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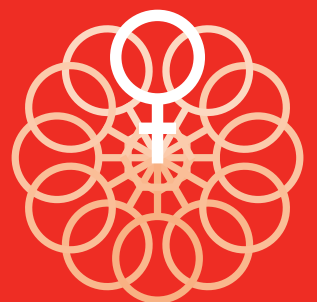
Oxfam

the everyone foundation



Women Reaching Women Final Project Report

Tackling world poverty, gender inequality
and climate change



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Front cover:

Top left photo:
Protestors at the Global Day of Action Against Climate Change Rally, part of Oxfam’s campaigning work at the UN Climate Change Conference in Bali, December 2007. Photo credit: Jack Picone/Oxfam

Top right photo:
Brenda Mwila is the only nurse at a clinic in Zambia, Southern Africa. Thanks to debt relief, healthcare is now free – where it is available.

Bottom left photo:
Business as usual in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in South Asia as vendors and customers try to adapt to the floods of 1998. Changing rainfall patterns caused by climate change leads to more flooding, affecting both rural and urban coastal populations.
Photo credit: Shafiqul Alam/Oxfam

Bottom right photo:
Srey Sap Sak, aged 24, in her rice paddies in the village of Thmey, Cambodia, in East Asia. Her rice crops have been subjected to extremes of weather. “Rice planting this year is not going well”, she says. “There is not enough rain and when there is rain it just comes too late.”
Photo: Jack Picone/Oxfam

April 2011.

Foreword



The NFWI first came into its own at a time of national need and, in the years since the First World War, the organisation has continued to widen horizons and help women to develop new skills and play an effective role in their communities. Our campaigns and educational work have long been central to the organisation and, at a glance, the issues that the WI has campaigned on have been as diverse as the membership itself. The common thread running through all WI campaigns has been a strong appreciation of the need for social and environmental justice, combined with a willingness to take action to achieve it. Everything we do is about empowering women, which is why it has been so important for us to widen our work on international issues and, in particular, examine the disproportionate impact of poverty and climate change on women through Women Reaching Women, our flagship education campaign.

Working in partnership with Oxfam GB and The Everyone Foundation, the project has allowed the NFWI's work spearheading the rights of women in the UK to be translated into an international context. Our commitment to realising the potential of a responsible civic society is at the absolute centre of our work on national, regional and local levels. The project has taken an educational approach to empower people to take action in support of development efforts around the world; helping to build an informed and active society that is prepared to take responsibility for its own impact on the planet.

We all have a responsibility to educate ourselves about the world in which we live in and to promote equality and sustainable living. By promoting an understanding of the role that individuals can play, we aim to enable members to go on to make informed choices with the knowledge of how their actions impact on the world around them.

During the project we have heard some truly inspiring stories; members and their communities have had the opportunity to hear, from a diverse range of voices, how global poverty and climate change has consequences for us all. I was privileged to visit Malawi with Oxfam GB in 2010 and met some amazing women who were full of fortitude, despite the tremendous obstacles they face.

This report provides a snapshot of the project and the educational, as well as personal, journey of the members involved. While it draws the project to a close it does not mark an end to the NFWI's interest in these areas.

Ruth Bond, NFWI Chair

Introduction

The NFWI

The National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) is the largest voluntary organisation for women in the UK, with 210,000 members in 6,500 WIs in England and Wales. The WI plays a unique role in providing women with educational opportunities and the chance to build new skills, to take part in a wide variety of activities, and to campaign on issues that matter to them and their families.

The WI has more than ninety years' experience spearheading work on women's rights in the UK, and for a number of years has been raising awareness of issues affecting women around the world.

The NFWI is a unique organisation in that all our campaigns and educational activities emerge from resolutions proposed by members themselves who table and debate resolutions at the AGM. The subsequent mandates are translated into national campaigns and activities, which are focussed on grassroots action for national change. The NFWI has mandates in place dating back to 1921 on supporting the League of Nations and 1946 on the role of women in world peace:

International understanding and cooperation

That this meeting urges all Women's Institutes and County Federations within the National Federation to encourage the study of the principles underlying the League of Nations. (NFWI Executive Committee May, 1921)

Women at the 1946 Peace Conference

That women delegates with special qualifications should share with men the honour and responsibility of taking an active part in the Peace Conference. (Oxfordshire Federation, June 1943)



Photo: Rajendra Shaw/Oxfam

And more recently on equality and upholding women's human rights:

Equal opportunities

The NFWI believes in the principle of equality of opportunity and of legal status for men and women and pledges itself to work to achieve this. (NFWI Executive Committee, June 1975)

Women's human Rights

This meeting deplores the fact that women's human rights continue to be violated worldwide and calls upon the governments of the world to adhere to the commitments made at the Fourth UN Convention on Women 1995, 'that women's human rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights' and to implement policies to this end. (NFWI Executive Committee, 1999).

Project Overview and Aims

In answer to members' requests that the NFWI expand its work on international issues, the Women Reaching Women project was launched in 2008 to educate WI members and their communities about the disproportionate impact of global poverty and climate change on women. Working in partnership with Oxfam GB and The Everyone Foundation, the project has allowed members to be at the forefront of supporting the efforts of women all over the world to achieve recognition of their rights and to join together internationally to tackle global poverty and climate change.

By building the knowledge of members about gender and development issues, and broadening their skill set for community awareness raising activities, the project aimed to empower members to take action in support of development efforts around the world.

Women Reaching Women (WrW) has also emphasised the role that individuals can play in helping to shape the world around them, by giving them the knowledge to make informed choices and an awareness of how their choices and actions impact on others around the globe.

By engaging members in this educational project, they were able to cascade key messages into their communities, helping to build a well-informed and proactive society.

The final year of the project culminates in a national closing conference on 12 April 2011 in London to showcase the project's achievements, with a photo exhibition of some of the events that have taken place over the three years. The conference will look at how we can engage and connect communities, both here in the UK and in developing countries, on the issue of gender inequality and development, particularly in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It will be an opportunity for the wider membership to hear from women who lead development efforts across the world, with speakers from Malawi and Honduras; to learn more about international efforts to reduce global poverty and gender inequality, and to promote development.

The conference will also provide a forum to disseminate this final report and share key lessons from the project on how to engage the wider public on these issues in an inspiring, informative and empowering way. A toolkit of key lessons will be launched at the conference, which we hope will offer useful insights into public engagement for organisations working on these issues.

