

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Inexorably Linked

As Dr. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, said in a recent speech, "For long-term growth and development to occur, to be sustainable, the role and contribution of women must be taken into account. When women are poor, uneducated and have low participatory roles in the wider areas of governance and leadership, the family size tends to be larger, population growth and the effect on sustainable growth negative. Poverty and gender inequality are, thus, inexorably linked."

How long has it been since this link became clear?

UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, was created by the UN in 1976 following a call from women's organizations attending the 1975 UN First World Conference on Women in Mexico City. Since that time, UNIFEM has been providing financial and technical assistance to innovative programs and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. We are thankful for having Margaret (Peg) Snyder, Founding Director of UNIFEM (retired), as a Global Women's Leadership Network (GWLN) Advisory Board member.

The Grameen Bank was started in 1983 by Muhammad Yunus, a recent recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. That bank has loaned money to millions of people - over 90 percent women. It is Muhammad Yunus's means of supporting the United Nations Millennium goal to "Halve poverty by 2015." As he said in his Commonwealth Lecture in 2003, "The poor themselves can create a poverty-free world -- all we have to do is to free them from the chains that we have put around them." Microcredit is his strategy for breaking the chains of inequality.

As you will read in the story about Supriya Banavalikar, the keynote speaker for the upcoming GWLN Voices of Global Leaders conference, it was 1997 when Joan Holmes and those leading The Hunger Project discovered this connection and altered their programming approach. They have made enormous progress in the last decade towards gender equality as well as ending poverty.

And, when did I personally begin to see the link clearly? I thank Peg Snyder and Nancy Hafkin (26 years in the UN in Africa and now retired) for crystallizing this link for me. In their keynote speech at the first GWLN conference on June 30, 2004, they told story after story of women leaders fighting and winning battles for women's rights around the world. They delineated the impact of those triumphs on economic growth, governmental stability, and the quality of life. That day, I saw how inexorably linked are women's leadership and the kind of world I want for my grandchildren.

Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the UN, states the opportunity in front of us: "We will have time to reach the Millennium Development Goals - worldwide and in most, or even all, individual countries - but

only if we break with business as usual." What it will take to break with business as usual was clearly stated by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan when he said, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance."

Join us on July 26 to hear more and to participate in building a future that fosters women's leadership and the results it will create. For more details on the Voices of Global Leaders conference, see "GWLN Events" in the left-hand column. I look forward to seeing you there.



Women Creating a New Future for Humanity

Supriya Banavalikar, director of research for The Hunger Project's global office in New York, has accepted the Global Women's Leadership Network invitation to be the keynote speaker at the Voices of Global Leaders conference on July 26 at Santa Clara University.

Originally from Mumbai, India, Supriya's journey to becoming the voice for women's empowerment throughout the developing world parallels The Hunger Project's story as a strategic organization pursuing an end to chronic hunger. Mentored by her aunt, Lalita Banavali, The Hunger Project India country director emeritus, Supriya learned the principles of The Hunger Project at the age of fifteen. She spent time with the villagers as they discovered their leadership role as empowered people creating permanent, society-wide solutions for their families and communities when given the opportunity to end their own hunger with dignity.

After earning a master's degree in Nutrition and Food Technology from New York University, Supriya joined The Hunger Project staff. In 1997, on a flight to India with Joan Holmes, founding president of The Hunger Project, the two women read a United Nations report, "The Asian Enigma," that explained the link between the high rates of malnutrition of children in South Asia and gender inequality. Supriya shared Joan's shock to learn about the cradle-to-grave discrimination against women. Joan met with nine top women leaders and advocates in Rajasthan, India, and, through their eyes, clearly saw the undeniable link between women's low status and the persistence of hunger. Joan and the entire Hunger Project became committed to breaking through the wall of silence that shrouds women, their lives, and

their contributions.

At the July 26 conference, Supriya will share how, upon discovering the truth about women and the end of hunger, The Hunger Project took bold action, strategically transforming all of its programs and creating ground-breaking initiatives to empower women as the key change agents for the end of hunger in Africa, India, Bangladesh, Mexico, and Peru. Supriya had the privilege of contributing to the development of the HIV/AIDS and Gender Inequality Workshop, and during her visits to Africa, she witnessed the new futures created through the African Women Food Farmer Initiative.

During her conference presentation, Supriya will make South Asian women's voices heard by sharing the results of The Hunger Project's four-prong strategy empowering thousands of women in India. These women are seizing the historic opportunity for the election of one million grassroots female representatives to local government. They are having impact by building alliances to support their vision in shifting the agenda towards health, education, nutrition, and family income. Through their efforts mobilizing the media to transform public attitudes and through their commitment to honor the future for all girls, millions of women are finding their voice and having their critical and extraordinary contribution to the well-being of society recognized. As a recent workshop participant said, "The results we produce are gold - they change lives forever... You have not yet seen what we women can do. Just watch."

On Saturday, July 26, on the campus of Santa Clara University, Supriya Banavalikar will blend the voices of the women of The Hunger Project India and Bangladesh with 200 Voices of Global Leaders from around the world, joining together to share a world connected as Whole Woman, Whole Leader, Whole World.