerable for, in a sense, the critics are right: the representative model, the sexless woman, is in the amalgam, and in certain Moroccan eyes, the most desirable of all representations.

This critical perspective in so far as indecorum is measured solely in relation to male female body contact, speaks of far more than delicacy of mind or distaste for things physical. It speaks of total obliviousness to or ignorance of female sexuality. Outside or beyond the physical presence of the man/husband, beyond his compass, a woman's erotic life does not exist.

Indeed, one of the most important aspects of the conceptual framework of women writers is the absence of perfectly sexless women. Their fiction underlines the idea that Moroccan society is unable to dispense with the sexual double-standard, which female sexuality still presents a threat to the dominant culture which refuses to grant women the opportunities granted to men.

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[26] Omar revealed many things to me: my body, my femininity, my sexuality, pleasure, inappropriateness. I became a woman and I had the impression that my "jouissance" was written on my face

[27] BahaaTrabelsi, une Femme tout simplement, Editions le Fennec, 1995, p. 133.

[28] See SN Guessous's Au-delà de toute pudeur : La Sexualité Feminine au Maroc, Imprimerie Eddar El Beida, Casablanca, 1987.

Moroccan writers' sense, here, of frustration in the face of authority accentuates a fundamental theme: the overriding of humanitarian concerns – the violation of basic human rights within society and within the institution of marriage in particular. The very term 'institution of marriage' itself resounds somewhat chillingly in a still institution-bound age which subsumes remedial and punitive establishments such as mental and penal institutions under the same heading, but reserves 'association' for the denomination of voluntarily grouped bodies.

We may never know the Truth of what happens in the conjugal bedroom, but what is certain is that something critical is born. The declaration of Laïla's mother is a revelation to the nation's men and women of the barrenness of marriage without "plaisir sexuel":

> « (...) ils dormirent côté à côté…chastement ; c'était la première d'une innombrable suite de nuits, qu'elle allait passer auprès d'un homme qu'elle estimait certes, mais qui n'éveillait en elle aucune passion. La manière dont elle dormit près de lui cette nuit-là lui parut comme une préfiguration de sa vie future : calme, sans amour, à côté de plaque »[29].

What happens to Moroccan women in the bedroom is also conveyed by several passages, where the mother and her daughter exchange ideas about male vigilance and control over female sexuality.

There is no doubt in my mind that Moroccan novels of French expression point to psychic and emotional realities never grasped by the male novels I have read.

Part III: Women's questioning of the marriage institution

If we think back upon the "shocking" passages in women writers' work, we are sharply reminded that the deep flaws in marriage might have been seen earlier if people had been able to be outspoken about sex and the marriage bed. There can be no question that marriage would have been a different institution had women been free to talk openly about their sexual experiences and had their sense of their own sexuality been revealed. Furthermore, despite the present enormous emphasis about sex, I believe that women writers do not begin to understand the reasons for the growing failure of marriage until they begin to see what marriage ought to have in common with friendship, with companionship, and with love.

The modern period deserves fame for its relentless consideration of marriage in all its disastrous aspects. Marriage is seen as the old institution, inevitable, necessary and unchanging as death. The similarity between marriage and death ought to be looked at more closely. For the Moroccan woman writer marriage is, except in rare instances, a form of death; it is the death of her individual identity, the death of her as a person under the law for she enters into her sexual experience ignorant and without acknowledged desire, perhaps her literal death in the marital bed.

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[29] Fatiha Boucetta, <u>Anissa captive</u>, Editions le Fennec, 1991, p. 223.

My point that marriage is a failed institution is substantiated by the work of all Moroccan women writers.

The novels hold up for condemnation not only marriage but also the family as an institution whose glories women are beginning to doubt. The heroines' decisions not to marry or remarry after divorce make clear the bankruptcy of marriage as a personal institution though it continues to serve the ends of society and business.

Happy marriages, simple contented liaisons are unknown in these works, so stark, so unblinking is their assessment of the gaping discrepancy between form and content in marriage. Those who believe that they love or are loved, are invariably exposed as being hideously deceived and self-deceived.

In une Femme Tout simplement, the writer attacks marriage as 'out of the frying pan into the fire!'. What is marriage, she repeatedly remarks, but prostitution to one man instead of many. Similarly, Rachida muses resentfully : « Je rencontrais toutes sortes de couples. Mais… Ils se consument, chaque jour et sacrifient leur bonheur. Peu importe, que chacun vive de son côté. L'essentiel est de respecter le pacte qu'impose la société est de vivre sous le même toit. » [30] [31]

Marriage is of course only one instrument through which dominant husbands wage the sex war on unprepared, unarmed women according to the experience of some women writers.

At any rate Yacoubi, Oumassine and Trabelsi are aware of the torture of being obliged to submit, and they are also conscious that several women do give themselves "to a man from considerations other than love". In fact, their voice resounds with the overtones of the nineteenth-century radical socialist Engels. Engels, as is well-known, claims that only with the abolition of private ownership will a new generation of women grow-up, who have never known "what it is to give themselves to a man from any other consideration than real love or ... [what it is] to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences"[32].

According to some writers, simple renunciation of marriage would have been more than adequate had not prevailing societal pressures dictated otherwise.

Sacrosanct as the institution of marriage is to Moroccans, a groundswell of dissent is gathering force beneath that seeming unruffled climate of stability and certitude. However, if indignation abounds even in a smoldering state, a condemnation of marriage has not yet become common among Moroccan writers. Few writers, for example, betray even a latent disposition to preach the abolition of institutionalized marriage. Even the strong-minded characters want changes which shall render husband and wife more equal, rather than any revolt against society.

In every case, we see the domestic tyranny of the husband. Ali's tyranny partly takes the form of protectiveness. When Rachida wants to send her son to France to continue his studies, he rejects the idea on the grounds that she cannot afford it. Without the slightest consultation of her wishes, he announces that Younes must study in Morocco. For all intents and purposes, as the writer perceives it, there has been little improvement over the years upon the barbaric marital behaviour as

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[30] I met all kinds of couples. But they are consumed or eaten up with misery. The only issue that matters is
    respect for the societal pact that compels them to live under the same roof

[31] Rachida Yacoubi, Ma vie, mon cri, Editions Eddif, 1995, pp. 106 – 107.

[32] Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, London, 1972, p. 145.

practised by Lary. A second divorce now becomes Rachida's most effective weapon and her most effective shield:

> "Un deuxième divorce! Ce n'était plus une étiquette que l'on me réservait, mais un drapeau noir flottant sur ma tête pour signaler : « Zone strictement Interdite ̎». Une femme qui avait raté deux fois sa vie"[33] (Ma Vie, p. 342).

Rachida's divorce particularly demonstrates that Moroccan intellectuals, like Ali, remain limited to sex-role models that are heavily dependent on a barbaric past, instead of accepting ones that would dynamise their perception of sex-roles. As Yacoubi observes, Ali adopts western dress, goes abroad for education, but does not want his wife to be emancipated. This contradiction between an increasingly male culture of the educated men in Morocco, and the fierce jealousy with which they want to preserve the so-called traditional culture of their women as the main symbol of their Muslim identity leads to an increased polarization in Moroccan society. Accordingly, Moroccan women are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, oppression and physical violence irrespective of educational levels of development. The emphasis as Rachida's case illustrates the fact the women's biological role is defined in terms of reproductive and associated social functions. Not surprisingly, Rachida manages to get rid of ceméchant virus. In her book 'Etes- vous vacciné' contre le "Harem", Mernissi deals with the 'Harem', in yet another way, by comparing it to 'a virus': [Le Harem] est un virus particulièrement méchant, réminiscence d'une antique maladie qui a sévi au moyen âge, … ce méchant virus attaque les hommes d'aujourd'hui … il s'insinue dans leur esprit, et leur suggère le désir fou de voir leur compagne, aussi moderne qu'eux, probablement une professeur à l'université … agir comme une jarya. Jarya est un mot arabe qui désigne la femme esclave[34]. The harem is a vicious virus, an echo of an antique illness that was widespread in the middle ages. Today, this vicious virus attacks men…and penetrates their minds, and leads them to think that women, such as university teachers are nothing but jarya. Jarya is an Arabic word meaning a woman slave

Indeed, Moroccan men feel insulted when their wives work outside the home. One is struck by the fact that the concept of women's work used in development projects at both the national and the international levels in Muslim societies is still a traumatizing experience for many Moroccan men who view women's work outside the home as an emotional mutilation and a symbolic castration because in their own frame of reference, a salary outside the home is the privilege and the monopoly of masculinity.

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[33] "A second divorce! It was more than a label reserved for me, but a black flag floating above my head indicating: Strictly forbidden zone".

[34] F. Mernissi, Etes-vous vacciné contre Le « HAREM » ? pp. 11-12. For more elaboration on marriage as a process of sacrifice and victimization, see "Femmes, Violence et Université au Maroc, Editions: La Croisée des Chemins, Casablanca, 2003, ed: Fouzia Rhissassi et A.Moulay Rachid. In the book, Moroccan women are explicit about what they loathe in men.

I do not really wish to conclude and sum up, rounding off the analysis I have made so as to dump it in a nutshell on the reader. A lot more could be said about any of the points I have touched upon, many more examples could be adduced, further connections could be made.

I have tried to show that when women write, they do not adopt an attitude of provocation. When Moroccan women write, they follow their truth and they tell it. Their role is to be a witness to their reality, an engaged witness, personal and sentimental and all that follows, but a witness nevertheless. This, then, is the general perspective that informs my tour of Moroccan women writers.

It is undeniable that Moroccan women writers acquire practice in making ethical choices which put some established values into question. This practice has revolutionary implications for feudalistic Moroccan society. For one, it pulls women out of the oppressive confinement of male values. This is an important breakthrough especially that value analyses are so taboo that the young often grow up without identifying their own values and without realizing that others may hold conflicting values with equal convictions.

Another View of Africa

A Photo Essay on Female Education and Empowerment in Burkina Faso
by Brenda Gael McSweeney and Scholastique Kompaoré with Cassandra Fox

Abstract

This photo essay is a challenge to what the authors perceive as a mega mindset and media bias towards negative depictions of Africa, particularly in the area of gender equality. The authors hope that this photo essay will illustrate the positive progress they observed in the West African nation of Burkina Faso through their decades-long action research on two powerful and inspirational initiatives: the Project for Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education, and the Multi Functional Platform, both of which utilize technology to reduce women's workloads, generate revenue, and allow females greater access to education, thus bringing positive change to their lives and entire communities.

Background

We are development activists and researchers, focusing especially on women's contributions to development in Africa. We wish to promote initiatives to change the image many people have of Africa, so heavily depicted in the media as a continent dominated by tragedy and disasters. This is only compounded by the picture often shared by Africans themselves: for example, world-famous filmmakers who must have felt obligated to showcase infanticide, Female Genital Mutilation, witchcraft – perhaps mainly to meet audience demand.

Our experience and image is instead of the positive and amazing things that are happening across the continent. This is why we would like to share the pictorial story of a duo of powerful initiatives that we lived and researched over a number of decades in Burkina Faso.

Introduction to the Project for Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education

Access to education is a crucial factor in societal advancement. In an effort to improve the situation of women in Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta), a pilot project launched by the Government in the 1970s with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aimed to address the barriers to female education in this West African country. Division of labor played a key role in the exclusion of women and girls from education, whose dual responsibilities in both income-generating activities (largely comprised of time-intensive manual labor) and in the domestic sphere did not leave energy and time for pursuits such as education. The introduction of improved technology – such as grinding mills and nearby water wells – to lessen the burden of the work assigned to women and girls effectively freed up time to allow females to pursue an education, thereby gaining critical skills such as functional literacy and numeracy. These, in turn, led to a shift in the perception of women – by others and by themselves -- who were able to become more active and vocal within their communities. While women have not yet achieved equal status with men, these projects focusing on female education have served as a catalyst in the advancement of women within Burkinabé society. Too often, people in general and the global media more specifically focus on conflict and struggle on the African continent, to the neglect of such narratives of progress and hope.

The Women's Education Project grew out of the observation that unequal, gendered labor roles act as a mammoth barrier to female access to education. As a direct result, women may also be barred from political activity within their villages and work advancement, creating a cycle perpetuating their second-class status. The Women's Education Project was launched initially in three pilot zones of the country, chosen to reflect different ethnic, economic, and climatic settings to facilitate replication. It aimed to address inequalities in all aspects of Burkinabé women's lives by focusing on one of the root causes of this problem – the immense workloads placed on women and girls, which include a variety of time-consuming agricultural and other physical tasks in addition to household work and familial care. The results included boosting women's 'voice' and their standing in the community. UNESCO Paris published our full Gender Case Study entitled *The Quest for Gender Equality in Burkina Faso: Female Workloads, Education and Empowerment*. The document shares the positive impacts on women – and entire communities – along with remaining challenges, and is available online.[35]

A Successor Initiative: the Multi-Functional Platform

The second "follow-on" community initiative, decades later, considered a 'child' of the Women's Education Project, is centered on Multi Functional Platforms introduced in rural West Africa, an approach and technology to reduce women's workloads, generate income and promote girls' education. We spontaneously visited villages where we witnessed this technology 'package' in action, managed by women's groups, changing women's and girls' lives.

The Multi-Functional Platform, provided with upfront funding by the UN Development Programme, consists of a simple diesel engine (that can also operate on bio-fuel) and a selection of add-on units chosen by the villagers, which may include tools like a shea and peanut butter press, a flour mill or a grain huller. Each of these units performs a labor and time-intensive task that was previously completed by hand, usually by rural women. Thus, the introduction of the Multi-Functional Platform lightened strenuous household tasks and allowed these women to shift to income-generating work (for example, growing vegetables and selling them in the market). This subsequently boosted the number of girls enrolled in school, as their mothers could forego their daughters' labor in day-to-day household and agricultural tasks. This facilitated a two-part upward cycle in income, where investments were made in human capital to increase girls' knowledge, and the extra income earned could be used as collateral, allowing women to expand their small rural enterprises.

The implementation of the Multi-Functional Platform initiative, given support by local Non-Governmental Organizations with strong track records, encouraged female education and empowerment in another way, as the Multi-Functional Platforms were managed and controlled by teams of women. These Women's Management Committees cultivated female leadership within their communities, and strengthened the practical skills of the women participants, who were in charge of tasks such as measuring grain, negotiating prices, and keeping records of their earnings. Thus, the women in charge of the platforms acquired a certain level of functional literacy, alongside

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[35] *The Quest for Gender Equality in Burkina Faso: Female Workloads, Education and Empowerment* by Scholastique Kompaoré and Brenda Gael McSweeney with Jennifer Hilda Frisanco, UNESCO, Paris, 2007

greater self-esteem. These findings were shared on UNESCO's [gender equality portal](#) in our feature, *Burkina's Women Shape Progress*.[36]

Moving Forward

Efforts geared towards improving female access to education have dramatically improved the situation in Burkina Faso. In the 1970s when the pilot Women's Education Project was launched, only 2.4% of females in Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) were literate, and about one girl for three boys attended primary school. In those years, based on time diary studies that the authors undertook in three regions of the country, girls worked on average over 7 hours a day, about twice the workload of boys. Today, the female literacy rate in Burkina Faso is 33% for youth and 22% for adults. Encouragingly, these percentages are projected to increase. Currently, 9.4 girls are enrolled in primary school for every 10 boys (2010 data). As to "school life expectancy" from primary through tertiary education, girls typically complete 6.4 years, as compared to 7.4 for boys. Aiding this improvement, in recent years the Government of Burkina has been investing above the all-Africa average in education. Yet the country just lost support of a major education donor. Overall, while more remains to be done, these statistics paint a promising future for the women of Burkina Faso.[37]

A Visual Depiction

The following photo-story illustrates this evolving situation of women in Burkina Faso over the past few decades, highlighting both important changes that have been made and areas where there is still work to be done.

The first photos show the double-workload placed on women, who perform tasks such as head-loading water for kilometers even at a young age, multi-tasking by pounding millet while caring for children, in addition to agricultural labor. These tasks are shared among women and their daughters, who subsequently leave school to take on more responsibility at home and in the fields. While the work of men and women may overlap as shown, men rarely if ever cross over into the domestic sphere.

The introduction of new technology, such as mills for grinding grain and nuts and later the Multi-Functional Platform, played a key role in freeing up women's time for other activities. This latter technology can also address more complicated tasks such as processing shea nuts – a major income earner - electricity generation, and water irrigation. These advancements cut down on the time females had to devote to grueling work, and thus freed time and energy for other endeavors, such as income-generating activities and education.
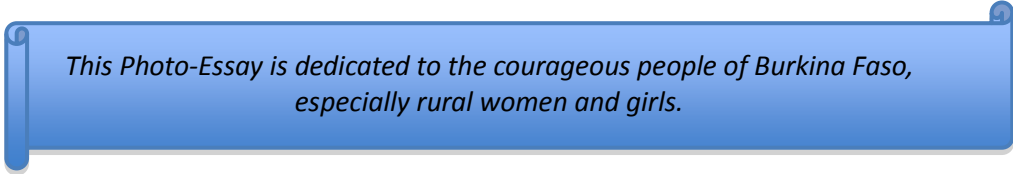
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[36] For a more detailed account of the Multi-Functional Platform initiative, see *Burkina's Women Shape Progress* by Brenda Gael McSweeney and Scholastique Kompaoré, e-published by UNESCO, Paris in 2008

[37] UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Paris, 2012

Several photos demonstrate the growing participation of women and girls in educational activities, like functional literacy and numeracy. These new skills allowed women to take more control of their lives and to participate in their communities. One photo illustrates a list of problems linked to the current situation of women, plus solutions outlined by a group of young students, demonstrating that education may be a catalyst to shifting the mindset of a community, and ultimately creating systemic change. This evolution ultimately facilitated increased female participation in village discussion and decisions. The concluding photos mark a change in the status of women, who increasingly speak out in their communities and express their opinions alongside men. The final photo is a picture drawn by a young village girl, illustrating her dream. In the sketch she depicts herself as the "Minister of the World." This lofty goal provides hope for the future advancement of women in Burkina Faso, for it demonstrates the mindset of the youngest generation. With education increasingly available to women and girls as a result of improved technology and changing cultural mindsets, women are approaching an era where the most ambitious of their dreams are attainable.

Cover photo: *Woman leader in Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) in the 70s*

This Photo-Essay is dedicated to the courageous people of Burkina Faso, especially rural women and girls.

Un autre regard sur l'Afrique

Un essai photo sur l'éducation et l'autonomisation des femmes au Burkina Faso
par Brenda Gael McSweeney et Scholastique Kompaoré avec Cassandra Fox

Résumé

Ce reportage photo est un défi à ce que les auteurs considèrent comme un état d'esprit répandu dans les médias et leur partialité dans les représentations négatives qu'ils font de l'Afrique, en particulier en ce qui concerne le domaine de l'égalité entre les sexes. Les auteures espèrent que ce reportage photo illustrera ce que durant des décennies, elles ont observé au Burkina Faso, pays d'Afrique de l'ouest, à travers leur recherche-action portant sur deux importantes initiatives et également sources d'inspiration: le projet d'égalité d'accès des femmes et des filles à l'éducation, et la Plate-forme multi fonctionnelle, qui, toutes deux, utilisent la technologie pour réduire la charge de travail des femmes, générer des revenus, permettre un meilleur accès des femmes à l'éducation, apportant ainsi des changements positif dans leur vie et celle de communautés entières.

Contexte

Nous sommes des militantes et des chercheurs dans le domaine du développement, centré en particulier sur la contribution des femmes au développement en Afrique. Nous souhaitons promouvoir des initiatives pour changer l'image que beaucoup ont de l'Afrique, trop souvent représenté dans les médias comme un continent où prédominent tragédies et désastres. Cela est d'autant plus grave que des africains eux-mêmes partagent cette image de l'Afrique: par exemple, des cinéastes de renommée internationale se sont cru obligés de valoriser l'infanticide, les mutilations génitales féminines, la sorcellerie - peut-être surtout pour répondre à la demande du public.

L'expérience et l'image que nous avons de ce continent se rapportent plutôt à des choses positives et extraordinaires qui s'y produisent. C'est pourquoi nous tenons à partager avec vous, à travers les photos, l'histoire vécue auprès d'un couple d'initiatives significatives sur lesquelles ont porté nos recherches pendant un certain nombre d'années au Burkina Faso.

Introduction au projet d'Egalité d'Accès des Femmes et des Filles à l'Education

L'accès à l'éducation est un facteur essentiel dans l'avancement de la société. Dans un effort pour améliorer la situation des femmes au Burkina Faso (alors Haute-Volta), un projet pilote lancé par le gouvernement dans les années 1970 avec l'Organisation des Nations Unies, pour l'Education, la Science et la Culture (UNESCO) et le Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement (PNUD) visait les obstacles à l'éducation des femmes dans ce pays ouest-africain. La division du travail joue un rôle clé

dans l'exclusion des femmes et des jeunes filles de l'éducation, La double responsabilité des femmes dans les activités génératrices de revenus (exigeant généralement beaucoup de temps et de main d'œuvre) et dans la sphère domestique ne laisse pas du temps et de l'énergie pour des activités telles que l'éducation. L'introduction de technologies améliorées - tels que les moulins à grains et les puits à proximité des habitations- a allégé le fardeau des tâches dévolues aux femmes et aux filles et effectivement libéré du temps permettant aux femmes de poursuivre des études, et acquérir ainsi des compétences essentielles telles que l'alphabétisation et le calcul fonctionnels. Cela a en retour, conduit à un changement de perception des femmes - par d'autres et par elles-mêmes – des femmes qui ont réussi à devenir plus actives et à se faire entendre au sein de leurs communautés. Bien que les femmes n'aient pas encore atteint l'égalité avec les hommes, ces projets axés sur l'éducation des femmes ont servi de catalyseur dans la promotion de la femme au sein de la société burkinabé. Trop souvent, les gens en général et les médias plus particulièrement, mettent l'accent sur les conflits et les luttes dans le continent africain, négligeant de parler de ces progrès et espoir.

Le projet d'éducation des femmes est né du constat que les inégalités, la division sexuelle des rôles agissent comme une grande barrière à l'accès des femmes à l'éducation. Comme conséquence directe, toute activité politique au sein de leurs villages pourrait également leur être interdite et leur carrière compromise, créant ainsi un cycle qui perpétue leur statut de seconde classe.   Le projet d'éducation des femmes a été lancé initialement dans trois zones pilotes du pays, zones choisies pour refléter des contextes ethniques, économiques, climatiques et linguistiques différents en vue de faciliter ensuite son extension à d'autres zones. Il avait pour objectif de lutter contre les inégalités dans tous les aspects de la vie des femmes burkinabé en se focalisant sur l'une des causes profondes de ce problème - les lourdes charges de travail imposées aux femmes et aux filles, qui incluent diverses tâches agricoles fastidieuses et autres tâches physiques sans oublier le travail ménager et la famille. Booster la voix des femmes et leur standing dans la communauté font partie des résultats obtenus par ce projet. UNESCO Paris a publié la totalité de notre étude de cas intitulé *The Quest for Gender Equality in Burkina Faso: Female Workloads, Education and Empowerment*. Le document vous parle des impacts positifs sur les femmes - et sur la communauté dans sa totalité - ainsi que les défis qui subsistent. Il est disponible en ligne.

Un successeur: la plate-forme multifonctionnelle

La deuxième initiative communautaire qui a suivi, des décennies plus tard, considérée comme un «enfant» du Projet d'éducation des femmes, est la plate-forme multifonctionnelle introduite dans les régions rurales en Afrique de l'Ouest, une approche et une technologie permettant de réduire et d'alléger le travail des femmes, générer des revenus et promouvoir l'éducation des filles. Nous nous sommes spontanément rendues dans les villages où nous avons vu fonctionner ce «paquet» de technologies, gérées par des groupes de femmes, et qui apportent un réel changement dans la vie des femmes et des filles[38].