Key achievements

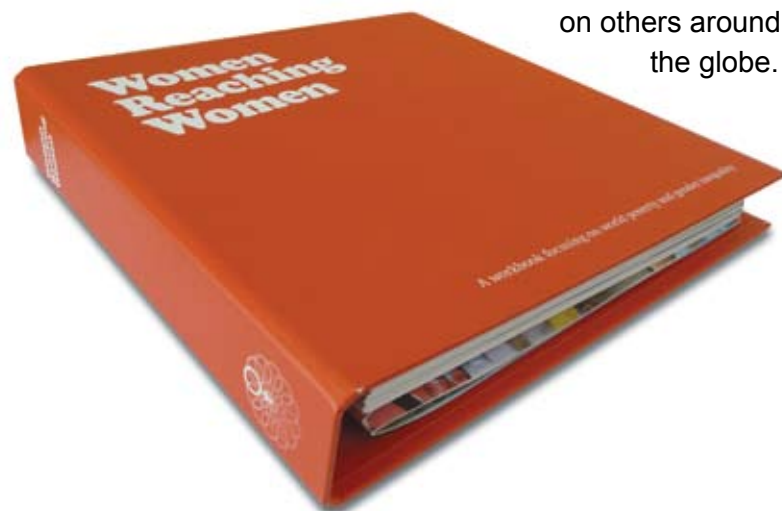
The project's key achievements, in line with the overall objectives, are as follows:

OBJECTIVE 1 By using specific education programmes and case studies covering the issues of aid, trade, health and education WI members will gain in-depth understanding of the *challenges and prospects for development and poverty reduction*.

- Each educational training event had a total of 11 sessions, spread over two-and-a-half days. Sessions covered issues of gender inequality, climate change and global poverty, with a focus on how gender inequality impacts on the MDGs in the second and third year training events.
- A wide range of educational materials and tools were produced to allow the project participants to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues and as a source of reference and 'expert input' into the community awareness-raising events they held. These included a workbook with case studies of how gender inequality and climate change affected poor women around the world.
- All 26 current project participants have utilised at least three of the educational resources produced, both at the educational training events and in the planning for their local events.
- To inform the wider membership on these issues, all the educational materials and tools have been made available on the WI's website and to the 9,033 members currently signed up to the WI's educational training site.
- Gender inequality, climate change, global poverty and the MDGs were the themes of the 250 awareness raising events held over the three years.
- These events were attended by over 12,250 people, including those from over 80 different community groups (as speakers, stall holders or attendees), in 28 counties across England, Wales and Jersey.

OBJECTIVE 2 While exploring poverty, development and climate change, how our actions affect it and the impact on developing countries, specifically on women, we will demonstrate *interdependence and the global consequences of poverty*.

- Climate change was a recurring theme in each year of the project and was effective in communicating the message of global interdependence both to the project participants and a wider audience.
- Oxfam's *Sisters on the Planet* film (about four women in different parts of the world who are affected by climate change) was shown at over 150 events in England, Wales and Jersey. This was instrumental in raising awareness on how climate change disproportionately affects poor women and how our actions impact on others in developing countries.
- To build on the success of this film, and further demonstrate how our actions affect and impact on others in developing countries, each participant was given a set of Oxfam films to show at their final year events. The films show how poor communities are adapting to the changing climate and the effects of climate change.



OBJECTIVE 3 Through examining and understanding past and current *international efforts to reduce poverty* and the various instruments and agencies involved, WI members will gain an understanding of what progress is being made and what is still needed.

- An overview of international agencies, instruments and efforts to reduce poverty were highlighted in the educational training events in years one, two and three. In year three this was linked to the MDGs Review Summit in September 2010, in order for the project participants to gain an understanding of the current progress being made on the MDGs and what further action was needed from individuals and the international community.
- Oxfam GB invited the NFWI Chair, Ruth Bond, to Malawi to learn more about maternal health. Through the Chair's speaking engagements at national WI events, over 10,000 members were informed of the current international efforts to improve maternal health in Malawi.
- A joint letter with Oxfam was published in *The Guardian* on the day of the MDG Review Summit in New York, to highlight the importance of achieving the goals.
- Due to the widespread interest of the membership in the MDGs, particularly maternal health, the WI and Oxfam further expanded their partnership to include a separate campaign initiative on maternal health, 'Mums Matter'. This work has further increased awareness of the MDGs by providing WI members with in-depth information, case studies and opportunities to engage with stakeholders on the issue. Over 8,000 members and individuals signed the campaign's petition.

OBJECTIVE 4 WI members will learn about *their role as individuals, citizens and consumers*, how their actions affect those in developing countries, and how to make choices that will have a positive impact on the world.

- The focus in year two on the message of 'talking is doing' was continued into the final year of the project. The lack of awareness of the MDGs that the project participants encountered amongst WI members and the wider public reinforced the importance of raising awareness of the MDGs and how key the empowerment of women is to achieving the goals. The focus on their role as citizens has been taken further by forming new links with other community organisations to build networks for local work on the MDGs in the lead up to the 2015 deadline.

Project partners

The planning, implementation and evaluation of the project has been a unique collaborative effort between the NFWI, Oxfam GB and The Everyone Foundation. It has been a successful partnership, with each organisation bringing a unique skills set, experience and expertise to the project.

Oxfam GB (Great Britain, member of Oxfam International)

Oxfam is a leading international NGO, with over sixty years experience working alongside poor people and communities, and campaigning for change around the world. Oxfam has provided theoretical and practical knowledge of working with others to overcome poverty and suffering in various forms, including:

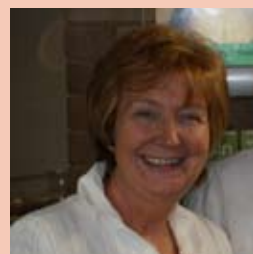
- Providing expert information and analysis on the challenges and prospects for development and poverty reduction (assisting in the production of workbook and educational materials)
- Co-designing, developing and facilitating the training programme for all three educational training events
- Providing knowledgeable speakers at annual WrW regional events and educational training events
- Providing multimedia resources with real life case studies of women affected by poverty and climate change.

The Everyone Foundation

The Everyone Foundation is a new organisation that is committed to exploring how to increase everyone's appreciation of our common humanity, by focusing on our similarities and shared hopes and dreams. The Everyone Foundation is committed to creating deeper human connections across the globe and understanding how this impacts on the choices and actions that people go on to take as global citizens. The Foundation has had two main roles in the project. Firstly, to monitor and evaluate the action learning model used, through:

- Monitoring and evaluating the design, implementation and impact of the annual educational training programme and producing an annual evaluation report
- Conducting annual interviews with a sample of the project participants and people who attended WrW events to assess the overall impact of the project. Their second role has involved:
- Co-designing and developing the training programme for all three educational training events
- Facilitating at the annual educational training events with carefully considered activities and prompts to highlight our interconnectedness, build engagement and encourage action among the project participants
- Assisting in the design and development of all educational materials and tools to ensure that all materials reflected the core message of interconnectedness.

