

Grassroots Academy in Latin America and the Caribbean

A brief report on the conclusions

1 – 4 August, 2007

Lima, Perú

14 August, 2007

The Grassroots Academy was a four-day event for grassroots women to network, share knowledge and strengthen their presence in the region. It was an historic first gathering of grassroots women in Latin America. The work focused on Economic Empowerment, Sustainable Agriculture, Community Organizing, Governance, Health and Domestic Violence, Safer Cities and Land and Housing. Women analyzed their work in plenary, divided into thematic workshops to exchange local practices and visited three neighborhoods of Lima to directly see grassroots women's work. They left the Academy with general terms for a Plan of Action in the region.



Highlights of Practices Shared

“When we use our creativity, we don’t need to wait for outside resources,” commented Lourdes Huanca about the agricultural activities that the rural women carry out. In the thematic workshop focused on grassroots women’s best practices in sustainable agriculture, she and other leaders shared methods on creating drip irrigation systems, using easily available materials such as cheap hoses and Coca-Cola bottles. They discussed guinea pig raising, collective farming methods, soil conservation and collective methods to take their products to local markets. Their practices demonstrate alternatives to the problems presented by intermediaries and demonstrated that it is possibility to achieve sustainability in rural communities, countering the dominant development practices that totally exclude poor women from naming and claiming their contributions to the development of their communities

The women’s creativity shone in all of the practices shared in the thematic workshops and plenary sessions during the four days of the Academy. Such presence and leadership of grassroots women truly creates a unique political space that counters the more typical networking spaces that have been claimed by mixed organizations and large NGOs. The space for naming good practices and exchanging them counters dominant development practices that generally exclude poor women’s innovations from recognized bodies of knowledge.

Among the four organizations from different countries that presented on their collective forms of carrying out micro-credit activities, each group had different norms and operating procedures. The women from the National Movement of Grassroots Women, Luna Creciente, and OMICSE in Ecuador used the earnings from their small guinea pig businesses to start up savings and credit groups (cajas). They began their businesses with financial support from Intermon-Oxfam, but the groups are an initiative financed and created independently by the grassroots women. This young program already has a total of \$75,000 in each group, among 24 women’s groups. In Bolivia, the women from Fundación Apachita have created a similar system – the difference being that they began their groups (communal banks) without any financial support outside of what the women contributed.



Josefina Anguisaca, from Luna Creciente / OMICSE emphasized something that all of these examples have in common. In OMISE, the only guarantee required is their government ID card, because **“we women pay back and follow through!”**

In a time when micro-credit is receiving much recognition worldwide, these women bring a unique and grounded perspective. These grassroots women use their own creative forms of micro-credit, and they place their own empowerment as women in their families and communities at the center of the process.

Among the ideas that came out for the plan of activities, various groups showed interest in learning from the Uniao Nacional por Moradia Popular in Brazil. In Sao Paulo, this organization has achieved the construction of houses that they negotiated for with the government. As a result, the government supported the training of women from the different slum neighborhoods (favelas) in construction. They collectively built the houses and negotiated to obtain basic services. Now their experience can serve as a best practice to replicate through exchanges with groups from other countries.

With the creativity, solidarity and hard work of these valiant women, much can be achieved, but this does not take away from the need for resources to support the work and take it to an even greater scale. The participants formed a plan of actions to carry out at the regional level, to scale up and attract more resources at the same time. They used participatory processes so that each participant would have the opportunity to contribute to the plan and to approve the fundamental ideas in it. **Maintaining this inclusive process, a committee will continue developing, refining and strengthening the plan, sharing it with everyone that was present.**

A Summary of the Action Plan can be found on the following page.

Results:

- Full participation of grassroots women – over **80%** of participants were grassroots women.
- Participation of 90 women total, with \$40,000 obtained from outside sources specifically for the event.
- Support from professional partners throughout the process.
- Grassroots women obtained experience in directing and facilitating the majority of the Academy.
- Relationships strengthened between grassroots leaders in the region.
- Innovative activities (local practices) shared in small groups.
- Plans suggested for follow-up of this learning and for broader collaborative activities.