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[38] La quête de l'égalité au Burkina Faso: La charge de travail féminin, l'éducation et l'autonomisation des femmes par Scholastique Kompaoré et Brenda Gael McSweeney avec Jennifer Hilda Frisanco, UNESCO, Paris, 2007

La plate-forme multifonctionnelle, initialement financé par le Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement se compose d'un moteur diesel simple (qui peut également fonctionner au biocarburant) auquel se greffent une sélection d'unités choisies par les villageois, et pouvant inclure des presses à karité et à arachides, un moulin à grains ou une décortiqueuse. Chacune de ces unités effectue un labeur ou une tâche qui exige beaucoup de temps et était exécutée jusqu'alors à la main, le plus souvent par les femmes rurales. Ainsi donc, la plate-forme multifonctionnelle allège les pénibles tâches ménagères et permet aux femmes de se tourner vers des activités génératrices de revenus (par exemple, la culture et la vente des légumes au marché). Le nombre de filles inscrites à l'école augmente également, puisque les mères peuvent désormais se passer de la contribution de leurs filles aux tâches ménagères journalières et aux travaux agricoles. On constate aussi une hausse régulière de revenus sur deux plans qui facilite d'abord des investissements sur le capital humain pour accroître les connaissances des filles, et puis, assurer, grâce aux revenus supplémentaires, le développement des petites entreprises rurales des femmes.

La mise en œuvre de la Plate-forme multifonctionnelle, avec le soutien des Organisations Non Gouvernementales (ONG) reconnues, encourage l'éducation et l'autonomisation des femmes d'une autre manière, puisque par équipe, elles en assurent la gestion et le contrôle. Ces comités de gestion aident les femmes à cultiver le leadership au sein de leurs communautés, et renforcent les compétences pratiques des participantes, des femmes qui assurent la pesée des grains, négocient les prix, et tiennent les livres de comptes. Ainsi, les femmes en charge des plates-formes sont parvenues à un certain niveau d'alphabétisation et de calcul fonctionnels, et ont en outre acquis une plus grande estime de soi. Ces informations sont sur le portail de l'UNESCO, [gender equality portal](#) dans notre dossier, Burkina's Women Shape Progress[39].

Aller de l'avant

Grâce aux efforts visant à améliorer l'accès des femmes à l'éducation la situation s'est considérablement amélioré au Burkina Faso. Dans les années 1970, lorsque le projet pilote d'éducation des femmes a été lancé, seulement 2,4% des femmes au Burkina Faso (alors Haute-Volta) savaient lire et écrire, et environ une fille sur trois garçons fréquentait l'école primaire. Dans ces années, comme le révèlent des études budget/temps que les auteures ont réalisées dans trois régions du pays, les filles travaillaient en moyenne plus de 7 heures par jour, soit environ le double de la charge de travail des garçons. Aujourd'hui, le taux d'alphabétisation des femmes au Burkina Faso est de 33% pour les jeunes et 22% pour les adultes. Fait encourageant, ces pourcentages devraient augmenter. Actuellement, 9,4 filles sont inscrites à l'école primaire contre 10 garçons (données de 2010). Quant à «l'espérance de vie scolaire» de l'enseignement primaire à l'enseignement supérieur, les filles en général complètent 6,4 ans, contre 7,4 pour les garçons. Pour aider à ce que cette amélioration se poursuive, le gouvernement du Burkina Faso investit ces dernières années, plus que la moyenne de toute l'Afrique en la matière. Pourtant, le pays vient de perdre dans ce domaine, le soutien d'un donateur majeur. Dans l'ensemble, tout reste

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[39] Pour un compte rendu plus détaillé de l'initiative Plate-forme multifonctionnelle, voir Les femmes du Burkina façonnent le progrès, par Brenda Gael McSweeney et Scholastique Kompaoré, e-publié par l'UNESCO, Paris en 2008

encore à faire, ces statistiques augurent cependant un avenir prometteur pour les femmes du Burkina Faso[40].

Une représentation visuelle

Les photos suivantes illustrent l'évolution de la situation des femmes au Burkina Faso au cours des dernières décennies. Elles montrent à la fois les changements importants réalisés et les zones où il ya encore du travail à faire.

Les premières photos montrent la double charge de travail imposée aux femmes, qui effectuent des tâches telles que transporter de l'eau sur la tête sur des kilomètres même à un jeune âge, assurer diverses tâches comme piler le mil tout en s'occupant des enfants, et assurer en plus la main-d'œuvre agricole. Les femmes et leurs filles se partagent ces tâches ce qui, en conséquence amène les dernières à quitter l'école pour assumer plus de responsabilités à la maison et dans les champs. Bien qu'il arrive comme nous le montrons, que le travail des hommes et des femmes se chevauchent, les hommes rarement, voire jamais, n'interfèrent dans la sphère domestique.

L'introduction de nouvelles technologies, comme les moulins à grain et à noix, puis la plate-forme multifonctionnelle, joue un rôle clé dans la libération du temps des femmes pour d'autres activités. La dernière technologie peut également prendre en compte des tâches plus complexes comme le traitement des noix de karité - une source importante de revenus - la production d'électricité et l'irrigation. Ces progrès ont réduit le temps que les femmes consacrent à ces travaux exténuants, et donc libéré du temps et de l'énergie pour d'autres entreprises, comme des activités génératrices de revenus et l'éducation.

Plusieurs photos montrent la participation croissante des femmes et des filles à des activités éducatives, telles que l'alphabétisation et le calcul fonctionnels. Ces nouvelles compétences ont permis aux femmes d'exercer plus de contrôle sur leur vie et de participer à celle de leurs communautés. Une photo montre une liste établie par un groupe d'étudiants des problèmes liés à la situation actuelle des femmes, ainsi que des propositions de solutions. Ceci démontre que l'éducation peut être un catalyseur de changement de mentalité d'une communauté, et peut même créer un changement systémique. Cette évolution a finalement facilité la participation accrue des femmes aux discussions et aux décisions dans leurs communautés. Les dernières photos montrent un changement dans le statut des femmes, qui se font entendre de plus en plus dans leurs communautés et expriment leurs opinions aux côtés des hommes. La photo finale est un dessin par une jeune fille villageoise, illustrant le rêve de sa vie. Dans le dessin, elle se dépeint comme «Ministre du Monde." Ce noble objectif donne de l'espoir quant à l'avenir des femmes au Burkina Faso, car il montre l'état d'esprit de la jeune génération. Avec l'éducation rendue plus accessible aux femmes et aux filles grâce à l'utilisation d'une technologie améliorée et l'évolution des mentalités culturelles, les femmes se rapprochent d'une ère où leur rêve le plus ambitieux peut être atteint.

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[40] L'UNESCO, Rapport mondial de suivi sur l'Education pour tous, Paris, 2012.

Photo de couverture: *femme leader au Burkina Faso (alors Haute-Volta) dans les années 70*

> *Ce reportage photo est dédié au peuple courageux du Burkina Faso, en particulier aux femmes et aux filles rurales.*

Liste des légendes

(1) Jamais trop jeune pour assumer une tâche éreintante

(2) La journée de travail d'une femme commence avant l'aube et se poursuit jusque tard dans la nuit, avec environ une heure de temps libre

(3) L'introduction dans les années 1970 par le projet d'éducation des femmes de technologies allégeant le travail des femmes, a libéré du temps et de l'énergie.

(4) Les femmes assument une double charge de travail, le dur labeur des champs en plus des tâches domestiques.

(5) Alors que les espaces de travail des femmes et des hommes se chevauchent parfois, les femmes assument seules des tâches ménagères et domestiques.

(6) Traitement des noix de karité sous un soleil de plomb.

(7) La plate-forme multifonctionnelle, gérée par les femmes, un gain de temps pour les femmes et les hommes.

(8) L'acquisition du calcul fonctionnel: renforce les compétences des femmes pour le commerce

(9) Jeune fille de Banfora (région du sud-ouest) région s'alphabétise en 1975, proclamée Année internationale de la femme par l'ONU.

(10) Femme leader à Kongoussi (région du Centre-nord) échange dans l'intimité de sa cour avec Scholastique Kompaoré, alors Coordonnatrice Nationale du Projet d'éducation des femmes

(11) Des années plus tard, des femmes se rassemblent pour participer ouvertement et à haute voix dans tous les débats au village

(12) Au 21e siècle, les enfants de Pô (région du Centre-sud) près du Ghana peignent leur vision des obstacles qui entravent l'éducation pour tous, et proposent des solutions.

(13) Petite Zaliatou, 11 ans, dessine son rêve: Ministre du Monde

(1) Never too young to assume a back-breaking workload

(2) A woman's work day starts before dawn and continues late into the night, with about an hour of free time

(3) The introduction in the 1970s of workload-lightening technology by the Women's Education Project freed up time and energy

(4) Females assume a double-workload, toiling in the fields in addition to shouldering virtually all of the domestic tasks
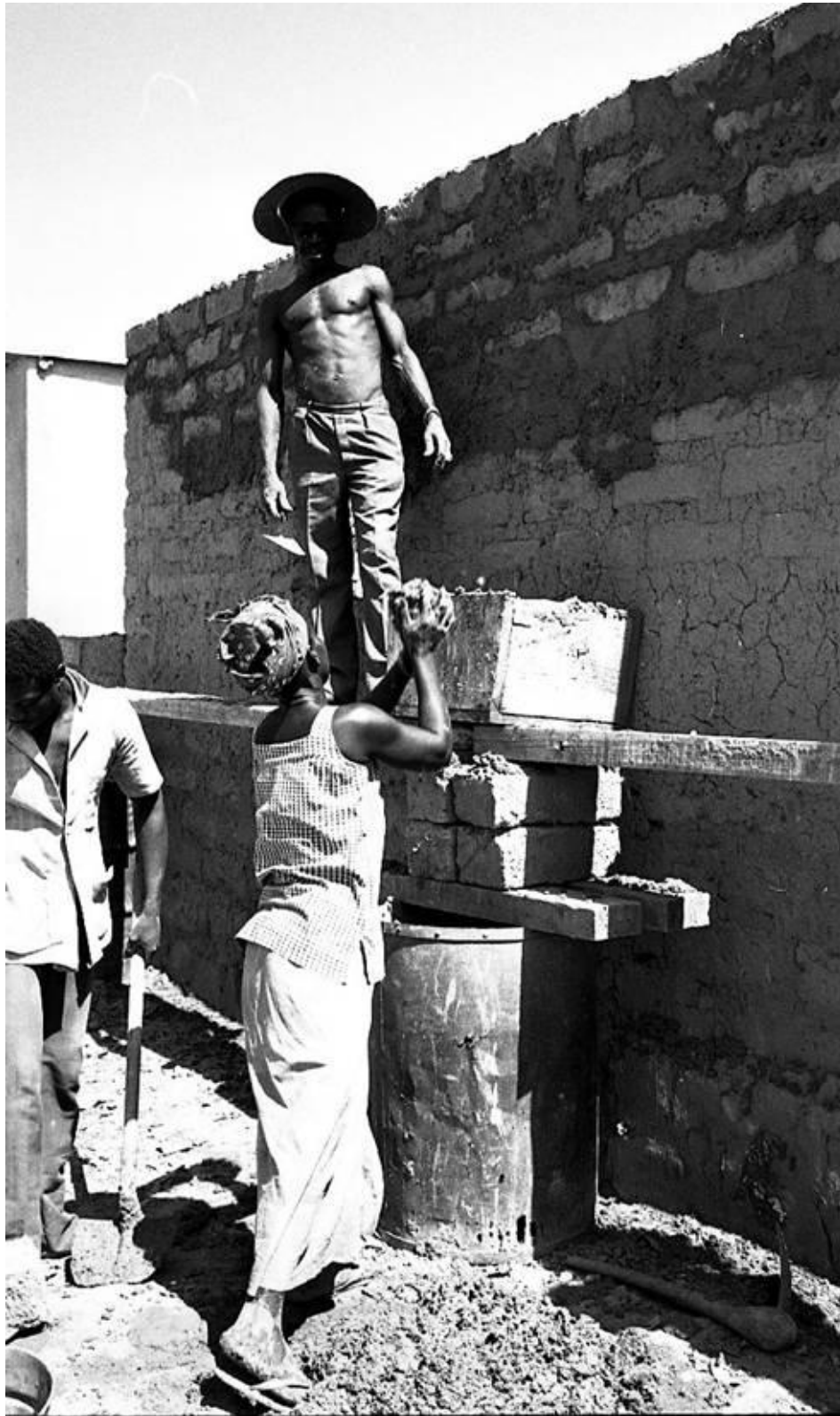
(5) While women's and men's workspaces sometimes overlap, women solely assume household and care-giving tasks

(6) Processing shea nuts
under a blazing sun

(7) The Multi-Functional Platform, managed by women, saves time for both women and men

(8) Acquiring numeracy: sharpening women's skills
for the marketplace

(9) Young girl in the Banfora (south-western) region becoming literate in 1975, the UN-designated International Women's Year

(10) A woman leader
in the Kongoussi
(north-central) region,
sharing her views
in the privacy of her courtyard with
Scholastique Kompaoré,
then National Coordinator
of the Women's Education Project
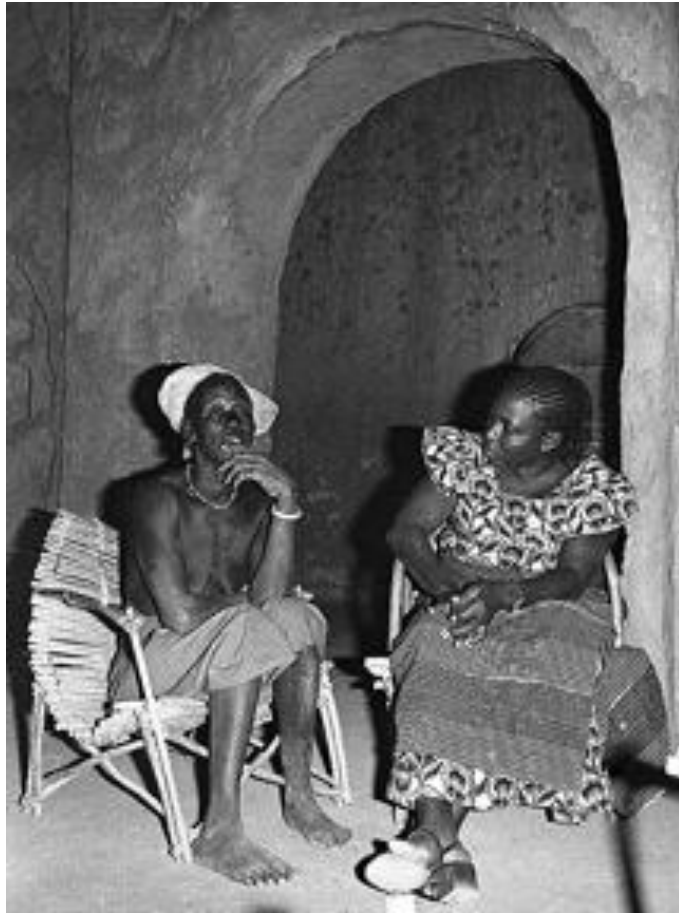
(11) In later years, women would flock to participate openly
and vocally in all-village debates
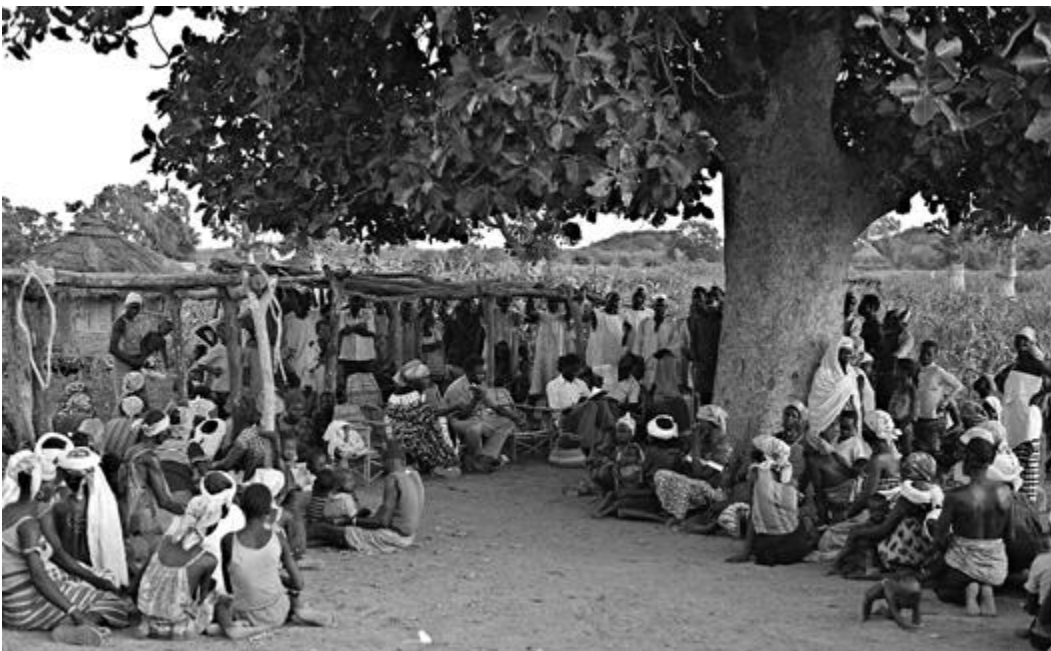
(12) In the 21st century, children in the south-central region of Pô near Ghana depict with vision the obstacles hampering education for all, and their proposed solutions

Zibané galiatou.

Age 11 ans.

que je deviens ministre du monde

(13) Little Zaliatou, age 11, sketches her dream: to become the Minister of the World!

Srihaswani or Creative Manual Skills for

Self-Reliant Development (CMSSRD):

A gender case study, 1996-2012

by Krishno Dey, Chandana Dey, and Brenda Gael McSweeney

Abstract

The case study looks at an initiative of grassroots development in nine villages of the District of Birbhum, West Bengal over the last two decades *from a gender perspective*. The initiative itself was not designed from the outset with any gender bias. Increasingly, with time, the activities dependent on the strong involvement and leadership of women and girl children showed better participation and results, based on their better understanding and sympathy with what was being attempted. The basic premise of Srihaswani was that the challenges faced by the local society from the current rural situation of increasing resource stress and economic uncertainty required a two-pronged response. While the 'mainstream' prong of monetization, commodification of village life, and increased dependency on external inputs and policies proceeded apace through market forces, the very survival and livelihood security of the majority demanded that what was left of the barter, subsistence economy and self-reliant skills of the village – where the women played the larger role – be strengthened and given fresh impetus through the programme. The paper seeks to show how, through an integration of concerns ranging from organic kitchen-gardening, artisan production, herbal medicine, basic education, to environmental resource protection and political participation, the women and girls in particular found the support to build up their self-confidence and collective voice, the willingness to question their status within the family, community and larger society and to work for their improvement.

Introduction

This particular development initiative was selected for a gender case study for a number of reasons: a) involvement of the same small rural population (**mainly, but not exclusively, women and girls**) over a long period of time – sixteen years. This helped to trace the gradual evolution of awareness and understanding in the same households and neighbourhoods b) the use of an integrated approach that was built on local village leadership, participation and self-help skills, with minimal reliance on external direction or resources c) a conscious effort not to pre-determine quantitative objectives and targets of a socio-economic nature, leaving the directions of intervention to emerge from a process of continuous dialogue and consultation.

The location and the participants:

The nine villages of the Srihaswani initiative are situated in the Bolpur Block of the resource-poor, rainfed Birbhum District of West Bengal State, in a 15-kilometre radial cluster around the university settlement of Shantiniketan. The area is some 160 kilometres North-West of the metropolis of Kolkata (ex-Calcutta), in Eastern India. The participating village communities and neighbourhoods ("paras"

that are, collectively, a mixture of the local Hindu, Muslim and Santhal cultures), self-selected themselves after being introduced to the basic concept of Srihaswani. In the case of the larger villages, the participating households have tended to come from low-income neighbourhoods, rather than from the village as a whole. The number of participating households has varied from approximately 400 to 600 over the years.

The concept and premise of 'Srihaswani'

1. A period of rapid change and uncertain futures

The period covered by this study roughly coincides with the period of economic 'reforms' introduced by the Indian Government since 1994 in order to remove the remaining barriers to free market transactions. Global economic integration has been embraced as the way forward, despite all its disruptive consequences for community and family life in rural areas. At the village level, this has meant an acceleration of the process of competition from factory manufactures and imports begun under British Colonialism, along with the earlier impact of the 'Green Revolution': the package of hybrid seeds, artificial chemical inputs and large-scale irrigation introduced in order to modernise agriculture since the 1960s. Access to credit and the level of rural debt has also increased markedly, leading to financial crises in many of the poorer households. Increased 'marketization' and consumerism has also led to the commodification and commercialization of many previously non-market services and mutual help benefits from within the village community.

The outcome, on the one hand, has been higher cash incomes for those who have been able to take advantage of the greater access to urban markets and new technologies for higher production. Bore-wells and submersible pumps have allowed a second rice crop to be cultivated, providing both employment and a rise in income. That, however, has been accomplished at a high price for the future, with underground aquifers drying up rapidly, along with a loss of soil quality. Moreover, men have been more influenced by (and benefited more from) greater commercialization and consumerism than the women, who are mostly confined to the home and its many routine tasks.

On the other hand, the largely self-sufficient, subsistence economy of the village has disappeared, becoming far more dependent on the uncertainties and fluctuations of market demand and prices. During this period, the Government's 'social safety net' measures such as food rationing under the PDS (Public Distribution System) or price ceilings, have been less effective than before, together with the looming spectre of agricultural input and fossil fuel subsidies being withdrawn. The demand for cash for essentials has become acute in the villages, especially for food,

medicines and health care, and education 'tutorials' for their children. Recently, Central Government schemes such as the Employment Guarantee public works ('MGNREGS' or Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) and free Mid-Day meals for school-children have had to be provided to buttress the 'safety net' measures once more.

Perhaps most importantly, the rapid transition from independent small farmer and artisan to hired wage-labourer has meant a shift to the slums in the towns and cities or to more prosperous regions in the form of migrant labour, causing a huge increase of insecurity as well as a permanent loss of skills, dignity and identity. The social costs of this transition, borne by the farmers and their families, are largely ignored. Culturally, the onslaught of mass-media advertising and foreign-urban lifestyles has penetrated these villages as never before, mainly through television 'soaps' and mobile telephones, generating expectations - especially among the young - that stand little chance of being met, thus creating fresh tensions and frustrations within the family.

2. The promise of Srihaswani

Srihaswani has been a countervailing attempt to encourage villagers to value their own knowledge and skills --- especially the fast-diminishing *manual skills* that they had in abundance --- and put them to use, particularly those that require 'mind-skills' as well, making them *creative*, such as organic farming and sustainable agriculture, nutritive food preparation, home construction using locally-found materials, the weaving and tailoring of furnishings and clothing, traditional crafts combined with artistry, the widespread use of medicinal plants and herbs for preventive health as well as for treatment, and aids to education of their children through vocational and apprenticeship training.

Mainstream government policies and market pressures will continue to strengthen the relentless drive to expand cash and credit transactions. But if creative manual skills can keep open avenues outside the market to buttress the provision of basic needs production and services at a low level of material costs, surplus labour and environmental stress, they can feed a healthy parallel economy that will help to meet survival needs without putting the future at risk. Their use should also help to strengthen the self-confidence of villagers to engage with the globally-integrated market in a slightly less unequal manner.

In sum, the original premise on which Srihaswani was built was that domestic and local self-reliance was an essential concomitant of a healthy development process. Moreover, that indigenous knowledge and manual skills, conscious and aware of the broader context in which rapid changes were taking place,

could be applied with benefit to meet many of their daily needs, in the interests of a fairer, more creative, self-confident and sustainable social transformation.

A gender perspective and focus has been a vital element of the Srihaswani design and evolution from the outset, not consciously at first but consciously growing in strength after the first three years. Simply trying to explain a concept and philosophy based on self-reliance found much greater resonance and receptivity among the women, than among their male counterparts preoccupied with their hunger for cash from external sources. Throughout this 16-year period, the women have kept their lead.

The 'architecture' of the Srihaswani programme and the mechanisms of the process

A continuing dialogue between the village participants and the external catalysts and local facilitators has been the central feature of both architecture and process. For the first two years, it was only dialogue, not 'intervention', a process of mutual learning through regular discussion and demonstration once or twice a week, using visual tools of drawing and image rather than literacy and reading/writing. Each of the participants of the process had to learn about the other, and about their selves as they were perceived through the eyes of the other. Men and women from normally separated communities, castes and cultures --- Santhal, Muslim and Hindu --- had to sit together and learn to trust and communicate. The women had to come away from their homes, and their men-folk had to agree to their doing so without feeling threatened.