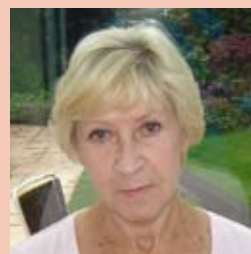
The Foundation's research work on the project was featured in the journal, *Action Learning: Research and Practice* (Taylor & Francis, Volume 7 Number 2 July 2010).



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Hampshire



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Elizabeth Lansman
Suffolk West



Enid Brown
Clwyd-Denbigh



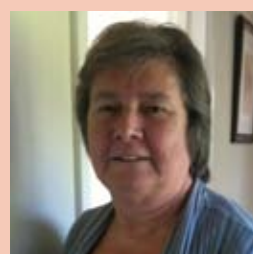
Esme Issacs
Dorset



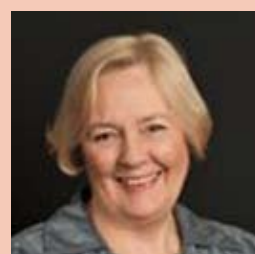
Gillian Hodgson
Teesside



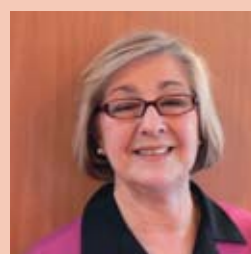
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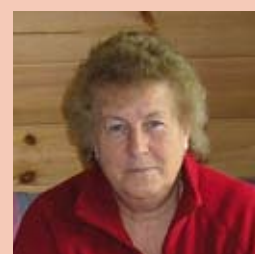
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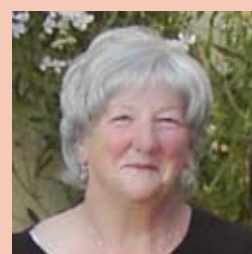
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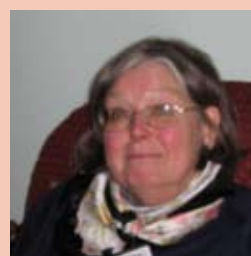
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Julia Sayce
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Julie Galliard
Cambridge



Liz Vigor
Norfolk



Lynda Beck
Northamptonshire



Lynne Tunley
East Sussex



Mary Dorrell
Norfolk



Mavis Turnball
Tyne & Wear South

Project participants

The 6,500 WIs, in England, Wales and the Channel Islands, form 69 county and island federations. Every federation has a regional office and is run by a voluntary committee of elected members. Each of the 28 federations that signed up to the project was asked to nominate a member who would act as their WrW Federation Representative. Federation Representatives acted as regional leaders for the project; attending the annual educational training event and cascading the information they had learned to other members and people in their community by hosting local events on the issues covered in the project. The WI, with its county federations and elected committees, already has in place an effective cascading structure and many WIs play an active role in their local communities. These

factors, as well as others which will be highlighted in the report, allowed the Federation Representatives to widely disseminate the project's messages and key learning among the membership and their local communities.

Aim of final report

The aim of this report is to provide a snapshot of the main issues covered throughout the project while highlighting the different ways in which learning about these issues has impacted on the members involved, and the membership as a whole.

The report also highlights the key successes of the project and demonstrates the collective achievement of all the members involved, as well as the achievements of the three central organisations, in working together to raise awareness of world poverty, gender inequality and climate change.



Sue Watkins
Derbyshire



Pat Collinson
Suffolk West



Rosemarie Jeffery
East Sussex



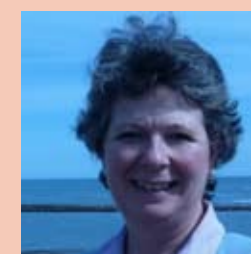
Sheila Wheldon
East Yorkshire



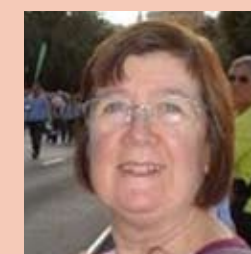
Sue Moulds
Gloucestershire



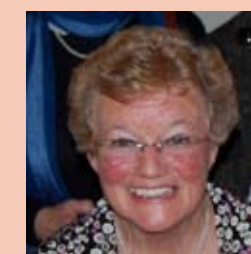
Sybil Graham
Cheshire



Teresa Scott
Northumberland



Val Durnall
Worcestershire



Valerie Hart
Hampshire



Valerie Hudson
Berkshire



Vicki Scott
East Sussex

Disproportionate effects of poverty and climate change on women

Alleviating global poverty involves ending discrimination and tackling inequality to ensure that change benefits men and women equally. But this doesn't happen as a matter of course. It is vital to understand the specific challenges faced by women –

to ensure better provision of basic services and a say for women in decisions that affect them; otherwise, development plans may help men while women fall even further behind, creating more inequality.

Women's inequality significantly impacts on the challenges and prospects for development and poverty reduction, so it was important, in each year of the project, to frame the issues of global poverty and climate change around this and how the empowerment of women significantly improves a country's prospects for development and poverty reduction.

This was a key theme at the annual educational training events, and in the educational resources and tools produced for the Federation Representatives and the wider membership. An overview of how the project examined these issues follows:

Sue Watkins, Derbyshire WrW Federation Representative, was inspired to write this poem after she watched Oxfam's Sisters on the Planet film at the first educational training event. She felt she should take more personal responsibility for her impact on the planet, and traded in her old car for a more eco-friendly one.

Martina

*My name is Martina,
We are sisters you and I
It shouldn't really shock you
As we live 'neath the same blue sky.*

*But how our lives are different,
Why, it hardly does seem fair
I walk for miles and miles for fuel
While you use it without care.*

*I scratch the ground for fruits to eat
To feed my hungry brood
While you eat too much. And then
You waste 'past its sell-by' food.*

*I'm not asking for very much
I only want clean water
My sister, yours is all on tap
And costs so much a quarter.*

*My name is Martina
We are sisters you and I
We share our beautiful planet
With its water-giving sky.*

What is development?

Development is a process of change, with the aim of improving life on our shared planet. It is a process that leads to a preferred, or better, world. International development has often been thought of as being about increasing people's wealth, as a way of lifting people out of grinding poverty. But it must also be about reducing inequality. People who are denied their basic rights face not only inequalities in income and wealth, but also inequalities in power and participation in society.

