



# Perspectives:

## Research Notes & News

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<http://www.ips.uiuc.edu/wggp/>

## Acting Director's Notes

Manisha Desai



### After Beijing Plus Ten

March not only ushers in spring for those of us in the Northern hemisphere but it also highlights women's issues locally and globally. In the US it is celebrated as women's history month. March 8<sup>th</sup> is celebrated as International Women's Day all around the world, and

at the United Nations, it is when the Commission on Status of Women (CSW) meets every year. This year, the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW was particularly important to all of us working for women's equality, as it was devoted to reviewing the Beijing Platform for Action and Current Challenges and Forward Looking Strategies for Women's Advancement. While there were a series of events that we in WGGP sponsored on campus for women's history month and to celebrate International Women's day, as noted on page two in our newsletter, in this space I want to reflect on the recently concluded 49<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW and the challenges we all face.

The major achievement of the CSW's two-week session was the reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform For Action. What was considered a perfunctory, first order of business took an entire week because the US representative insisted on an amendment to the Platform that "no new international right to abortion" would be considered. As the US representative found, no one besides the Vatican supported this amendment, and she was forced to withdraw it and reaffirm the platform along with 1800 other government delegates, among

Desai, cont. on p.6

## Research Notes

Mary Arends-Kuenning

### The Gender Impacts of Programs that Pay Children to Attend School in Bangladesh

For ten years now, Bangladesh has had policies in place to increase children's schooling by paying families when their children attend school.

These policies have succeeded in increasing student enrollment and the time spent in school, especially for girls. The next challenge for Bangladesh is to increase the quality of schooling so that all children can have the literacy and numeracy skills that they need to be empowered. An important unanswered research question is how schooling programs interact with parents' decisions about when to marry their daughters and to which groom.

The Food for Education program started in 1993. To participate in the program, which was targeted to poor families, primary-school aged children were required to attend 85 percent of days that school is in session and to pass the grade to continue receiving funding in the following year. Families were paid in wheat, which was worth \$2-\$4 each month. In 2003, the program payment was changed to a cash payment. The Secondary School Scholarship Program, started in 1994, was available to girls who attended secondary school and whose families promised not to marry them off before the age of 18. The Program paid girls \$1-\$2 per month



Arends-Kuenning, cont. on p. 8

## WGGP Spring 2005 Activities

Thanks to all the speakers of the **WGGP NOON SEMINAR SERIES** that meets on Mondays in Room 101 International Studies Building: Feb. 8, **Manisha Desai**, Assoc. Prof., Sociology, UIUC: "Mumbai: A Global City Study Abroad Experience?"; Feb. 14, Manisha Desai on "The Feminist Dialogue at the World Social Forum"; Feb. 28, **Ana Fava**, Ag & Consumer Economics, UIUC; "Gender Roles and Earnings in Brazil: Were There Any Changes Between 1981 and 2001?"; Mar. 28, **Rebecca Ginsburg**, Assist. Prof., Landscape Architecture, UIUC, "Beyond the Smiles: Apartheid-Era Portraits of Black South African Nannies and Their White Charges"; Apr. 4, Patricia Steinhoff, Sociology, University of Hawaii; "Gender, Ideology, and Political Violence: The Case of Fusako Shigenobu and the Japanese Red Army"; Apr. 11, **Jules R. Elkins**, Visiting Lecturer, Ag & Consumer Economics, UIUC; "Power Relationships in Household Monetary Income in Indonesia"; Apr. 12, **Dr. Anis Al-Rawi**, Dean, College of Science for Women, Univ. of Baghdad, "Iraqi Women: A Comprehensive View"; Apr. 18, **Junjie Chen**, PhD Candidate, Anthropology, UIUC; "Population Control Policy and Constructions of Women's Subjectivity in Rural China"; Apr. 25, **Joy Williams-Black**, PhD Candidate, History, UIUC; "Women and External Higher Education in Kenya"

**The visit of Catherine Bertini**, Under-Secretary General for Management, United Nations included her Miller Comm talk on "Progress Toward Global Food Security," Feb. 3, 4:00 p.m. and a Panel Discussion on "UN Development Goals for the Millennium," Feb. 3, 1:30-2:3 with Moderator, Gale Summerfield.

On **March 8, International Women's Day**, WGGP coordinated the following events with Amnesty International, South Asian Collective, and Illinois Council on Family Relations: A talk on "Women's Activism in the Context of Globalization," by **Manisha Desai**, Sociology/WGGP/PSAMES; a talk on

"Feminist Praxis and Grassroots Movements for Shelter: Perspectives from the Global South," by **Faranak Miraftab** (pictured below), Urban and



Regional Planning/Gender and Women's Studies, and a photo exhibit on "Visible Work, Invisible Women" and talk on "When Farmers Die: The Agrarian Crisis, Farmer Suicides and the Media," both by P. Sainath, a leading journalist from India.

On April 1, Gale Summerfield and Paola Leon gave a presentation for the Migration Studies Group on "**Gender & Human Security of Latina/o Immigrants in the Midwest.**"

**Other Co-Sponsored Events:** Martin Luther King Symposium, Jan. 16-18; Francis Robinson, "Islamic Revival," Jan. 31; Asian Americans and the Law, Angela Oh, "Solving Tough Problems – The Intersection of Law, Society, and Spirit," Feb. 3-5; Latina/o Grad Student Conference, "Exploring Fronteras in Midwest," Feb. 25-27; International Careers Workshop, Feb. 28-Mar. 4; Women's and Gender History Symposium, Mar. 10-12; Jacqueline Bobo, "Subversive Spaces and Resistant Black Women," Mar. 8; Arabic Linguistics and Global Issues, Apr. 1-2; Mary Frances Berry, "New Challenges, New Opportunities: For African Americans the Struggle Continues," Apr. 4; June Nash, "The Celebration of the Word: Maya Confront the Military as They Define Their Future," Apr. 10-15. \*\*\*\*\*

# Impact of Gender Innovation Fund on Family Life: An Experience in Mesang and Baphnum District, Kingdom of Cambodia

Rosintan Panjaitan-Drioadisuryo, Ph.D.

## Introduction

Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia and is surrounded by three countries -- Thailand to the West and Northwest, Laos to the North, Vietnam to the East and Southeast, and by the Gulf of Thailand to the South and Southwest.