The rules of dialogue are still being learned, slowly but surely, the art of expressing more abstract notions of choice and preference proving unfamiliar and difficult to acquire. Once acquired, however, the results are dramatic in terms of the strength and conviction of the views expressed. Each 'session' or meeting was remembered through symbolic images that took the place of literacy tools. One of the first psychological hurdles took a long time to navigate: what exactly was the Srihaswani programme in time and space, what *concretely* was it trying to do, how was it funded, and so on. It didn't bring any benefits of brick and mortar (a school a road, a health clinic), for instance, to the village. It wasn't a government scheme or a Non Governmental Organization (NGO). Was it then subversive or exploitative?

As the process of mutual learning and trust continued, and dialogue was accompanied by 'field' activity

and demonstration, the architecture of the programme grew more defined and formal, with the village participants, their local facilitators (also drawn from the same communities and villages themselves) and the external catalysts, all functioning as interacting 'layers' without any obvious hierarchy. The village facilitators and participants had the responsibility for conducting informal surveys of the households in their villages, drawing maps of residences and scattered cultivation plots, places of worship and ceremony, roads and passages. Numbers of households belonging to different communities had to be

ascertained, their differences of wealth, income and opportunity at least given some qualitative sense of magnitude – if not numerical precision. Each village's identity and history had to be learned from the elders and noted. Where were the markets and what commodities were traded, what were the 'external' balances of trade at the village level? The facilitators have the challenging task of combining their Srihaswani animation work with the daily chores and tasks of their village households. They, like the external catalysts who have more formal education and training, receive modest levels of remuneration consonant with Minimum Wage levels for the state.

In order to map the creative manual skills still alive in the participating communities and villages, and to demonstrate their current state of functioning, it proved necessary to construct three **'resource centres'** for each cluster of neighbouring participant villages. These physical structures built with village resources would be places to meet and discuss; also to collect, store and exhibit the Srihaswani resources and explain how to strengthen them. They were intended to become focal points for other village households to visit and learn from. To fund these resource centres, new sources of financial support had to be tapped.

Since that point, the Srihaswani programme has had a succession of benefactor bodies over more than a dozen years, varying in origin, size and duration according to the changing views and priorities of (mostly international) donor organizations. The continuity of management support for these donor funds has been ensured by the Ahimsa Trust, a Delhi-based body run by Shantum and Gitu Seth, with a Field Coordinator, Chandana Dey, based in Shantiniketan. She has provided both the intellectual guidance and inspiration, especially for the gender perspective, and has been the essential link between the external catalysts and village facilitators. Cushioning a small local initiative from changing development fashions and donor pressures has been an important function. Coordinating with village-level Government-supported structures and schemes, especially women's Self-Help Groups, is of primary importance. Many volunteers – local and international – have been induced and mobilized by her over the years to bring their enthusiasm and commitment to the Srihaswani programme. Similarly, Chandana has fostered links between Srihaswani and a whole range of local as well as national organisations with similar or complementary aims, such as Manab Jamin and Traditional Medicine Research (FRLHT) and the Development Services Resource Centre focused on organic farming with many field locations in the state. Arranging visits by the village women and men to their activities in far-off states of India has provided eye-opening exposure and radical inspiration.

The external support has been crucial for the level of modest funding that has sustained the Srihaswani programme over this long period, as well as discussions on programme direction and the establishing of

priorities. In the first 3 years it came from two phases of support from the Australian bilateral aid programme, AUSAID (2000-2004) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for India; this was followed by funding from the Irish Government, through its bilateral programme for India, that provided support for the period 2005 to 2010. During this time, private donors have made a very welcome contribution in cash and in kind, especially welcome because of their own commitment and active work in the villages.

Since 2010, the external support has been less systematic and covered only particular components of the programme. As the funding has shrunk, the "strings" and paperwork have increased. The one continuing theme for the past decade has been the gender focus of the Srihaswani programme, with its central concern being the raising of self-awareness and livelihood capabilities of the women themselves, with special emphasis on mothers and their daughters. The primary instrument has been education and training, from home-based and pre-school right through adulthood.

The growing focus on Women and Girls' involvement in the Srihaswani programme

Among the first steps taken by the Srihaswani programme in 1997 was the conducting of an informal survey by the village participants with help of their facilitators of how the different household members spent a typical day (mothers, fathers, girls and boys, the grandparents and in-laws) with a time study of the hours devoted to each task. These were then charted for each of the initial nine villages/neighbourhoods to show the variations and ascribe reasons for the differences.

It became immediately obvious that against a typical *male* adult day of 7-8 hours, mainly in the fields and sometimes on other manual work such as construction, the *female* working day was twice as long, typically 16-18 hours, *and with almost no breaks*. This work was just as tedious and backbreaking, whether:

♂	♀
Plowing	Sewing, Harvesting paddy
Paddy collection and cutting	Parboiling rice, frying puffed rice
House thatching	Cooking
House / garden fencing	House and courtyard cleaning
House / furniture repair	Washing clothes
House construction	Cleaning cattle-shed
Fishing and making fish nets	Fetching water
Tree planting	Fetching firewood/ fuel
Outside (town) marketing	Bartering, or buying and selling locally
Potter/ Blacksmith/ Mason	Collection of "free" foods (vegetables, roots, snails)
Van/ Rickshaw driver	Care of children, elderly, and sick
Bullock cart construction	Looking after animals, livestock
Bamboo craft work	Crafts such as mats, quilts, brooms
Money lending, sales, purchases	Worship and rituals

in the fields for sowing and weeding; feeding the cows, goats and chickens; fetching water from long distances; collecting leaves and twigs as well as edible wild plants and berries for cooking; food preparation for many hours throughout the day; cleaning and washing; child and parent care; treating ailments; engaging in embroidery or other craft work to bring in a little cash; or helping the children attend to their school home-work even if, as in most cases, they were illiterate themselves.

Boys would be out playing games; the girls were mostly indoors from early adolescence, helping their mothers or tending to the livestock, or looking after younger siblings. Early marriage for girls was the norm, from 12 to 18 years of age, and often entailed a life of virtual bondage in the husband's home, at the beck and call of the mother-in-law and paternal grandmother. They would be the first to serve the meals and the last to eat themselves - whatever was left - with rarely much thought for their own needs or satisfaction.

Men, on the other hand, had recourse to numerous forms of entertainment, rest, and relaxation. If their husbands left the household in search of manual wages elsewhere, the conditions of their wives would almost always deteriorate, living at the mercy of the in-laws, with the full responsibility for bringing up the children and feeding them and the in-laws, from whatever meager remittances were made – erratically and uncertainly – by their absentee husbands.

With the help of the volunteer doctors and village facilitators and the village literate volunteer teenage girls who took part in the programme, the health condition of the women and girls has been assessed periodically, with large numbers of women recording problems of under- and mal-nutrition, anaemia and iron deficiencies, serious child-bearing and pre-natal disorders. This awareness has had a major impact on village and household sensibilities and raised fresh queries as to the causes.

Three consistent programmatic threads, with a gender focus, over the 12-year Programme implementation period (2000-2012)

A: Nutrition and income at the household level

The first of these has been a nutritional improvement programme based on the organic cultivation and Creative Manual Skills involved in over a hundred **kitchen gardens** run by women in all the villages, where a combination of fruit trees, lentils, and protein- and iron-rich vegetables have been grown alongside medicinal plants and herbs. Located within the homestead, the women have been able to take over this programme with a great deal of enthusiasm and pride, once they were assisted with the free supply of seeds, technical advice on inter-cropping, organic fertilisation and pest-control, and on the processing and cooking

of the fresh output for themselves and their families. Those who managed a small surplus, were eventually organised into small groups that formed part of the "Ajoli" women's cooperative, producing conserves, fruit juices, seeds and herbal teas and medicines, all for sale in the Shantiniketan-Bolpur markets. The fresh possibilities of income-generation, and bringing in extra cash resources to the family, have been eyed with favour by the men-folk. An important part of the training was conducted through guided visits to larger-scale cooperative ventures in other states. A key inspiration was provided by their brief stay and tours of the FRLHT in Bangalore, which has extensive testing and research infrastructure at the national level related to the Ayurvedic and Yunani schools of Traditional Medicine.

In the last few years, a new prong has been added to these efforts in better coping with the effects of climate change, through more adaptive micro-practices and knowledge of soil and water depletion. The Resource Centres helped women's groups spread and internalize the training on organic farming and kitchen gardening. Many women also attended Melas or Fairs and spoke on the need for self-reliance and self-sufficiency in food security, health and the environment. A horticulture development programme has added to the capacity building of both men and women to grow and nurture fruit trees so that rural children can add fruit to their daily diets. 'Environment', thus, has been added as the third prong below, with Education and Empowerment, as a specifically designed "Three-E's" integrated programme of awareness for the emerging women.

B: Education, Empowerment and Awareness-Raising in the context of the family as well as of society at large

Initially, education was entirely non-formal, conveyed vocally and through images, and related at first to their own natural and social environments. Their gradual understanding of especially women's conditions in the cities and in other parts of India and other countries meant opening their eyes to their own situation in ways and areas they had not explored earlier. In this way, a whole new generation of young girls, although very limited in total numbers, has also grown through the Srihaswani programme and used their new-found knowledge to become much more articulate, self-aware and self-confident in dealing with those inside and outside their homes. A few have even been helped to complete their formal schooling and been able to enter 'college', a *revolutionary first* for their own villages.

From the mid-point of the programme period, especially after 2008 when external funding became more limited, the push to expanding the vocational training schemes in craft employment, as well as efforts to facilitate the entry of children to the formal school system found a ready response among adolescent and teenage girls in particular. Getting the more educated older teenagers to serve as volunteers in pre-school education ("Home-Schooling)" for the ages 2.5- 5 years, in conjunction with the supply of

nutritional supplements to them, proved encouragingly easy, and raised their status in the eyes of their own families. Adolescent girls completed a two-year training programme in pre-school education and learned about child rights as well as different facets of child development. The 'Home School' education syllabus combines sensorial, environment-friendly teaching materials and attempts to make teaching and learning as fun and imaginative as possible.

C. Closer linkages with government schemes and local democracy at the village level

The last decade has seen a more concerted effort by the Central Government, systematically encouraged by civil society groups, to ensure that more financial and direct support is provided for rural employment, credit, and health (including reproductive health) through schemes such as the "Anganwadi" and "Asha" for the health of women and children, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (one of the most ambitious programmes of wage support for public works that the world has seen), and widespread and fast-expanding use of the mostly women-run Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and credit cooperatives. This has been combined with minority reservation efforts for increasing the representation of women as well as minorities in positions of power among local authorities and elected bodies (the "Panchayats"). The increasing participation of women in SHGs and in panchayats has motivated younger women to follow the lead demonstrated by their seniors. In addition, almost all adolescent girls help their mothers with income generation schemes such as needlework and also keep some of this money for themselves. Many young women try and pay for their own studies by taking on younger children as students in 'tutorials'. All these have been seen as exciting opportunities for the Srihaswani Programme to contribute to, especially through the female cadres that it has helped to build up.

The role of External Support

The Ahimsa management of the Srihaswani programme, and its local coordinator in Birbhum, have always taken the "self-reliance" aspect of the title seriously. The spirit, from the beginning, was to understand that this was an activity by and for participants, and that they would benefit from the very process and participation rather than through material gains. The very modest coverage of the Programme in terms of household and village numbers has also been deliberate, so that the experimental nature of an intensive effort of awareness raising through dialogue, and its purposefully gradual and participatory expansion would be safeguarded. The international donor support from Australia and Ireland it received was concomitantly modest, never exceeding $25,000 in any year, but it was involved and committed. Even at this level, however, the pressures to show short-term quantifiable

results and obtain financial support in limited and uncertain tranches have been a challenge and a distraction, since it was essential to maintain the continuity of the village facilitators and their predominantly women volunteer supporters. This last has undoubtedly been the biggest strength of the Programme, and the joys of working together for a cause, jointly believed in and fought, will sustain many unsung, perhaps unknown, efforts going into the future, no matter what the immediate fate of this particular Srihaswani Programme initiative may be.

<p align="center">***Ongoing Debates for a "Work in Progress"***</p>

What do the participating women and girls themselves now aspire to, emerging from the Srihaswani experience? (as articulated by them)

They see that the biggest gift they received from the existence and continuing support of Srihaswani through these years was the "liberating effect". Quite literally, it allowed them to step out of their homes, out of their ethnic, religious, and caste identities and the often-claustrophobic confines of their homes and neighbourhoods, to experience new vistas and make new friendships, and to freely express their concerns and questions and lack of understanding of many issues. Voice and mobility were gains of great importance, even if temporary and uncertain.

It allowed them to see how gender-based most of their constraints were, and how these constraints increased rather than diminished with age and life situations. They were not interested in acceptance --- in taking things for granted. They would always want to know the reasons "why" roles and hierarchies and gender perspectives were what they were, why men who had made the rules should get away with unjust and unfair practices. They would like to have much more say in the choice of future partners, or, heaven forbid, not get married at all! From the moment of an unwelcome birth (not the dreamed-of "son") to the living prison of widowhood and old-age, there was little of joy to be expected from life unless they took matters more into their own hands and joined in the struggle for change. Education was the biggest instrument, but so too were paid employment and Panchayat politics. Greater self-reliance in consumption and care would give them a stronger basis for market-based endeavours. They saw a distinctly brighter prospect for the future that they would carve themselves than what their mothers had experienced – they would see to that, using whatever means they had. Presently women, including single women, have started looking forward to acquiring some social security schemes like pensions that will give them some measure of security in their old age.

What possibilities are offered by the 'slow-but-sure' changing relationships between men and women?

An original Srihaswani premise was that both men and women would have to be approached simultaneously for the Creative Manual Skills that had managed to survive the onslaught of machine and factory, and that men would be more interested and capable of spreading an interest in production for barter in local and regional markets than the women. But we had not foreseen the extent of the rot that had set in: of crass consumerism and extreme individualism (not to call it outright selfishness) in many village men, combined with the craze for cash and dependence on Government input subsidies and its system of crop off-take and public distribution. There was very little male interest in the economy of self-subsistence and self-reliance. They were therefore canvassed equally, but it was the women who showed more interest in these small initiatives through dialogue.

In the intervening period of the Programme, it would appear that there is a slow groundswell of change in the men's view of future agricultural developments, welcoming more experimentation on organic cultivation, and testing new multi-cropping and early-planting systems that minimize risk in the context of the rapid and unforeseeable impacts of climate change. For the first time, farmers' groups willing to try out different techniques have been working with the Programme, and supported by NGOs partnering with Srihaswani who have long been working on alternative systems. Srihaswani farmers' groups have begun on the journey to provide food security for their families and cultivate a wide range of food crops, essential for nutrition and health. With reduced yields from paddy, farmers are now switching to different pulses, sugarcane and various types of mustard and sesame that are essential for a balanced diet.

Seeing the intimate trust and easy working relations that have developed between their wives and daughters and the Srihaswani team, the men have also expressed their concern regarding the current lives of women with their exhausting, debilitating and essentially deadening daily routines. Many have shown their preference for marrying educated women and would like them to be less subject to the exploitative treatment by in-laws and grandparents that the bride experiences the moment she enters her new home. They want them to be much better educated for a variety of reasons: to help educate their children and support completion of their school assignments; to bring in cash through their own employment and supplement family income; and, not least to provide a higher level of companionship than heretofore. Fathers and mothers have seen that the support they expected from their sons in old age can no longer be relied upon; it is the daughters and daughters-in-law who appear to be more caring and dependable.

These changes have been matched by the greater assertiveness of the women themselves, manifest especially among the younger women, as mentioned above. With greater access to the visual media, to

jobs, to communication with other girl friends and women through mobile telephony, they have begun to see that it is a rights issue, and that they can reach out to allies outside the village, even in Government, to fight for those rights successfully. Where they encounter violent opposition and repression, divorce has started to become an option in the villages, even a return to their own family home, without it being seen as a curse if they can hold on to their sources of independent income. Current thinking within the Central government also focuses on the rights of single, unmarried women and a slew of proposals meeting these needs have been taken on board. (2012)

Concluding Remarks: Srihaswani in tomorrow's external environment

As significant improvements in women's lives appear more promising, the hard-won gains achieved face being overturned by a much more uncertain and hostile external environment that is looming over all rural lives. One is the natural environment, with its dwindling resources of fertile soils and clean water, where the climate is clearly more uncertain and unfavourable to steady harvests. Government policies have also shifted in favour of reducing and eliminating subsidies in agriculture and health-care, and allowing greater corporatization of farming and food retailing and processing, while job opportunities are being sharply curtailed, especially for school graduates. Rural healthcare is in crisis, viral epidemics are on the rise, and families are being forced to sell off parts of their remaining land in order to meet the escalating costs.

In this context, the original Srihaswani principles applied to home- and local community-based production of goods and services assume much greater significance. While the programme has been unable to move ahead much in these areas for lack of adequate funding, promising initiatives have demonstrated positive direction, the processes and local leadership have shown their strength. It has also proved possible to now count on the active involvement of the farming men as well, and an additional educational and training effort applied to adolescent and teenage boys – as has been done with girls very successfully – has every chance of producing excellent results.

Another Srihaswani feature with proven progress has been the friendly mixing of villagers from different ethno-religious backgrounds: Muslim, Santhal and Hindu, in all these educational and other related areas, and it would be a great pity not to build further and wider on that path of comradeship.

The gender focus should remain because it has many insights and mutual support strengths to offer, demonstrating how Creative Manual Skills can indeed produce Self-Reliant Development. All over the world, people and some political leaderships are discovering the importance of the 'local' as opposed to, or alongside, the 'global', valuing natural resources for simpler, healthier, and happier forms of living that will not destroy life as we know it on this little planet. The Srihaswani experience has a useful story to tell for this challenge.

References and Acknowledgments

We thank all those who supported the *Srihaswani* initiatives over the decades, and notably the participating communities themselves. The authors drew in particular from intensive interactions with the villagers from 1995 onwards, and from numerous *Bhab* Initiative and Ahimsa Trust studies and reports. Specific gender case study interviews were organized in Birbhum District in 2004, 2010 and 2012. The core *Srihaswani* Team shared numerous insights, all contributing towards our first '*Srihaswani*: A Gender Case Study', a subsequent '5 Years On' Update, plus this current paper.

Boston University's Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies programme anchors our [UNESCO/UNITWIN Network on Gender, Culture & Development](), and has enthusiastically supported our action-research for years. We are also grateful to The Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University; and through its Student-Scholar Scholarship Program, we were able to benefit from Lucia Hsiao's talents, including in general editing.

Photo Captions:

Explanation of the Cover: This terracotta art piece was designed by a local artist, Subir Ghosh, from the village of Bandhnavagram, West Bengal. Each segment shows a different form of self-reliant work from farming to health, from functional crafts to the arts and creativity that engage both women and men who work for themselves and the good of the community.

P. 89) This embroidered tapestry is an artistic rendition of village resources by the *Srihaswani* team
P. 90) A *Srihaswani* team-member boosting village education
P. 91) A medicinal plants demonstration
P. 92) The Bhab ("Thought") House, for village-*Srihaswani* team interactions
P. 93) Chandana Dey regales the village women (July 2012)
p. 94) Table of men's (left column) & women's (right column) workloads, Shantiniketan, West Bengal, India
p. 95) Lush kitchen garden
p. 96) Coaching preschoolers, with a mid-day meal to follow
p. 97) Three women leaders conversing with case study interviewers Brenda Gael McSweeney, Chandana Dey, and Krishno Dey in West Bengal
p. 98) Once 'hidden' women in a village outside of Shantiniketan are both visible, and vocal on issues of access to education and work opportunities
p. 99) The village men, too, speak out for girls' education (though they are happy that they were born male!) – monsoon season, 2012
p. 100) Gender Group in artistic mode – Shantiniketan, Nov. 2010
At right: Youngsters' faces augur well for a bright future.

Strengthening Networks for Women in Science and Engineering

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Abstract

Boston University (BU) began its National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE initiative, "WIN: Women in Networks, Building Community and Gaining Voice," to strengthen the networks of women scientists and engineers at BU in order to increase the work satisfaction, retention, and advancement of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) women faculty. The high level of attrition had kept the university from expanding its women STEM faculty, despite hiring considerable numbers of women scientists and engineers. It was also hoped that strengthening women's professional networks at the university would make BU science and engineering departments more attractive to potential female hires, thus augmenting our hiring efforts as well. All of the programs that were put into place as part of the WIN initiative received very positive reviews from participants. In particular, STEM faculty appreciated the pre–tenure mentoring programs, which introduced them to senior and junior faculty members beyond the bounds of their own departments, fostering some enduring professional relationships and providing multiple perspectives on the critical questions tenure track faculty face about their professional lives as they prepare to be evaluated for tenure. Second, women STEM faculty who received grants (up to $3,000) to expand or strengthen their networks by bringing potential collaborators to campus, visiting collaborators elsewhere, or networking at professional meetings reported many professional accomplishments that were enabled by the grants. The ability to use these funds in non-traditional ways, such as providing childcare to make professional travel possible, was especially appreciated.

Introduction

Boston University's Women in Networks (WIN) initiative was designed to increase the work satisfaction, retention, and advancement of women science and engineering faculty by enhancing women's professional networks. The WIN programs were funded by the National Science Foundation's ADVANCE Program and included pre-tenure mentoring, networking receptions, sponsored colloquia, and grants to tenured and tenure-track women science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM) faculty to enhance their networks and promote new research initiatives. All WIN programs and research efforts included faculty in the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), the College of Engineering (ENG), and Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SAR). Several WIN initiatives were open to men as well as to women faculty members.

Context

Since the arrival of President Robert Brown in 2005, Boston University has been on a course to recapture the University's founding principles of inclusion. Boston University was begun in 1839 by three Methodist abolitionists who believed that higher education should be accessible to all, and Boston University has always admitted students of both sexes and of every race and religion.

Boston University was also the first university in the country to admit women to graduate education, award a doctorate to a woman, award a doctorate in medicine to a Native American, and graduate a black psychiatrist. In addition, Boston University's School of Medicine was the first co-educational medical school in the world.

This legacy of inclusiveness was lost, however, and by the turn of the millennium Boston University had become conspicuous instead for the paucity of women and minority group members in positions of leadership and decision-making power, and, in fact, for the near-absence of minority group faculty on campus. In academic years 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 there were no women chairs in any of the 24 departments in the College of Arts & Sciences or any of the four departments in the College of Engineering. More than half of these departments had not had a female chair in the previous quarter century. At Boston University the representation of African American faculty was only half as high as it was at virtually all of the top-ranked universities and liberal arts colleges in the nation.

At the time of our application for the WIN grant, the typical male faculty member on the Charles River Campus (CRC) of Boston University (BU) was a Full Professor and the typical female faculty member was not on the tenure track at all. The overall percentages of women in natural science and engineering departments had remained flat between 1997 and 2007, and the percentage of female Assistant Professors in the CAS natural science departments (16.2%) was below the average for comparable disciplines in the National Science Foundation's (NSF) "top 50" departments (20.5%). Some data suggested differences in the time to tenure and promotion for men versus women in the natural sciences and engineering, as well as some differences in the rates at which men versus women on the tenure track ultimately ended up in tenured positions.

Results from the BU faculty climate survey had also revealed that in many areas, women from STEM disciplines were much less satisfied than their male peers. Only 11% of female faculty (compared to 54% of male faculty) from Natural Science departments in the College of Arts & Sciences and from the College of Engineering agreed that the climate and opportunities for female faculty at BU were at least as good as those for male faculty. Over a third (37%) of female faculty in these STEM departments, but only 16% of their male peers, believed that they had to work harder than some of their colleagues to be perceived as legitimate scholars. More male than female STEM faculty members (72% versus 48%) agreed that the academic leadership within their departments was supportive of improving the climate and opportunities for women faculty, and more female than male faculty (41% versus 16%) disagreed with the statement, "I feel diversity of opinion is valued and respected at BU." A higher percentage of male STEM faculty than of female STEM faculty (62% versus 47%) said that they had a voice in the decision-making that affects the direction of their departments, and a smaller percentage of female STEM faculty than male STEM faculty (41% versus 56%) reported that they had sufficient opportunities to collaborate with departmental colleagues.

