

## WIDTECH's Small Grants Initiative: Small Investments Bring Large Returns

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The WIDTECH Small Grants Initiative supported efforts of local organizations in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America to integrate women into the development process. The initiative, which started in 1998, complemented WIDTECH's ongoing work in providing technical assistance and training and also supported the broader objectives of fostering independent activities that address gender issues. The small grants were awarded to organizations whose work involved efforts to build capacity, analyze gender issues, disseminate findings, and implement pilot activities to improve the economic, legal, or social status of women. The organizations that received grants fell into three general areas: promotion of women's economic opportunities, promotion of women's legal and political rights, and integration of gender in conservation efforts.

Although the grants described in this bulletin represent only a small sampling of the total awarded, they illustrate the impact that a relatively small investment can have in raising awareness of gender inequities in developing countries and in affording local groups the opportunity to address them.

### PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Grants in the economic growth sector were awarded in Eastern Europe, West Africa, and Asia. Activities ranged from information dissemination to training programs to research.

**Training and Technical Assistance.** Vesta, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Bosnia and Herzegovina, used radio as a medium to raise awareness

about a variety of issues that affect women's daily lives. Vesta started the country's first women's non-profit community radio station. The station, which began broadcasting in October 2001, discusses economic policies as they affect women, as well as issues such as women's property rights and gender-sensitive legislation. It also provides information on business, credit, and training programs for women. The publicity generated by this radio station has enabled Vesta to connect with other women's NGOs in the region. This, in turn, will help the NGOs reach a wider audience in a variety of communities, using VestaRadio as a platform. VestaRadio staff routinely conduct audience research and use the feedback to refine the development of their programs.

Songtaaba, a women's cooperative of shea butter producers in Burkina Faso, received funding to organize a business training workshop for women. The three-day workshop stressed the importance of collective marketing, included discussions of strategies for increasing revenue, and addressed problems related to cross-border commerce in shea butter, which is used in the production of cosmetic products. Songtaaba selected 120 women from eight villages to participate. The workshop was designed to help participants consider marketing factors such as the importance of quality standards and pricing. The women were also organized into networks to respond more effectively to market demands. After the training, a follow-up evaluation was conducted to assess the impact of the workshop. Songtaaba visited participants to ensure that they understood the business practices of trading with shea butter across the West African borders and were applying the business skills that they mastered in the workshop.

In Nepal, a grant supported a local NGO's efforts to develop insurance services for rural women by conducting a needs assessment and, based on the findings, to implement a program to meet those needs. The Center for Micro-Finance (CMF), a Nepali NGO, worked with the Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) to research insurance services needed by rural women and microcredit insurance schemes already in place in other countries. This led to the finding that rural women needed livestock insurance and term life insurance: the former to help women pay back their loans if their livestock died before the loans were paid off, and the latter to help offset the costs of expensive funerals for family members, which drained the women's savings.

Partnering with microfinance institutions and Nepali insurance companies that work with rural women, CMF and CECI initiated a pilot program to provide this insurance to rural women clients of microfinance institutions. CMF staff will continue to work on this effort with the assistance of USAID's Office of Microenterprise Development. The Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest and the Canadian Cooperative Association also have expressed interest in supporting CMF's efforts. The work supported by this grant is filling a gap in the realm of women's microenterprises—for although women's needs in relation to credit and savings programs have been well researched around the world, there has been little research to date on women's needs for and access to insurance programs.

**Studies.** Some of the WIDTECH grants supported research to expose less obvious ways that women are

being disadvantaged in development programs and to provide evidence that can be used to encourage constructive change. One such study took place in Ethiopia, where the NGO Winrock International examined rural women's constraints to accessing appropriate technologies in 11 rural communities. The study assessed the effectiveness of nine Technology Promotion Centers in Ethiopia (which promote the use of technology among rural people to improve their livelihoods), along with governmental, NGO, and higher institutions' rural technology programs, in addressing the particular technology needs for women's work and women's constraints to accessing such technologies.

The study revealed that despite an implicit assumption that technology development is "gender neutral," in reality there is a clear gap in the technology needs of women and what has been developed. Furthermore, dissemination of technology to women has been very low. The report also presents a list of appropriate technologies for women, based on their particular needs and priorities. These include low fuel-use cooking accessories such as solar ovens and ceramic stoves, grinding mills and butter churners for food processing, and weaving looms and wheelbarrows for income-generating activities.

The study has leveraged a national effort to address these problems: The Women's Affairs Office of the Prime Minister intends to use the findings of the study to guide the pilot phase of a program, earmarked with \$9.4 million, that will provide technology training and information to women at the grassroots level throughout Ethiopia.

## PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S LEGAL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

A number of grants supported various organizations' efforts in promoting women's legal and political rights. A grant to the Liberal Women's Brain Pool (LEOS) of Mongolia sponsored events to raise awareness of women's roles and rights with respect to political participation.

The 1998 Third East Asian Women's Forum, organized and hosted by LEOS, was convened to discuss economic, social, and political issues concerning women in

**Countries Awarded Grants under WIDTECH's Small Grants Initiative**

Asia and Near East	Africa	Europe and Eurasia	Latin America and the Caribbean
Nepal	Benin	Albania	Brazil
Mongolia	Burkina Faso	Bosnia	Dominican Republic
	Ethiopia	Poland	Ecuador
	Kenya	Russia	El Salvador
	Senegal	Slovak Republic	Nicaragua
	South Africa		
	Tanzania		
	Uganda		

the region and to promote the participation of East Asian women in global affairs and regional development. LEOS also used grant funds to finance a women's leadership training workshop designed to equip women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become leaders of their communities and, potentially, run for political office. Out of 430 applicants, the LEOS steering committee identified 47 participants, who were selected based on the quality of their application and recommendations from the local government. The three-day training workshop was conducted by one of Mongolia's top women leaders in Parliament. In addition to learning about leadership and political participation through lectures and handouts designed by LEOS specifically for this workshop, women also divided into teams for a mock campaign. In this process, they learned skills such as selecting the best candidate and organizing an election campaign.