The size of Cambodia is about 181,000 square kilometers. The population size is 11.4 million. Fifty-two percent are female. Illiteracy rate is considerably high, particularly for women. The official language is Khmer which is written in Khmer alphabet.

The country consists mainly of low plains crisscrossed by many rivers that flow into the Mekong River. Rainfall in Cambodia is uneven and irregular. During the wet season, from September to February, Mekong River, which starts in China passing through Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, always overflows resulting in flooding in some parts of Cambodia. Despite the destruction caused by the flooding, it also brings sediment which improves the fertility of the soil. However, often untimely floods or irregular drought cause devastation for farming business. In addition to frequent natural disasters, the poor socioeconomic and infrastructure conditions as the legacy of 20 years of civil war leaves many Cambodians, particularly rural people, living in poverty.

## District Profile

For three years, I worked as an Extension Advisor for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in Cambodia in two provinces, Prey

Veng and Svay Rieng. These findings are based on observations in Mesang and BaPhnum district, Prey Veng Province. About 80% of the population makes their living in agriculture. The average landholding is 1 ha/family, and 15% are landless. These districts are plains, and they are always flooded from September to February every year regardless of the low rainfall. It is impossible to work in the fields and there is lack of fodder for the herds. Women raise pigs and chickens at this time, but the floods also bring animal diseases. Women use this time to collect firewood, with canoes as the main transportation. Children catch wild fish in flooded fields and gather wild vegetables along the river. Practically, there are no economic activities in those months that help the farmers to meet their daily needs. Only a small portion of the fields are irrigated in dry season and the yield is only 2 to 3 tons/ha in irrigated fields and even lower in un-irrigated fields. Lack of funds and agricultural production techniques contribute significantly to the low yields.

Considering the hardship people face in the district all through the year, they are in serious need of other economic activities. Therefore, *it is important for development agencies to assist them to identify economic activities, other than agriculture, that will help the rural people to improve their lives, particularly for the 6 month flooding period.*

## Social Characteristics

Traditionally, Cambodian culture is influenced by Buddhist codes that guide relationships and behavior between men, women, children and other different groups. The codes are orally handed over to the next generations. Cambodian has a very strong patronage relation, where people follow the higher status and expect to receive some form of protection in return. Further, women have lower status than men in the same socio-economic background. They are supposed to be shy, submissive, un-assertive, and subservient to their husbands.

Early in the 1970s, Cambodia experienced civil war which resulted in loss of life and great devastation on its economy. The war left the country with 17% female-headed households. Thirty-four

percent of the female-headed households live in poverty compared to 36% of male-headed ones. The smaller size of the female-headed household (4.4 members) compared to 5.6 of male-headed household may explain this fact. The poverty may be similar but the gender discrimination makes it more difficult for women to have access to development facilities such as credit and skill training.

The Cambodian government has issued a policy to eradicate discrimination against women in all aspects of life. However, this policy has not been enforced. The government also recognizes that even if the best policy and programs to address poverty and gender discrimination are in place, without money to back them up, they are simply a wish list.

### **Gender Innovation Fund and its Procedure**

In line with the government policy on gender, it is stated that one of the agricultural extension project objectives is gender mainstreaming in the extension system. To ensure participation of women in all levels, gender balance is always emphasized in recruitment of staff and participants of field activities. However, the number of female extension staff is very low because of female's low educational level. At the field level, participation of females for activities such as demonstrations, field days, Farmer Field School, and Rapid Rural Appraisal is 55% male versus 45% female on average. Most of the international organizations make efforts to raise gender awareness in their respective working areas. It is fair to say that society is familiar with gender issues but due to shortage of funds, there is lack of action.

The extension project provided \$750.00 Gender Innovation Fund (GIF) per province to assist rural people to increase their income. The purpose of the funds is to encourage and to train women to manage the funds effectively and efficiently. The learning process starts with identification, planning, and implementation of a project of their selection. The recipient of GIF is selected through competition. The competition and its requirements were announced through WGGP Perspectives, Vol. 25(2), Page 4



*Fish trap group in Mesang*

radio, and leaflets were posted in the provincial and district government offices. The Field Extension Workers were trained to help the farmers to write the proposal. The funds can be used by an individual or group on any economic activities.

The team, which consisted of the Director of Provincial Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the extension advisor, and the Chief of Provincial Office of Agriculture, evaluated the proposal based on the objective, management plan, value added, and cash flow, marketing strategy, and expected profit. First, the team screened the proposals and visited the short listed group to assess the feasibility of their project.

In the first year, the GIF was released to four groups. The activities were: 1) making palm roof which is sold locally; 2) bamboo chicken cages and fish traps which were marketed locally and in other provinces; 3) rattan pan holders and baskets which were marketed locally and in Pnom Penh; and 4) soil baskets (banghy) sold locally.

Prior to receiving the funds, each group signed an agreement that the funds would be used according to their proposals, and to save 15% of the profit in group savings. The use of the savings is left to the discretion of the groups with assistance from the field extension worker if needed.

A fund release ceremony was attended by key people from the provincial and district offices, and recipients' husbands. The participants were informed about the purpose and the use of the funds, which is important particularly



*Rattan handicraft in BaPhnum*

to the recipients' husbands in order to avoid misinterpretation of the fund use.

After one year, the progress of the groups was evaluated. The total profit of the four groups was 3,796,428 Riel (\$973.00) which is about 128% of the fund received. The other benefit of this Gender Innovation Fund is that the project becomes the family project. Husbands and children were involved in the project and the group leader's husband helped in record keeping.

The most profitable project and industrious group was the chicken cage and fish trap group. This group has used their savings to lend to group and non group members with 2% interest each month. One member has expanded her business to raise ducks and grow vegetables.

In general, the group members' condition is improving. Some of the profit was used to buy food and cloth. When we visited the groups, I was so happy to see one member was wearing new cloth, which she wore specifically to show me how the project has improved her life. Her husband was very proud of her -- he hugged her and kissed her in our presence, which is not common in that society. One can see how he and other family members appreciated the assistance they received from the project.