Women STEM faculty were more likely than their male colleagues to report having had a mentor formally assigned to them within their own departments (44% versus 17%), and were also more likely to report having had an informal mentor (63% versus 51%). Despite this apparent female

advantage in mentoring, only 19% of female faculty reported receiving adequate mentoring at the university, while 45% of male faculty did. Women were less likely than men to agree that there had been clear communication about the criteria for tenure (42% versus 70%) and promotion (15% versus 49%). In addition, 23% of women reported that the formal mentoring they received as actually unhelpful, as opposed to only 9% of men.

Boston University began its NSFADVANCE initiative to strengthen the networks of women scientists and engineers at BU in order to reduce the high attrition rate of STEM women faculty from the university. It was also hoped that strengthening women's professional networks at the university would make BU science and engineering departments more attractive to potential female hires, thus augmenting our hiring efforts as well.

Programs

a) Pre-tenure Mentoring was a two-part program designed to provide career guidance to pre-tenure faculty and to enhance their networks by connecting them to senior colleagues across the university who could continue to provide guidance, and to other pre-tenure faculty members with whom they could share peer support. In the fall of each year, all junior faculty members in the College of Engineering (ENG), Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SAR), and STEM departments in the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS) were invited to a working lunch and a panel discussion with senior faculty members who had recently served on tenure review committees at the college or university level. In the spring of each year, junior faculty were invited to sign up for one-on-one meetings with such senior faculty members.

At pre-tenure mentoring luncheon panels, table assignments were arranged so that junior faculty members sat with senior faculty members. To stimulate conversations over lunch, a set of discussion topics was suggested. After lunch, four of the senior faculty members at the luncheon gave brief prepared talks, offering career and tenure advice to their junior colleagues. The panelists were chosen to represent a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and colleges and to include both men and women. The talks were followed by a question and answer period and general discussion.

Summaries of the substance of all of these talks are available on the BU WIN website: www.bu.edu/win/programs/pretenure/.

Evaluations of these mentoring panels showed that they were very well received. In the first year, for instance, 20 out of the 24 junior faculty members who responded to our evaluation survey (2 did not respond) said that they had gotten what they had hoped to get out of the mentoring panel, with several responding: "Absolutely," "Yes!," "Yes—more than I ever expected," "Yes—I did. It was extremely helpful." One respondent left the question blank and three respondents gave qualified answers: (1) "Partly. It gave some answers to my questions, but I wish there was more time to talk to and have questions and answers from junior faculty," (2) "More or less," and (3) "In large part—of course, the standards/norms in each field vary, but I got a general feel for what comes into consideration."

All of the respondents said that they had learned at least one thing that they thought would be helpful to them as junior faculty members. The ideas they listed included the need to set limits on service, time management suggestions, and advice on which conferences to attend. Several mentioned that simply seeing the tenure application was helpful. All but four respondents said they had met at least one person at the workshop they could call on in the future if they had questions or concerns, and most of these were senior faculty, including the panelists.

When asked what were the best things about the meeting, attendees frequently pointed to the multiple perspectives offered. One person said that there was a "very helpful variety of perspectives, with core consistency in message, from the panel." Respondents valued the bringing together of senior and junior level faculty for interaction and gaining perspectives from outside one's own department. Hearing about balancing work and family life was also valued, as was hearing people talk explicitly about the tenure process. Respondents praised the honesty of comments and the well organized panelists.

In subsequent years these positive evaluations continued, with most attendees reporting a great deal of valuable learning and new connections with senior and junior faculty members. One attendee noted that "This is the first time that I heard of/attended such a meeting in four years." Another said, "I wish this existed years ago when I, personally, needed it most. Please keep this going into the future. Information is empowering to promote success, lessen fear, and put a plan into place to achieve this goal." Attendees praised in particular the "direct," "frank," "honest," and "informal" conversations and talks by panelists. "It was really nice to see how the (tenure) process works from insiders." One person noted that he or she was seated at lunch with two senior faculty members and that "it was nice to get their personal attention." Another attendee listed the excellent panelists with thoughtfully prepared statements," and another praised the packet of materials provided. One wrote, "Thank you so much for organizing this lunch last week. It was tremendously useful. I have pages of notes that I will study over the winter break."

The **one-on-one mentoring sessions** facilitated by WIN took place in the spring semester of each year. In the first year, twelve junior faculty members, including six men and six women, chose to participate in this part of the program. In 2010, nine women and two men attended, and in 2011, twelve women and six men participated. Most of these junior faculty members had also participated in the pre-tenure mentoring panel event in the fall. Responses to the evaluation questionnaires and in focus groups were overwhelmingly positive.

When asked to what extent their expectations for their one-to-one meetings with senior mentors were met, virtually all stated that their expectations were met and, in many cases, exceeded. "It was great, all my questions were answered and I learned more than I expected to." "They were absolutely met and I feel comfortable calling on my mentoring partner in the future." "I had a very productive meeting with my mentor!" A mildly negative note was sounded by one junior faculty member who wrote, "I was somewhat disappointed that I was paired up with someone inside (my own) college. At the same time, I was pleasantly surprised at how useful the meeting was."

Junior faculty cited several important things they had gained from their one-on-one sessions, including a better understanding of the level of expectation for receiving tenure, an unbiased

opinion of their current status, suggestions on how to make their work better known, ideas on setting priorities and on networking to promote themselves in their fields, learning details of the review process from the perspective of the reviewer, and gaining advice on how to be useful and important in the department "without being completely overburdened." One participant stated that "the piece of advice that most resonated with me was to somehow define myself within my department. I was already aware that I need to define myself as a good teacher and as a top-notch researcher in my field, but I hadn't really thought that I should also fill an important role within my department." Another said, "I have another contact that I can turn to. He is outside the department, can give me an objective opinion, and can give me advice and resources." Another said, "My mentor was able to guide me on making my application cogent without being effusive, and how to present my material well even to those outside my area."

Although the one-on-one pairings were advertised as one-time events, several mentor/mentee pairs have met on subsequent occasions. One mentor/mentee pair brought together by the program decided to pursue a grant together. One of the participants said that she meets for lunch with her mentor at least once a semester to update her progress, "and I can always email quick questions on any questions or difficult academic matter at hand, and I usually will get a response within a few days. Please do continue the mentoring program for others!"

One junior faculty member learned she had similar research interests to her mentor and reported that when they attended the same research working group, her mentor introduced her to his colleagues and "that helped break the ice." She was the only female and the youngest faculty member in a research working group teleconferencing with a group in another country. "It was a bit intimidating at first, but … when there was an opportunity that I could join in the discussion, my mentor turned to me and said 'I think this is your topic of interest, would you like to say something?' I know that I could have stood up for myself but being the new, young, and the female faculty in this working research group, it was difficult for me to say something. But right after my mentor gave me the spotlight to talk, I talked about my ideas and research interests, and my thoughts about a grant opportunity. Shortly after that research group meeting, the leader of that working group contacted me directly to ask for my CV."

Most participants reported no disappointments with their sessions. One did say, "I am a relatively junior person so my application wasn't as full as I would have liked, so it made it somewhat difficult for my mentor to critique it." Another stated that the mentor was "not in the technical sciences, so it limited questions I could ask. At the same time, it was a strength because I was curious as to how a member of the university-wide tenure and promotion committee that was not a member of my college would evaluate my application."

All of the participants said that they would advise a friend to spend the time to attend such a meeting, with many emphasizing they would do so "definitely," "or "absolutely." One said, "I would. As I mentioned, it was surprisingly helpful." Another said, "If nothing else, it's a nice way to meet more people at BU, and most likely it will be a much more valuable experience than that!" One commented, "I know that many of my colleagues always say that they are too busy to attend these personal/professional development workshops, and would rather focus on research. I think

that their thinking is short-sighted. I believe that small talk leads to big talk. I think these types of workshops and activities are an essential part of career development."

When asked how we could improve these pairing sessions in the future one person suggested mentoring groups, in which three mentors and their mentees might meet once or twice a year to touch base. "It would widen the network." Another suggested that junior faculty should be encouraged to bring along a CV to the sessions. A third suggested having such sessions earlier in the career of junior faculty members. We were also encouraged to have a mentor award or mentor certificate by nomination. "This may get more senior faculty involved, and if a mentor has more than one mentee, there is some kind of recognition of their services."

One participant stated that, "overall, the mentoring and networking activities sponsored by WIN were a great help to me in my first year! I don't have many BU colleagues in my specific field, and it's been great to have the opportunity to meet other BU faculty beyond my field and to get assistance in making connections to researchers in my field at nearby universities." Another said, "My meeting with Dr. Dorothy Kelly was really helpful. I was preparing my tenure package at that time. The suggestions and perspectives from Dr. Kelly were invaluable. I am glad that I participated in the one-on-ones."

b) New Faculty Networking Events were held for all newly hired faculty in STEM disciplines to help them make or deepen connections with their STEM colleagues, particularly those in other departments and in other local universities. The first year we invited all departmental faculty from the departments which were welcoming new colleagues and held two separate receptions to accommodate the large crowds we expected. In subsequent years we held only one reception each year with a more restrictive guest list: department chairs as well as the designated departmental mentors of new faculty were invited, rather than the entire membership of the department. In the second and third years we held the welcoming receptions at the President's House, with Dr. Beverly Brown, life scientist and wife of the university president, as official host. New faculty attendees were encouraged to invite to the reception members of their local professional networks or Boston-area individuals they hoped could become members of their professional networks. Not all new faculty members took the opportunity to invite outside guests, however, and many of those who were invited could not attend. In some cases the invitations alone were sufficient to initiate a relationship that was later pursued.

A total of 36 STEM faculty members new to Boston University attended one of the three new faculty networking events. Evaluation questionnaires and focus groups showed that many attendees of these events experienced significant gains from these receptions. One attendee said he invited a professor from Harvard with whom he was acquainted. "It made such an impression on him to be invited to the President's House as my guest that he has assumed the role of mentor for me." Another attendee said that the valuable contacts she made there were crucial to getting her research started and "out there" as soon as possible. One new faculty member had felt the need to meet a particular professor of biomedical engineering at BU whose research in the area of biomechanics and electromyography overlapped her own research interests and who was very well established in the field, but she had not had the opportunity. She invited him as one of her guests

and he was able to attend. She communicates with him regularly now. Another new faculty member discovered during at the reception that a BU faculty member shared his research interest in remote sensing. As a result of this meeting, the new faculty member says, "I speak with him often now. I would not have made this connection had it not been for the networking event."

c) **Erskine Grants** were designed to enhance the research and professional networks of women faculty members in STEM disciplines. Named after the late Mary Erskine, Professor of biology, founding member of Boston University Women in Science and Engineering (BU WISE), and a revered mentor of many young women in the sciences, the grants were available to all female faculty members with tenured or tenure track appointments in science and engineering. We offered larger catalyst grants of $20,000, available through an annual award competition, and smaller grants for up to $3,000, available on a rolling basis. The larger awards allowed faculty to venture into new areas of research. The smaller awards allowed women to host colleagues at BU, visit colleagues elsewhere, attend conferences and workshops, and kickstart new projects by covering the costs of supplies or undergraduate research stipends. Unlike NSF and other traditional funding, Erskine grants could also be used to cover child care expenses that would allow a scientist to manage her child care responsibilities while pursuing her research.

The larger catalyst grant proposals were reviewed by a panel of senior faculty members in the sciences and engineering using a review procedure modeled on the NSF research proposal reviews. All faculty members who did not receive funding in one round were given feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of their proposals and many were encouraged to revise their proposals and apply again. Three rounds of catalyst grants resulted in 27 proposals, with 10 of these funded. Twenty smaller grants were awarded during the duration of the WIN grant, with only 7 requests turned down. In a small number of cases a faculty member was awarded a second small grant or awarded a larger catalyst grant after first receiving one of the smaller grants. In all, a third of all eligible female STEM faculty members at BU received one or more Erskine grant.

Our evaluation efforts suggest that these awards were quite valuable in enriching faculty networks and in enhancing faculty research. Winners of the ten larger awards reported that the research undertaken with Erskine grant funds had already led to four new research proposals, eight conference presentations, and five journal articles under review. Several recipients of the smaller awards are now writing grants and papers with new collaborators they met at conferences or workshops they attended with the support of Erskine grants. Five have journal articles that have already been published on work jumpstarted by their small grant, and six others have papers either under review or presently being written. Six report that they have presented the findings from their new area of research at conferences. One faculty member believes her recently received CAREER award grew out of her attendance at a critical conference that was supported by her Erskine grant. Five recipients have mentioned being invited to give lectures at other universities or conferences because of a new connection they made thanks to an Erskine grant.

d) **Sponsored Colloquia** were designed to increase the visibility of women in STEM departments, strengthen networking and career opportunities for women in STEM disciplines, and bring new ideas to BU from industry and from other ADVANCE schools. WIN offered two sponsored

colloquium programs. The Women in Industry Colloquia brought women scientists and engineers in non-academic careers to Boston University in order to provide faculty and graduate students with additional female role models and mentors while providing information on industry agendas and networking opportunities for all faculty members. The Women of ADVANCE series sponsored visits from female faculty members who were active with ADVANCE programs at their home institutions. Each visit in the Women of ADVANCE series included both a research seminar and an ADVANCE-related seminar or discussion during which BU faculty members could learn more about the initiatives and outcomes of ADVANCE at the visitor's university. Each colloquium took place as part of an ongoing colloquium series within a college, department, or center. WIN funds were used to provide travel funds, honoraria, reception funds, and additional support in publicizing the events. Men as well as women were eligible to nominate speakers, and many did so. The program brought exceptional women to campus. Yet nominations for these colloquium speakers declined over the years of the grant and, while some departments and individuals continued to nominate new speakers, many other departments never did so.

Synergistic Activities

During the period of the WIN grant, BU WISE worked independently and in concert with WIN to promote networking and career development opportunities for STEM faculty women, including working lunches with leaders; workshops on effective communication, salary negotiations, NSF CAREER grant writing, effective classical mentoring, and peer mentoring groups; and campus speakers who addressed the remaining barriers to women's progress in STEM fields. BU WISE chairs met with women candidates for STEM positions to let them know about the WISE community and its programs, and to answer any questions they might have about being a woman on our STEM faculty. One WISE faculty member, Professor Cassandra Smith of Biomedical Engineering, received funding from Elsevier Publishers to create a weekly yoga group open to STEM faculty women. Another, Assistant Professor Kee Chan of Sargent College, created a monthly book group and then a set of writing groups for STEM faculty women. These networking and professional development opportunities pursued WIN's goals in different and creative ways, and with great success.

Conclusions

Boston University began its NSF ADVANCE initiative, "WIN: Women in Networks, Building Community and Gaining Voice," to strengthen the networks of women scientists and engineers at BU in order to increase the work satisfaction, retention, and advancement of STEM women faculty. The high level of attrition had kept the university from expanding its women STEM faculty, despite hiring considerable numbers of women scientists and engineers. It was also hoped that strengthening women's professional networks at the university would make BU science and engineering departments more attractive to potential female hires, thus augmenting our hiring efforts as well.

All of the programs that were put into place as part of the WIN initiative received very positive reviews from participants. In particular, STEM faculty appreciated the pre–tenure mentoring programs, which introduced them to senior and junior faculty members beyond the bounds of their own departments, fostering some enduring professional relationships and providing multiple perspectives on the critical questions tenure track faculty face about their professional lives as they prepare to be evaluated for tenure. These programs were made available to men as well as women, and there was no gender difference in the positive views attendees had of these programs. Second, women STEM faculty who received Type I Erskine grants (up to $3,000) to expand or strengthen their networks by bringing potential collaborators to campus, visiting collaborators elsewhere, or networking at professional meetings reported many professional accomplishments that were enabled by the grants. The ability to use these funds in non-traditional ways, such as providing childcare to make professional travel possible, was especially appreciated.

Recommendations

Continuation of pre-tenure networking programs and Erskine small grants. Women STEM faculty who received grants to expand or strengthen their networks by bringing potential collaborators to campus, visiting collaborators elsewhere, or networking at professional meetings were enthusiastic about the value of these grants in furthering their professional objectives. The ability to use these funds in non-traditional ways, such as facilitating childcare, was especially appreciated. Faculty also pointed to many specific professional accomplishments they attributed to these small grants. The pre-tenure mentoring programs provided a wealth of information and useful perspectives and made possible new, supportive relationships beyond the home department. These programs were strongly valued by participants as they worked toward tenure. We recommend that the pre-tenure networking programs and the Erskine small grant program be continued by the university in the years to come.

Sharing lessons learned. We hope that this Boston University case study of strengthening women's professional networks will be useful to those at other universities in the U. S. and beyond. We are also eager to learn of other positive experiences from around the globe in jumpstarting new opportunities for female faculty – and students – in the science and engineering fields.

Acknowledgments

"God First, Second the Market"

A Case Study of the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund of Liberia

"God first, second, the market. If I was not making that market,
I would not be able to help myself."

"I am a strong woman and I am well-blessed. I earn my own money so I can be proud."

"We cannot depend on our husbands. We have to depend on ourselves."

"When our children become self-sufficient, then we are truly rich."

Abstract

Liberian "market women" conduct an estimated 85 percent of agricultural marketing and trading but face poor working conditions, resulting from the 14-year civil war, and lack recognition of their economic contributions. The Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (SMWF), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) named for Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Peace Prize winner and the first woman ever elected Head of an African State, was established in 2007 to address market women's needs, from improved working conditions and human capital development to social services allowing them to address family priorities, develop as individuals and enhance their markets as drivers of the Liberian economy. This Case Study profiles typical market women and describes SMWF achievements and challenges in coordinating international and local capital and institutional resources to work with these women, their stakeholders, and communities. Its findings emphasize a comprehensive approach that includes market infrastructure development, addressing women's business, personal and household goals, and national and local good governance with supportive policies.

Executive Summary

The cover page statements from typical Liberian market women vividly illustrate how important the market is to their livelihoods – and indeed, their lives. For them, as it is for women in sub-Saharan Africa in general, trade is the most important source of employment.

In West and Central Africa, women traders support an average 3.1 adult dependents in addition to children and spouses. Their work often accounts for a significant percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Yet very often this essential component of national economies is neglected by national and international development policies and programs seeking to strengthen institutions, build capacity and human capital, and increase access to resources. Women who trade are often invisible and face both poor working conditions and lack of recognition of their economic contributions. In Liberia, it is estimated that female traders, commonly known as "market women," conduct approximately 85 percent of agricultural marketing and trading, and that this activity is the main source of income for 68 percent of women.

Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman ever to be elected Head of an African State, has publicly promoted and personally supported women's rights and empowerment initiatives through Liberia's national Poverty Reduction Strategy. The eponymous Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (SMWF), established in 2007, has begun to address the specific needs of market women – ranging from improved working conditions and human capital development, to better social services to allow them to develop as individuals and enhance their markets as drivers of the Liberian economy. This Case Study presents some of the first steps being taken to find solutions to the problems facing this major economic sector.

In bringing together and coordinating international and local capital and institutional resources to work with market women, their stakeholders, and their communities, SMWF aims to promote a better understanding of both the commonalities and differences of the groups that comprise this important segment of the Liberian population. This will enable SMWF to tailor its interventions to effectively support the coordination of public, private and civil society groups working with market women in urban and rural settings within the country.

The Case Study was designed to determine who the market women are, how they work, and what they think about their personal and business goals and priorities. Information was obtained through interviews with market women individually and via focus group discussions in 11 markets around the country, including 7 of 13 markets that were assisted by SMWF from 2007 to 2011. Also examined was the effectiveness of some of SMWF's first steps to improve the lives of the market women it assisted, including rehabilitating market infrastructure, providing literacy training, and enabling increased access to capital resources via microcredit. One critical insight gained is the close integration of personal and business elements; programs to improve the business side of market women's lives must also consider the family and household conditions that drive these women's business strategies and practices.

Among the important contributions of this Case Study is the formulation of a typology of Liberian market women that greatly facilitates an understanding of their needs. Four types of market women were recognized – women with: 1. strong, growing market operations whose household demands are fully met; 2. small but stable market operations that support a young household where demands are met; 3. small but stable market operations that support a mature household with older children and more expenses where demands are unmet; and 4. small or declining market operations that can barely support their household. Among the women interviewed, most fall into categories 2 and 3.

The majority of market women interviewed have the same main household priority: the education of their children through secondary school and, if possible, college. Business strategies, from selection of products to sell, to raising capital and choosing mechanisms for credit and savings are invariably aligned with household goals. Market women consider provision of daycare and pre-school education top priorities that can help them improve and develop their marketing.

The Case Study also sheds light on a variety of market factors that offer opportunities for intervention, underlining the importance of infrastructure and the working environment. Discussions with market women showed how important the new market halls and renovations have been for them and their operations in that they protect the marketers, their children and their goods from rain, wind, dirt and dust, and keep traders and children away from the roads. The women also noted that the structures allowed them to socialize and band together for mutual support. While the SMWF has brought many market women considerable benefits such as market halls, safe storage and refrigeration, the Case Study shows that infrastructure development is only

the first step forward. Women strongly feel the need for continued interventions focused on **opportunities for more literacy training** and the upgrading of physical conditions, especially with regard to sewage, garbage disposal and solid waste management.

The utilization of market halls versus streets and space around the market is especially meaningful, as choosing to work inside or outside a market facility influences many elements of market management. A majority of women prefer to work inside the halls where they benefit from infrastructure, security, literacy, the mutual support provided by the market community, and the savings and loans schemes that market women organize among themselves. Street traders do not enjoy such advantages.

Findings of the Case Study emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to infrastructure development, from effective supervision during construction to maintenance and support services. Interventions need to be tailored to individual market profiles, hence the need to regularly update these profiles based on the issues mentioned above as well as matters of transport and cross-border trading (particularly with Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone).

Levels of literacy vary from market to market and among different age groups and economic levels. Although the desire for literacy classes initially appeared limited, once classes got underway and participants saw their benefits, demand increased. Participating market women all reported that the literacy classes had helped them run their businesses – in particular because they learned how to calculate, check their money, and prepare receipts. At the same time, it was found that as literacy programs continue and expand, they will need to be tailored to the economic realities of those taking them. Some market women complained about the long gap between completion of level 1 and the delivery of level 2, fearing that during the interim they would forget what they had learned.

Also, interest in literacy seemed to be tied to market women's economic status. After initial enrollment, participation dropped among low-income-earning market women responsible for their family's livelihood due to an absence of crèches for care of their children and lack of a stipend for taking classes, which would have enabled them to hire someone to tend their stalls while they did so.

One important area for future consideration will be the **increased issuing of credit and loans**, which are overwhelmingly essential to market women for meeting both domestic and business needs. Terms must be affordable and address women's particular circumstances. At present, local credit associations are the preferred mechanisms, as market women trust and understand these peer-managed facilities. Bank and NGO-based microcredit schemes so far don't appear to satisfy the needs of the majority because these systems are too administratively complicated and sometimes punitive regarding repayment.

Effective leadership and governance will be required to address the above issues. For the most part, current structures and capacities of national and local organizations and mechanisms exhibit significant managerial and technical deficits. Leadership needs to be tied to policies, coordination among stakeholders, and new programs as they come on board. As the Case Study shows, market women have not been given the opportunity to participate formally in leadership structures, although their experience and personal investment in the success of the markets in which they work warrant a greater and stronger role in decision-making and management. Good governance, both nationally and locally, will be required to ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making by the various national, county, and local market administrations as they deal with legal, property, financial, and contractual arrangements, as well as partnerships with civil society and municipal governments, in administering what are often large, complex market institutions.

This will require effective implementation of supportive policies such as the National Gender Policy and a corresponding increase in coordination efforts among both national and local stakeholders. In addition, more resources will be needed to support the economic empowerment of women, the integration of formal and informal economies, and specific actions to improve the working conditions and capacities of market women. Mobilizing these resources could be an important role for SMWF as one of today's most important champions of Liberian market development and advocates for market women. It is committed to overcoming the many remaining challenges and urges a similar commitment on the part of all stakeholders.

Background

The Sirleaf Market Women's Fund (SMWF) began with a 2005 celebration in New York City to honor the first woman to be elected President in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The celebrants, an international group, had recently produced *Liberian Women Peacemakers: Fighting for the Right to be Seen, Heard and Counted,* a book that describes how, through 14 years of civil war, Liberia's women had brought food and necessities to their markets against terrible odds, then organized for peace and finally elected "Ma Ellen."

