

Strengthening Community Trainers

Latin America and Caribbean Regional Workshop Report

Across the GROOTS International network there are grassroots women's groups who have done innovative work to rebuild their communities after disasters or build resilient communities that can cope with disaster. These innovators are disaster survivors themselves and are thus best equipped to train and teach other disaster hit communities on how they can shape resilience and recovery processes; and how they can change government, NGO and donor led programmes to the advantage of disaster affected families and communities.

As those who were present at the Grassroots Academy this summer know, the GROOTS International network in partnership with the American Jewish World Service is embarking on an innovative global initiative to build on the expertise of grassroots leaders in disaster prone areas to create a global network of grassroots women trainers who can be called upon to support and teach each other disaster-affected communities. As part of this project, workshops bringing together grassroots leaders in three disaster-prone regions – Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the 2004 tsunami affected region – were held in late November-early December 2006.

STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

Each group presented three strategies that they will continue to strengthen over the next nine months. They will form a team of trainers and begin developed training tools and initiate training in other communities in their country.

Honduras:

- **Mobilization of women to organize disaster relief efforts**
- **Community action and advocacy on housing and infrastructure**
- **Food security**

Jamaica:

- **Strengthening roof safety**
- **Community mapping process**
- **Prevention of river flooding (using wire baskets of stones, also known as river groining)**

Peru:

- **Strengthening the organizational capacity of the women**
- **Consciousness-raising, collection and disseminating information for community advocacy**
- **Production of earthquake-resistant materials by grassroots women**

Participants said they would consider the meeting a success if they:

- *Listened actively to each other*
- *Concretized which three strategies they would further develop*
- *Practiced presenting the three strategies of their country as a team.*
- *Advanced in implementing the tools learned*
- *Left with strategic plans for the next nine months*

The Latin America and Caribbean Regional Workshop meeting was held from November 27 to December 1, 2006 in Kingston, Jamaica. It was hosted by the Construction Resource and Development Center, a grassroots women's organization that organized their community in response to Hurricane Ivan.

Twelve leaders from GROOTS member organizations Honduras, Jamaica and Peru came together to update each other on the strategies they are developing to teach through their disaster response teams. From communities struck yearly by hurricanes, tropical storms or small earthquake tremors, the three groups shared what strategies best represent their expertise. Together, the women reflected on each other's strategies and the teaching tools they will make to transfer the strategies to other communities. At the end of the five day meeting, each group left with a plan to develop their teams over the next nine months.



Nine Month Strategic Plan

Garifuna Emergency Committee of Honduras

Jan. – Mar. 2007

- ✓ Team leaders and twelve members of the Team design manuals for the Strategies presented at this meeting.
- ✓ Team Leaders evaluate the progress of the twelve Team members to access who needs more training.

Apr. – Jun. 2007

- ✓ Recruit new Team of fifteen women from five different communities.
- ✓ Train the new Team in the three Strategies.
- ✓ Hold 2-3 day trainings sessions twice per month.
- ✓ Prepare interim report on strategic plan.

Jul. – Sept. 2007

- ✓ The new Team of fifteen women will work with other communities to educate them on the three Strategies.
- ✓ Conduct training workshops in the new communities.
- ✓ Hold 2-3 day trainings sessions twice per month.

Potential Peer Exchange

The Committee also wants to collaborate with CRDC and Women United to learn the community mapping techniques they shared at the workshop, as well as the safe roof technique shared by CRDC.

HONDURAS:

GARIFUNA EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

Three women representing the executive board of the Committee and two rural communities came to present their strategies. One important lesson they shared was that if the community organizes early, then they are able to work together transparently and trust each other when outside resources arrive. After Hurricane Mitch in 1998, they called people together using trumpets, drums, church bells and megaphones. They continued to organize regularly with all the social organizations of the community, eventually negotiating for and contributing labor to new houses that they helped to design and reestablishing and even improving their agricultural practices. One activity in Food Security that the Jamaican women particularly enjoyed hearing was collective marketing of their products. One woman from each women's group takes the produce of the women in her group to sell at the market, returning the earnings to each woman at the end of the day.



Figure 1: Marelen from Honduras shared her organizing experience in the wake of Hurricane Mitch with Jamaican leaders.

Nine Month Strategic Plan

Construction Resource and Development Centre

Jan. – Mar. 2007

- ✓ Produce at least 350 more copies of the roof strengthening manual.
- ✓ Draft manual for community mapping technique.
- ✓ Continue training of 26 participants on community mapping technique.

Apr. – Jun. 2007

- ✓ Invite technical trainer to train grassroots women on river groining technique.
- ✓ Appoint facilitator to document the river groining technique.
- ✓ Based on facilitator's documentation, produce river groining technique manual.
- ✓ Print 300 river groining manuals.

Jul. – Sept. 2007

- ✓ Send experts in river groining and community mapping to train communities in other countries, such as Peru.
- ✓ Reach out to donor agencies to procure funding to train more communities and countries.

Potential Peer Exchange

CRDC expressed interest in learning Women United's resistant roof building technique, and will send five members to Peru to learn their strategy in 2007.



Figure 2: CDRC demonstrated mapping technique to participants.

JAMAICA:

CONSTRUCTION RESOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (CRDC)

Women from various grassroots community groups that have partnered with CRDC demonstrated strategies as well as practices that they would like to adopt or improve through the process of forming a disaster response team. Their team consists of 26, rather than 12 women, because there was so much interest in participating! Their strategy on community mapping was a bit hit with the other groups – the women from Peru and Honduras both expressed interest in learning their Mapping process. After visiting a community that is highly vulnerable to mud slides, flooding and hurricanes, they learned how that community and others have mapped their neighborhoods, identifying vulnerable and safe areas, landmarks, and damaged homes. Seeing the vulnerability of their communities contrasted with their achievements impressed the visitors.



Figure 3: CDRC demonstrated hurricane resistant roofing.

Nine Month Strategic Plan

Women United for A Better Community

Jan. – Mar. 2007

- ✓ Organize a Team of fifteen women to meet 2-3 times a week to develop a module for teaching the practical component
- ✓ Network with women in Carabaho community.
- ✓ Seek funds

Apr. – Jun. 2007

- ✓ Team of fifteen will train Carabaho women on leadership, disaster prevention, and community mapping in workshops held 2-3 times per week.

Jul. – Sept. 2007

- ✓ Conduct practical training on prefabricated components
- ✓ Train women how to start business of pre-fabricated anti-seismic housing components.

Potential Peer Exchange

Women United will participate in CRDC's training on their community mapping technique.

PERU:

WOMEN UNITED FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY

Three women from Peru demonstrated how their strategies of community mobilization, information gathering and consciousness-raising contributed to their third strategy: fabrication of earthquake-resistant materials by grassroots women. Through the earlier processes, women come to work together, develop relationships and gain the confidence to participate in meetings and activities for the improvement of their community. With their new confidence, women begin small businesses to fabricate earthquake-resistant housing components. The projects bring them an income by selling the components to builders outside of the community, as well as a hope to one day build improved earthquake resistant homes for their own community. They use the information gathered through organizing to successfully negotiate various improvements to their communities with local government. Together, these strategies create a resilient community, better prepared to withstand disasters.



Figure 4: Peruvian and Jamaican grassroots leaders learned techniques and strategies from each other.