#### **Lessons learned**

The development agent should apply a suitable approach for each situation and condition,

should know the needs of the stakeholders, should involve them in identifying their needs, should allow them to decide activities and to work with people of the same interest, should provide them with knowledge and skills to evaluate the financial feasibility of their activities, and equally important, to assist them to have access to financial support.

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## **Nobel Peace Prize Awarded to African Woman**

Professor Wangari Maathai received the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2004, for, as the Nobel Committee put it, "She has taken a holistic approach to sustainable development that embraces democracy, human rights and women's rights in particular." University professor, grassroots organizer, and assistant minister for environment, natural resources and wildlife of Kenya, Maathai is the first African woman to receive the Prize. Nearly 30 years ago, Maathai started encouraging women to plant trees. By now her Green Belt Movement has planted tens of millions of trees in Kenya, and inspired similar initiatives throughout East and Southern Africa.



photo PRB

Desai, cont. from p. 1  
 whom were 80 ministers and 7 first ladies,  
 and 2600 NGO representatives. This was an  
 important victory as it not only demonstrated  
 that 160 world governments could act together  
 on women's  
 rights, even in  
 the face of US  
 opposition, but  
 also that the  
 US delegation  
 saw its isolation  
 and changed its  
 position. We  
 can only hope for such awareness and actions on  
 other global issues where the US holds similarly  
 isolated positions.



**UNIFEM at the Commission on the Status of Women 2005**

Following this reaffirmation, the session reviewed the secretary general's report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform (available on the CSW website <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/csw>), based on questionnaires that member states filled out (can be seen by country on the above website) along with research and documents from various UN agencies. The report acknowledged the uneven progress towards women's equality. The major achievement that it highlights is the increase in global awareness of women's inequalities and how new forces like globalization, HIV/AIDS, and armed conflicts contribute to such inequalities as well as the commitment of national governments and international agencies to address these inequalities. The specific achievements noted were increase in girls' education, women's economic empowerment, political participation, and legal changes. But it also noted the challenges in the areas of continuing violence against women, including in armed conflict, the spread of HIV/AIDs among women and girls, discrimination in employment, decline in sexual and reproductive health, and access to land and property. Not only had the world's governments not lived up to the Beijing commitments but neither had the UN. Despite its commitment to gender parity by 2000 in professional and higher posts, in 2005 only 37% of these posts are

filled by women. The only UN agencies which have reached this goal are UNFPA, WFP, and UNITAR.

In addition to reviewing the implementation of the Beijing Platform, the CSW succeeded in adopting six new resolutions on: gender mainstreaming in national policies and programs; the possible appointment of a special rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women; trafficking; integrating a gender perspective in post-disaster relief, particularly in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster; indigenous women; and women's economic advancement. It also adopted four traditional texts on: women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS; the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan; and the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women.

Despite 30 years of explicit commitment to women's rights at the UN, there are several reasons we haven't seen major advances in women's equality around the world. One, as the US representative insisted at the current CSW session, the Beijing Platform (and most other UN declarations of the past three decades) remains a guide for policy framework not a set of binding, international legal rights. This allows governments to make commitments without acting on them as there are no mechanisms to ensure accountability. Thus, the US representative can support the call for collecting gender disaggregated data even as the US government has decided to do away with some parts of such data collection. Thus, the lack of political will as well as agendas that are detrimental to women's equality become invisible behind non-binding commitments. Second, even within the UN system, resources allocated to ensure women's equality are limited. For example, the new resolution on strengthening

INSTRAW relies on voluntary funds not specially earmarked funds. Finally, the UN has mastered the art of double speak. One part of the UN system can commit to reducing poverty and enhancing women's economic power at the same time that other parts of the UN family enforce policies that do just the opposite. It can mention structural inequalities in division of power and resources and yet the only specific economic initiatives, introduced by the US representative, refer to encouraging women's entrepreneurial activity and micro-credit.

So three decades after the UN's First World Conference on Women in Mexico City, we have a long way to go. Activists around the world have spent a lot of time and energy organizing around UN conferences and meetings for very low returns. So while women's issues and agency have become part of the UN and government discourses and there have been some policy changes and institutional mechanisms to address women's equality, women's lives around the world have not improved significantly. Perhaps, it is time to reconsider where and how we invest our energies to better women's lives.

*Manisha Desai is Acting Director of WGPP for the Spring semester.*

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## **Report on International Association for Feminist Economics Conference in Budapest**

**Marianne Ferber**

Having attended every IAFFE conference since the association was first officially organized in 1992 I have been most pleased by the extent to which it has increasingly become truly international. One decision that furthered this development was the decision a number of years ago to meet only every third year in the United States and in other countries for the remaining years. One of the intriguing results of that has been that the representation of members from different countries has tended to vary depending on the location of the meetings. As might be expected, the representation from North America was particularly large when we met in Ottawa several years ago, there was an unusually large number of Latin

Americans when we met in Mexico and in Barbados, the latter also attracting more members from the Caribbean. Similarly, there were many Europeans at the conferences in the Netherlands, France and the UK, and this was also true at the meeting in Turkey, in addition to a gratifying number of Asians.

In spite of the variations, however, there are also some persistent patterns. One of the striking consistencies has been the virtual absence of members from the Central and Eastern European countries. Coming from Czechoslovakia originally myself, I have probably been particularly conscious of this and was very pleased to be at meetings in Budapest with a substantial representation of this group, including participants from Austria, Bulgaria, one from the Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and, of course, Hungary.

Another very interesting feature of this conference was the extent to which the topics of the papers presented at this conference were not unlike those generally offered at other IAFFE conferences, suggesting that, in spite of the differences in the economies of different parts of the world, concerns of feminists tend to be surprisingly similar. On the other hand, there was one striking difference. Of 24 papers presented by authors that do not include anyone from outside Central and Eastern Europe fully 19 were single-author papers. This suggests that at this time, when scholars for the most part tend to collaborate, there may still be a dearth of feminist economists so that it is difficult to find colleagues to work with. It is to be hoped that this conference, where feminist scholars had the opportunity to meet may have helped to establish networks that will help to remedy this problem.

For this reason, among others, I would not want to close this brief report without thanking IAFFE Europe and especially the organizers of this conference for their hard work and the Hungarian hosts for their gracious hospitality (including the delicious buffets) in the impressive buildings of Corvinus University in the splendid city of Budapest. The tour of the city arranged for the day after the conference was over was a worthy finish to a very successful venture.

