

Report From the Field

Crabgrass

691 Minna Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
415.861.5121
crabgrass@gmail.com
www.crabgrass.org

November 2007

Africa Here We Come!

Crabgrass is headed to Africa in 2008! Working with two other American NGO's (A Single Drop and Women's Earth Alliance) and two Kenya organizations (GROOTS Kenya and the Green Belt Movement) Crabgrass is helping organize our most ambitious conference yet: the African Women and Water Conference to be held in Kenya next March. Each US organization brings a unique element to this collaboration. Crabgrass brings its history of three earlier Women and Water conferences in South Asia, and years of water work in India. A Single Drop brings experience in water technology transfer and organizational development from their current project "Safe Water for the Philippines." Women's Earth Alliance brings an international networking and information sharing platform for women environmental advocates, entrepreneurs and com-

Hello Again

This Crabgrass newsletter brings you up to date on our work. We take you to India for the 25th anniversary of the work there, as well as more details about a story with a happy ending concerning ethnic violence. We also share news of the exciting conference on Women and Water being planned in Kenya for March, 2008. The think piece this year is about lessons from Africa. To round out the newsletter there are two articles by Crabgrass board members: one on the UN Millennium Development Goals by Rita Maran and a book review by Marti Roach.



This is a typical street scene in Africa where people line up to buy fresh water, filling up their own containers and returning home with heavy loads.

munity leaders. (See our special website for all the details: www.africanwomenandwater.org. Once we have selected the participants, their bios will be on the website too.)

We have invited African organizations to nominate grassroots women from local Kenyan and other East African communities (as well as a few from Southern and Western Africa) who have a track record of community activism and who live in villages where access to clean water is a significant problem. Jan traveled to Kenya this fall and met with many organizations and individuals, encouraging them to participate. She also finalized arrangements to hold the conference at the Green Belt Training Center on the outskirts of Nairobi. We are very excited to have the involvement of the Green Belt Movement, one of the most prominent women's civil society organizations seeking to empower individuals worldwide to protect the environment and to promote good governance and cultures of peace. Our other African partner, GROOTS Kenya, is a

network of women self-help groups and community organizations formed as a response to inadequate visibility of grassroots women in development and decision-making forums that directly impact them and their communities. GROOTS is deeply rooted in the region and has the ability to offer ongoing support to the conference attendees.

The goal of the conference is to equip African women in local leadership positions to gain access to safe water technologies, build capacity and vocational skills, and support the creation of manageable community solutions to ensure sustainable access to clean water. Upon completion of the conference, participating women will understand and have tools to: 1. Design and implement a community-based water service project from start to finish, 2. Share knowledge and develop peer networks with other women leaders, and 3. Strengthen their leadership and community organizing skills.

We are excited about our model for this conference. It is holistic in that it will not only be sharing prov-

continued on next page

Africa Conference cont. from p. 1

en and appropriate water technologies, but it will offer women valuable organizational skills and strategies to fully step into leadership roles in addressing their communities' water needs. Local African women who have launched successful projects relating to water resources and community organizing will be both the facilitators and trainers of the conference. The role of the US organizations is strictly as coordinators.

The African Women and Water conference does not end after five days. Our commitment is to facilitate ongoing collaboration in the form of technical support, information-sharing and relationship-building. We intend to grant seed money to any teams ready to launch the projects they've developed during the conference. We will also request that each team offer a training of the technology they learned at the conference to a neighboring community – thereby “funding forward.” This will also strengthen the women's skills and their confidence as trainers, adding more value and credibility to their work. A Single Drop (ASD) is preparing to be available for onsite visits to the women's projects twice a year in the first year, or as needed. ASD will also foster relationships between training organizations and the trainees for future assistance. Women's Earth Alliance (WEA) will be responsible for a comprehensive follow-up process by way of an ongoing communication platform via internet. This may include publicizing the work of our women teams in the media, connecting them with further funding support, and sharing their success stories with a global audience.

Our intention is to replicate this conference model in other regions of Africa in the coming years. Conference evaluations and feedback from the participants will be key to improving the conference format. We also plan to distribute a conference summary report to the

participants, trainers, funders, and other interested parties within six weeks after the conference. (Let us know if you want to receive the report.) We plan to invite the conference participants to take on an advisory role for future conferences as a way of building continuity and providing a structure for maintaining relationships among the group.

In order to make the conference relevant to the participants we have asked each of them to fill out a survey about the water and sanitation situation in their communities. We know that the problem is vast. According to the World Health Organization in Geneva, an estimated one billion people live without clean water, and 2.6 billion people lack sanitation facilities. This sample of answers illustrates how serious the problem of safe water really is in East Africa. These quotes are heart-breaking and informative.