The renewal of rundown and battered community markets was a special concern in Liberia's pursuit of reconstruction and reconciliation. These are places where girls and women buy and sell food and basic goods, often from mats on the ground or temporary shelters. Even under these circumstances, they are community centers.

The New York group determined to help Liberia rebuild its economy by providing these market women with decent workplaces that give them shelter, storage for their goods, clean water, sanitation, business and literacy training and access to credit to build their businesses and provide for their families.

In 2007, an assessment of 83 markets was carried out for SMWF by the Liberian firm, Subah-Belleh Associates, in partnership with Liberia's Ministry of Gender & Development and Ministry of Commerce & Industry, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). It found that of the 83 markets surveyed, two-thirds had been badly damaged; only about a third had any sanitary facilities or garbage disposal, and hardly any had on-site storage, making security a major problem.

Among the market women themselves, more than 50 percent were heads of households and sole breadwinners – a statistic virtually unchanged over the years. Most had no formal education. Many had families of six to eight children, some of whom were orphans of war or AIDS.

The current case study, funded by the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa and using the earlier market survey as a foundation, assesses the challenges, successes and failures of SMWF projects over the past few years and identifies lessons learned. Based on its findings, including ideas from the market women themselves, it makes recommendations for all stakeholders.

Need to improve the working environment of market women

In sub-Saharan Africa the informal economy contributes as much as 41% to GDP (International Finance Corporation, 2012). In West and Central Africa, women traders support on average 3.1 adult dependents in addition to children and spouses. Self-employment represents about 80% of informal employment, over 60% of urban employment, and over 90% of new jobs. It is estimated that some 500,000 Liberian women are involved in the informal economy, of which 450,000 are market women, i.e., self-employed women selling a variety of products on a daily, weekly or monthly basis in and around municipal market structures (World Bank). The recent global economic crisis has tended to exacerbate the informal economy. Most of these people are close to or at the bottom of the income scale, earning around $US2 per day.

Nevertheless, this huge segment of the population has extraordinary potential for both job creation and income generation if proper policies are put in place, physical capacity and human capital development are improved, and appropriate resources are allocated to meet this challenge. Such strategies have potential for improving women's conditions because 60% - 80% of women worldwide comprise the informal economy both within agriculture and in other sectors. For women in sub-Saharan Africa, around 90% of the total job opportunities outside of agriculture are in the informal economy, and almost 95% of these jobs are performed by women as self-employed or own-account workers, mainly petty traders or street venders. In many cases, there is a significant overlap between basic agricultural and non-agricultural activities, as many women who raise crops are also involved in the transport of their products to markets and other points of sale, as well as storage, sanitation and waste disposal.

Challenges to strengthening the economic potential of women in the informal economy have been clearly identified. They include infrastructural, institutional, and economic issues, as well as skills building for market women.

In many post-conflict countries such as Liberia, where institutional and human resources have been seriously impaired by more than a decade of civil war, the general economic and social situation is especially aggravated. Over the last six or so years, Liberia has taken the lead on the international stage in promoting a gender-positive political environment. But despite many efforts in the policy arena since 2003, some groups, particularly the many petty traders, have not realized much benefit from the dividends of peace and reconciliation.

The Government of Liberia has faced many challenges in its attempts to rebuild the economy and deal with the devastating impact of war. Basic infrastructure had been completely destroyed. There was no electricity, no running water, and roads were impassible throughout the country. Observers described the country's post-conflict environment as dysfunctional, with diminished human and social capital, devastated municipal and public infrastructure and a government severely hampered in its capacity to deliver services. Per capita GDP plummeted from a high of US$800 in the 1970s to a low of around $50 in 1996 and has since been struggling to recover. The recent global economic crisis has affected formal economies; exports have contracted since 2007 and have yet to fully recover (World Development Indicators 2008 and International Monetary Fund 2009).

With an estimated 50 percent of the population still living in extreme poverty (Republic of Liberia, 2007)[41], the government's development agenda has been largely defined by its 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which focuses heavily on investment in the natural resource sector (Werker and Beganovic, 2011)[42]. As of late 2010, however, the government had only managed to complete 214 of the 473 objectives set out in this PRS, originally scheduled to expire in mid-2011 (Werker and Beganovic, 2011: 10). Liberia numbers among the top 10 countries for official development assistance as a percentage of Gross National Income (almost 70% in 2009, according to the World Bank).

A current government challenge is posed by the urgent unmet demand for formal and informal employment, a key priority for Liberians (Werker and Beganovic, 2011: 10). According to a recent study, the total unemployment rate in Liberia is estimated at about 20 percent (World Bank, 2010) [43]. Among the employed, only 17 percent are found in formal sector employment, 47.8 percent are

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[41] Republic of Liberia, 2007. 'Liberia Market Review'. World Food Programme, Ministry of Agriculture, and Liberia Marketing Association.

[42] Werker, Eric and Jasmina Beganovic. 2011. 'Liberia: a case study'. Prepared for the International Growth Center Workshop on Growth in Fragile States". June 24, 2011. http://www.theigc.org/sites/default/files/presentation_slides/liberia_case_study.pdf

[43] World Bank. 2010. 'Liberia: Employment and pro-poor growth'. Poverty Reduction and Economic Management 4, Africa Region, Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics, Human Development Network, Country Department W1, Africa Region. Report No. 59124-LR.

"unpaid family workers" (most of them in the smallholder farming sector and very likely to be women), and a further 32.1 percent classified themselves as "self-employed without employees" (World Bank, 2010: 11). This last category captures people engaged in a wide range of informal sector activities, including those working both part- and full-time in urban and rural markets. According to the study by Subah-Belleh Associates (SBA)[44], commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for SMWF in 2007, roughly 85 percent of daily market traders in Liberia are women and the majority are the primary breadwinners in their households (SBA, 2007: 23). Most of these women make small profits from their market operations (SBA, 2007: 27), but have the potential to contribute in important ways to the economy, given the support needed to do so.

Liberia's informal sector includes a variety of activities, especially petty trading within and around markets in large and small urban areas. The markets comprise covered concrete structures, sometimes multi-storied, as well as simple tables in a cordoned off area. There are two distinct populations: people who work within the physical confines of the structures, and those who work on the surrounding streets and roads. They sell a variety of foodstuffs, some of which they may grow, and a variety of dry goods and household items, textiles and clothing. As part of the informal sector they are self-employed, don't have cash except when they borrow money to buy goods, usually on a daily basis, don't have any regulatory or social protection, and don't pay taxes. Those who work in markets usually rent stalls from a local market association and pay fees for various services such as sanitation or storage, if such amenities are available.

Larger urban markets are open every day, while smaller markets may be open only once a week. It is estimated that women conduct approximately 85 percent of agricultural marketing and trading in Liberia (Kinder and Stanger, 2008)[45]. In the Liberia Market Review[46], published in 2007 and sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture with assistance from the European Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the World Food Program (WFP), and several Liberian agencies, figures from Monrovia showed that street vending/petty trading was the main source of income for 38 percent of the women, followed by 30 percent who identified themselves as market women selling goods in the daily markets around the capital. In contrast, only 17 percent of males indicated that their main source of income was petty trading and five percent identified themselves as market men. These figures suggest that, at least in Monrovia, the largest city in the country, women make up 83 percent of petty traders working in daily markets. The 2007 SBA study, mentioned above, found a similar percentage in urban markets outside of Monrovia. Thus, market

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[44] Subah-Belleh Associates (SBA). 2007. 'Liberian Markets and Marketers Survey'. (Volume I). Unpublished report, Liberia, August 2007.

[45] Kinder, Molly and Emily Stanger. 2008. "What will the revitalization of Liberia's economy mean for the women at its center?" Policy Brief based on paper was prepared for the Master in Public Administration in International Development programme at Harvard University.

[46] Republic of Liberia, 2007. 'Liberia Market Review'. World Food Programme, Ministry of Agriculture, and Liberia Marketing Association.

women working in the informal sector are a critical component of the current Liberian economy; not only do they grow most of the food but also, through income earned from their market activities, feed most of the population.

Understanding the market environment

A major problem, recognized by many advocating the economic empowerment of women, has been the lack of basic information about women in the informal economy, critical for both the formulation and evaluation of national policies. Rectifying this has been a goal of the Liberian government.

SMWF has taken up this challenge as part of its efforts to assist market women, promoting the major survey of market women in 2007 and several subsequent surveys, including the one for this Case Study, as a means of continually learning about the needs and dynamics of the people with whom it is working and the institutions that serve this group.

For this Case Study, the market survey set out to capture basic information on infrastructure and the physical and social requirements for a functional market and a decent working environment for market women. It reviewed the seven markets listed below, five from the first phase of reconstruction and rehabilitation and two scheduled to receive support, namely Ganta and Voinjama. (Construction began for both in October 2012.) Counts of sellers and tables may vary as each market is highly dynamic. All except Ganta are managed by the Liberia Marketing Association (LMA).

Current status of markets

Jorkpen Town Market, Monrovia

The Jorkpen Town Market (aka Nancy B. Doe Market) is located in the Sinkor District in central Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. It is a three-story, concrete closed market building in good repair. The market is well-managed and clean, with all its marketers assigned areas designated according to their products. It has 419 tables and 330 marketers. There are empty tables inside the market hall and traders operating illegally behind the building, which backs onto a main road.

Paynesville Market, Monrovia

Paynesville is a suburb of Monrovia, known for its traffic light as the "Red Light" commercial district, one of the largest market areas in Liberia. This market comprises 34 acres of land, most of it occupied by squatters. There are two market halls, one built and the other renovated by SMWF. They have 650 tables but only 450 marketers, so there are quite a number of empty tables. There are also a lot of street vendors operating illegally in front of the market.

Barnersville Market, Monrovia

Barnersville is a suburb of Monrovia. Its market has two halls, both built by SMWF, and between 230 and 250 tables, with 200 to 250 traders. There are no vendors trading in front of the market. There are some empty tables because some market women stay home when they can no longer afford to pay their daily rental fees or buy goods for sale.

Ganta Market, Nimba County

The Ganta market, one of the largest in Liberia, has been structured as an independent association – the Ganta Marketing Association – since 2004 because it was not receiving any benefits from being part of the LMA. Construction work in Ganta is based on new architectural designs and on an assessment already carried out (SMWF, 2011c). The market structure is made up of wooden stalls that have corrugated iron and tarpaulin coverings and are divided into four sections, for clothing, plastics, meat and fish, and dry goods and vegetables. People from in and around Ganta and the neighboring country of Guinea come to this market to sell. There are approximately 8,000 people trading with 5,700 tables available. Some marketers can trade only three times a week because there is not enough space.

Saclepea Market, Nimba County

The town of Saclepea is 45 kilometers from Ganta. It has both a daily market in town and a weekly market nearby, where a larger market hall was recently constructed by SMWF. On Tuesdays, the regular market day, the grounds are crowded with people from Ganta, neighboring villages and counties, as well as from Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Over 2,000 people are accommodated at Saclepea's Tuesday market, many of them itinerant traders, but there are only 1,398 tables. The new market hall was intended to re-house market traders from the daily market, but this has not yet happened. According to the Market Superintendent and the market women this is because there is not enough secure storage and there are no schools nearby. On market day women carry goods to sell with the help of their children, whom they often take out of school to assist them.

Zorzor Market, Lofa County

The Zorzor Market is composed of 400 tables during the regular daily market and accommodates 4,000 to 5,000 tables on Thursdays, the special market day when people and marketers come from Guinea and nearby counties and villages to sell and buy. It has two market halls, one of which was constructed by SMWF. Women trade both within and outside, around the market area.

Voinjama Market, Lofa County

Voinjama market is the largest market of five in the district. Like the Saclepea, Ganta, and Zorzor markets, hundreds of marketers and buyers from nearby villages and counties as well as people from Guinea and Sierra Leone travel here on its weekly market day. The market comprises four buildings, with 205 tables in these buildings and 500 tables outside. Some women sit on the ground outside the market halls and sell foodstuffs and vegetables. SMWF broke ground to construct a new multi-purpose market hall and provide other services for this market in October 2012 so that these women can move inside.

Market women's priorities

Given the diverse range of requirements for a functioning and decent physical and social environment, the strategic issue for market women is one of priorities. Interviews with individual and groups of women attempted to draw out a list of these, summarized in the Table below, for use as a basis for making decisions. As can be seen, there is considerable variation among women from market to market.

Priorities and concerns of market women

Note: the table below is drawn from a longer publication of the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund, also entitled *God First, Second the Market – A Case Study of the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund of Liberia (July 2012):*

	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4
Jorkpen Town	No affordable school	No nursery or daycare	No clinic	
Paynesville	No daycare facilities	No cold storage	No garbage disposal	
Saclepea Weekly Market[9]	Need for secure storage in new market	Need for affordable daycare in or near new market	Need for affordable school in or near new market	
Zorzor	No daycare facilities	No clinic/hospital	No cold storage	
Ganta	Need for market hall	No daycare facilities	Need for affordable loans	Lack of water supply and toilets
Voinjama	Need for cold storage (for some women) and daycare (for all women – more imporant than new market hall)	Need for affordable loans	Lack of water supply and toilets	
Barnersville	Need for water drainage	Water coming in on both sides of market hall (and corrugated protection rotting and coming away from building)	Toilets already full and overflow in wet season	

[9] NB. The discussions around priorities for the market women in Saclepea were focused on what services would need to be supplied at the weekly market site in order for the women to relocate there from the daily market in town.

Typology of market women

Market women in Liberia constitute a fairly heterogeneous community, defined by the welfare of their households and the successes of their small business enterprises. Interviews and group discussions with women from the markets covered in this Case Study made it possible to develop a social and economic typology comprised of four distinct groups and revealed that stability and struggle in the market are often intertwined with stability and struggle in the household:

Type 1: A strong growing market operation where household demands are fully met

Only two of the 18 individual women interviewed for this Case Study have businesses that are growing. Both are mature married women who sell high-value manufactured items such as plastic bowls and cosmetics. Both have an income that they themselves earn, in addition to their market income. One is also married to a man with a salaried income. These women have educated their children through high school and some of these children have now entered college. They are also taking care of grandchildren. They take on loans and also participate in traditional loan schemes such as the *susu,* a group savings/loan mechanism based on trust to which members regularly contribute and from which they can borrow, interest-free, in times of need or emergency. They use some of their loans and *susu* credits to develop their businesses.

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CHRISTINA (Type 1) *is 47, married with four children, one in high school and three in college, and cares for four grandchildren, whom she hires a nurse to look after. She sells plastic bowls in Paynesville market and has a small drinks stall that her daughter manages in the evenings. She used to be a secretary, but the market brings in more money and her colleagues treat her better there. She also runs a seasonal palm oil business and sometimes earns income from teaching literacy classes. Her husband has a salary of US$300 a month. Total annual costs for her children's high school and college fees are US$2,000 and she has had to take one child out of school, unable to afford these expenses. She has one daily* susu *amounting to US$100 a month and regularly takes loans from BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), an international NGO providing microcredit services. Her last loan was for US$400. She finds the SMWF loans too small.*

Type 2: A small growing market operation supporting a young household where demands are met

Thirteen market women fall into the Type 2 or Type 3 category, where businesses are stable or possibly growing in very small increments over long periods of time. Types 2 and 3 market operations are alike in many ways because their proprietors sell similar types of low-value market goods – fish, dry goods, vegetables and food staples such as rice and *fufu.* The main difference is that Type 2 households (represented by four women in the study) tend to have younger children and reside with parents or family members who provide daycare. They therefore have more opportunities to invest in their market operations. Some of the young women also have boyfriends living with them or supporting them in different ways. "Profits" (i.e. cash put aside for *susu* and savings clubs – around US$150 a month in these households) are largely ploughed back into the household and used for tuition fees, house construction, support for relatives, and to purchase items for the market table.

LOOLU (Type 2) *is 36, single, and has been working in the Zorzor market for four years. She has no schooling. She has two children of her own, one in school and one in daycare, and takes care of her deceased aunt's child, also in daycare. Her daughter in school has a full scholarship and daycare costs for the younger children are L$1,920 per semester per child (roughly US$25). She lives in her father's house and takes care of him while the children live with her mother. She sends people to Monrovia to buy fish, purchasing three or four cartons at a time and selling each for L$550 profit. She uses the money for a susu. She also buys five boxes of chicken feet a week, which she sells to cover her food costs. She receives a susu payment of L$2500 a week, which she uses to pay daycare fees. She also supports her brother with a loan.*

YVONNE (Type 2) *is 29 and has completed 7th grade. She is not married but lives with her boyfriend. They live in the house of her grandmother, who is 98, and whom Yvonne cares for. She has three children of her own – one, four and seven years old, with the four- and seven- year-olds both in school. She also supports two of her sister's children. Yvonne's sister takes care of the one-year old while Yvonne sells fish and chicken feet in Ganta market. Her boyfriend has a motorbike that he uses to taxi people around, earning around L$400 or L$500 a day, though this income is*

very unstable. Yvonne makes between L$500 and L$700 profit a day. She puts L$350 of her earnings into a daily susu, *giving her a monthly* susu *of around US$150, which she uses to pay school fees (US$250 a year). She is planning to buy a plot of land for a house. She has been selling in the market for six years and says that even though her business has not developed very much during that time, her knowledge of how to run it has improved.*

Type 3: A small stable market operation supporting a mature household where demands are unmet

In contrast to Type 2 market women, Type 3 women, of whom there were nine in the study, tend to be more mature (i.e., tend to have older children and many more demands made on their income). Most were single, and of those who were married, all but one had an unemployed husband living at home. Some of these women do not own their home and are paying rent. "Profits" in these households vary from US$50 to US$110 a month and are largely invested back into the household – in the form of tuition fees and, for some households, construction costs – rather than into their businesses. Emergency health care and funeral expenses also have prevented business growth. Many of these women had taken out interest-bearing loans and paid them back. But although they have the capacity to get loans, they need specific loan products to meet particular circumstances.

KEBEH (Type 3) *is 31 and has been working in the Zorzor market for 16 years. She finished first grade, lives with her mother, but is building a house with four rooms. She has three children whom her mother helps raise, aged 17, 13 and 6. All are in school. The 17-year-old helps her mother in the market in the afternoon while the 13-year-old goes to school in the afternoon and helps in the market in the morning. School fees for all three children are US$85 per semester.*
Kebeh says that even though her daily income is low, it is enough to buy food and small items for the market stall. On market day, her earnings can be as high as L$3,500. She spends L$1,000 a month on rice and L$100 a day on fish and other food items. She has one weekly susu *of L$1,000, which she can collect every six months. When she last collected, she received L$25,000 (roughly US$350) from the* susu. *She used it to pay school fees and put money into her house.*

Type 4: A small or declining market operation that can barely support the household

Three women interviewed were in this category. They sell low-value vegetables or dry goods and their incomes barely support them and their children. They use various coping mechanisms to survive, including participating in *susus* of very small amounts. They are unable to manage interest-bearing loans and struggle to keep their children in school. All single, these women have no support from family members. One was elderly and disabled and one was a teenager with a tiny baby. Two of the women were taking care of disabled dependents. Two were young and apparently no longer in contact with their families. One had been raped during the war and that encounter had resulted in her first child.

MARTHA (Type 4), *around 90 years old, is almost blind. She had six children, but only one daughter is still living who became paralyzed after the birth of her last child. Martha is widowed and taking care of five grandchildren. The oldest granddaughter, 21, looks after her paralyzed mother at home while Martha sells cassava leaves that she buys on a sell and pay system in Saclepea market, where the other marketers look out for her. She spends L$100 each day on food for the family and pays L$200 to a traditional loan club every second Saturday.*

Creating two institutions to support Liberian market women

As noted above, celebrating the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first female head of state in Africa, overseas Liberians and friends of Liberia in the USA decided to complement and expand the country's national reconstruction efforts. Their idea was to set up a non-governmental, tax-exempt organization to assist the restoration of urban and village markets and support the market women's contributions to their families, communities and nation by providing services such as literacy training, business education, and access to micro-finance. To function effectively and ensure continuity, SMWF/USA determined it would need an autonomous counterpart organization in Liberia, later called SMWF/Liberia, initially housed in the Ministry for Gender and Development.

The NGO began in the USA by selecting a Steering Committee whose 11 volunteer members organized an event with President Sirleaf and potential donors on 21 October 2006 at the Hilton Hotel in New York City. There, two pledges of $50,000 each were added to smaller contributions already received. These first major grants, which launched SMWF as a fund, were tax-exempt thanks to a generous gesture from the African Women's Development Fund/USA, which already had a US tax-exemption. The Steering Committee, which became the US Board in 2008, identified a *pro bono* law firm to assist in establishing SMWF as a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that could solicit tax-exempt contributions. It was formally established as a non-profit 501(c)(3) NGO based in New York City, effective April 2007.

During that first organizational year, the Steering Committee requested the Government of Liberia to establish SMWF/Liberia as an autonomous corporation based in Monrovia with its own Governing Board and a staff that would prepare to implement activities with funds the New York office would secure, and which would eventually raise its own funds. This procedure was clearly the reverse of that of most international NGOs, which seek to register *themselves* as local NGOs to carry out activities. The strategy worked, however, because it had the support of the Liberian government, and because SMWF/US started with a staff primarily composed of volunteers who were active or former UN staff members (including UNDP and FAO retirees and the first Director of UNIFEM, the precursor to UN Women) and included Liberians and Americans with Liberian experience. Together they brought skills in fundraising, proposal development, technical oversight, and financial management and could tap into networks of other experts to serve as volunteers in areas such as communications, management, and health. The group facilitated networking with the donor community and other development institutions and continues to do so. Among its main

roles, SMWF/US fosters confidence in the managerial and governance capabilities of its Liberian counterpart, assuring potential donors that resources will be both well spent and accurately accounted for in accordance with international standards.

To meet the challenge of providing technical support and oversight by government agencies, given the scarcity of Liberians equipped with the technical capacity to address the multiple needs of market women, SMWF/Liberia constituted a Board of Directors made up of representatives of government and civil society bodies concerned with the country's development agenda. They included representatives from Liberia's ministries of Public Works, Gender and Development, Agriculture, Trade and Commerce, and Health and Social Welfare, as well as from semi-governmental organizations such as the Liberia Marketing Association (LMA), and market women themselves.

SMWF/US was able to create a diverse funding base, raising close to $6 million from multilateral organizations (UN Women, UN Development Programme, UN Development Fund for Women/UNIFEM), foundations (NoVo Foundation, Speyer Family Foundation, African Women's Development Fund), and charitable associations (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Sister Fund, Global Fund for Women), plus hundreds of individuals.

Focusing on the organizational development of SMWF/Liberia, in 2011 SMWF made substantial progress in strengthening the Monrovia office through a grant from the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, which enabled it to expand its market rehabilitation and construction program, and a grant from UNDP to strengthen its communication and advocacy activities. These grants enabled SMWF/Liberia to hire additional technical and management staff, move into new offices and buy new equipment, as well as to reinvigorate the NGO's internal management capacity by hiring a new full-time executive director and restructuring the membership of its Board of Directors with representatives from the private sector and civil society. Board members contributed expertise in education, human resources management, architecture and public works, finance, public health services and program management. The new Chairperson has extensive experience in working with UN agencies and bringing in local expertise in international donor relations.

Beginning with an ambitious program

As a nascent NGO beginning with a bold strategy of market construction and rehabilitation, one of the most important issues SMWF had to confront was how to start up activities that would put it on the map, demonstrate serious commitment to improving conditions for market women, establish a presence and leadership in supporting them, and focus attention of the larger donor community on the need to make support for this group a vital part of their commitment to reconstructing Liberia. As its first major activity, SMWF was able to convince UNDP to contract a survey of markets around the country to provide baseline data and fundamental knowledge about them. Carried out by a local consulting company in 2007, the survey provided a detailed analysis of

market conditions and economic activities, as well as a profile of market women and their families and households.

The first major study of its kind, this survey guided the SMWF's second major decision: to focus the bulk of its program on infrastructure. The first set of grants and donations from various multilateral organizations, foundations and individuals addressed the rehabilitation and construction of 13 markets. Using the funding for infrastructure was a high-risk decision because of the complexity of managing construction projects, and the need to rely on relatively weak government capacity to supervise the various processes, including deciding on the scope of the work, hiring contractors and ensuring high quality. It was also a bold decision because few donors support major infrastructure programs (though this is beginning to change), and a credible program of this kind implies extension beyond the pilot phase. There are an estimated 224 markets in Liberia and SMWF is gradually working towards its current target of construction or renovation of 50 of them. While a 2010 grant from the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality is enabling SMWF to support the construction and renovation of eight markets, this is still a long way from the 50 slated for attention, and even farther from the 224 markets that exist.

Still, SWMF/US has shown that it can raise funds for construction from the private sector, as shown by the generous half million US dollars raised from the US-based Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority Foundation to construct the Omega market in Montserrado County. SMWF/Liberia is beginning to raise significant funds from local businesses. Equally importantly, SMWF doesn't have to do it all: the spirit of market restoration it has ignited has spread, and other groups are now joining the effort.

Early on, SMWF/US began to address literacy training, which will be substantially expanded by the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality grant. SMWF is also exploring ways to expand and improve microcredit facilities for market women. Continuing to think big, it is seeking funds to address the problem of garbage disposal, a major issue that affects the market environment.

A learning organization

Beginning by contracting other NGOs with relevant technical expertise, SMWF used continual reviews and assessments to identify issues affecting the success or failure of its efforts, integrating the results of these reviews into future programming. As part of its work plan for the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality grant, SMWF/Liberia organized a lessons learned workshop for stakeholders, covering activities carried out from 2008 to 2010. This review was a wide-ranging assessment of SMWF's first generation of programs in construction, adult literacy and microcredit. The stakeholder team addressed issues of implementation with a great deal of frankness and candor the attitudes of market women in the 13 sites covered, and use of resources. The table below presents the results of the stakeholder program review, which proved enormously valuable, not only because of the lessons learned but also because its forthright assessment of problems inspired confidence it the program's integrity and transparency.

Results of stakeholder review of first phase of SMWF intervention in 13 markets

Intervention	Implementation	Market Women's Views (120 participants)	Use of Resources
Construction	> Quality compromised by lack of adequate government supervision > New facilities compromised by lack of maintenance planning > Garbage disposal not addressed > Ownership of construction programs compromised by insufficient stakeholder involvement in planning	> Often excluded from planning process > Excluded from oversight of contractors, resulting in use of poor quality materials > Markets constructed didn't conform to specifications	> Low-quality materials used due to paucity of reliable contractors and insufficient government oversight > Costs for construction and renovation underestimated > Contracting process did not always follow accepted procedures > Market women had few opportunities for feedback
Adult Literacy	> Dropouts high because training conflicted with market activities > Interest in literacy, business, credit and leadership training grew among continuing participants	> Not enough space or teachers (due to inadequate compensation) to meet demand > No incentives to stay in training and leave market activities	> Compensation for trainers inadequate due to poor budgeting > Poor management of contract with literacy group
Microcredit	> SMWF loans considered too small > Loan program didn't match market women's business goals > Association of loans with the President caused repayment problems > Limited staff capacity weakened implementation > Choosing appropriate partner proved essential for success	> Small size of loans resulted in limited interest > Criteria for taking loans did not promote repayment > Program staff did not reinforce need for loan repayment	> Management of loans and repayments were not computerized > SMWF lacked capacity to manage or oversee credit program > SMWF program confused with government program due to NGO's name

This analysis revealed several common themes and constraints that need to be addressed in the program's future development: management capacity; decision-making processes and adherence to regulatory and oversight norms; a strategic framework to guide decisions; and better internal management systems, especially financial and program monitoring and evaluation. Overall, the review showed the importance of robust management systems to meet internal, beneficiary,

stakeholder and donor expectations and the need for market women and other stakeholders to own the programs through their involvement in decision making, management and oversight.

This review attests to SMWF's commitment to strengthen both its core institutional capacity and systems and its partnerships with beneficiaries. The newly configured SMWF/Liberia Board of Directors and the project's Executive Director are now addressing these constraints and the lessons learned have already been incorporated into plans for the execution of the new four-year program. This program focuses on building more effective management systems in the Monrovia office, especially with regard to finance, monitoring and evaluation, as well as codifying internationally recognized procedures for procurement and oversight of contractors and consultants. (An *Integrated Policies and Procedures Manual* has been completed, published and is now operational.) SMWF has demonstrated that it can take action to improve its organizational and institutional capacity, take on major program initiatives, and function as a learning organization.

SMWF has also taken on the multi-dimensional challenge to create a decent working environment for market women, addressing such issues as market infrastructure, storage and security; water, sanitation and solid waste management; daycare, schools and health clinics, literacy, and needs for credit.

Building on the international consensus for economic empowerment of women

To identify further actions for enhancing the policy environment for women, international agencies have conducted detailed assessments of the informal economy in Liberia with particular emphasis on women's roles. These studies (The World Bank's *Gender-Aware Programs and Women's Roles in Agricultural Value Chains* [May 2010]), International Labour Organization's *Labor - A Rapid Impact Assessment on Global Economic crisis on Liberia*, [2010], and US Agency for International Development's *Gender Assessment*, [2009]) all provide policy guidance that echoes a general consensus on ways to promote women in development. This consensus, whether specifically addressing women in agriculture or in the informal economy, where they predominate, recognizes that the informal economy has extraordinary potential for growth, and that governments need to address the informal and formal economies together. It advocates an "integrated approach to equip women entrepreneurs with the means to enable them to shift from marginal income generation to profitable business" *(ILO, The informal economy in Africa: Promoting transition to formality: Challenges and strategies* [2009]). Key elements include skills training in basic business development, as well as in a range of financial, legal and social support services. In discussing women in the agricultural value chain (WB, 2010) recommendations resonate across the full spectrum of the informal economy as many women marketers are also producers.

Policies thus need to embrace rehabilitation of marketing infrastructure, training in new technologies, access to market information via all media, especially cell phones (which the majority of Liberian market women seem to possess), and establishment of closer linkages between petty traders and small and medium enterprises. They also need to focus on institutional strengthening and coordination of women's organizations, with special emphasis on the development of leadership. A World Bank policy paper on promoting women's empowerment (2011) argues that good governance needs to embrace polices aimed at the informal economy that are inclusive, participatory and gender aware, primarily because of the lack of voice of informal economy participants. Many organizations also argue against the dual categorization of formal and informal

sectors, advocating that the two should be viewed as a continuum from small to large traders. In short, this new paradigm sees the informal sector as a vital engine in economic growth, and as a major source of productivity.

Policy implementation will require increased resources. Unfortunately, while many international donors support economic development, allocations to gender issues, under which women in the informal sector often fall, tend to represent a relatively small share. In fragile and conflict-affected states, where national reconstruction is of paramount concern, a recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) study on aid in support of women's economic empowerment (*OECD, Aid in Support of women's economic empowerment* [2011] & *OECD, Women's Economic Empowerment*, Issues Paper, April 2011) indicates that only a small share of the aid going to this area has gender equality or women's economic empowerment as its main objective. Most aid goes to agriculture and rural development under the rubric of women's empowerment.

The OECD report indicates that there is scope for increasing investments in transport, energy, trade and employment. In the absence of investments in these areas by the donor community as a whole, SMWF fills an important role in mobilizing resources, advocating for this important sector, and showing what can be done and what still needs doing. The OECD issues paper has a number of key messages targeting policy in the Development AID Community as the basis for a more forceful and comprehensive strategy and these apply equally to all donors, national policy makers, government agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector. A key pillar for investment in this area is that it must be long-term and holistic rather than viewed as a "quick fix." It must involve both assets and services, and include a mix of programs to enhance infrastructure, transport, communications, water, land, energy, technology, innovation, and credit, banking and other financial services. Donor support policies also need to reflect the dual role of market women as both business people and heads of households, valuing care-based work and seeing it as a means of promoting thriving economies. Finally, the OECD recommends that donors look to partnerships and innovative approaches as they scale up their commitments.

SMWF has taken these messages to heart. It is currently working on translating several of these prescriptions into action, particularly with regard to supporting infrastructure programs designed to maximize market women's access to decent working environments; care-oriented services; and the promotion of a wide range of partnerships to scale up its work with market women. As this Case Study shows, there is great scope for the improvement and development of SMWF as it carries out its mission.
 SMWF realizes that there are no short-term solutions to overcoming the multiple barriers that impede market women from developing their businesses and increasing their wealth and that of Liberia, especially since so many other priorities are competing for resources to reconstruct the national economy. Therefore, it is committed to a long-term process and urges all other development partners in Liberia to also commit to the long haul.

Descentralización y derechos de las mujeres en América Latina

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Abstract

¿Ha contribuido la descentralización de la gestión estatal a promover gobiernos locales más participativos, eficientes y transparentes? ¿Son los ámbitos locales más propicios para el reconocimiento y ejercicio de los derechos de las mujeres? ¿Favorecen su participación en el plano social y político?

Estos son los principales interrogantes que fundamentaron el desarrollo del proyecto regional multifocal: "Descentralización y Derechos Humanos de las mujeres" implementado en África, Asia y América Latina por IDRC (International Development Research Centre)- Canadá.

En el caso de Latinoamérica, la coordinación de este programa estuvo a cargo de Gloria Bonder, Coordinadora de la Cátedra Regional UNESCO Mujer, Ciencia y Tecnología en América Latina, basada en el Área Género, Sociedad y Políticas de FLACSO- Argentina.

Su objetivo fundamental fue producir conocimientos sobre la incidencia de los procesos de descentralización de la gestión estatal que primaron en la década de los 80 y se intensificaron en los 90 en la ampliación de los derechos de las mujeres y el ejercicio activo de su rol ciudadano en los ámbitos locales.

En este marco se realizaron cuatro estudios de caso: "La tensión entre derechos colectivos e individuales y relaciones de género en un contexto de diversidad cultural. Efectos del proceso de descentralización"[47] en Bolivia; "Las mujeres como sujetas sociales y políticas en proyectos de gobernanza local y descentralización en Ecuador"[48]; "Aportes a la descentralización y la gobernabilidad democrática: actoras municipalistas y mecanismos locales y nacionales para la equidad de género en El Salvador y Honduras"[49]; y "Descentralización de la salud en Paraguay. ¿Un aporte para la igualdad de género?"[50][51]

El contexto regional

A mediados de los 80, tras la crisis del Estado de Bienestar, la mayoría de los países de América Latina comenzaron a experimentar diversas modalidades de descentralización político–administrativa y/o sectorial desde los gobiernos centrales hacia los territorios sub–nacionales (provincias, municipios, departamentos, etc.). En general, estos procesos fueron definidos y ejecutados desde una lógica de ´**arriba hacia abajo**´ por el gobierno central, en muchos casos aliado o condicionado por las agencias multilaterales de crédito que esgrimieron distintos argumentos para su aceptación por parte de la sociedad.[52]

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[47] Institución: Promotores Agropecuarios – PROAGRO
[48] Institución: Instituto de Estudios Ecuatorianos - IEE
[49] Institución: Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo – FUNDE
[50] Institución: Centro de Documentación y Estudios – CDE
[51] Se encuentra en prensa el libro "Descentralización y Derechos de las Mujeres en América Latina", que compila los informes finales de los cuatro estudios realizados en el marco de esta investigación.
[52] Un ejemplo de ello lo encontramos en el informe del Banco Mundial (1997) donde se señala que, en algunos casos, la descentralización fue una condición para el otorgamiento de créditos para el desarrollo.

Inicialmente, las políticas descentralizadoras mostraron un fuerte sesgo privatizador en la prestación de los servicios básicos, por ejemplo el agua. Ello generó conflictos en algunos países y localidades con comunidades indígenas y campesinas que vieron amenazado su acceso a los mismos, siendo las mujeres uno de los grupos que manifestó explícitamente sus prevenciones.

En efecto, pese a la existencia de distintas definiciones y caracterizaciones, la descentralización en la mayoría de los casos estuvo asociada con el modelo neoliberal predominante en los 90, uno de cuyos rasgos básicos fue la privatización de los servicios: *"cuando el impulso para la descentralización es la eficiencia en lugar de la equidad, los intereses de género tienen menos probabilidades de tomarse en cuenta" (Cos-Montiel, 2006)*.

Beall (2006) profundiza este aspecto y en concordancia con Cos-Montiel afirma que la estrecha asociación entre la descentralización y las políticas neoliberales[53], particularmente respecto de los costos compartidos, debilitó la posición e incluso ignoró los intereses de las mujeres.

Conforme avanzaba la década de los 90, la fundamentación para promover la descentralización se desplazó hacia la defensa de las instituciones y la gobernabilidad a nivel local[54]: *"El énfasis pasó de una obsesión por ´retirar al Estado´ a la de ´traerlo de vuelta´, pero bajo la condición de descentralizarlo"* (Beall, 2006).

Después de 20 años de promover, condicionar y aplicar medidas de descentralización político–administrativa hacia instancias sub–nacionales por parte de gobiernos nacionales (centralistas), agencias de cooperación multi y bilateral y otros actores, este proceso continúa siendo discontinuo e incompleto (Cos-Montiel, 2006).

La mayoría de los gobiernos de la región, anclados desde hace siglos en una lógica ´estado – céntrica´ tuvieron una conducta errática en la aplicación y ejecución de las políticas de descentralización. Sin embargo, algunas de las experiencias analizadas en las investigaciones antes mencionadas muestran que -mucho antes y simultáneamente a estos procesos implementados de ´arriba hacia abajo´ - asomaron gobiernos locales autónomos (Arocena, 2003) de la mano de movimientos sociales (indígenas, localistas, de mujeres) que demandaron por su reconocimiento identitario y por una mayor participación en las decisiones de gobierno.

Ello impulsó la emergencia de nuevas institucionalidades creadas de **´abajo hacia arriba´** con modalidades asamblearias, foros vecinales, mesas de concertación, experiencias de planificación participativa y cambios en la ingeniería de algunos Estados locales.

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[53] Este argumento fue promovido por el Banco Mundial y, en mayor o menor medida, refrendado por agencia de Naciones Unidas y gobiernos nacionales.

[54] El Banco Mundial (1997) en su *Informe sobre el Desarrollo Mundial* admitió que en la etapa previa hubo "*un retiro excesivo del Estado*" y que, en cierta medida, los gobiernos debían "*volver a re - territorializarse*"en el nivel local para que los gobiernos locales ganaran mayor eficiencia y eficacia propiciando una democracia de mejor calidad, basada en la participación social, la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas.

Lo antedicho demuestra que ambas formas de descentralización (como prescripción desde "arriba" y/o como demanda "desde abajo") son los extremos de un arco variado y rico de combinaciones actores e iniciativas sociales y políticas.

A continuación se presentan los estudios realizados en América Latina y se destacan sus resultados principales.

Bolivia: "La tensión entre derechos colectivos e individuales y relaciones de género en un contexto de diversidad cultural. Efectos del proceso de descentralización"

Objetivo

Indagar (i) cómo afectaron las políticas de descentralización e intervención en riego la equidad y seguridad en el acceso al agua y (ii) el significado y las estrategias diferenciales de acceso al agua por parte de varones y mujeres en los diversos contextos socioeconómicos, culturales y agroecológicos del país.

Metodología

El proyecto incluyó ocho estudios de caso ubicados en diferentes zonas agro-ecológicas y culturas, tomando en cuenta el vínculo con el mercado, presencia de poblaciones indígenas, tipos de sistemas y formas de gestión de agua.

Combinó la aplicación de los métodos cuali y cuantitativo. El primero permitió explorar e interpretar las percepciones culturales respecto al agua, las concepciones y ejercicio de los derechos en el acceso y usos del agua, y los cambios a raíz del proceso de intervención. El segundo se aplicó para realizar un sondeo de opinión y fundamentalmente cotejar algunos datos correspondientes a los principales ejes temáticos de la investigación: descentralización, participación popular, derechos al agua y género.

Resultados

Durante el período que abarcó el estudio, Bolivia asistió a su refundación como Estado Plurinacional, basado en la premisa del "Vivir Bien" que propicia una relación armónica con la naturaleza y el reconocimiento y respeto por la diversidad y la interculturalidad. Con esta reforma, el Estado asumió el desafío de profundizar los procesos de descentralización y reterritorialización, ampliando las divisiones administrativas y autonomías regionales de pueblos indígenas. Ello complejizó el mapa de relaciones de poder en los territorios y las competencias (descriptas a continuación) a transferir del nivel central al regional y local.

Al igual que en otros países andinos, en Bolivia la gestión del agua para la vida comunitaria, familiar y personal ha estado históricamente en manos de las organizaciones campesinas e indígenas, sustentada en los `usos y costumbres´. La relación con el agua y con la naturaleza forma parte de distintas cosmovisiones que le atribuyen tanto un carácter ´sagrado´ como un valor como recurso comunitario. La investigación muestra, entre otros resultados, la ausencia de políticas de Estado descentralizadas en materia de riego (atención, regulación y competencias claras). También que las intervenciones de los organismos internacionales y las agencias de cooperación al desarrollo, con sus propias agendas y concepciones técnicas, tuvieron una fuerte incidencia en la gestión de los sistemas de riego y en las tramas de cooperación y solidaridad de las comunidades beneficiarias, pero sus resultados no parecen haber mejorado la posición de las mujeres en sus comunidades, al tiempo que en muchos casos se sobre impusieron a las decisiones de políticas del Estado local.

Se verificó que la planificación, construcción y organización de la gestión de los sistemas, independientemente de la cosmovisión que predominara, se discutieron y pautaron entre las agencias de financiamiento internacional y los varones de las comunidades beneficiadas. Las **mujeres fueron escasamente convocadas** a participar, perdiendo la oportunidad de integrar sus voces, racionalidades e intereses a la programación. Pese a ello, se advirtió una lenta feminización de las organizaciones que tienen a su cargo la gestión y mantenimiento de los sistemas, aunque **no una democratización del poder**. "…*ellas vienen por obligación, porque si nadie representa a su chacra, se exponen a perder el turno de riego. Ellas hablan poco.…*" (vicepresidenta de sistema de riego de Aguayrenda).

El contexto de los ocho estudios de caso, mostró una dinámica generalizada de flujos migratorios internos e internacionales de varones y mujeres jóvenes. Se verifica también que los ocho sistemas de riego están vinculados a los mercados rurales y urbanos (locales y regionales) mediante la oferta y demanda de mercancías y de mano de obra. Ello deriva en influencias mutuas de corte económico e hibridación cultural con otros pueblos y centros urbanos. Así, las formas de organización social y comunitaria tradicionales para la gestión del riego se han ido transformando debido a estos factores, así como a la modernización del Estado y la adopción de nuevas tecnologías que facilitan las condiciones de acceso y distribución del agua de riego y uso domiciliario. Todo ello ha influido en la división del trabajo según género y en otros aspectos socio-culturales que afectan no siempre positivamente las posiciones de las mujeres en su comunidad.

Al respecto la investigación demostró una significativa heterogeneidad en los roles y condiciones de las mujeres en la gestión del riego y específicamente respecto a los derechos al agua. Ello guarda relación con las diferentes concepciones o cosmovisiones en vigor, que recorren un arco que va desde la noción de "derecho natural y colectivo" al "derecho propietario hidráulico" (cuyo correlato es la valoración del derecho individual y en términos generales la individuación de los sujetos sociales). En los sistemas en los que predomina el "derecho natural", se verifican conductas

más solidarias e incluyentes, por ejemplo de familias pobres, especialmente con jefatura femenina[55].

No obstante se hizo evidente que esta situación de mayor inclusión e igualdad no se expande hacia el conjunto de los derechos que debieran gozar las mujeres de esas comunidades, los cuales en muchas oportunidades no son reconocidos, ni respetados.

Las mujeres como sujetas sociales y políticas en proyectos de gobernanza local y descentralización en Ecuador

Objetivo

Fortalecer, a través de nuevos recursos conceptuales, las actorías locales de mujeres, el ejercicio de sus derechos y aportar a la elaboración de proyectos de gobernanza territorial con y para la equidad de género.

Metodología

La investigación se centró en cuatro municipios llamados *alternativos o de facto:* Cotacachi, Nabón, Cayambé y Esmeraldas.

Se elaboraron y aplicaron cuestionarios a mujeres líderes locales; y una encuesta a actores/as locales gubernamentales y no gubernamentales, para identificar su valoración de las capacidades de los gobiernos locales para mejorar las condiciones de vida de las mujeres. Se realizaron talleres y grupos focales con mujeres de diversos sectores (indígenas y jóvenes, por ejemplo), entrevistas y actividades de observación participante.

Se elaboró y aplicó una guía analítica para la recolección de información secundaria relativa a los casos con indicadores de desarrollo humano y enfoque de género.

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[55] Un dato de gran interés es que el Plan de Igualdad de Oportunidades (PIO) reconoce los derechos de las mujeres a la propiedad de la tierra y de acceso al agua para uso doméstico, obviando curiosamente su derecho al agua de riego. Confirma de este modo los estereotipos de género, al ubicar a los varones en la esfera productiva y a las mujeres en las tareas domésticas y reproductivas.

Resultados

Con el modelo de descentralización que se inicia en la década de los '90, emergen discursos y movilizaciones que reivindican lo "local" como identidad y reconocimiento de las y los sujetos, mientras las instituciones políticas de nivel nacional sufren "crisis de representación". Este proceso expresó la capacidad de las organizaciones de base para transformar al Estado.

Los gobiernos locales alternativos fueron y son sostenidos por actores sociales de base, en especial organizaciones indígenas, ambientalistas, de mujeres y habitantes mestizos de clases medias, y sus demandas fundamentales radican en cuestiones de justicia, equidad, participación, democratización en la toma de decisiones, cuidado o protección de la naturaleza, desarrollo económico endógeno y, en gran medida, combate a la pobreza, al racismo y a diversas modalidades de discriminación. Estos actores encontraron apoyo en algunas organizaciones internacionales de cooperación para el desarrollo que les permitió fortalecer sus niveles de participación y de autonomía. Sin embargo, es de remarcar que la visión, ideas y convicción política fueron de las y los líderes de movimientos locales.

Estas experiencias se contraponen a la descentralización *"oficial",* tras la grave crisis vivida por Ecuador en 1999. En este último caso el proceso se asentó en la transferencia creciente de responsabilidades a los municipios para la atención de asuntos sociales, las que fueron asumidas a través de la ejecución de proyectos de inversión social, bajo la coordinación del Estado central. De este modo el rol asignado al municipio fue el de ejecutor de intervenciones -decididas a nivel central- (privilegiando la materialización de los proyectos por sobre la política pública). (Torres, 2004)

Ambos modelos -*descentralización de facto y descentralización oficial*— sustentan criterios y valores distintos sobre la reforma del Estado y sobre la caracterización de lo público. Asimismo, asumen enfoques diferentes sobre el rol social y político de las mujeres, su ciudadanía, el ejercicio de sus derechos y la integración de sus demandas y agendas en las políticas públicas. Según surge de este estudio la corriente social que condujo a la *descentralización de facto* integra en su propuesta política la lucha contra el racismo y la discriminación remanente del colonialismo, planteando un horizonte más amplio de cambio democrático, al mismo tiempo, que una propuesta de "otro" desarrollo para las localidades (Arboleda, 2009).

En relación a la descentralización y la equidad de género

Las claves para comprender las descentralizaciones *de facto* de los cuatro casos analizados radican en las formas de gobierno de tipo asamblearias con base en las demandas que asomaron en "lo local" conforme avanzaba el neo– liberalismo en Ecuador. Estas experiencias participativas incorporaron muy tempranamente en el escenario la presencia y las voces de los y las históricamente excluidos/as.

Los espacios de participación ciudadana generados desde los gobiernos locales y a la vez apropiados por la ciudadanía, establecieron las condiciones para la emergencia de nuevos actores y actoras sociales en la esfera pública, que, al menos en tres de los casos, permanecieron en el tiempo[56].

Con distinta intensidad y modalidad, en los cuatro casos estas iniciativas abrieron caminos para las mujeres en la esfera pública.

Estos "gobiernos alternativos", resultaron además de justos y reparadores para las poblaciones más pobres, eficientes en la gestión, y eficaces en la aplicación de políticas co-elaboradas con la población. Al mismo tiempo, sus alcaldesas y alcaldes fueron ganando credibilidad y confianza por parte de la población y el reconocimiento nacional e internacional por el buen gobierno realizado.