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to attend school.

In previous research, we looked at the impact of these two programs on children's time use in two villages in rural Bangladesh (Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2004). We found that enrollments increased especially for adolescent girls, whose attendance rates increased from 42 percent to 59 percent between 1992 and 1996. Children spent more time in school and less time in agricultural work after these programs were enacted. Girls were able to combine domestic work with school more readily than adolescent boys were

able to combine wage work with school because domestic work was more flexible than wage work.

Adolescent boys who did any wage work worked an average of 8 hours per

day. Children reported spending significant time studying outside of class, so they were not merely sitting in classrooms in order to collect wheat; the incentive to pass the grade to collect the benefit encouraged students to study and learn.

However, the success of the program led to new challenges. As enrollments expanded, the government did not hire new teachers or build new schools. As a consequence, class size increased dramatically. Class size in the primary schools was an average of 68 students in government schools that had Food for Education programs compared to an average of 59 students in government schools that did not have the program. In addition, the students who entered the schools came from poor families and were not

well prepared for school. A study by Ahmed and Arends-Kuenning (2003) looked at the effects of increased class size and the increased proportion of poor, unprepared students in schools on the school achievement test scores of students who did not participate in the Food for Education program. Although class size did not affect these students' achievement test scores, we found that as the proportion of children in a classroom who received Food for Education increases, the test scores of the children who did not receive Food for Education decrease. Also, test performance overall was very poor—the exam was

administered to fourth graders and designed to reflect what fourth graders should be expected to know. On average, students only answered half of the questions correctly, with especially poor performance in math and English.

Girls do worse than boys on achievement tests, with boys getting 53 percent of

the questions right compared to girls getting 48 percent of the questions right. We found that increased class sizes and increased proportions of poorly prepared students in classes had equal impacts on boys and girls, and girls were more positively affected by attending a school with electricity than boys (Arends-Kuenning and Ahmed 2004). However, we were not able to identify many school characteristics that explained the gender differential in test scores. This is an important area for future research.

In rural Bangladesh, options for women's employment are very limited. We found evidence that the increase in girls' schooling is changing some attitudes in the villages about women's roles. In Arends-Kuenning and Amin (2001), we gave examples of respondents who talked about the importance of women having job



*School girls in Bangladesh*



opportunities to fall back upon if marriages go bad. Female teachers and health workers provide girls with role models and the idea that it is possible for women to have respected positions in their community.

However, despite these signs of change, the most important determinant of the quality of a woman's life is still the marriage that her family arranges for her. Therefore, studying the effect of the Secondary Scholarship Program on marriage timing and the quality of marriage is an important research question. Arends-Kuenning and Amin (2001) presented evidence that girls' education is valued in the marriage market, although it is not as important as other attributes such as perceived purity and physical appearance. Parents also have to consider whether to pay a dowry and, if so, how much to pay. We found some evidence that the program does increase the age when girls marry (Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2000 and Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2003). The decision about when to marry a daughter is complicated and differs by socioeconomic class. If a good marriage offer comes along, parents will accept it and take their daughters out of school (Huq and Amin 2003). Daughters are vulnerable to threats that are both implied and explicit. When daughters attend school, they are more exposed to the risk of being watched and gossiped about. If their daughters become the target of gossip, parents feel pressure to marry their daughters off as quickly as possible (Huq and Amin 2003). With the secondary school stipend, parents seem to decide that their daughters may as well stay in school if there is no acceptable marriage offer. Perhaps the stipend helps parents to wait a



*The author and friend*

year or so for a better marriage offer to arrive (Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2003).

The education programs in Bangladesh have helped girls to spend more time in school and studying. There is some evidence that families are marrying their daughters later than they would have in the absence of the program. However, expanding access to schooling is not sufficient to improve women's lives in Bangladesh. School quality has to be improved so that women can learn skills that will lead to employment. Expanding women's employment is likely to improve women's bargaining position regarding marriage.

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## **The Role of Literacy in Enhancing Women's Agency and Well-Being:**

### **A Qualitative Inquiry of the Effects of the Tostan Educational Program on the Lives of Women in a Rural Community in Senegal**

Maimouna Barro

#### **ABSTRACT**

The literature related to women and literacy has well documented that women's lack of literacy limits their ability to maximize their potential at the individual, collective and national levels, thus leaving them at the margins of their respective societies. Women in Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, remain one of the least educated groups in the world. For the majority of these women, non-formal education may constitute a significant tool to bring about changes in their lives.

From the 1990s, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have played a significant role in women's basic education in general and in non-formal education for women in particular. NGOs are viewed as the indisputable new actors in the educational scene in developing countries.

Despite the extensive coverage of the role of NGOs in providing education programs for poor women, there is a paucity of research showing how successful these programs prove to be in catering to women's needs and in bringing about meaningful changes in their lives. More importantly, there is paucity of field-based research using the voices of women as prime data to explore the extent to which these literacy programs have effects on their lives.

This study examines the effects of the NGO Tostan's educational program on the lives of women in a rural community in Senegal, and ways in which it affects their agency and well-being. The study progressed on the assumption that any literacy program that seeks to be successful in improving people's lives should develop greater sensitivity to local knowledge and culture. It is also premised on the assumption that, it is only when learners themselves play a full role in determining the place of literacy, that literacy becomes relevant to them and their lives. Data were gathered through the use of qualitative methods, namely, focus groups, individual interviews, conversations, as well as observations.

The findings suggest that it is not literacy per se, but the overall empowering education process in which women gained access to skills, knowledge, and greater awareness, that allowed them to critically reflect on their social reality and take collective action to transform it.

