

**Report on Participation of WOCAN in the 11th AWID International Forum on
Women's Rights and Development, Cape Town, South Africa
14-17, 2008
by**

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Introduction

Two members from WOCAN Western/Central Africa, namely Elizabeth and Danielle, participated in the above Forum. Their participation was kindly sponsored by New Field Foundation, USA. Elizabeth Arrived on 12th November and Danielle on 14th and both departed on 19th November.

Theme

The theme of the forum was "The Power of Movements". Movement was defined in the context of AWID to mean "an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action". In the context of Africa it was contextualized as collective power for marginalized groups and that when a group acts together it could hardly be ignored. It is, therefore, critical for African women to come together with other women to take ownership of their own development in order to drive development for women. Thus movement building provides space for feminists to come together to dialogue and to contribute towards connecting space from one level to another. It also promotes justice, access to resources and brings about positive systematic fundamental change.

Sponsorship

The New Field Foundation fully equipped us for the impending forum and with travel information. We are indeed grateful for the support and the opportunity provided to participate in such an important global forum.

Before our departure/travel, New Field sent us via the internet, relevant reading materials and information on what to pack and what to expect in Cape Town. We were also provided with sim cards for our cell phones.

On arrival, we were met at the airport, a gesture which made us feel at home right from the word go. Mr. Ighsaan Moosa, the Local Coordinator, hired by New Field, took care of our concerns throughout the period of our stay.

enary and Sessions Attended During the Forum

Plenary

From Nov. 14-17, four plenary sessions were organized.

- Women organizing and changing the world (moderated by Ms Geetanjali Misra, from CREA - INDIA).

During this opening plenary, some important questions were raised such as : how do we understand movements? Why do movements matter? Why is it important to raise the issue now?

These questions because the power movements make us believe in the vision and the changes we want to see in our world. This plenary was setting the stage for the next coming days of exchanges and learning.

- Making Our Movements Stronger; A look inside (Moderated by Jessica Horn, from African Feminist Forum, Uganda/UK)

This topic was at the center of the second day plenary. It was a kind of reflexive assessment of internal dynamics and challenges within organizations and movements. The questions raised during this plenary were: How to build more inclusive, cohesive movements with healthy, accountable and leadership? How to constructively manage power dynamics and tensions within our movements? How to more effectively build alliances and collaborative strategies across diverse contexts and levels of organizing? Etc.

- The Context of our Organizing (moderated by Joanna Kerr, Oxfam, Canada)

Movements are built in a specific context (growing poverty, conflicts and war, authoritarian regime, spread of HIV/AIDS, etc.). This session has provided participants with clear strategies, insights and inspiration to take back the experiences to their own work.

- The Future of Movements (moderated by Brigitte Inder, Women's initiative for gender justice, The Netherlands)

This session was a kind of restitution of key lessons learnt during the forum with a focus on how the participants can carry back these lessons to their sisters, organizations and communities.

Sessions

- Funding Movement Building: Donors get real about what it takes.
- Climate change and Gender Equality
- INGOs, Women's Organizations and Movement building; the Challenges and Opportunities of Global partnerships
- Internet, mass media education: Powerful Tools Contributing towards Movement Building and Social Change.
- How to build stronger movements through networking: the experience of transnational feminist networks.
- Women in decision making have not made a difference?
- Measuring the success of movements
- Climate change in Africa: why women's Leadership is critical
- The Community Radio Movement: Connecting people, Empowering communities
- Women's Empowerment: what do men have to do with it?
- The UN as a legitimate space for women's organizing successes and challenges – Past and Future

Orientation Workshop, 13th November, 2008

New Field Foundation organized a one day orientation workshop in connection with the AWID Forum for the participants that it sponsored. The Foundation was led by Sarah Hobson, the Executive Director. There were about 20 people present. Most participants were from Francophone West Africa, with 2 representatives from each organization. To facilitate communication, each pair of participants was assigned to French-English interpreters throughout the forum.

This was a very good and relevant meeting. The orientation was well planned. We were each provided with a booklet that contains the programme for both the pre and post New Field meetings with its beneficiaries and selected programmes of the Forum. There was an overall introduction to the Forum, whilst Sarah gave us highlights of the Plenary and sessions scheduled for the Forum.