'Poverty is pain; it feels like a disease. It attacks a person not only materially but also morally. It eats away one's dignity and drives one into total despair.'

A poor woman in Moldova¹

We've all lived through – and are still living through – changes that are developmental. For example, many of the rights enjoyed by women in the UK were only achieved relatively recently.

A very brief history of women's rights in the UK

August 1870 Women gain some rights over property taken into a marriage or accumulated while married – prior to this, a married woman's property became her husband's.

1 January 1883 The Married Women's Property Act is extended to allow married women full rights to their property.

October 1897 Two suffrage organisations combine to form the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which is able to coordinate peaceful campaigns.

10 October 1903 Frustrated by the lack of success of peaceful struggle, Emmeline Pankhurst forms the Women's Social and Political Union.

4 June 1913 Suffragette Emily Wilding Davison is trampled to death by the King's racehorse at the Epsom Derby. Hunger strikes, suicide attempts and violent protest are by now part of the arsenal of the WSPU's campaign.

16 September 1915 Women's Institute formed with two clear aims: to revitalise rural communities; and to encourage women to become more involved in producing food during the First World War.

16 February 1918 Women are allowed the vote for the first time, as long as they are over 30 and propertied.

1 December 1919 Lady Astor is elected to Parliament. She is the first woman to take a seat in the House of Commons.

23 December 1919 The Sex Disqualification Removal Act makes women's exclusion from many jobs illegal.

7 May 1928 The Equal Franchise Act makes the UK a near-democracy for the first time, granting all women over 21 the right to vote.

'Development is a slow process and it needs to come from the communities, and a voice needs to be given to women.'

Sybil Graham, Cheshire Federation Representative



What is gender inequality?

Being a woman in a developing country does not automatically mean that you will be poor, but it does mean that you are much more likely to be poor than your male counterparts. It is the combination of gender with economic, social and political disadvantages that makes poor women and girls disproportionately affected by poverty, and more recently, climate change, making up an estimated 70%² of the world's poor. This statistic clearly shows how, by addressing the challenges facing poor women, the world could also be simultaneously reducing global poverty and inequality, and therefore increasing the prospects for development.

Here are just a few examples of the types of disadvantages that women and girls face, which keeps them in grinding poverty, and make it difficult to achieve sustainable development that benefits everyone.

Education

Of the 780 million people who are illiterate, 510 million are female³. Girls missing out on education more than boys is a symptom of long-standing cultural values and views of women's roles, for example, early marriages, cultural beliefs about the value of educating girls and the pressures of domestic chores. This is a vicious circle, as educating girls really is one of the most all-encompassing ways of breaking the cycle of poverty, and has a knock-on effect of improving communities and societies. Educated women tend to:

- a) be better off (and re-invest more in their families and communities than men)
- b) be healthier
- c) have fewer children
- d) understand their rights, and have the tools at their disposal to claim them.

This picture was taken by Khadija as part of a women's photography project in Herat, Afghanistan. She says, "I look at this photograph and see another woman in our community who has no education."



Violence against women

Violence against women is commonplace around the world and domestic violence is the single biggest cause of injury and death to women worldwide⁴. Gender-based violence causes more deaths and disability among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined. The problem is truly global and a violation of everyone's right to live free from violence and the threat of violence. It causes untold misery and hampers both women's development and that of society as a whole.

'Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world.' Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General

It is worth reflecting that, here in the UK, rape within marriage only became illegal in 1991; two women a week are killed by a former or current male partner and a case of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute⁵.



Wangari shares her story at a WrW event

Jill Wadsworth, Huntingdon and Peterborough WrW Federation Representative, learnt first-hand how transformative fully educating girls can be when she invited Wangari Cecilia Karuri to speak at her WrW event.

Wangari was born in a small village in Naivasha, Kenya. She was one of ten children and her family were poor. She was able to go to primary school, but hated the thought of having to leave school at 11 years old. However, she was sponsored and able to continue to secondary school and go on to Missionary College.

But she never forgot about her fellow pupils, who had to leave primary school, and were forced to live the same lives as their mothers – married very young, bearing children and trapped in a life they had never chosen. Wangari promised herself that one day she would return to Naivasha, to try to build a school that would give other girls like her a say in their own future. She has worked tirelessly to make that dream come true and, with support from her family in Kenya and friends in the UK, she founded the Karuri School Charity Project. The school, with 75 pupils, many of them orphans, is partly funded by the sale of bags made by a group of local women who are living with HIV.

‘Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. No other policy is likely to raise economic productivity, or to reduce infant and maternal mortality. No other policy is as sure to improve nutrition and promote health – including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generations. And I would also venture that no policy is more important in preventing conflict, or in achieving reconciliation after a conflict has ended.’

Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General

Millennium Development Goals

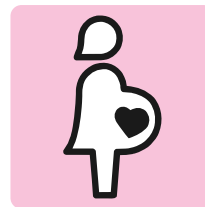
In 2000, the efforts of campaigners from all over the world helped to make 189 world leaders sign up to the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs). These are a series of eight goals, setting out targets to be achieved by 2015. Gender equality sits as a single goal, separate from the other seven, when in fact promoting women’s rights is a precondition for achieving many of the others.

In a UK national poll in 2008, when asked which MDGs the government should focus on⁶, promoting gender equality and empowering women ranked last. This clearly demonstrates the need to make people aware of how gender inequality impacts on all areas of development.

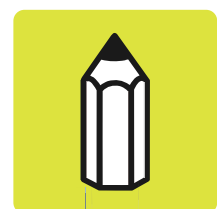
These are the eight goals:



1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: 70% of the world's poor are women.



5. Improve maternal health: little progress has been made - the target most likely to fail.



2. Achieve universal primary education: girls in the poorest households are most likely to drop out.



6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases: educating and empowering women play a crucial role in saving lives.



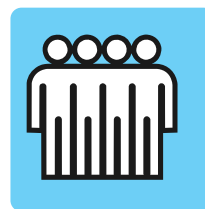
3. Promote gender equality and empower women: women are more likely to remain trapped in low-paid, insecure positions.



7. Ensure environmental sustainability: women worldwide are the stewards of natural resources and can lead their communities towards a sustainable future.



4. Reduce child mortality: women’s lack of access to reproductive health, education and employment are the underlying socioeconomic causes.



8. Develop a global partnership for development: without women’s equal participation in decision-making, no partnership will be truly global.