*Maimouna Barro, Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, successfully defended her dissertation in April. She also completed requirements for GRID certification. Congratulations, Mai! She can be contacted at [barro@uiuc.edu](mailto:barro@uiuc.edu).*



# Investing in Women: Myths and Realities of Micro-Credit Programs in Peru

Angelina Cotler

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation analyzes how groups of low-income women in Lima and the Amazonian region get together to apply for small loans to local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in order to establish their own small-enterprises in the sectors of commerce and services. My interests were in answering the following questions: Are these small loans—average US\$100—enough to establish a successful enterprise? What are the necessary conditions that women have to fulfill to be able to achieve this? Are these programs accomplishing what they promote: empowerment, economic independence, and self-sufficiency? And finally, can these micro-credit programs provide a path to enhanced access to resources and reduce poverty or are they simply promoting petty commodity production that adds to the already saturated informal sector in Peru? This is an anthropological analysis of the conditions, possibilities, and limitations imposed by two different micro-lending methodologies—Communal Banks and Solidarity Groups—that are based on the joint liability of women to guarantee each other's loans. I stress the importance of the social embeddedness of women's economic decisions to establish economic ventures; in other words, women's economic decisions look for profit maximization but at the same time they are deeply constrained and framed by the socioeconomic conditions of their communities and their household arrangements. Many low-income women are active members of Communal Kitchens—a food-survival grassroots organization that receives foodstuffs donations from the Peruvian state and international cooperation. Even though these organizations cannot make any profits, participation provides women with knowledge of social skills and expands their social networks.

In that sense, they represent spaces in which women increase their social capital. I argue that participation in these grassroots organizations, coupled with family arrangements in which partners negotiate and discuss economic decisions, and a secure economic base play far more critical roles in establishing successful enterprises than merely the injection of a small loan.

Micro-lending services for women have become a transnational phenomenon. These programs, however, ignore the specific local conditions of each country and apply a narrow and homogenizing model without considering the different demands and needs of different groups of women. Even though the programs in Peru show high rates of repayment of loans as signs that they work, regularity and frequency of repayment does not automatically mean that poor women are getting out of poverty. In fact, many women who are unable to repay their loans turn to local loan sharks in order to repay them, incurring a vicious cycle of indebtedness. By the same token, female participation cannot be treated as a direct indicator of female empowerment, especially when women cannot control the use of loans. The pervasive presence of micro-finance institutions offers an alibi for donors as well as governments to withdraw from broader policies for poverty reduction. While micro-credit programs can help alleviate poverty among a very select group of women, who are not the poorest, significant poverty reduction is dependent on economic and social changes well beyond the reach of these projects.

*Angelina Cotler,  
PhD, Anthropology,  
successfully  
defended her  
dissertation in April.  
She also completed  
requirements for  
GRID certification.  
Congratulations,  
Angelina! She can  
be contacted at  
cotler@uiuc.edu.*



## NEWS FROM WGGP ASSOCIATES

**Nancy Abelmann**, Anthropology/East Asian Languages and Cultures/Gender and Women's Studies, UIUC, has a new book, *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2003. The book was reviewed by Seungsook Moon in *Gender and Society*, February 2005.

**Manisha Desai**, Sociology, WGGP/South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, UIUC, published "Transnational Feminism and its Discontents: The Global Women's Movements post-Beijing," *International Social Science Journal*, 2005 and "Women, Globalization, and Health: A Critical Social Movement Perspective," in Kickbusch and Hartwig (eds), *Gender, Globalization and Health in the 21st Century*, McMillan Palgrave, 2005. She has a chapter on "Feminist Political Strategies," forthcoming in Lorber (ed), *Handbook of Feminism*, Blackwell.

**Alma Gottlieb**, Anthropology/Gender and Women's Studies, UIUC, published "Babies as Ancestors, Babies as Spirits: The Culture of Infancy in West Africa", cover article in *Expedition* 46 (3) (Winter 2004-05) 13-21 (special issue: "Ethnography"); "Babies' Baths, Babies' Remembrances: A Beng Theory of Development, History and Memory," in *Africa* (special issue on "Collective Memory and Generation in Africa," ed. Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg); in press (scheduled for publication, spring 2005); and "Dancing a Jig with Genre," in *Anthropology News* (publication of the American Anthropological Association), April 2005 (in press). She gave talks on "Deconstructing the Notion of 'Education': A View from West Africa" to the School of Education, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, Feb. 11; on "Luring Your Child into this Life: Beng Childcare Practices" at the Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, Feb. 10; and on "Rethinking Personhood: The Case of Beng Twins," at NewcombeGallery/Tulane University, January 15. She presented a paper on "The Implications of Reincarnation for a Theory of Child Care: A Case Study from the Beng of Côte d'Ivoire," in a session on "Reincarnation," 103rd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (invited session, Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness), Dec. 15-19, 2004, Atlanta.

**Ethel Hazard**, PhD GRID Student, Anthropology, UIUC, is twice recipient of the Tinker Foundation Summer Research Grant offered by the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. This year, she received an anthropology department summer research grant that will allow her to begin her preliminary field research on Cuban political migrants in Jamaica. She has also been invited to attend the Society for Caribbean Studies Conference at the University of Newcastle in England. The title of her paper will be "Living on the Edge of Empire and Colony." Presentation of this paper qualifies her for the David Nicholls Prize that honors advanced graduate student work on Caribbean research and is an internationally recognized award attracting students from Europe, the Caribbean, and the United States. While in England, Ethel intends to continue archival research on British colonial administrators' response to 19th century Cuban migrant-insurgents in Jamaica in particular, and their reaction to Mariana Grajales, an under-recognized figure in 19th century Cuban historiography. British historian Jean Stubbs has offered the services of London Metropolitan University to Ethel, and the University has agreed to serve as her institutional home while in the UK.

**Cindy Ingold**, Women and Gender Resources Librarian, UIUC, recently co-edited the book *Women's Studies: A Recommended Core Bibliography* (3rd edition, Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited/Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004). She was the author for two chapters "History" and "Law". The book recently won the 2005 Significant Achievement Award from the Women's Studies Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries. The award will be given at the June 2005 annual meeting of the American Library Association. Copies of the book are available in the Library and in the WGGP Research Room.

**Isidore Lobnibe**, PhD GRID Student, Anthropology, UIUC, has been conducting dissertation field research in Ghana for the past nine months and will return to campus in the fall. His dissertation research was supported by a graduate college dissertation travel grant, the Kathleen Cloud grant from WGGP, and the Human Dimensions of Environmental Systems Program (HDES). His recent publications include a review of the ASA award winning book by Sean Hawkins, University of Toronto, entitled, "Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana: The Encounter

Between the Logadaa and the 'World On Paper'" in American Anthropologist 2004, Vol. 106, No.2 and an article, "Forbidden Fruits in the Compound: A Case Study of Migration, Spousal Separation and Lineage Wife Adultery in Northwest Ghana" that appears in *AFRICA* 2005, Vol. 75, 4. He received a grant from the Wenner-Gren Historical and Archival program to travel to France in June 2005 to interview Prof. Emeritus Jack Goody of Cambridge University.