There was a presentation session. Two papers were presented. The first one was presented by Nombini Msumpela on “Women’s Hope Education and Training (WHEAT) Trust of South Africa”. WHEAT empowers women’s groups economically by giving/ providing grants. They target groups with at least 80% women leadership. She talked about the grant making process, the use of service providers, economic enterprises of the women, challenges and the way forward.

The second presentation was by Ashoka Organization which has a strong network in West Africa, especially Senegal and Cote D’voire. The Organization develops rural banks in order to provide financial assistance to women who work on the land and are desirous of development. Ashoka is a leading organization on environment in Senegal. It helps protect forests and animals. It works in collaboration with others.

After discussions and interactions in the afternoon, participants went together to the conference centre to register individually for the AWID Forum..

Post-Conference Evaluation and Beyond

On the 18th New Field foundation organized a meeting to enable participants (coming from organizations that received a grant from NFF to attend the AWID Forum) to evaluate the Forum, identify some common interests, and draw some perspectives. It was a round table discussion that allowed each participant to share impressions about the organization of the meeting (logistics, topics, speakers, etc.). This evaluation was the occasion for Elisabeth and myself to share with NFF partners what are WOCAN domains of interest. As organized by AWID, there were no specific room for organizations in the domains of agriculture and natural resources to make their contributions to the whole debate. This was expressed during the closing ceremony by a NFF partner organization. All discussions were mainly focus on women in politics, sexuality, HIV-AIDS, etc. But one of the strong lessons learnt was that women movements at all level contribute to decision making processes, especially when women believe that the issue defended is valuable.

Meeting With Donor/ New Field

On the 18th Nov. Danielle and Elisabeth met with Sarah Hobson New Field Foundation Director. The objective of the meeting was:

- (1) Evaluate the work done so far with the financial support her organization provides to WOCAN since 2007.
- (2) To revisit with us the objectives and the strategies of WOCAN in the region
- (3) Share some recommendations for the way forward.

Danielle Lema Ngono and Elisabeth Ardayfyo presented WOCAN team, the activities planned, the main achievements and the objectives for the coming years. Among the activities presented, we focused on networking, communication and capacity building in west and central Africa. The entry

points is actually Cameroon and Ghana and progressively from these countries, WOCAN intend to reach all francophone and Anglophones countries.

NFF suggested to WOCAN to reformulate its vision, its strategy and clearly state what are its main domain of intervention. As an example they would like to see in our strategy, which type of intervention we intend to do in agriculture, which type of agriculture we would like to encourage and for what purpose. How we assure that rural women are contributing to the identification of these options etc.

Lessons Learnt

We learnt that

- Every woman counts and that it is important to share our knowledge in an inter-generational multidisciplinary dialogue.
- Movement building is like a relay. You must know how to hold the baton, how to pass it on, whom to pass it on to.
- Community Radio has a tremendous ability to share information, connect people and empower women and people.
- Women are the mostly affected by climate change effects and can also contribute to attenuate these effects if they work hand by hand.
- Women movements need men and youth support to achieve their objectives.

Social Activities

- AWID Dinner at the Forum
- Dinner organized by New Field on 18 November night
- We had the opportunity to visit the National South Africa Museum and the Table Mountain

Recommendation for Follow-up

In future, in preparation for such a global forum, participants should be aware of early of the first call of papers and round tables. It should be possible for West/ Central Africa to organize sessions. This will enable them to put their issues across in the Forum. It will also stimulate issues of priority concerns and engagement in debate with other organizations. It may equally draw donors' attention to grassroots organizations and the need to integrate their issues into the great debate of movements.

Conclusion

Our participation in the 11th AWID Forum was rewarding. The planning and implementation were excellent and impressive. We met and interacted with many people across continents and organizations. It was an opportunity to meet and exchange information on women's rights, development and the power of movements. It linked us up with donors and caused to reflect on our own organizations. WOCAN Western and Central Africa, needs to rethink and be more focus in its activities in relation to its goals and visions.

Appreciation

We thank the New Field Foundation for Funding and for making it possible for us to participate in this important forum. We also thank the President of WOCAN, Dr Jeannette Gurung, for her immense support and direction.

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