Asked where she gets her water, a Kenyan woman answered: “Being an informal settlement, the women do not own the land they occupy, hence they are squatters. However we do have stagnant ponds left over from excavated stone quarries where run-off water collects during the wet seasons. The women use the water from the stagnant ponds to wash their clothes and provide for their animals. Some of the poorest women even use the water for cooking as they cannot afford to pay for water from vendors or water kiosks. These quarries are over 6 kms away. The nearby riv-



er water is heavily contaminated from sewage effluents and pesticides from flower farms upriver.”

A response from Nigeria: “Poor people in our community have resorted to sourcing water from a nearby unprotected stream which is shared by animals. Worst still, cart pushers who collect wastes from households dispose of most of these wastes in the river.”

One respondent doing HIV/AIDS support work said: “Home caregiving work has been challenging as our region has no rivers, springs or dams, and we rely on rainwater. We have to buy water in 20 liter plastic jerricans. So the women have joined together, pooled their money and bought water tanks to harvest rainwater that now supports 83 households. It has reduced the amount of time spent to look for water, and cut down on the cost of water so money can be used for other household needs. Families have also begun kitchen gardens to enhance food security and quality.”

In Western Kenya, one applicant told us: “In our area the main source of water is Lake Victoria. Considering that the lake water is multipurpose – used for leisure, for agricultural production, fishing, and as a dumping site, lake water is not safe for drinking. I carry water for domestic use from the lake, and buy drinking water from a central well managed by women. We all carry the water on our heads.” Another person from the same area responded: “We carry our water either from the river or the lake, but both are 20 km away from the village. Some people use donkeys but very few.”

“Yes, we carry water from a shallow, impermanent well that has been dug in the river bank about 5 km away. Most of the time we use donkeys to carry water from the river. The water sinks after the rainy season so that water is not safe. The well is also open, and it's not easy to maintain clean water as

continued on page 3

many people access water there.”

To end this on a positive note, here is one woman’s idea of how to solve the water crisis in her community: “Our vision is to build a well at a central place which will be managed by women to provide water in the community, reducing the burden of women having to walk for long distances looking for water. This will be an income generating activity in the community, as well as means of outreaching the community on issues of water and environmental hygiene.” Hopefully this is the kind of project we will see coming out of our conference.

A Message of Support from Dr. Wangari Maathai

Founder of Green Belt Movement
2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner

As we pass the halfway mark to reaching the UN Millennium Development Goals and celebrate the third year in the UN Decade for Action: Water for Life, it is a key moment to redouble our effort to reaching these important targets. I applaud the commitment of the African Women and Water Conference organizers in creating and supporting a community of women to share and strengthen their skills as waterkeepers. Not only will it be bringing our African sisters together to build their capacity, but it is essential that women transfer sustainable technologies and strategies that have had proven success in providing safe water at the community level.

It is my pleasure to support the upcoming African Women and Water Conference. On behalf of the Green Belt Movement, we are honored to be in partnership as conference hosts and are excited to welcome the women to our training facilities where we can share our programs and best practices.

Lessons From Africa

By Fran Peavey

Oprah Winfrey says we should all do something to help Africa. She didn’t exactly say why so I can only guess at her logic. All the peoples of the world originated in Africa, according to anthropology as taught in most Western schools. And yet the way world economics and racism have worked up until now, most African countries are at the lowest end of the development spectrum.

I’ve been to Africa three times: once as a tourist to Egypt, and the second and third times were work trips to South Africa. The gifts Africa has given me are enormous. I learned a lot about apartheid - the belief system and set of practices which denied black South Africans their human rights, as well as ownership of land. When we took a group of Balkan young people to South Africa to learn about reconciliation, those who had been shooting at each other two years before now sat together listening to the wisdom of the black South Africans. We learned about the native African concept of ubuntu that inspired Nelson Mandela to propose the reconciliation process for South Africa, where the victim or the victim’s family is able to confront the person or persons who were victimizers. It is based on the belief in the possibility that people can profoundly change. Something transformative happens often within the victim when a victim confronts the individual or group of individuals responsible for violence in their life. And something happens to the victimizers, too, as they are forced to listen to the effects of the violence they perpetrated. The whole context is enriched. In South Africa the trials were broadcast over national television every night, so that everyone could follow the process as it unfolded.