Climate change

Tackling climate change is crucial to achieving sustainable development that benefits men and women equally, and to achieving the MDGs. It is clear that unchecked climate change will affect us all; it could reverse the benefits of development we’ve seen to date, and will disproportionately affect poor women, who, according to estimates, make up the majority of the world’s 1.4 billion poor⁷. Climate change hits the poorest hardest, not only because poor countries and communities are the least able to cope with the changes it will bring to all our lives. Changes in rainfall, temperatures, plant and animal life particularly affect people who use their environment to make a living and sustain themselves – which is true of many of the poorest people, and poor women in particular.

Below are just two examples of how unchecked climate change has a disproportionate impact on poor women and girls, stalling a country’s development.

Impact on poor women and MDG 1

Women grow over 60% of the food in developing countries, but own only just 2% of the land⁸. Their lack of land ownership to put up as collateral makes it harder for them to get credit, to pay for changes in their farming habits or the types of animals they wish to raise. Having relatively less education and higher levels of illiteracy than poor men, these women also find it more difficult to keep informed about new technologies and farming strategies that might allow them to cope.

Srey Sap Sak, aged 24, in her rice paddies in the village of Thmey, Cambodia, in East Asia. Her rice crops have been subjected to extremes of weather. “Rice planting this year is not going well”, she says. “There is not enough rain and when there is rain it just comes too late.”

Photo: Jack Picone/Oxfam

Impact on poor women and MDG 2

Women and girls tend to be responsible for the strenuous work of collecting firewood and water, and climate change threatens the availability of these vital resources. As women are forced to walk further to find wood or water, girls' education could well suffer. Already in sub-Saharan Africa alone, women and children spend an estimated 40 billion hours⁹ collecting water every year, equivalent to the annual working activity of the entire workforce of France.

*Increasingly scarce resources mean that women like Martina (on the right) from Caicaon village, in Uganda, East Africa, must walk further each day for the essentials.
Photo: Geoff Sayer/Oxfam*



Many girls are expected to do these chores as well as get an education – and the longer the chores take, the less likely they are to be able to concentrate in school, or go to school at all. Climate change could actually reverse the recent gains made in getting more girls

into school; developing countries may succeed in making schooling more freely available, only to find that climate change makes it less likely that girls will go.

Inequality, women's rights and climate change are all connected and it is clear that failure to tackle climate change and attitudes towards women will make achieving the other MDGs impossible.

Solar Solutions

'At one of my talks an 80-year-old lady, Pat, stood up and said:

"Everything you've told us is true. I've just come back from Uganda, my son married a Ugandan woman. She invited me to go and meet her family in the village."

She took a breath.

"I saw children dying of malaria because, without electricity, they couldn't keep the anti-malaria medicines cold enough. The children couldn't read because there was no light at night."

We were silent.

"So I raised money to get them some solar panels. Now they can run the fridge and the boys are teaching the girls to read because they have electric lights at night."

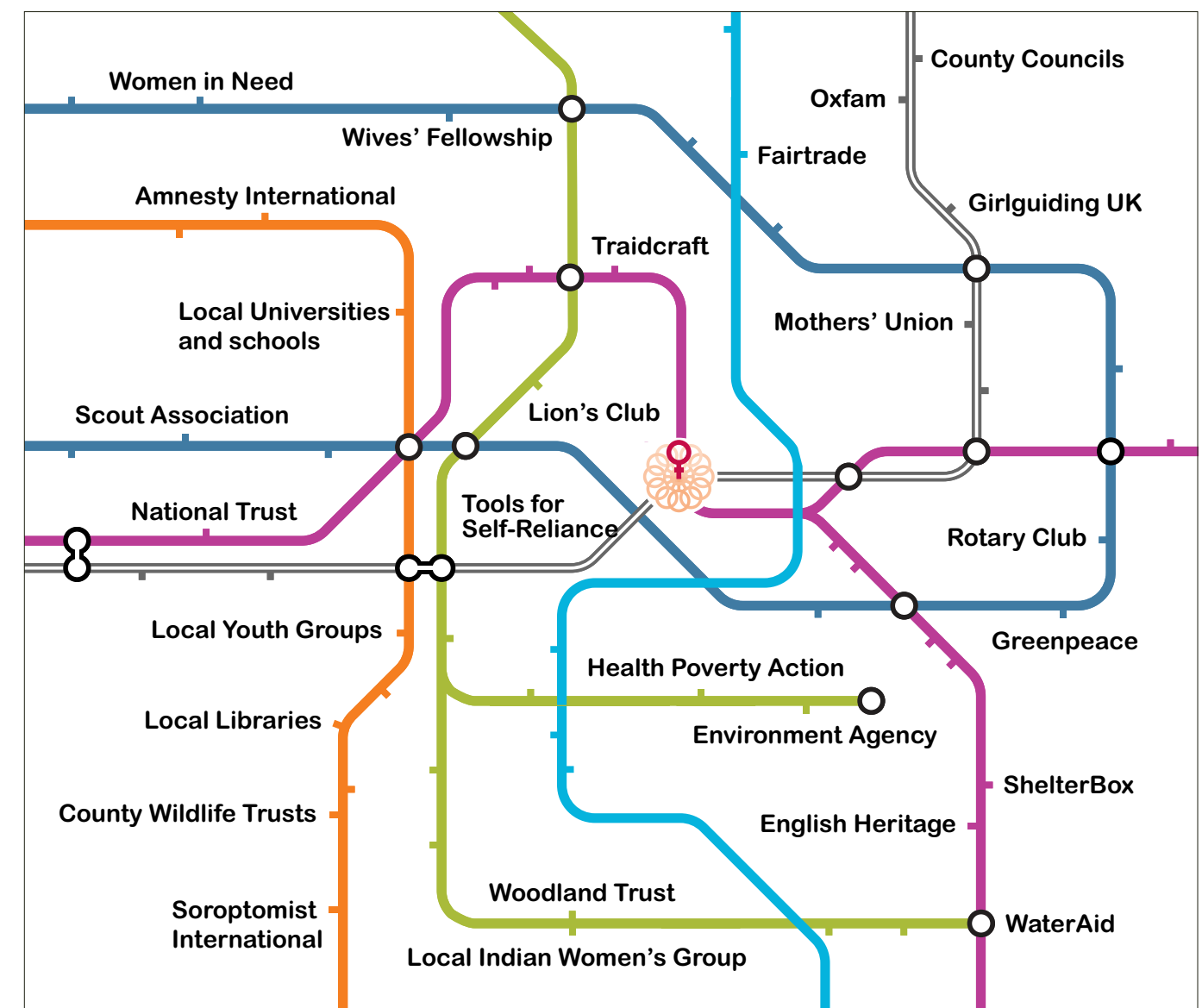
This was the inspirational story of one individual at a WrW event.'

