

## **Actions by Grassroots Women's Groups**

### **Round Table**

*Presenter:* Carmen Griffith

*Facilitator:* Jan Peterson

*Secretary:* Susan Rogers

### **Summary**

Land tenure issues make it hard for many people in Jamaica to take pride in the land that they are squatting on and don't feel ownership over. Modern society is no longer based on the cohesion of older tribal communities and communities don't *feel* like communities. Such low social cohesion escalates the likelihood of violence.

“Arodons” are young unemployed men who terrorize communities, intimidate women, and offer “protection” in exchange for money - however if a woman refuses, *arodons* harm or threaten her. Police and State corruption also continually work against women's efforts to improve safety. Women have lost trust in these institutions as they often lie to or challenge women when approached for help. Corrupt government practices further promote illegal and violent activities such as the state supplying youth with guns in exchange for votes.

The key to lasting change is investing in and socializing children against violence. Mothers must spend time with their children who need positive role models and encouragement, to reduce their risk of becoming involved in violence and corruption. Women must unite to regain control and claim safe spaces for themselves and their children.

It is important to persist in lobbying the government. Women can play a strong role in local decision-making through participatory democracy. Prevention work must start by forming local networks and directly exchanging with diverse community members in order to sensitize them to the root causes of violence and how they can help develop solutions. The goal is ensuring

that everyone feels that they have a stake in the community so that they will be more likely to try to improve it.

## **Discussion**

Women's efforts to educate and sensitize youth by talking with their brothers, sons, husbands, etc. are often counteracted by the fact that many of their own sons and partners are gang members or leaders themselves.

Carmen Griffith asserts that people take less pride in and have less respect for their living environments when they do not legally own the land they are living on. In Jamaica, women united to get a loan for \$5000 which they used to obtain land permits. Two years later, these settlements now have houses with water and toilets and 28 children have a healthier, safer environment to grow up in. In South Africa, women have mobilized to put up streetlights and pave roads themselves.

The role of the state in perpetuating violence is discussed. In Zimbabwe, a large cause of youth violence is the lack of government programs to create employment. All responsibility for educating children when not to kill, fight, and steal is left to parents, especially mothers.

Meanwhile, state corruption sets a poor example for youth and works against parents' efforts. In Jamaica, the state has bought guns for youths in exchange for votes in the past. This has resulted in putting more fire power in criminals' hands than in police hands. The guns-drugs trade is partly to blame for this.

The threat of state power being ceded to corporations is also touched on - for example, the risk that anti-terrorism bills could be used to label grassroots organizations as terrorists if it is convenient to those in power.

## Conclusions

- Corrupt Governments lead to corrupt citizens and can often perpetuate violence.
- To make real change, the root causes of violence must be examined and investments made in prevention rather than building prisons.
- Children need positive role models that will socialize them to be non-violent, give them attention, and encourage them to stay at home rather than get into trouble.
- Government provision or subsidizing of some land for people to live on could boost the pride that people take in the land that they live on, feel some ownership for, and thus better care for.
- Women must think and act locally while keeping global issues in mind. Prevention efforts must start by forming local networks and investing in the infrastructure and very fabric of the community in order to have a strong foundation from which to reach regional and global levels.

## Recommendations

- Communities need to organize activities that counteract children's socialization into "cultures of violence" by giving them attention and non-violent role models.
- Mothers have united and claim space for themselves and their children - ex., creating safe play spaces where children can grow and be educated effectively.
- People must take the power back - participatory democracy needs to be used to encourage women's representation in local decision-making and governance.

- Local action must involve direct exchange with diverse community members in order to get them to understand the root causes of violence and how they can be part of solutions. The goal should be to ensure that everyone feels that they have a stake in the community so that they will take more pride in it and be more likely to try to improve it.
- Local government should subsidize some land for people to live on and invest money in "renovating" public spaces to make them safer for women. For example, visibility can be improved by removing large hedges and providing better lighting.
- Don't give up! Women must continue to lobby government and ask for their help despite long bureaucratic government and police processes.