**Dora Mwalwenje**, GRID and UIUC Alumna, Vocational and Technical Education, has been working with United States Peace Corps as an Associate Peace Corps Director/Education in Malawi. She works mainly with the American Volunteers who come into the Education Project to teach in secondary school. She serves as the primary Education Volunteer point of contact within Peace Corps office and administration. She gives comprehensive training on the Education Project and assists the Training Director in the development and implementation of the Education Pre-service training and in-service trainings.

**Aida Orgocka**, GRID and UIUC Alumna, Human and Community Development, has been working since December 2004 as the Development Officer for Christian Children's Fund in Albania. The organization runs community-based projects in the areas of children's health, education, and protection. Aida's main responsibilities relate to coordinating new grant proposals, establishing relationships with donors and partnerships locally and internationally. She has been also working as a consultant for the Albanian Center for Development and Population and has contributed to their newsletter that aims to raise level of knowledge on sex and gender among Albanian adolescents. Aida has a chapter on Albanian high-skilled migrant women in the U.S. in *The New Albanian Migration*. The book is edited by Russell King, Nicola Mai and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and is published by Sussex Academic Press.

**Batamaka Somé**, PhD GRID student, Anthropology, UIUC, has won the Casa Grande Honorable Mention Award and the NSF Summer Research grant. He also won a WGGP award. (See announcement on p. 19.)

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This WGGP newsletter, **Perspectives: Research Notes and News**, is also available

on-line at <http://www.ips.uiuc.edu/wggp/newsletters2.html>. This semester, due to budget priorities, we will mail out hard copies by request only. Please contact the WGGP office at 217-333-1994 or email [kcimartin@uiuc.edu](mailto:kcimartin@uiuc.edu) to request a copy.

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WGGP cordially invites you  
to our

## SPRING RECEPTION

Friday, May 6, 2005

4:00 - 6:00 p.m.

Room 101 International Studies Building  
910 South Fifth Street, Champaign

Relax with friends and celebrate the achievements of graduate students receiving WGGP awards and GRID certificates.

Certificates and awards will be presented at  
4:30 p.m.

by **Manisha Desai**, Acting WGGP Director

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## Coming In Fall 2005!

**Ruth Pearson**,

Professor of Development Studies,  
University of Leeds,  
will give a talk on

**"The Maria Tax:**

**Gender and Policy**

**in Export-Oriented Employment  
Around the World"**

on

**September 19, 2005.**

Prof. Pearson is a development economist with an international reputation for vibrant policy innovations. One of her recent policy contributions is the idea of a Maria tax to be imposed on all multinational corporations in export processing zones to be used to fund health care and other benefits for employees in these areas, most of whom are women. Her talk will address the Maria Tax as well as other new policy initiatives in the field of gender and globalization.

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# The Feminist Dialogues and the World Social Forum

Manisha Desai

An emerging site for transnational feminist activism in recent years has been the World Social Forum (WSF). The first WSF was held in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil organized by the Workers Party ([www.worldsocialforum.org](http://www.worldsocialforum.org)). It was a response to two contradictory tendencies in Latin America in the 1990s: increasing democratization and the spread of neo-liberal globalization. The latter generated structural crises and inequalities while the former provided a space to address these growing crises. The protests against corporate globalizations that began in Seattle in 1998 and continued through the end of the decade created new networks and led to the consolidation of the global justice movement. It was in the name of the global justice movement and as an alternative to the World Economic Forum in Davos, where leaders of corporate globalization meet, that the first WSF was called in January 2001 in Brazil.

The WSF was organized as a democratic space for people from around the world to share their struggles and reflect on alternatives. The language of the WSF stresses process and autonomy from state and parties, even though it was an initiative of the Worker's Party.

Feminists were active in the WSF from its inception and gender equality was stressed as one of the important aspects of global justice. Yet the first two WSF, however, did not have as many sessions on gender nor were women in prominent positions in the International Organizing Committee. It was to address this lack of attention to feminist issues that women's

groups from Latin America, Asia, and Africa met informally at the 2003 Forum to discuss the idea of "Feminist Dialogues" that would engender the WSF and make it feminist in its focus, method, and participants.

The first Feminist Dialogues (FD) was held at the 2004 World Social Forum that was held in Bombay, India (<http://feministdialogue.isiswomen.org>). Given the contentious debates within women's movements and the debates within academic feminist discourses around the term feminist, their self-identification as "feminist" is remarkable. I think this identification reflects two realities. (1) All the networks -- Development Alternatives with Women For a New Era (DAWN), Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ), Articulacion Feminista Marcosur (AFM), National Network of Women's Autonomous Groups (NNWAG), African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), INFORM-Sri Lanka, and Isis International-Manila -- that coordinated the FD come from urban, autonomous tendencies in their respective countries, which are more likely to identify as feminists and (2) the rise of religious fundamentalisms, their cooptation of the human rights framework, and the participation of a large number of women in those movements has necessitated differentiating



*Facilitators' Panel at the Feminist Dialogues*

feminists, committed to gender equality, from other women's movements. So even as the FD emphasized

the variety of feminisms and the diversity of women's experiences in particular local/global contexts, it clearly articulated its feminist identity.

The FD focused on four themes: women's human rights (tensions at the intersection of globalization and fundamentalism); reclaiming women's bodies (the struggle for reproductive

rights); challenging sexual borders and frontiers (affirming sexual rights); and beyond the local-global divide (resistances in current geopolitics) (Santiago 2004). The FD was organized autonomously from the WSF, it met a couple of days before the WSF, and was a fairly closed gathering restricted to feminists from the 7 networks. According to the Coordinating Group (CG) of the FD and participants who were present at the 2005 FD, the 2004 FD in Mumbai was a “disaster” as the two day workshops were not well organized, facilitators were identified at the last minute and hence were not clear about their role, and logistics and the facilities were neither comfortable nor handicap accessible. But their efforts to change the WSF, however, succeeded. The 2004 WSF in India was vastly different from its predecessors in Brazil. Feminists from India were on the International Organizing Committee, major plenaries all had equal numbers of men and women participants, and gender was integrated in most of the workshops and, most importantly, issues of caste/race and fundamentalism were added as important aspects of global justice.