Sybil Graham, Cheshire WrW Federation Representative

These issues formed the theme of the events that the Federation Representatives held in their local communities to cascade the learning they had gained to WI members and their communities, and to raise awareness of the issues affecting poor women around the world. In total, 250 events were attended by over 12,250 people, including those from over 80 different community groups (as speakers, stall holders or attendees), in 28 counties

across England, Wales and Jersey. The final year of the project coincided with the centenary of International Women's Day, 8th March 2011. This provided the Federation Representatives with a fantastic opportunity to form new links with community organisations or include more organisations in the community networks they had already formed.

Just a few of the diverse range of community organisations are highlighted below:



Three-quarters of all those that attended a WrW event left with a piece of learning and over half were inspired to take action.

‘Everyone who attended enjoyed themselves – but left feeling they had extended their understanding and awareness of how women have to struggle to feed their families, to care for their children and to ensure they receive some form of education and equality within cultures which are vastly different from our own. A lasting testament to the aims of the Women Reaching Women project, which helped us all to consider ourselves “Sisters on the Planet”.’
Julie Galliard, Cambridgeshire WrW Federation Representative

‘Will support organisations doing something to alleviate the problems’

‘Save water urgently’

‘Donate more to third world charities’

Individuals at Surrey and Huntingdon and Peterborough WrW events

By placing articles in WI Life (the WI’s membership magazine circulated to over 200,000 members), making all the project’s educational resources and tools available on the WI’s website and to the 9,033 members signed up to the WI’s educational training site, the project was able to inform the wider membership on how gender inequality impacts on the challenges and prospects for development and reducing global poverty.

The comparative result from the baseline survey conducted with the wider membership of the WI in the first and final year of the project highlights an increase in members’ knowledge of the MDGs:

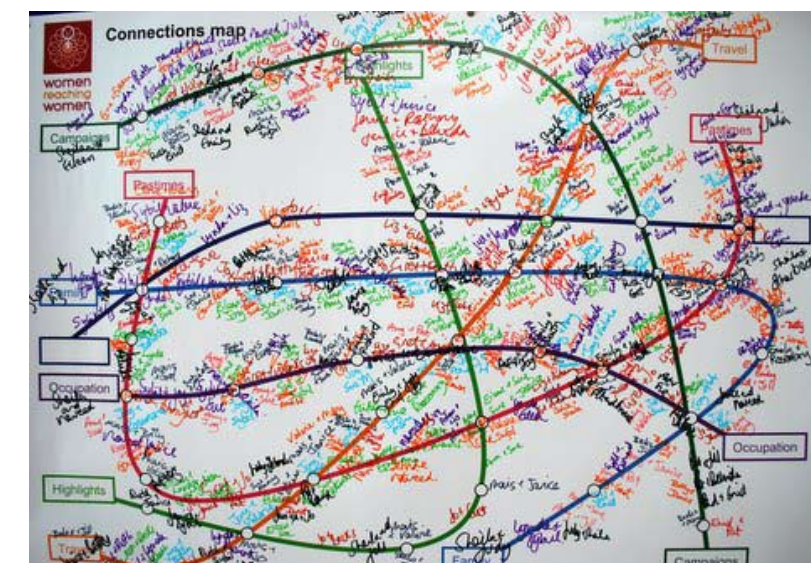
- In the first year of the project, 59.0% had answered that they only knew a little about the MDGs.
- In the last year of the project, this dropped to 40.2%.

Interconnectedness and our common humanity

People often find it easier to understand and empathise with people who are in some way ‘like them’. This tends to mean people they know personally, those who live near them, or who share their culture, race or religion. But why do people not feel this same sense of connection with ‘other’ people? We’re all human, all sharing a global home and, as is becoming more apparent with climate change, our futures are inextricably linked.

Everyone has hopes and dreams for themselves, their children, grandchildren, and for the future of the planet. Imagine a world where people didn’t turn their back on those who are different or who seem far away - a world where everyone acts as if they really mean it when they say that everyone’s human rights should be respected. The suffering of a child in Bolivia ought to be as abhorrent to us as the suffering of a child next door.

In this world we wouldn’t feel, as so many of us do, that what happens around the world is somehow less real than what happens on our doorstep. It was important to convey this message to the Federation Representatives right from the outset of the first educational training event, in order to highlight how interdependent we are on one another, and that global poverty has consequences for us all. The activities at the training event, such as the connections map below, encouraged members to re-imagine the world as a global village, by looking at how connected they all were as a group of strangers.



Interconnectedness was not an abstract concept or theme for the Federation Representatives, but it came to life through personalising the circumstances that they read and heard about, and building empathy for people they grew to know through the workbook and films. Once we understand that we are all the same, we find it easier to empathise and feel a stronger motivation to create change – we become more incensed at the injustice of inequality when it is happening to someone who is essentially just like us, who happens to live in a different place.

“Sometimes looking at the effects of a drought can be overwhelming but watching the story of Martina in the Sisters on the Planet film brought it down to a family and that really brought it home.” Mavis Turnball, Tyne and Wear South Federation Representative

'WrW really initiated a change in how I view the world.'

Jill Whitehead,
Pembrokeshire
Federation
Representative

'The biggest impact for me is the sense that we are all connected – and the power of conversations. I set myself the goal of having five more conversations and they [in turn] will have five more conversations.'

Federation
Representative

'Women can really make a difference, they can move mountains!'

Pat Collinson,
Suffolk West
Federation
Representative
Interview

By highlighting how connected people are through shared hopes and dreams for the future, by love of their families, and by virtue of our common humanity, the Federation Representatives were able to connect with the issues they were introduced to on a more personal level, which in turn enabled them to talk to others about the issues affecting poor women with real emotion and honesty.

By openly exploring personal connectedness, we were able to explore the reasons for acting or not acting, in a way which inspired the participants to take action and gave them the tools to inspire others in their wider community to also support development efforts.

Part of the problem or part of the solution?

The Federation Representatives learnt how, in our interconnected world, our actions and choices, and the actions and choices of the institutions and governments we choose to support, affect the lives of people both close to home and further afield.

Most of the Federation Representatives signed up to the project because they 'wanted to make a difference'. While they were already a part of a local organisation, which in turn was part of a wider national organisation working for change, it was important throughout the project to examine the power these women held as individuals to make a difference and contribute to reducing global poverty, gender inequality and climate change. For example, whether this was as consumers,

voters, educators or as members of a community, with the capacity to influence local-level decisions.

By the end of the project, the Federation Representatives understood their role as individuals, citizens and consumers, how their actions affect those in developing countries, and how to make choices that will have a positive impact on the world. They also realised that, although one person can make a big difference, more often than not it takes lots of people coming together to make change happen.