## **INTEGRATION OF GENDER ANALYSIS IN CONSERVATION EFFORTS**

Grants addressing the integration of gender into environmental planning were awarded in Central and South America and East Africa. Many of the activities focused on research into how the different roles and priorities of men and women can affect environmental sustainability and conservation efforts. Others used media and events to promote specific conservation efforts.

Two studies showed the importance of conducting a gender analysis in conservation planning. In the Dominican Republic, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales developed a case study of how social mapping can be incorporated into conservation planning. The study took place in the Hispaniolan Pine Forest ecoregion of the Dominican Central Cordillera, identified by the Dominican government and local and international NGOs as a critical conservation zone.

The study revealed that contrary to conventional belief, the massive out-migration of people—the majority of whom are women—from this region may actually be harming ecosystems in this area. One reason for this is that subsistence farming practices, most common among women, are being replaced with the growth of large-scale

agro-enterprises, which threaten local habitats in the area. The study also revealed a need for ongoing consultation with local stakeholders—especially women, who typically are invisible in a community's political and conservation processes—when considering environmental interventions. Other findings revealed a need to emphasize the importance of conservation, including women's roles and rights, to local inhabitants; the need for the professionalization of the Dominican Forestry and Park Services; and the need for entrepreneurial activities, targeting women, that reinforce conservation of the parklands.

For more information about these and other grants awarded under the WIDTECH Small Grants Initiative, contact Catherine Spaur, Small Grants Coordinator: [catherine\\_spaur@dai.com](mailto:catherine_spaur@dai.com).

Fundacion Nicaraguense Pro Desarrollo Comunitario Integral (FUNDECI), a Nicaraguan NGO, also conducted a study examining how men's and women's roles have an impact on the environment, looking at their production of non-timber forest products (NTFPs)—specifically brooms and baskets. In addition, the study looked at how these gender roles affect women and men as conservation stakeholders. To answer these questions, FUNDECI analyzed the significance of NTFPs to household income and whether the extraction of NTFPs is environmentally sustainable. Findings showed that women depend on and manage NTFP-generated household income much more than men. This led to the recommendation that conservation management plans take into account the differences in the ways that men and women use NTFPs. The findings and recommendations were given to the Ministry of the Environment in Nicaragua and to others developing management plans for protected areas in the region.

In Uganda, ACDI/VOCA received a grant to evaluate a voluntary resettlement program conducted by the Environmental Protection and Economic Development (EPED) Project in the Masindi District. This included a close look at the impact on men and women who were resettled and the reasons why the effort was so successful for all stakeholders involved.

The resettlement project took place over three years, successfully relocating 125 households for a total of about 1,000 people. The study identified several reasons for the project's success. First, there were wide-ranging stakeholder consultations in the communities prior to any interventions. In this process, EPED learned the importance of consulting with women on critical family matters. They also realized that new host communities for the relocated population must benefit from the change to avoid hostility or resentment. In this case, host communities in resettlement villages benefited immensely from increased access to safe water, better roads, health services, and other positive outcomes that resulted from the resettlement project.

The project also benefited from allocating land to households, rather than individuals, in the resettlement process. As a result, many married women perceived themselves as "joint" owners of the newly allocated land—providing a good opportunity to redefine and strengthen women's landownership rights. Because of the benefits of resettlement for both men and women, relocated women also reported changes in the household that led to improved household welfare. Finally, the study revealed that the success of conservation and development projects largely depends on interventions that help resource users overcome obstacles to their ability to sustain their livelihoods.

Uhai Lake Forum in Kenya used media and hosted a forum to promote the conservation of Lake Victoria, focusing on the role of women in the management and conservation of Lake Victoria resources. The media component included the production of a video documenting women's roles in the use and conservation of lake resources and the publication of a book discussing issues and lessons learned from earlier forums on Lake Victoria. These will be disseminated widely and used in training workshops. Uhai also convened a regional forum for women elders, researchers, and policy makers to discuss conservation initiatives and to explore ways of improving women's participation in the management of lake resources. For example, women in the area traditionally have been responsible for the processing and marketing of fish.

Now, however, they are struggling to compete with local wholesalers and processors, who have the advantages of modern storage and processing equipment and modern marketing techniques. Another obstacle that specifically affects women's livelihoods is inadequate transportation systems: without roads to transport fish and products that they produce from wetland resources, they must transport their wares to market by foot, which is both laborious and time consuming.

In the course of conducting these activities, Uhai Lake Forum has established a network on gender and conservation in the region, creating links between institutions, NGOs, and communities in East Africa, thus increasing awareness about the importance of local resource conservation in the Lake Victoria region.

### **SMALL GRANTS, LARGE IMPACT**

Over the three-year period of the Small Grants Initiative, WIDTECH awarded 26 grants in 20 countries, with an average amount per grant of \$20,000 over six months. Although these grants covered different sectors and activities, they shared the goal of giving women in developing countries new opportunities to raise awareness of women's needs, roles, and rights and to take action.

WIDTECH supports innovative approaches to technical assistance and training that take into account women's roles and contributions and enhance the effectiveness of USAID's development assistance. The WIDTECH project ends in the third quarter of 2002.

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