Despite the limitations of the 2004 FD, the (CG) decided to meet again in 2005 in Brazil where the 2005 WSF would be held. I participated in the second FD as a facilitator. This time the coordinating group had expanded to 18 networks from the initial 7 and the participation was through an open application process. The CG had raised money to bring women from countries who couldn't afford to send them to Brazil. About 230 women gathered for a 3 day workshop that was run more or less like an academic event. Not only were most women at the FD, middle class and educated, there were also regional imbalances. Both in the CG and among the participants women from Latin America and

Asia were a majority. Part of this reflects the location, 80% of the 155,00 participants at the 2005 WSF were Brazilians, and part of it reflects the abilities of women to mobilize funds.

A concept paper had been circulated ahead of time to set the framework for discussions. It outlined a very complex, feminist analysis of the contemporary context within which feminist struggles are taking place around the world and the need to focus on the body as an important political site.

“We would like the feminist dialogue to interrogate the body, recover its complexities, and examine the ways in which we can regain control over our bodies as a strategic element of our collective agency and our vision of alternatives. This is in relation to the inter-linkages of the multiple oppressions arising from



*Intermovement Dialogue at the World Social Forum*

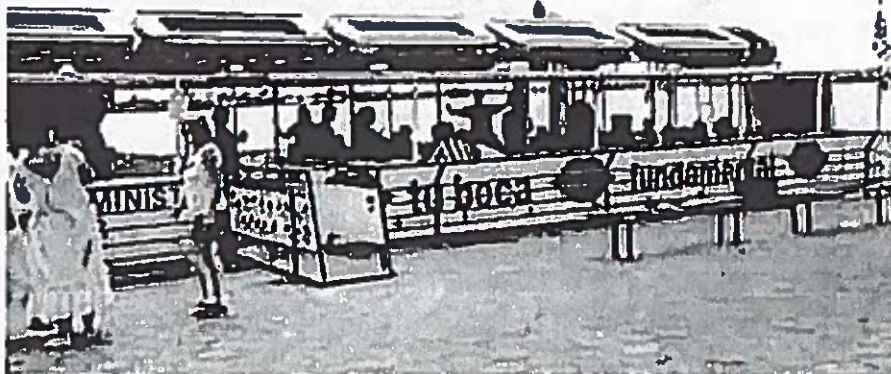
the consolidated and yet autonomous forces of: neo-liberal globalization, war, conflict, militarism and militarization, fundamentalisms” (FD 2005:1-2).

The FD was organized to facilitate collective reflection and used buzz groups, small group workshops, and plenaries to facilitate participation. Translation remained a key impediment to

interaction. While there were simultaneous translations in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French for the plenaries, the group discussions were based on language groups and thus undermined the ability of those who spoke only one language to interact with women from regions who were not bilingual.

The language that framed the questions for discussion reflected a mix of academic and activist agendas. The small group workshops focused on two questions: "the particular and general dilemmas of the feminist movements and the new strategies that can be developed in relation to us and to other movements, including the World Social Forum." Yet, it seemed that the CG did not want to be seen

as developing a call for action and so we were instructed not to come up with specific actions or plans of actions but to think of strategies as a vision or a framework. This tension between reflection and strategizing was evident throughout the three days as



*The Boat Against Fundamentalisms at the World Social Forum*

women from different parts came with different expectations, with different experiences of organizing, and different agendas. So while all the plenary speakers, some of whom were members of the CG and others were facilitators and academics like Maxine Molyneux and Maria Betania, emphasized the need to revive and revitalize the feminist movement as a political project, the CG did not want to make any specific call to action. Partly, this reflected their position: that local situations are so varied that a unified call did not make sense; that there are a diversity of feminist perspectives, many not in the room; and the FD was not a space for specific strategies. To avoid making claims on behalf of women in WGGP Perspectives, Vol. 25(2), Page 16

general, they seemed unwilling to make claims even on behalf of the FD. As a result, at the end of the FD despite enriching discussions and their intention to think of new strategies, there were no strategies, general or specific, to work with other movements or the WSF. As one facilitator from Paraguay noted "it (the FD) is a privileged space for privileged feminists."

There was a clear division in the CG between those who saw it as a space for reflection and dialogue and those who saw it as a place to reinvigorate the feminist political project which they felt had been undermined and fragmented with the onslaught of globalization, fundamentalisms, and militarism post 9/11. Those who saw it as a space for reflection

focused on process issues and tried to make the dialogue as open and participatory as possible. For example, there were daily evaluation sessions, when language based

workshops

seemed too regional with not enough transnational discussion, they reorganized the groups. But the focus on process undermined outcome. Those who wanted it to be more political did not succeed in reframing the FD. Another divide revolved around the relationship of FD to the WSF. Some CG members saw it as an autonomous space, even though it meets around the time of the WSF, while others saw the main role of the FD to not only influence the WSF but also to link with other global justice movements. Despite such differences, at the closing plenary, the CG members hoped that there would be another FD in 2007 when the WSF meets again in Africa and that during the year in between there would be multiple feminist dialogues like the



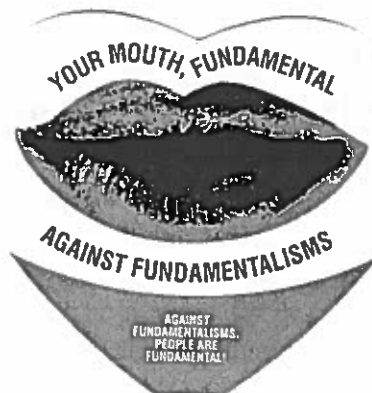
multiple local and regional social forums.