'From a state of powerlessness that manifests itself in a feeling of "I cannot", activism contains an element of collective self-confidence that results in a feeling of "we can".'

Professor Naila Kabeer,
academic

The power of collective action was echoed in the letter on the next page, written by Julia Sayce, former Northumberland Federation Representative and published in *WI Life* following the MDG Review Summit in September 2010.

Write to: The Editor, *WI Life*, 104 New King's Road, London SW6 4LY, or email wilife@nfwl.org.uk
For letters to be printed in the next issue, please write in by **6 December 2010**. *WI Life* reserves the right to edit letters where necessary. We cannot accept anonymous contributions. Regrettably, it is not possible to acknowledge receipt of correspondence. Please keep your letters to 150 or fewer words.

Letters

Star letter

Let's all get together

For more than 90 years, WI members have been 'women reaching women' at a local level, and I am writing to urge members to support the final phase of our global 'Women Reaching Women' campaign.

Ill-health prevented me from joining other federation representatives at Denman College for the third-year briefing but it has allowed me to spend more time listening to the radio. When world leaders met in New York recently to review progress of the Millennium Development Goals, the bulletins, and particularly an interview with Kofi Annan – former Secretary-General of the United Nations – made it clear that the Maternal Health goal, the one we're focusing on in the 'Mums Matter' campaign, has risen dramatically up the agenda.

Our Deputy Prime Minister also reiterated the United Kingdom's commitment to giving 0.7 per cent of GDP in aid. These facts should encourage us.

So come on, fellow members, let's get out into our communities and help people to understand that together we can make the world a fairer and more stable place.

Julia Sayce, Stocksfield WI, Northumberland

Editor's comment: You can read more about the Women Reaching Women project and the Mums Matter campaign on page 10 of this issue, or by visiting www.theWI.org.uk/wrw

Star letter prize

The Élan II from PURE – the world's leading radio-maker – is a great looking, great sounding portable stereo.



The limit of our ambition

Like so many villages throughout Great Britain, Middleton-cum-Fordley, close to the Suffolk coast, was a village where the roads that were simply cart tracks and footpaths, and the car came along.

All roads approaching our village other than those in the centre are hazardous due to track configuration and blind bends, and 40 and derestricted speed limits. There are other than those directly outside a school.

Our WI celebrates its 90th birthday this year and alongside the partying we want to mark the occasion with something significant for our village.

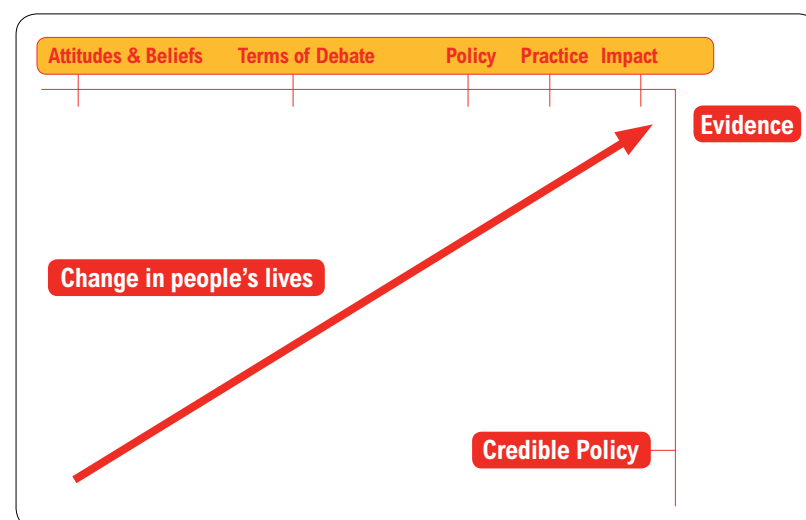
‘Talking is doing’– the power of conversations

The power of conversations to raise awareness on an issue should not be underestimated or seen as having less value than a more practical action, such as fundraising. It contributes to international efforts to reduce poverty and promote gender equality in development, by helping to both shape and change the terms of the debate around those issues and to inform the changes we want to see in the world.

‘I believe that if we want change in the world we are the change. We can help the world to be more caring through very simple ways and I believe creating awareness is a strong and powerful way.’

An individual at a WrW event

Creating awareness around issues has a tangible, knock-on effect on other areas that help to bring about change. Oxfam’s advocacy model, below, illustrates changing attitudes and behaviours in order to ultimately influence policy.



Oxfam Advocacy model

Oxfam presented this advocacy model at the second annual educational training event, alongside an overview of international institutions and systems which work together to tackle global poverty and promote development. The presentation also highlighted to the Federation Representatives where individuals can have influence and make a difference. The message of how, by talking about the issues facing women in developing countries with a friend or neighbour and hosting awareness raising events in their local communities, the Federation Representatives were contributing to international efforts to improve the lives of women in poor communities around the world was also reinforced at this training event.

‘Little people can make a big difference and we all can do something. Sometimes when bad stuff is going on you feel helpless but just talking to a neighbour about it can make a difference.’

Federation Representative

On the next page is the story of Beauty Ara; it was used at the second annual educational training event to demonstrate just how important talking is in changing attitudes and beliefs in developing countries as well.



Photo: G.M.B. Akash/Oxfam

Real life stories

Changing the world from the bottom up.

In South Asia, millions of men and women are coming together to end violence against women. Comprising over 600 organisations and individuals across six countries, the “We Can End Violence Against Women” campaign is known more simply as “We Can”. Its aims? To empower women and men to educate their communities and challenge ingrained cultural views about the acceptability of violence against women, and the practices that stem from them. The vision is of five million such “change makers” reaching 50 million women and men by 2011.

Being a change maker is a brave job. To be highly visible in your community,

working for changes that go against many people’s attitudes and beliefs, takes guts and perseverance.

Beauty Ara is a change maker from Bangladesh: “When We Can started this campaign to inform and mobilise people in the community, I became interested and wanted to get involved. I have seen so much unfairness and violence – early marriage, divorce, dowry, violence – these have all been part of my life, and I don’t want any more women to face these problems so I am now a part of this campaign to stop early marriages in our community. We organise our own sessions and rallies in different areas to make people aware of the issues and I take time to contact and visit families, sometimes setting up community groups. I try to stop early marriages by providing counselling.”