En suma, la investigación demuestra que las condiciones que favorecen una mayor participación y ejercicio de derechos por parte de las mujeres, entre otras, son:

- Gobiernos locales dispuestos a replantear la ingeniería del municipio para dar cabida a nuevas formas de toma de decisiones y vocación por mejorar las vidas de las personas.
- Creación de nuevas institucionalidades –asambleas, mesas de trabajo, consejos locales- para cogestionar las políticas y las decisiones.
- Presencia y/o fortalecimiento de organizaciones sociales y de mujeres con agendas propias y con convicción política sobre la necesidad de mantener un equilibrio, siempre inestable, entre la alianza con el poder local y su propia autonomía.

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[56] En **Esmeraldas** se abrieron 22 asambleas sucesivas durante dos años que acercaron las demandas del pueblo afro a la centralidad de los debates y a la toma de decisiones en las políticas. En **Nabón**, las asambleas populares se realizaban 1 vez al año desde 10 atrás, con el fin de responder a los intereses de las comunidades. En **Cotacachi**, durante 12 años la Asamblea cantonal, integrada por representantes de organizaciones sociales de indígenas, mujeres, afros, ambientalistas, co–gestionan el presupuesto participativo que se distribuye según las necesidades y prioridades relevadas entre las comunidades. En ambos municipios las comunidades indígenas ingresaron a la esfera de las decisiones políticas. En cambio, en **Cayambé** la gestión del alcalde socialista se inició también con formas participativas. Pero a poco andar, sus opciones políticas y el establecimiento de alianzas se deslizaron hacia los sectores más conservadores.

Aportes a la descentralización y la gobernabilidad democrática: actoras municipalistas y mecanismos locales y nacionales para la equidad de género y los derechos de las mujeres en El Salvador y Honduras

Objetivo

Estudiar las condiciones políticas, sociales y técnicas que contribuyeron a promover procesos de participación ciudadana de las mujeres en el nivel local. Asimismo, su vínculo con los mecanismos institucionales nacionales responsables de políticas de equidad de género.

Metodología

Se realizó un análisis comparativo entre 6 estudios de caso (3 en El Salvador y 3 en Honduras) de los procesos que dieron lugar a la creación de institucionalidades locales dedicadas a promover los derechos de las mujeres y la equidad de género en ambos países, el papel que jugaron en su surgimiento y desarrollo los movimientos de mujeres y sus organizaciones y su incidencia en las políticas locales.

Para el relevamiento de información se desplegó una estrategia que combinó encuentros sectoriales con funcionarias de Oficinas Nacionales de la Mujer, responsables de OMM junto a ONGs locales y otros funcionarios ejecutivos y legislativos de nivel local – con la aplicación de una guía de indagación institucional sobre las Organizaciones Municipales de la Mujer (OMM).

Resultados

El Salvador y Honduras son Estados altamente centralizados, con democracias débiles, recientes y con muchos años de gobiernos conservadores. En ambos países, y en buena parte de los casos, fueron las organizaciones de mujeres nacionales y locales quienes promovieron cambios institucionales en los gobiernos municipales a favor de sus derechos. Ello no obedeció a la creencia en "lo local" como el ámbito más propicio para la acción reivindicativa, sino a una opción en cierto modo "obligada" debido a la falta de espacios de interlocución real y efectiva con instancias del gobierno nacional, entre ellas las Oficinas Nacionales de la Mujer, a las cuales se las caracteriza como débiles y con muy escasos recursos.

Estas actorías de género, en general, no participaron de los debates sobre la descentralización del Estado y en el diseño de las políticas locales. Salvo en los casos en que estos cambios se percibían como una amenaza para sus derechos: la posible privatización de los servicios públicos.

En este escenario una de las estrategias que desplegaron las mujeres más excluidas consistió en canalizar sus exigencias al municipio proponiendo remover las reglas y procedimientos burocráticos y establecer mecanismos institucionales más fluidos capaces de escuchar y responder a sus demandas y que permitieran avanzar hacia una gobernabilidad democrática.

La creación de Oficinas Municipales de la Mujer fue posible gracias a la convergencia de los siguientes factores:

- La convicción y voluntad de dar respuestas a las demandas de las mujeres por parte de algunas autoridades locales;
- la permeabilidad del alcalde/sa frente a las demandas de las organizaciones locales y/o nacionales de mujeres;
- la intervención de mecanismos nacionales de la mujer que optaron por descentralizar sus programas en los territorios (como ocurrió con el Instituto de la Mujer de Honduras o su par de El Salvador). Fue determinante el apoyo de la cooperación internacional. Y, en especial, la capacidad de interpelación e interlocución de las actorías de mujeres.

Como es sabido, las posibilidades de construcción y sustentabilidad de una política local de equidad de género depende, en gran medida, de que los organismos responsables cuenten con un presupuesto adecuado para ello. Salvo excepciones, esta no era la situación de las comunidades estudiadas. Ello no es un fenómeno excepcional; se observa en muchos otros ámbitos en los que prevalecen las tensiones entre intereses partidarios, electorales y la distribución y auditoría de las partidas presupuestarias.

Otro factor que limitó el accionar de las institucionalidades de género fue la carencia o debilidad de recursos humanos locales formados para llevar adelante estas políticas; situación que se visualiza en la mayoría de los países de la Región.

Descentralización de la salud en Paraguay: ¿Un aporte para la igualdad de género?

Objetivo

Comprender la dinámica de los procesos de descentralización de los servicios de salud llevados a cabo entre 1996 y 2008 y su implicancia en el bienestar de las mujeres y la equidad de género.

Metodología

Se utilizaron técnicas cuali y cuantitativas de recolección de datos en 10 estudios de caso, los cuales fueron analizados mediante una adaptación del modelo *Espacio de Decisión – Principal – Agente* propuesto por Bossert (1998).

Resultados

En Paraguay, el sector salud fue uno de los que más se expandió hacia los espacios locales. Ello se debió a las crecientes demandas de una población en permanente aumento, pero también al interés de algunos gobiernos locales que vieron en la descentralización de los servicios de salud una oportunidad para hacer frente a las necesidades críticas y postergadas de su comunidad.

Este proceso se ancló en los Consejos Locales de Salud (CLS), dispositivos concebidos para la gestión pública en salud, con participación de la sociedad civil. Se los facultó para promover alianzas interinstitucionales, gestionar recursos y orientar las acciones conjuntamente con las autoridades del establecimiento de salud y del municipio. Se integraron representantes de instituciones locales, organizaciones indígenas y de mujeres.
La participación en los CLS fue integrada sin mayores precisiones metodológicas ni protocolos que facilitaran la inclusión de sectores históricamente excluidos, como las mujeres.

Considerando que una buena parte de sus integrantes eran mujeres, se presumió que éste sería uno de los factores de oportunidad para tratar sus derechos referidos a la salud. Este supuesto no se verificó en todos los casos y curiosamente en aquellos que se propusieron iniciativas en este sentido no fueron ellas quienes las propiciaron, al menos no de manera deliberada.

En los estudios de caso se verificó la dependencia del sistema descentralizado del nivel central, con escaso margen para que los CLS, el personal de salud local y las/os pobladores influyeran en la oferta local del servicio. Las eventuales innovaciones que pudieron realizar dependieron del aumento de recursos propios, producto de los aranceles, lo cual influyó en un mayor gasto de bolsillo de los/as pacientes, con las consecuentes limitaciones para revertir las brechas de exclusión del sistema.
En general, el modelo de descentralización aplicado no ofreció mayores oportunidades para que se consideraran necesidades y demandas de las mujeres en el diseño y prestación de los servicios. En su devenir reforzó el déficit crítico de personal sanitario, sobre todo en las zonas rurales, comprometiendo la calidad de los servicios y su capacidad resolutiva.

En relación a las reglas de acceso de recursos humanos e inclusión del enfoque de género, los resultados fueron los siguientes:

- Los establecimientos de salud descentralizados reprodujeron criterios fijados en el nivel central para los programas focalizados, dando prioridad casi exclusiva a la atención de la salud maternoinfantil.
- ⬜Las innovaciones estuvieron fuertemente condicionadas debido al modelo de recaudación propia de los entes descentralizados. Más allá de lo especificado por la política ministerial, ello desalentó la concurrencia a los servicios de amplios sectores de mujeres.
- Respecto de las reglas de dirección y la igualdad de género, se verificó que los CLS fueron una oportunidad de participación de agentes locales, pero ello no abarcó en igual medida a las mujeres y por tanto no se vio reflejado en una inclusión de sus perspectivas y demandas.

En suma, si bien se emprendieron algunas acciones específicas muy importantes y valiosas para la salud de la población femenina, tales como la elaboración de un Protocolo de Atención a Víctimas de Violencia, actividades de sensibilización y capacitación en materia de derechos y la instalación de albergues para mujeres embarazadas, estas actuaciones puntuales no han sido suficientes para desplegar una estrategia integral en materia de género en la atención de la salud, ni una asignación equitativa de los recursos.

Al finalizar este estudio el escenario político nacional había cambiado notablemente. El gobierno que asumió en 2008, puso en práctica la política de ´Calidad de Vida y Salud con Equidad´ que concibe la salud como derecho humano sustentado en los principios de universalidad, integralidad, equidad y participación. La primera medida adoptada fue la gratuidad de las prestaciones, exonerando de los aranceles que se exigían previamente. Los derechos humanos de las mujeres fueron incluidos en las nuevas normativas con eje en la promoción de la igualdad de género, reconociendo la existencia de necesidades diferenciadas de mujeres y varones.

Conclusiones: Invisibilidad-visibilidad de la desigualdad de género en el ámbito local

Existe un muy bajo reconocimiento de las desigualdades de género en los ámbitos locales, que contradice los discursos más optimistas respecto de la descentralización, con sus augurios de mayor democratización, relaciones cara a cara, transparencia y seguridad; un modelo en el que supuestamente las mujeres -acostumbradas a desenvolverse con comodidad en las relaciones cercanas (físicas y simbólicas) – podrían aprovechar para aumentar sus posibilidades de participación en la esfera pública.

Por el contrario, los análisis demuestran que la descentralización puede, en muchos casos, reproducir situaciones de subordinación (Cos-Montiel, 2006) y captura del poder local por parte de élites que no reconocen ni se comprometen con el avance hacia la equidad de género (Beall, J. 2006. Kabeer, N. 2003. Massolo, A. 2005).

No obstante, también se han encontrado excepciones que debieran servir como experiencias inspiradoras: municipios en los que las mujeres han ido asumiendo roles protagónicos en el espacio público, demostrando su capacidad estratégica para ampliar y calificar la democracia. Por supuesto estos logros no son una consecuencia directa de los procesos de descentralización, sino que responden a una serie de estrategias y decisiones políticas que favorecieron las condiciones para su concreción.

Del conjunto de los estudios incluidos en esta publicación se desprende que las experiencias más favorables para el ejercicio de los derechos ciudadanos y la participación activa de las mujeres fueron las que articularon de manera virtuosa (i) una gestión abierta a la escucha de todas las voces y demandas y propiciadora del empoderamiento de los y las ciudadanas/os[57] (necesidades, ideas, propuestas), (ii) la presencia de organizaciones sociales y de mujeres activas y alertas a las condiciones de oportunidad que abrieron las políticas públicas locales, (iii) la existencia y sostenibilidad de espacios de participación, con acciones deliberadas para la integración de las mujeres de manera igualitaria, iv) la capacidad y puesta en práctica de mecanismos que aseguren la participación de la ciudadanía en la rendición de cuentas de la gestión local.

Alcanzar estas condiciones es una meta compleja pero no imposible. Encaminarnos hacia ella requiere, en primer término, un mayor reconocimiento de los derechos de las mujeres y de su activa participación en la gobernanza local, así como de los obstáculos manifiestos y latentes que persisten en cada comunidad más allá de cambios en las políticas y de discursos "políticamente correctos" sobre la equidad entre varones y mujeres.

Los aciertos y desaciertos sobre la relación de las políticas locales y los derechos de las mujeres y su plena participación descriptos en este artículo ofrecen pistas tanto para identificar nuevas temáticas de investigación en este campo de estudio, así como para diseñar políticas y programas que partiendo de bases de información más sólidas se proyecten hacia el mediano y largo plazo atendiendo a las características singulares de cada contexto.

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[57] Según Cos-Montiel ello transforma la representación de los habitantes de una comunidad de "beneficiarios de asistencia" a "dueños de derechos y directores de desarrollo".

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(Beall, J. 2006. Kabeer, N. 2003. Massolo, A. 2005).

Organizaciones de mujeres en Madrid:
Socialización para el empoderamiento en la post-transición democrática española

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Abstract

En este texto se analiza la actividad de las organizaciones de mujeres que surgieron en Madrid en la década de los ochenta y su impacto en el período post-constitucional, es decir el que se inicia tras la aprobación de la Constitución democrática en 1978 tras cuarenta años de la dictadura de Franco. Se analiza de manera preferente aquellas organizaciones que no tenían entre sus finalidades propósitos feministas y que, sin embargo, a través de la actividad asociativa tomaron conciencia de su opresión y generaron cambios personales y colectivos de gran alcance para la democratización de la sociedad española y el avance de las mujeres. En este sentido, se considera que estas asociaciones fueron espacios de nuevas socializaciones para el empoderamiento de sus vidas y para su incorporación a otros ámbitos de incidencia social y política.

Introducción

En los años ochenta del siglo XX surgieron un gran número de asociaciones de mujeres en Madrid como consecuencia de las demandas y aspiraciones de muchas mujeres que deseaban superar sus carencias en educación, en participación en el espacio público y en la solución a los problemas de sus entornos en los barrios y pueblos donde vivían. Este surgimiento fue facilitado por la creación del Instituto de la Mujer como organismo político en el año 1983, cuyo objetivo fue promocionar la igualdad entre mujeres y hombres en el marco de la naciente democracia española tras los cuarenta años de la dictadura del general Franco.

La mayoría de estas asociaciones no tenían en sus fines explícitos ni en su autodenominación propósitos feministas. Formaban parte de ellas mujeres de las clases trabajadoras y amas de casa, ajenas hasta entonces, de la lucha por los derechos de las mujeres que se habían llevado a cabo en la clandestinidad y en el período de la transición política en España que concluyó con la aprobación de la Constitución Española en el año 1978.

El objetivo de este capítulo es analizar los diferentes tipos de organizaciones, sus finalidades y el discurso y las prácticas de estas organizaciones de mujeres. De manera especial se analizarán los discursos de las mujeres acerca de sus cambios personales y sociales a través de su participación colectiva. En este sentido, considero que estas asociaciones fueron un espacio de nuevas socializaciones para el empoderamiento de las mujeres. Y, a su vez, contribuyeron a formar un amplio movimiento de mujeres a través de un trabajo en red que incorporó a nuevos sectores sociales y capas cada vez más amplias de la población femenina, formando un tejido social capaz de sostener los procesos democráticos basados en la igualdad.

Este texto es el producto de una investigación de trabajo de campo con técnicas cualitativas y cuantitativas que se llevó a cabo durante los años 1993 y 1994[58]. Este período es significativo

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[58] El presente texto es parte de una publicación de Virginia Maquieira (1995)

porque habían transcurrido diez años, en la mayoría de los casos, del surgimiento de estas asociaciones. Un tiempo suficiente que hacía posible la reflexión sobre los orígenes, trayectoria y cambios de las personas y de las instituciones y de su repercusión en los ámbitos más amplios de la sociedad española. En la primera sección me referiré al contexto etnográfico de la Comunidad de Madrid y la elaboración de la tipología de asociaciones que permitió afrontar el objeto de estudio. La segunda sección está dedicada a los significados atribuidos por las informantes sobre la participación en las organizaciones. La tercera sección analiza los obstáculos que las mujeres identifican en dicha participación. En el cuarto apartado se analizan los procesos de cambio que ellas protagonizan. Si bien estos cambios están presentes también en los apartados anteriores, es en esta sección donde se analizan las actividades desarrolladas por las organizaciones y la capacidad de desencadenar procesos abiertos de cambio y nuevas posibilidades para ellas. Finalmente, la quinta sección se dedica a analizar las redes e interconexiones, formales e informales, como un modo de superar la fragmentación y amplificar la eficacia de sus demandas y propuestas.

1.- Contexto etnográfico y tipología de las Asociaciones

Mapa de España. En el centro la Comunidad de Madrid.

Madrid es una Comunidad Autónoma según la configuración del Estado democrático español, formada por una sola provincia que acoge en sus 7.995 km cuadrados, 179 municipios de muy diversos tamaños cuya población aumenta en relación a su cercanía con la ciudad de Madrid capital. Un dato a destacar del censo de población del año 1991 es el mayor número de mujeres que de varones entre los 25 y 60 años, una tendencia que se acrecienta conforme aumenta la edad. El régimen autoritario del General Franco se basó en la centralidad política, administrativa y económica del gobierno que produjo un modelo de desarrollo industrial en los años sesenta del

siglo XX, que atrajo a un gran número de inmigrantes desde otros puntos de la geografía española hacia la capital. Este fenómeno favoreció, por un lado, la atracción de la población inmigrante a Madrid y a su vez la expulsión de muchos trabajadores desde el centro a la periferia. Se configuró así una desordenada transformación de los pueblos más cercanos a Madrid creando nuevos barrios con graves carencias en equipamientos y servicios. Este fue el origen de la formación de un área metropolitana como periferia segmentada social y espacialmente y que motivaron las luchas de los movimientos ciudadanos que fueron consolidando la ampliación de sus demandas en los años 70 y 80 en el marco de las nuevas conquistas democráticas.

La crisis industrial del área metropolitana en los años 70 supuso el hundimiento de buena parte del aparato productivo con la pérdida de empleos, básicamente masculinos, convirtiendo ciertas zonas en espacios de marginalidad, desempleo y deterioro ambiental. La agudización de las desigualdades sociales planteaba nuevos problemas de exclusión que operaban sobre otros ya viejos y no resueltos, como los derivados de la desigualdad de género que había sido uno de los pilares del régimen católico-franquista. La herencia de la dictadura era muy potente en cuanto al modelo tradicional de familia basada en la jerarquización de papeles entre mujeres y varones, la asignación para ellas, casi en exclusiva, del trabajo doméstico, la escasa participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral y sus severas carencias en los niveles educativos. Las demandas de empleo de las mujeres se producen en el contexto de la crisis aludida en los años setenta con consecuencias negativas en cuanto a precariedad, inestabilidad y bajos salarios. Aún en los momentos de recuperación económica la tasa de desocupación laboral femenina continuó siendo el doble que la tasa de masculina.

En cuanto a los niveles educativos según los datos oficiales del año 1993 la tasa de analfabetismo de las mujeres mayores de 50 años en Madrid era más del doble que la de los varones. Con respecto a los otros niveles educativos, el 32 % de las mujeres adultas de la Comunidad de Madrid estaban incluidas en los niveles tipificados como deficitarios. Se constataba que a mayor edad eran también mayores las deficiencias educativas que disminuía notablemente en el tramo de edad de 25 a 34 años y era prácticamente residual en la población entre 16 y 24 años.

En este contexto se produjo desde finales de los años 70 y especialmente en los 80 el surgimiento de un gran número de organizaciones ciudadanas y de manera significativa asociaciones femeninas al amparo de las libertades conquistadas. Uno de los primeros problemas de la investigación fue la constatación de la inexistencia de bases de datos fiables acerca del asociacionismo femenino activo y no meramente registrado oficialmente. En el Registro Nacional de Asociaciones del Ministerio del Interior se recogían bajo el epígrafe de asociaciones de mujeres un total de 487 en la Comunidad de Madrid y 1650 en el conjunto del Estado Español. Otras fuentes institucionales dedicadas a la intervención en políticas sociales y de igualdad, así como la Federación Regional de Asociaciones de Mujeres, coincidían en que la cifra era de sólo 178 asociaciones activas.
A partir de esos datos se elaboró un cuestionario para conocer desde las propias asociaciones sus finalidades, ámbito de actuación, fecha de constitución, número de afiliadas, programación de actividades, recursos propios y fuentes de financiación. Esta información constituyó una primera

base de datos, hasta ese momento inexistente, y la posibilidad de elaborar un mapa de la distribución territorial de los distintos tipos de asociaciones, los contenidos de sus programas y las actividades que desarrollaban. A partir de estos datos se seleccionó la muestra de las organizaciones que se estudiaron etnográficamente a través de la observación participante de la asociación y del desarrollo de sus actividades, y se elaboraron las entrevistas en profundidad que se realizaron a informantes significativas.

Para abordar el objeto de estudio se procedió a elaborar una tipología de las asociaciones a partir de las autodefiniciones expresadas en las respuestas recibidas. Esta clasificación responde al carácter de las actividades y las finalidades que se perseguían. La tipología fue la siguiente:

- ASISTENCIALES: dentro de este tipo se agrupaban las asociaciones cuya actividad se dirigía a la atención, ayuda y orientación de mujeres en situación de indefensión y carencias personales o sociales.
- FEMINISTAS: asociaciones que se congregaban en torno a los fines políticos, sociales y reivindicativos del movimiento feminista y que de manera expresa se autodefinían como tales.
- INMIGRANTES: asociaciones con objetivos de informar, orientar y capacitar a mujeres inmigrantes para lograr su integración social y laboral en la sociedad española así como sensibilizar a la opinión pública sobre los problemas de estos colectivos.
- PROMOCIÓN LABORAL: asociaciones cuyo objetivo era la capacitación de las mujeres para su incorporación al mercado de trabajo.
- PROMOCIÓN SOCIOCULTURAL: asociaciones que centraban sus objetivos en torno al desarrollo personal, la promoción educativa-cultural, la participación en tareas grupales y la formación permanente.
- PROMOCIÓN DE LA SALUD: se incluyeron las asociaciones con objetivos de información y de sensibilización de los problemas de salud que atañen a las mujeres.
- PROFESIONALES: asociaciones agrupadas en torno a la defensa de una actividad laboral o campo profesional específico.
- SINDICALES: las que en el marco de un sindicato centran su actividad en la información, defensa y formación de las mujeres como trabajadoras.
- VECINALES: asociaciones que en el marco de los movimientos vecinales, se agrupan para potenciar la participación social y política de las mujeres en el ámbito local y comunitario y reivindican mejoras en sus entornos.
- DEPORTIVAS Y RECREATIVAS: las que tienen como objetivos el desarrollo de actividades deportivas y la participación en actividades lúdicas y culturales.

Cuantitativamente las asociaciones mayoritarias eran las de Promoción Sociocultural y que reunían también a mayor número de integrantes activas y beneficiarias, seguidas por las Vecinales y Feministas. Para el propósito de este texto y, tal como he planteado en la introducción, me fijaré de

manera especial en las asociaciones de Promoción Sociocultural y en las vecinales para dar cuenta de los procesos que he señalado anteriormente.

2.- Los significados de la participación: ganar nuevos espacios y conocimientos.

Como ha señalado Arturo Escobar la dominación avanza a través de estrategias que organizan el espacio y el conocimiento colonizando así los entornos físicos, sociales y culturales (1992: 398). Desde esta perspectiva, hay una estrecha relación entre la usurpación de los espacios y el silenciar o distorsionar la palabra de los sectores excluidos. No obstante, los sectores subordinados no son víctimas pasivas de las condiciones estructurales y efectúan múltiples procesos de cuestionamiento, negociación y transformación para desafiar las estructuras dominantes. Por este motivo uno de los objetivos de la investigación consistió en indagar las estrategias de las mujeres para superar "las asignaciones espaciales y de conocimiento" (Amorós, 1991: 135) que las confinaban a una situación de desventaja estructural.

En este sentido es significativa la estrecha vinculación que aparece en el discurso de las informantes entre la necesidad de trascender los límites del espacio doméstico y la adquisición de nuevos conocimientos para proyectar sus vidas hacia nuevas dimensiones. A la hora de expresar los motivos por los cuales comenzaron a participar en sus organizaciones, las expresiones más frecuentes son: *"salir de casa", "aprender cosas", "superar la humillación de no saber nada", "sentirte útil", "salir de la monotonía y la soledad", "saber más", "encontrarte con otras personas y descubrir muchas cosas de tu vida y de la sociedad".*

Una de las pioneras en la asociación de mujeres de su barrio en la periferia de Madrid relataba así la importancia de su experiencia:

"…lo más importante para mi fue el hablar con otras personas: Yo me acuerdo   que   en aquel entonces las mujeres empezábamos a hablar de nuestras cosas. El   juntarte   con   un grupo y ver que teníamos problemas en común, fue un hallazgo para mi. Además fue un aliciente el decir: pues no estoy sola, esto se puede   arreglar, o no se puede arreglar pero aquí estamos…"

Las integrantes de una asociación de Promoción Sociocultural y que se definen a sí mismas como amas de casa, sintetizan los significados de la participación del siguiente modo:

"…al participar despiertas a nuevas inquietudes y te sientes viva. Es importante   para despertar a la mujer que está muy metida en casa y acercarla a la cultura, a   los problemas de barrio, del mundo…"

En el mismo sentido se expresa una responsable de una asociación vecinal dedicada a mejorar las deficiencias del entorno de su barrio:

"Conoces a la gente y te enteras de los problemas que otros tienen en el barrio que tú no has visto. Saliendo, encontrándote con la gente, escuchando y luchando (…) porque en la lucha por resolver las cosas se aprende mucho. Uno aprende a organizar, a hablar en público, a reivindicar…"

Así vemos que el salir del espacio físico de la casa y el descubrimiento del compartir y actuar colectivamente es un nuevo espacio para desarrollar procesos personales y romper trabas inmovilizadoras. La idea de participar y aprender se presenta como la antítesis del aislamiento en el ámbito doméstico y éste, a su vez, es percibido como sinónimo de estancamiento personal : *" …una mujer que se queda en casa, no sabe mucho, no avanza, está limitada y hasta termina enfermándose porque está sola, trabaja mucho y nadie la valora".*

En muchos casos hay una estrecha relación entre los motivos que originaron la participación en las asociaciones y sus necesidades y responsabilidades familiares*: "yo me acerqué a la asociación porque quería aprender cosas que me ayudaran a cambiar la relación con mis hijos".* Otras informantes también insisten en este aspecto pero al mismo tiempo expresan que en el transcurso del tiempo y del trabajo en la asociación se han producido cuestionamientos y redefiniciones personales: *"muchas de nosotras empezamos a participar en la asociación porque nos sentíamos humilladas ante los hijos, era como una espina clavada que había que solucionar pero vas aprendiendo y te preguntas ¿por qué las mujeres tienen que ser siempre las más ignorantes?".* Algunas mujeres con una larga experiencia reivindicativa en sus barrios expresan: *"las que siempre nos hemos movilizado en el barrio somos nosotras porque sabemos las necesidades de las familias y porque estamos aquí. Los hombres se van a trabajar y no saben lo que ocurre cotidianamente. Por eso queremos más protagonismo y que se nos reconozca porque también somos ciudadanas y vecinas".*

Los procesos hasta aquí reseñados pueden ser interpretados en el marco de las "nuevas socializaciones para el poder" analizadas por la antropóloga Teresa del Valle (1993). La autora señala la importancia para las mujeres de contemplar la socialización como un proceso que abarca la totalidad de la vida y que propicia los cuestionamientos de las orientaciones recibidas. La desigualdad de género produce una socialización diferencial para mujeres y varones desde etapas tempranas de la vida e incide en las mujeres en una preparación para el "no-poder". A su juicio, las nuevas socializaciones para el poder requieren una inserción en grupos y asociaciones con unas características específicas que sirvan de base para la elaboración de nuevas estructuras, identidades y relaciones sociales que son claves para la superación de la desigualdad de género. Como hemos visto a través de los relatos recogidos este fenómeno de grupalidad activa produce nuevos significados culturales y son el soporte de nuevas elaboraciones personales que las mujeres perciben como logros importantes. Sin embargo, estas nuevas prácticas sociales no están exentas de contradicciones y obstáculos tanto subjetivos como estructurales que ellas mismas identifican y que veremos en el siguiente apartado.

3. Los obstáculos para la participación

Algunas mujeres entrevistadas vinculan la labor asociativa con una nueva experiencia de libertad: *"Para muchas de nosotras hay un convencimiento de que somos más libres desde el momento que maduramos la idea de asociarnos como mujeres"*. Testimonios similares se repiten en los discursos recogidos y coincide con aquellas que son los sectores más activos en sus respectivas asociaciones. Con estos testimonios pretenden transmitir a otras el descubrimiento de nuevos sentimientos y experiencias que posibilitan conquistar nuevas metas. Pero también son ellas quienes identifican algunos de los obstáculos que dificultan la participación de las mujeres en las organizaciones.

Uno de los aspectos que con más frecuencia se menciona se refiere a la carencia de tiempo de las mujeres como consecuencia de las responsabilidades familiares: *"...muchas no pueden participar activamente porque en casa tienen mucha tarea y peor las que encima tienen a su cargo a los padres o a las suegros..."*. La división genérica del trabajo tiene también otra consecuencia: *"Nosotras tenemos limitaciones de horarios para asistir a reuniones y participar en actividades, en cambio ellos no tienen estos problemas porque nosotras les resolvemos la vida"*. La carencia de tiempo es aún más acuciante entre las que hacen frente a una pesada doble jornada: *"...para muchas compañeras es muy difícil venir a las reuniones o encargarse de actividades porque llegan agotadas del trabajo y tienen que ponerse a preparar cenas, planchar y la comida del día siguiente"*. Aparece también en los discursos la referencia a los conflictos que se plantean con la pareja: *"Hay maridos y maridos, pero todavía hay muchos que preguntan ¿pero tú qué quieres?, ¿a qué vas a la asociación?, hay muchas broncas a cuenta de este asunto"*.

Pero en la rememoración de lo que vivieron cuando se iniciaron en el trabajo en la asociación también recuerdan aquellos conflictos y presiones que no sólo estaban al interior de sus hogares sino también entre los vecinos del barrio. Distintas formas de presión social que se manifestaba en comentarios, gestos e insultos:

"...aquí en el barrio hemos oído de todo. Gente que nos veía por la calle y decía: mira éstas, en lugar de estar en su casa atendiendo a sus hijos andan por ahí, no   sé   cómo   los maridos lo permiten. Nosotras seguimos pero es duro, muy duro, a   mí   al   principio   me afectaba que la gente dijera que yo abandonaba a mis hijos y   otras   cosas   peores. Pero esto lo hablábamos entre nosotras. Me ayudó mucho   hablarlo con las demás".

Las presiones sociales y los prejuicios patriarcales los describen también aquellas mujeres que optaron por incorporarse a organizaciones mixtas en diversos movimientos sociales: *"el machismo no es sólo de los maridos, está en todas partes, porque aquí la batalla por acceder a las Juntas Directivas es muy dura, nos ponen muchas trabas, a veces sutiles y otras no tanto. Pero nosotras tenemos que perder el miedo y organizarnos porque juntas hemos ido cambiando muchas cosas"*. Profundizando en esta cuestión, otra informante con un puesto relevante en una organización sindical relata su experiencia personal en el ámbito político:

"El salto político es muy duro porque en las cúpulas de las organizaciones hay   mucha competencia y discriminación. Las mujeres en esos ámbitos tenemos   muchas   carencias   por falta de conocimiento de los mecanismos y las relaciones   de poder que se establecen. Se juntan muchos miedos personales, poco apoyo y   el complejo de estar planteando siempre las cuestiones de los derechos de las   mujeres que parece algo secundario y muchas veces se banaliza. Llevar adelante   en una organización mixta un trabajo específico de mujeres es difícil, de ahí que   es tan importante la solidaridad entre nosotras, la capacidad de presión colectiva   desde todos los ámbitos y lograr promocionar y apoyar a mujeres para puestos   de dirección y responsabilidad".

Es significativo en todos estos testimonios provenientes de ámbitos asociativos tan diversos la alusión al *miedo* y la *culpa* como sentimientos amenazantes que frenan la incorporación de las mujeres al espacio político y a la toma de decisiones públicas. Al mismo tiempo el asociacionismo, la fuerza de la acción colectiva y la solidaridad, aparecen como soporte y referencia, como una fuente de elaboración positiva para hacer frente a las exclusiones. La solidaridad entre las mujeres aparece no como una hermandad abstracta e idealizada sino como una experiencia vivida y como un componente eficaz de la acción colectiva que vincula a los distintos grupos a través del tiempo. La fuerza de la solidaridad también se percibe como un proceso de *aprendizaje*:

"Hemos aprendido mucho durante todos estos años que no han sido nada fáciles.   También hemos aprendido a crear solidaridad, confianza y respeto entre las   mujeres. Nosotras pensamos que esta tarea es como una cadena de solidaridad   que cada vez tiene que ser más fuerte. Lo que otras han hecho y hacen por   nosotras, nosotras lo hacemos por otras y éstas a su vez lo harán por otras".

4. Actividades de las Asociaciones y procesos de cambio

Las asociaciones estudiadas promovieron y dieron a conocer públicamente a muchos sectores de mujeres como nuevos agentes sociales en el marco de los procesos de cambio político, jurídico y social de la España surgida de la nueva Constitución democrática. Como hemos visto, estas asociaciones promovieron una realidad intersubjetiva que generó un trabajo comunicativo y grupal que arrancó de las experiencias concretas de las mujeres que protagonizaron estas acciones. La mayoría de las prácticas asociativas se enmarcaron en el mundo de la vida cotidiana creando unas relaciones sociales nuevas que configuraron procesos de politización de las mujeres. A partir de esa grupalidad activa tomaron conciencia de la opresión y generaron motivaciones específicas para trabajar por el cambio de su situación en los contextos en los que vivían. Asimismo, las mujeres como sujetos activos se constituyeron como un poder difuso o un antipoder que erosionó la superficie del poder formal y fue generando desde ese entramado activo alternativas sociales, políticas y económicas.

Me interesa dar cuenta en este apartado de esos procesos de cambio a través de las actividades desarrolladas por las asociaciones estudiadas pero de manera especial para mostrar cómo a través

de esas actividades, aun aquellas que no pretendían desarrollar finalidades explícitamente feministas, generaron procesos abiertos de toma de conciencia, de nuevas posibilidades y de ciudadanía activa. A partir de la información recogida de las 178 asociaciones estudiadas se pudo conocer los distintos tipos de actividades que clasifiqué de la manera siguiente:

1. Servicios de carácter permanente: asesorías jurídicas, servicios de información y orientación, servicios de documentación.
2. Actuaciones de carácter continuado de formación: cursos, talleres, desarrollo de programas de intervención social, grupos de autoayuda.
3. Campañas específicas: organización y participación en campañas de sensibilización social y/ o reivindicación de los derechos de las mujeres.
4. Encuentros y Jornadas con temas monográficos.
5. Estudios e investigaciones.
6. Edición de publicaciones.
7. Actividades de carácter puntual: conferencias, presentaciones de libro, mesas redondas, excursiones, visitas culturales, concursos, exposiciones.

Es necesario destacar que las denominaciones de "permanente", "continuadas" y "puntuales" es una mera clasificación que hace referencia a las características de la acción desarrollada en su dimensión temporal, es decir, si se desarrolla durante días, semanas o abarca muchos meses. De los datos cuantificados sobre los distintos tipos de actividad y su desarrollo en el tiempo, los porcentajes más altos correspondían a actuaciones continuadas. No obstante, eran muy semejantes a los porcentajes de aquellas actividades clasificadas como "puntuales" pero que tenían una recurrencia anual lo cual permitía valorar la capacidad de planificación y de continuidad de las actividades y su capacidad de proyección e influencia en el tejido social más allá de los límites de la propia organización.

La etnografía hizo posible captar el significado y el impacto de las diversas actividades desde la experiencia de las mujeres y analizar los procesos de cuestionamiento y cambio que dichas actividades generaron en ellas. Como en toda acción social, una misma actividad producía formas de apropiación diversa según la historia personal y las necesidades de cada sujeto. A través de las observaciones de campo y las entrevistas a las informantes pude comprobar que las actividades desarrolladas generaban tantos procesos de cambio deliberadamente buscados a través de objetivos claros, como procesos sutiles de transformaciones personales, de pequeñas rupturas y acciones de autoafirmación que desencadenaban nuevas experiencias y redefiniciones de sus modelos de comportamiento. En este sentido, el relato de una integrante de una asociación de un barrio de la periferia de Madrid, ilustra cómo una actividad puntual de carácter cultural generó en ella un proceso de cambio que la proyectó a nuevas posibilidades porque supuso una superación de los límites de los espacios físicos y simbólicos interiorizados:

"Cuando lo pienso me parece mentira…porque todo empezó con una salida al   teatro. Yo al principio no quería, no había ido nunca al teatro, ni había salido sola sin mi marido y menos

al centro de Madrid. Yo, de noche, con otras mujeres y al teatro…pero no sé cómo, me armé de valor y fui y esa decisión me hizo tomar otras y creo que ya no soy la misma".

Una mujer trabajadora en una fábrica textil, procedente de la inmigración rural y que se instaló en un barrio de la periferia de Madrid en los años setenta junto a su marido e hijos, relata su experiencia de carencias educativas y su proceso de empoderamiento como consecuencia de las actividades desarrolladas en su asociación:

"Yo empecé a ir a la Asociación para mejorar mi lectura y escritura porque casi   no fui a la escuela. Con las clases fui despertando, aprendí muchas cosas y sobretodo a dejar de estar avergonzada, a hacerme valer. Poco a poco, fui haciendo otras cosas y aprendiendo muchas cosas que nos pasan a las mujeres y porqué nos pasan…ahora algunos me dicen ¿no serás tú una feminista de ésas?...bueno no sé, yo lo que quiero es luchar para que las mujeres no estén sometidas como estábamos antes"

5. Redes e Interconexiones

La historiadora Geraldine Scanlon analiza el surgimiento y desarrollo de la segunda ola del feminismo en España como una trayectoria desde "la unidad a la fragmentación" (1990:96). Una trayectoria, a su juicio, similar a la de otros movimientos feministas en Europa y Estados Unidos, pero que en el caso español tuvieron unas circunstancias políticas y sociales específicas. La autora señala como un aspecto crucial de esta situación el punto de partida desventajoso del movimiento feminista como consecuencia de la dictadura y las circunstancias especiales de la transición democrática que plantearon al movimiento problemas y debates apremiantes tales como la doble militancia, la relación con los partidos políticos y la cuestión de las prioridades: la prioridad de la lucha política por la democratización del país o las prioridades de la lucha feminista cuyos objetivos primordiales eran acabar con la situación de retraso y marginación soportadas por las mujeres. A pesar de esta fragmentación ideológica la autora considera que hubo en los años ochenta signos inequívocos de tolerancia, de acuerdos y de acción consensuada. Por ejemplo, las campañas unitarias en pro de la despenalización del aborto y la lucha contra los juicios penales de las mujeres que habían abortado, o las distintas acciones emprendidas para ampliar el número de candidatas femeninas al Congreso y al Senado en las elecciones de 1986.

El diagnóstico de crisis y de fragmentación de los movimientos sociales en España está presente en la bibliografía de aquel período. Las causas son muy variadas pero entre ellas se menciona el cumplimiento del ciclo lógico-temporal de los nuevos movimientos sociales, surgidos en los años sesenta, que recorren una trayectoria aparentemente común desde la contra-institucionalización a la institucionalización. Al ser recogidas total o parcialmente sus propuestas y demandas por parte de la política institucional genera un cambio de escenario

político que necesariamente implica una situación de crisis y redefinición de la acción colectiva (Alonso, 1992,1993, Jelín ,1987; Offe, 1992).

Por lo que respecta a la acción colectiva de las mujeres en la sociedad española durante la década de los ochenta y noventa, el panorama se hizo aún más complejo ante la emergencia de una diversidad de iniciativas asociativas que aparentemente parecían auto-aisladas en función de intereses y objetivos sectoriales y temáticos. En este sentido, durante el transcurso de la investigación, las palabras "atomización" y "fragmentación" se repetían en muy diversos ámbitos. Por ejemplo, una funcionaria de las administraciones públicas con responsabilidades en la implementación de Políticas de Igualdad, expresaba la importancia de la diversidad entre las mujeres y la diversidad de las asociaciones activas pero, al mismo tiempo, señala el temor a la atomización y dispersión con la consiguiente pérdida de fuerza colectiva y capacidad transformadora:

"Yo creo que es una situación muy nueva e interesante, que se está trabajando   muy bien, hay muchas asociaciones y muy variadas. Algo impensable hace algunos años. Pero el problema es que me parece que están dispersas,   atomizadas y te preguntas si todo esto es efectivo"

Una destacada activista del movimiento feminista de los años sesenta se expresaba en términos similares:

"No hay duda que se están consiguiendo cambios, pero me parece que son coyunturales, locales, también personales. No digo que los cambios personales no sean importantes, pero me pregunto si toda esa energía circulando, todo ese esfuerzo nos lleva a un cambio mayor o la fragmentación de los grupos y asociaciones hacen inviables esos cambios colectivos".

Como acabamos de ver en estos últimos testimonios, el fenómeno o la percepción de atomización se vive como amenaza a la eficacia en el logro de objetivos de cambio más amplios y globales. Esta discusión ocupó a muchas personas estudiosas de los movimientos sociales urbanos en Madrid y otras ciudades españolas en aquellos años. Se resaltaba, entre otras cosas, que la distinción entre asociacionismo y movimiento social reside precisamente en la diferencia entre atomización y sistema de coordinación y comunicación entre los grupos. Una asociación puede encontrarse aislada en su contexto social, por impotencia o por voluntad. Mientras que un movimiento social es tal porque es un sistema de comunicación en acción, es decir, porque establece una fluidez de mensajes a través de una estructura de red, donde distintos grupos formales en consonancia, hacen a la vez de nudos de conexión, de salida y de entrada de información que generan actitudes y prácticas que se expresan positivamente en momentos álgidos de movilización y/o en procesos de desarrollo comunitario.

De este modo el concepto de red aparece como superador del aislamiento y la atomización y como característica organizativa y estratégica de los movimientos sociales. Cuando se habla de red se está haciendo referencia a una forma horizontal de organizarse para objetivos comunes a través de instituciones, localidades y fronteras territoriales. Se señala que la historia de los movimientos sociales han sido tanto más efectivos cuando conscientemente se han organizado sobre la base de estas redes horizontales, sin negar la necesidad práctica de la jerarquía organizativa en la ejecución de una operación particular (Wainwright, 1994; Beck, 2004).

El concepto de *red social* tiene una aquilatada historia en la antropología y los estudios de redes han puesto de manifiesto la importancia de las organizaciones informales en la vida social, como canales que permiten el flujo de información y de recursos creando condiciones de ayuda mutua, de reciprocidad y adaptación a diversos contextos socio-culturales. En sociedades a gran escala, en situaciones urbanas de gran heterogeneidad, las redes sociales pueden ser un instrumento analítico útil para mostrar el modo en que los individuos se vinculan a las instituciones y éstas se generan a través de los actores sociales (Bott,1990; Lomnitz,1978; Mitchell,1969; Wolf,1980)

La investigación feminista ha desarrollado una gran erudición en el análisis de los movimientos de mujeres en contextos muy diversos a través de una organización en red y su eficacia a la hora de concertar acciones para lograr objetivos comunes a conseguir y la amplificación de sus acciones (entre otras, Caplan & Burja, 1978; Jaquette, 1989; Morgen & Bookman, 1988; Molyneux & Razavi, 2002). En el caso que nos ocupa, el estudio de las redes fue un objetivo clave para dilucidar si aquel universo asociativo heterogéneo y plural era una forma de creación y participación en un movimiento amplio de mujeres con objetivos de cambio de gran alcance, o si meramente, estábamos ante un panorama asociativo atomizado y particularista. En la actualidad estas preguntas tendrían que resolverse también analizando otros ámbitos de relación social y de manera especial el uso e impacto de las TIC. Entonces, cuando se realizó la investigación, las redes virtuales no habían reconfigurado todavía a la sociedad española y sus organizaciones ciudadanas.

A través de la investigación se comprobó que los aspectos más relevantes que se estaban desarrollando para potenciar las interconexiones entre los grupos y la organización en red fueron los siguientes:

a) Federaciones de Asociaciones, Coordinadoras y Plataformas de Acción en torno a un tema específico. Por ejemplo, la Plataforma más activa y potente era entonces y, sigue siendo en la actualidad, la que aglutinaba la lucha contra la violencia. Uno de sus logros ineludibles fue la aprobación de la Ley Integral contra la Violencia de Género en diciembre de 2004. A pesar de este avance la pervivencia de la violencia contra las mujeres sigue haciendo necesario su acción coordinada.
b) Redes Internacionales
c) Coordinación local

d) Publicaciones
e) Interconexión con otros movimientos sociales

Estos distintos niveles de actuación no eran excluyentes, sino que conectaban las actividades, aspiraciones y reivindicaciones de las diversas asociaciones solapando sus actuaciones, ampliando sus enlaces y efectos y dando una mayor fluidez a la intercomunicación. Asimismo, la intensidad de sus conexiones y su efectividad dependía de las circunstancias específicas que había que afrontar. Estas redes de acción fueron decisivas en las reformas legislativas que se aprobaron en la década de los ochenta en las distintas materias del ordenamiento jurídico dirigidas a implantar el principio de igualdad entre mujeres y hombres que se había establecido en la Constitución. Los distintos enclaves organizativos de mujeres, las actividades desarrolladas, las investigaciones y publicaciones impulsadas y las interconexiones establecidas tejieron una *red espacial, social y política en la ciudad*, distribuida por todo el entramado territorial enlazando el centro y la periferia. A través de esa organización que en muchos momentos tuvo una gran visibilidad pública y en muchos otros actuaba de manera silenciosa, aunque no menos efectiva, circulaban personas, conocimientos, colaboración mutua, prestación de servicios y un aumento de conciencia feminista que sin duda fueron cruciales para la modernización del país, la democratización de la sociedad española y el avance de las mujeres.

Conclusiones

Con este trabajo nos hemos asomado al mundo del asociacionismo de mujeres en Madrid en la España post-constitucional. Su estudio permitió captar la riqueza de los procesos sociales y políticos protagonizados por las mujeres y frecuentemente invisibilizados en los análisis predominantes de la transición política española y del período post-constitucional. El asociacionismo de mujeres que emergió con fuerza en la década de los ochenta configuró un amplio movimiento de mujeres a través de una organización en red que amplificó su impacto social porque permitió la circulación de información, conocimientos y la acción concertada de reivindicaciones y propuestas de cambio en el orden jurídico, económico y social que permitieron el avance de las mujeres.

Las voces de las protagonistas que se incorporan a este texto muestran la importancia de la actividad colectiva en el cuestionamiento de los espacios tradicionalmente asignados a las mujeres y la conquista de nuevos conocimientos, habilidades y modelos de comportamiento que condujeron a su compromiso social y político. He caracterizado estos procesos de cambio como socializaciones para el empoderamiento, siguiendo la propuesta de la antropóloga Teresa del Valle. La toma de conciencia de la opresión y la desigualdad de género a través de los enclaves organizativos tuvo una importancia crucial para la redefinición de la vida de las mujeres y su incorporación a espacios más amplios de incidencia social y política. Me he centrado especialmente en aquellas asociaciones que tenían en sus finalidades explícitas

propósitos feministas y que formaban parte de ellas mujeres de clase trabajadora del ámbito rural y urbano, inmigrantes o amas de casa ajenas, hasta entonces a las luchas por los derechos de las mujeres que habían protagonizado las organizaciones feministas en la clandestinidad y en los años de la transición política. Si embargo, a través del análisis de los discursos y de sus prácticas sociales asociativas se han podido comprobar conquistas personales y colectivas que difícilmente pueden excluirse de los objetivos amplios del feminismo como movimiento emancipador.

En los últimos treinta años la situación de las mujeres españolas ha cambiado de manera significativa en relación a la educación en todos los niveles, el empleo, la autonomía sexual y reproductiva, la lucha contra la violencia y la creación de una opinión pública favorable a la igualdad. Estos logros han sido posibles por el trabajo sostenido de cientos de organizaciones de mujeres coordinadas entre sí. No obstante, es necesario resaltar que la actual crisis económica y financiera que se inició en el año 2008 amenaza las conquistas de las décadas anteriores. Estas circunstancias hacen necesario el fortalecimiento de las organizaciones y sus interconexiones pero también la necesidad de impulsar investigaciones que hagan posible conocer los nuevos tipos de organizaciones, los perfiles de sus integrantes, las nuevas demandas y las propuestas alternativas.

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