One of the sessions that the FD had organized at the WSF in India and that was continued at the WSF in Brazil this year was an inter-movement dialogue between the feminist, gay, lesbian, and transgender, labor, and *dalit*/anti-racism movement. The inter-movement dialogue at the WSF was an example of taking intersectional politics seriously. Its aim was to enable each movement to re-conceptualize its vision in relation to those of other movements. A representative from each movement had a chance to reflect on the ways in which they had succeeded and failed in addressing the issues of the other three movements. Given the setting, all the representatives spoke of building alliances but again none of them engaged in the questions of the dialogue very concretely. There was no effort to think through ongoing coalition building for redistributive efforts at local or regional levels. The participants and most of the panelists were women. Here were feminists who had become autonomous from parties and other movements and were now seeking to build alliances based on a position of strength and a well developed feminist perspective. But if this session was an indicator of coalition politics, it did not seem very promising. Coalition politics for social movements has become the strategic equivalent of micro-credit in development: a panacea. But as the inter-movement session at WSF in 2005 showed, movements haven't done the serious work: of rearticulating their visions to integrate other visions; reorganizing their movements to include others; rethinking strategies to address issues of all inequalities, class, race, gender, sexuality, among others.

In addition to sessions organized by the FD at the 2005 WSF in Brazil, other gender and feminists sessions were organized by INGOs, such as AWID, WEDO, WIDE, CWGL, Latin American feminist organizations, academics, and most visibly the World March of Women. The 2005 WSF carried over the major issues from the WSF

in India but was organized differently. Workshops, presentations, and meetings were organized into 11 themes, which met in 11 sites, with a huge site in the middle for a youth camp where 35,000 young activists lived in camps and met for sessions to discuss various issues. It was in the youth camp that there were incidences of sexual harassment and young women did not let them go unnoticed. They responded with a march and a big public discussion about them. The women who led the protest were mostly from the World March of Women. While there were many sessions related to gender and feminist issues at the WSF, some of the major plenaries were male dominated despite the presence of women on the organizing committee of the WSF. And as is often the case, sessions dealing with gender issues were dominated by women, as presenters and participants. But it was heartening to see young feminists, both men and women, most of whom were not even aware of the Feminist Dialogues that had taken place a couple of days ago.

As the above discussion shows, a new geography of feminist politics is emerging. Feminist movements have to be local and global and frame issues that can speak to a global audience. As the example of the FD and WSF shows, they also need to build bridges across specific movements. But the terrain of transnational activism, given its reliance on information technology and expert knowledge, cross-border travel and dialogic gatherings, privileges educated middle-class activists who are able to engender discursive changes for whose implementation there are few resources and even less political will in the era of neo-liberalism, fundamentalism, and increased militarism.



Mask worn by participants at the march.

*Manisha Desai is Associate Professor of Sociology, Acting Director of Women and Gender in Global Perspectives Program, and Associate Director of the Program in South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She can be contacted at [mkdesai@uiuc.edu](mailto:mkdesai@uiuc.edu).*

## CONGRATULATIONS TO WGGP AWARD WINNERS!

WGGP supports the international research of graduate students through grants funded by generous donations of people committed to improving conditions that affect women's lives and gender equity in the developing world. The following students received grants for 2005-06:



### **The Rita and Arnold Goodman Fellowship:**

**Mirta Paola León** (Social Work/Latin American and Caribbean Studies), *Gender Relations, Women's Agency and Domestic Violence in the Peruvian Highlands*



### **The Due and Ferber International Research Award for Doctoral Dissertation Research:**

**Batamaka Somé** (Anthropology), *Cotton Production, Economic Disempowerment of Rural Women and Environmental Effects in Burkina Faso*



### **The Kathleen Cloud International Research Grant:**

**Alyssa Garcia** (Anthropology), *Ethnographic Analysis of Gender Relations in Cuba: Cultural Processes, Institutional Structures, and Social Change*



### **The Barbara A. Yates International Research Award:**

**Eliza Johannes** (Educational Policy Studies), *Education for Social Transformation among Nomadic Pastoralist Indigenous Women in Great Lakes Region, Africa*

# WGGP WELCOMES NEW STAFF

We are pleased to announce that Noreen M. Sugrue is joining Women and Gender in Global Perspectives Program as Assistant Professor in May 2005. Professor Sugrue is Senior Research Associate at the University of Illinois, Nursing Institute, and a Faculty Affiliate at the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. Her research interests include public policy, sociology, work, and family in health care with special focus on the theme of who gets what and why, as well as an exploration of the consequences, especially in terms of resources related to health and social welfare. In the international arena, she focuses on working with developing nations as they confront questions of how to most effectively develop and fund sustainable, efficient, and efficacious health care delivery models. Professor Sugrue is currently working on two externally funded projects related to health care labor issues, in particular, "*Work, Families, and Health Care: A Crisis in America and Abroad*" and "*Distributive Justice and Disparities in Rural America: Implications for Rural Health Policy*". In addition, she is co-editing one book, *Who Gets What: Linkages between Health Policy and Social Welfare*, and writing another, *Essential Workers*, and developing her research on domestic and immigrant workers. Noreen has recently been appointed to a national advisory committee exploring policy and legislative initiatives linking mental health and primary care.

We also are very pleased to announce that Anita Kaiser is joining WGGP in May 2005. Anita has been with UIUC for over 8 years. In addition to her duties at WGGP, Anita will begin graduate school in sociology in fall 2005. She will be Project Director on the health initiatives in WGGP.

We welcome Noreen and Anita and the new energy, experience, and connections they bring to our programs and research.



*Noreen Sugrue and Anita Kaiser*

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## On-Line Giving: An Easy Way to Support WGGP Research

The WGGP web page has an on-line giving site at <http://www.ips.uiuc.edu/giving.shtml>. Scroll down the page to the WGGP program listing where you can find information about our grants and fellowship. You can also connect to our main web page to find information about our research projects. Your contribution will help us increase understanding of the gendered implications of on-going economic, political, and demographic change and will assist more students in developing the analytical skills needed to address changing gender relations in research and public policy, as well as in daily life. Contact us at 217-333-1994 or email [kcmartin@uiuc.edu](mailto:kcmartin@uiuc.edu) for further information or if you have questions. We greatly appreciate your interest and support.



## *Perspectives: Research Notes & News*

*Perspectives: Research Notes & News* is a publication of the Women and Gender in Global Perspectives (WGGP) program. WGGP offers a graduate minor in Gender Relations in International Development (GRID). *Perspectives* is published once each semester and distributed to WGGP associates and other individuals interested in issues of women and gender in global perspectives.

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