Conclusion

A major part of the success of this project was undoubtedly down to the commitment and passion of the Federation Representatives. During the three years of the project, 70% of the members involved acted as the Federation Representative throughout. The Federation Representatives demonstrated an exceptionally high degree of commitment to the project with, an average of just under 100% attendance at the annual intensive two-and-a-half day educational training events at Denman College (the WI's educational training college). The countless hours of voluntary time and effort the Federation Representatives put into cascading the project's core messages and key learning to new audiences in communities throughout England, Wales and Jersey, have been crucial in raising awareness and understanding of the disproportionate effects of poverty and climate change on poor women, and how gender inequality impedes development and poverty reduction.

There are three key elements that have been identified as the project's three 'pillars of success', enabling the WrW Federation Representatives to remain committed and impassioned throughout the life of the project and allowing the messages from the project to cascade into communities.

First pillar of success: Inform

The most effective way of informing the Federation Representatives about the issues facing poor women in developing countries was for them to hear women recount their experiences and the

positive actions that they were taking to improve their lives, through the medium of film. Oxfam's Sisters on the Planet film was able to awaken the emotions of the Federation Representatives in a manner that facts and figures alone were unable to, because it highlighted our interconnectedness and established a powerful connection with one individual woman.

The film was an excellent tool in highlighting how climate change impacts on poor women and their families and it was used to communicate global interdependence, which remained a key theme throughout the project. The film has been used at over half of all the WrW events that took place over the three years and has been widely distributed by the Federation Representatives to other local WIs and community groups, as many of them are keen to share these women's stories with others.

'Seeing the Sisters on the Planet film was life changing' Gret Woodason, Surrey Federation Representative

This highlights the importance of giving poor women a platform to share with other people around the world their day-to-day life experiences. By giving poor women a voice, particularly through film, people become more empathetic, are angered by the injustice many poor women face and want to take action in support of development efforts around the world to ensure women everywhere are afforded their basic human rights.

Second pillar of success: Inspire

At each annual educational training event, it was important to create a trusting and supportive environment, where each Federation Representative had an opportunity to share with the rest of the group the project activities they had undertaken that year. For example, some of the Federation Representatives used a MDGs educational resource as placemats at their WrW events.

'I have learnt that everyone worked very hard to get the message out to their federation members and I have been impressed by their dedication and enthusiasm.'

'So many different ways of getting the message across.'

This was a great way of inspiring and motivating the group, as they were able to share learning about the type of actions and events that were most effective at getting the message across to both WI and non-WI audiences, as well as reflect on their collective achievement.

'I thoroughly enjoyed the course – I've learnt a lot from everyone else – "true" experiences are very "empowering".'

'...Also, there were several seriously good ideas for events that I fully intend to use – an Africa day is certainly one, and perhaps a water-themed event as well. Here's to another year.'



Members at a WrW event in Northamptonshire.

I feel hugely excited about what I have learnt over the last two days with a super group of like-minded people. It's wonderful to feel that I now have the opportunity to try and pass on this very important message to others, so that I can do my part in making a difference to the world we live in and to try to help women in particular.'
Federation Representatives

In this environment, they were also able to share their own personal stories and experiences that connected with the issues covered in the project.

'If not me, then who?'

Federation Representative

'Women have no idea what is going on in the world with other women, and how women are treated. When tuned into it, it is hard to switch off.'

Jill Wadsworth, Huntingdon and Peterborough Federation Representative

Third pillar of success: Empower

The project was not prescriptive about the type of event that the Federation Representatives used to cascade their learning. Instead, at each annual educational training event and throughout the year, Federation Representatives were given tools, ideas and one-on-one support to help them plan their event. This empowered each individual, as they felt a real sense of ownership over the project. They were able to retain creative ownership over how they channelled their empathy, passion and knowledge to get the message across to others.

For example, Lynda Beck, Northamptonshire's Federation Representative, asked all those who attended her event to carry six litres of water across a bridge, as way of highlighting the strenuous work carried out each day by many women and girls in developing countries and how climate

change could make this even more difficult.

Over the course of the project, a sense of responsibility grew amongst the Federation Representatives with their task of raising awareness about the daily challenges facing women in many parts of the world. This sense of responsibility is likely to remain long after the project, as many of the Federation Representatives have formed links with community organisations and Oxfam's regional networks, and plan to carry on raising awareness locally of how key women's empowerment is to achieving the MDGs and sustainable development, both in the run up to the 2015 deadline, and beyond.

Development efforts and policies by developing countries and international donors that put women's rights as a priority will undoubtedly have a domino effect of reducing poverty and promoting development.



Lynda Beck, (pictured here on the right) and friends highlight the MDGs on International Women's Day.

'I have seen myself what women, often in the toughest circumstances, can achieve for their families and societies if they are given the opportunity. The strength, industry and wisdom of women remain humanity's greatest untapped resource. We simply cannot afford to wait another 100 years to unlock this potential.' Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women on 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, 8th March 2011



Women dancing at the museum centre in Ololosokwan, Tanzania, to greet the arrival of visitors. The centre has been developed by the women's groups in the village. Photo credit: Geoff Sayer/Oxfam

Acknowledgments & endnotes

The NFWI would like to thank all the Federations that took part in the project: Berkshire, Cambridge, Cheshire, Clywd-Denbigh, Derbyshire, Devon, Dorset, East Sussex, East Yorkshire, Glamorgan, Hampshire, Huntingdon and Peterborough, Jersey, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Oxfordshire, Pembrokeshire, Somerset, Suffolk West, Surrey, Teeside, Tyne & Wear South, West Kent, West Sussex, Wiltshire and Worcestershire. Their support, encouragement and commitment were much appreciated.

Thank you also to the WI members and individuals who supported the project by attending or speaking at events, completing questionnaires and encouraging others to spread the message and take action.

Thank you to the staff at Denman College for their help and support at the educational training events.

A very special thank you to all the Federation Representatives who hosted events and spread the word; for their time, energy, passion, opinions and honesty, and for sharing their thoughts and experiences, without which the success of the project would not have been possible.

Thank you to the Department for International Development for providing funding and support. We would also like to thank our project partners, The Everyone Foundation and Oxfam GB for their knowledge, expertise and support throughout the WrW project. Their contributions were invaluable to the success of the project.

Endnotes

- 1 Voices of the Poor (2000), World Bank
- 2 UN Women: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/
- 3 VSO: <http://www.thegodmothers.org.uk/>
- 4 Oxfam: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/issues/gender.html
- 5 Home office, Domestic Violence Unit: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/domestic-violence/>
- 6 Department for International Development: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/intheuk/opinion.asp>
- 7 State of the World Population (2005), United Nations Population Fund
- 8 UN Women: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/
- 9 United Nations Development Programme: <http://www.uneca.org/acpc/publication/docs/UNDP-GENDER-CLIMATE-CHANGE-RESOURCE-GUIDE.pdf>