General Terms for the Action Plan

Following the participatory process that was used before and during the Academy, **a committee will continue developing, refining and strengthening the plan**, sharing it with all the women that were present. *Below are some examples of the specific plans within each general area of the plan.*



General Actions:

- 1) Consolidation and strengthening of the grassroots groups at the national level in each country that participates in the plan.**
- 2) A Grassroots Academy in Latin America and the Caribbean every 2 years to report on advances, difficulties and new goals.**

Exchanges:

Transfer:

- Savings and Credit from Luna Creciente, Ecuador to >>> Uniao, Brasil; El Comite, Honduras; La Coordinadora, Guatemala; Varias, Peru; Las Brumas, Nicaragua; F. Apachita, Bolivia
- Soil conservation, reforestation, irrigation systems, etc. from Las Brumas, Nicaragua to >>>> Luna Creciente, Ecuador; F. Apachita, Bolivia; varias, Peru
- Popular Housing from Uniao Nacional por Moradia Popular from Brasil to: >>> Mujeres Unidas, Peru

Political Advocacy

- Support to the Zero Eviction campaign of the World Social Forum and other organizations.
- Solidarity with FOVELIC in their struggle for basic services, housing and zero evictions in Lima, Peru.
- Elaboration of a legal proposal so that women can access land as property owners and access credit with low interest rates for the construction of housing, with disaster mitigation features.. (Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, Brasil, Nicaragua)

Communication

- Use international conference calls, Skype and other technologies more frequently to advance direct communication among the grassroots leaders in the region. Encourage more continuous communication, and training and sharing of popular guides for the use of new communications technology.

Leadership Support

- Capacity building in Political Advocacy related to economic development.
- Political formation and support from grassroots women participating in electoral processes at local and national levels.

Immediate Actions for implementation by grassroots groups

Suggestions to achieve immediate change for women's safety in public spaces:

Collaborate with local governments for:

Maintenance of lighting in dark places

Improved security in abandoned property

Beautification and maintenance of parks

Educational and productive programs for populations in high-risk zones

Consciousness-raising with communities and authorities

Making maps of dangerous zones in the city

Suggestions toward a plan for the new Economic Empowerment Program of GROOTS International:

Store for selling products

A seed fund

Trueque (exchange of products)

Support for obtaining international marketing certificates

Basic Principles for the plan:

1 Inclusion and promotion of the participation of women of all races and ethnicities.

2 The inclusion of women's empowerment and a gender focus in all areas of work in the plan.

3 Continuous communication

4 The regional committee will consist of no more than six people, from six different countries, including the three networks.

5 A support committee of NGO partners will support the regional committee in specific areas.

To receive more information about this plan as we continue developing, refining and strengthening it, or to find out how you can participate in or support the plan, please communicate with

Dahlia.goldenberg@huairou.org

Regional Planning Committee:

Comite de Emergencia Garifuna (Honduras) - GROOTS
Unión de Cooperativas las Brumas (Nicaragua) – GROOTS y Red Mujer y Paz
Uniao Nacional por Moradia Popular (Brasil) – Red Mujer y Habitat
Casa da Mulher do Nordeste (Brasil)

Local Planning Committee:

Central de los Bancos Comunales (con el apoyo de SEA)
Mujeres Unidas para un Pueblo Mejor (con el apoyo de Estrategia)

The following Member Networks of the Huairou Commission are participating in the planning of the

Grassroots Academy:

FEMUM (Federación de mujeres municipalistas – ALC)

GROOTS International

Red Mujer y Habitat – Latinoamérica y el Caribe

Red Mujer y Paz

With support from the following institutions:

American Jewish World Service (AJWS)

Cordaid

Ford Foundation (through GROOTS International)

Global Fund for Women

Horizons

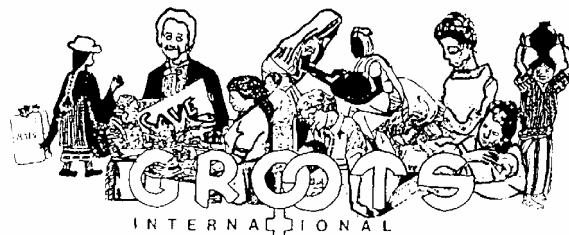
Intermon (Ecuador office)

UNIFEM (Brasil and Southern Cone)



*Red Mujer
y Paz*

****The "Grassroots Academy" is a GROOTS International methodology***



Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood