

**Second Plenary Panel Breakout Session: GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES**  
**DISCUSSION NOTES**  
Tagore Room  
3:15 – 4:15 pm

**Facilitator:** Barbara Dodge

**Recorder:** Michael Cain

**Participants:** Ashmita Gosai, Keiko Ikeda, Mehul Pandya, Jesse “Nga” Ngatokorua, Maureen Fordham, Kristina Peterson

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**1. What grassroots initiatives are you aware of that may be similar to the experiences of the panel?**

- Panel had many experiences – difficult question here
- Many cases in Pacific Islands where people live along riverbanks without awareness of the dangers, or without mitigation measures. Fiji just experienced heavy downpours, and many measures failed.
- Louisiana area has area that keeps flooding, people keep moving back as they do not know where else to go. Initiatives to move them would result in people losing their community. So people stay. No mechanism to move community as a whole. It is outside groups coming in to ask local people to set their own goals – this is a good start. Ask “What objectives do you have for your future?” Efforts are still in their infancy.
- Third world issues with squatters – they do not own the land, so it is difficult to move them. Government has huge deficits and has trouble helping.
- Difficulty in answering: Who is the community? Who speaks for the community? What right do outsiders have to impose ideas on community involvement? Potential problems with insider/outsider issues.
- Problem solving facilitators need to gain trust of community.
- The Ukrainian example contains an important factor: allowing the community to determine what they view as the main risks. Our group focuses on *disasters*, which are infrequent compared to the everyday issues that people deal with.
- The environmental initiatives and action groups are an important component of reducing vulnerability. We have not made this linkage yet – we still treat each as separate groups. Link up environmental action groups; promote environmental justice as a component of sustainable disaster risk reduction.

**2. What have been some of the challenges of these initiatives in your organization / community that will prevent implementation of strategies?**

- Gaining the trust of the community.
- Determining who speaks for the community.
- Who makes the decisions?
- Availability of funds is always a challenge.
- Community might not be aware of other solutions or approaches.

- Men's and women's society are quite separate in many cultures. Women speak out within women's groups, but around men many women become silent.
- Religious communities are also separate [example: Hindus and Moslems in India]
- Women in academia are more apt to intermingle better with men. A degree bestows respect; academic is more comfortable speaking in groups.
- There are confidence building techniques that help women learn to speak out.
- Academics/'experts' might also intimidate people without the same experiences or knowledge
- Speaking in the local language improves trust and understanding. Having a local facilitator helps.
- In some areas grassroots groups cannot go to donor agencies; needs to go through gov't
- In the U.S. communities are suspicious of the research community and some NGO's. They have exploited communities, and left them worse off than before.
- US: marginalized communities view themselves as providers of jobs for NGO's. NGO's take jobs that locals could have had, and keeps them vulnerable.
- Pacific Islands: The view is: because we are marginalized NGO's need to look after us.

### **3. What opportunities might you be able to use to build gender sensitive tools and implement gender fair practices at the grassroots and community levels?**

- Need to go back to communities and challenge the idea that 'a woman's place is in her home.' Go to women's groups and encourage them to speak, let them know that their voices need to be heard.
- This comes about when women see that what they say has value in the outside world. It is difficult to change the way people have been socialized. Without evidence that things might change it will be difficult for them to speak out.
- In developing communities there hasn't been any value placed on 'woman as caregiver.' The internal attitude is 'I am not worth much, I am just a house keeper.' In places where this is valued and emphasized women have more self-esteem.
- Need to introduce gender-sensitive tools early on in the process, and on a broad level. Delineate the number of men and women who will be involved. Things will run more smoothly.
- Tool can be: how do you translate skills so that they can be used in the external world, or by the dominant group.
- Promote economic equality

### **4. What types of support tools will be required?**

- Training and education is required, as well as research. Advice and guidance is necessary. All falls under 'capacity building.'
- Research should be developed by grassroots to identify their own issues.
- Also focus on men, encouraging them to let women be strong.

- Develop a lexicon or directory of who all the NGO's are, and what their mission is.
- Network with other groups that have been successful. Choose appropriate media – groups do not all have access to online resources.
- It is difficult for scientists/media/professionals to understand what is needed at the grassroots level. A group of women in Africa is translating the weather forecasts into their own terms ['showers tonight' means one thing, 'you will have to walk one/two/five miles for water' has more meaning].
- Professionals need examples they can draw upon.
- Economic opportunities for women
- Have women's groups that advocate for food security [i.e. crops that are drought resistant, water access, storage].
- Link with other grassroots groups to share experiences. Knowledge is stronger when learned through peers rather than from outside experts coming in.

#### **5. What would be a good measure of effectiveness?**

- A sustainable group, rather than one that was set up by outside experts and runs as long as they have funding.
- A group that serves needs, and evolves as needs evolve
- Grassroots women's groups viewed as experts.
- Continuous existence.
- Grassroots women becoming part of the political structure, having a recognized role in development plans.
- Economic equality between men and women

#### **6. Are there experiences from grassroots initiatives that should be included in the Honolulu Call-to-Action?**

- Cook Islands has involved women in a program to conserve part of the lagoon through marine protected areas. After two or three years the area is rotated. Women's leaders are involved in the decision making. There is a similar program on land that is supported by women.

#### **7. What statement about grassroots initiatives do we want to contribute to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe?**

- Grassroots women need to become part of the political structure, and have a recognized role in development plans.
- Promote economic opportunities for women, and use the women's fair-trade movement as a tool for disaster risk reduction and sustainable use of the environment.

- Promote formal and informal educational opportunities for women at the community level. This could include information on self-protection, public speaking, esteem building, etc.