Ubuntu also teaches that there

“The rain does not recognize anyone as a friend; it drenches all equally.” Nigerian proverb

“Sun and and rain are for all.” Ethiopian proverb

“Flowing water does not return.” Ugandan proverb

“Do not throw away the water in your pot simply because you have heard the rain.” Nigerian proverb

is no good person in a bad society. We are all washed by the same water when it comes to attitudes and practices in the society. This is why the reconciliation process is designed to help the victims as well as the victimizers grow beyond that relationship from the past. It also allowed both whites and blacks to confront their own violence and grow beyond it. The Balkan young people heard about how black Africans had seen white people as only temporarily racist, not permanently stained. And that it was not only whites that abused blacks. There was also a lot of black on black violence in the apartheid years.

In the United States, there are people trying to introduce concepts of ubuntu into our civil justice system. Evelyn Messenger of Link TV has used television for US victims to confront the victimizers before they are released from jail. Community leaders gather in a community center, connected by closed-circuit television to the jail, and can dialog with the perpetrators of crime. “Don’t you come around here threatening our family anymore. We don’t need that in our community.” They are given the opportunity to listen to each other.

We all have a lot to learn from Africa. Crabgrass has barely begun.

Time to Celebrate

by Fran Peavey

The Sankat Mochan Foundation (SMF), the group we have supported for 25 years in their work to clean the Ganges River in India, is celebrating its Silver Jubilee Anniversary this year. Catherine Porter and I went to Varanasi to join the celebration and to continue offering our support for their work. We know that Ganga, the holiest of Indian rivers, is highly polluted near many cities on its banks, primarily due to sewage being dumped into the river. Zero discharge of pollutants in Ganga is the ultimate goal of the Swatcha Ganga (Clean Ganges) campaign. Prof. V.B. Mishra, charismatic SMF foundation leader affectionately called Mahantji, describes the project this way: “SMF believes that faith and commitment in Gangaji on one side and science and technology on the other are like two parallel banks of the river. They don’t meet. But both these banks must be firm and strong. They are essential to protect the river and solve the problem of pollution.”

Founded in 1982 the Foundation launched the Swatcha Ganga (Clean Ganges) Campaign and started the programme of creating mass awareness about the causes of Ganga pollution and the urgency to clean her. The Foundation has assumed different roles (catalytic agent, watchdog, expert, and activist) over the years as it uses its extremely limited resources to stop the abuse of mother Ganga. It has been able to bring the issue of Ganga pollution to national and global attention. It has been successful in working with the local government to present a non-electrical appropriate solution to clean Ganga’s pollution in Varanasi utilizing gravity flow and evaporation ponds. This solution has grassroot support and is presently waiting for the Government of India’s sanction for its implementation. In July and again in November Mahantji was invited to



Fran Peavey and Dr. V. B. Mishra at the 25th celebration of the Swatcha Ganga campaign in Varanasi.

Delhi to meet with the Prime Minister about the river-cleaning work.

To celebrate the anniversary, a two day conference was held where cultural events were woven between technical and political contributions. Catherine commented: “This year was about bringing our actions for Ganga out of the courts and back into the public arena – holding a big celebration event to garner media attention, bring out high level local officials, and have experts show up to highlight the technologies the Foundation is promoting. The presence of Friends of the Ganges from the US, Australia and Sweden lent an air of international attention to the event.”

Maybe we weren’t water people when we started those many years ago, but Ganga has changed us all. By working with the staff and directors each year to help them be stronger and clearer in their work, we have become close friends and it was great to celebrate with them.

**“Even though the
ground does not have
a visible mouth, it is
always drinking water.”**

Nigerian proverb

Review of *The Real Wealth of Nations* by Riane Eisler, 2007

By Marti Roach, Crabgrass Board Member

Riane Eisler’s new book, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, is the third book of a trilogy of books on the topic of how societies can organize in either a Dominator mode or a Partnership mode. The first of this trilogy was *The Chalice and the Blade*, published in 1988; the second, *The Partnership Way* came out in 1998.

In *Real Wealth*, we have reason to celebrate and a cause for hope because she describes a new vision of how to define wealth and calls for a movement to demand Caring Economics—a system that values what is really important to societies. Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* deified “the market” as the best mechanism for producing and distributing the necessities of life. As Eisler explains, this led to flawed economic models that devalue activities that fall outside of the market’s parameters of buying and selling.

Eisler presents an analysis of what has gone wrong in our current ways of valuing economic activity. She shows how the great problems of our time – such as poverty, inequality, war, terrorism, and environmental degradation – are due largely to flawed economic systems that set the wrong priorities. Both capitalism and socialism have been incapable of addressing the economic problems endemic to modern societies. She wryly notes that we can have a high productivity indicator in our economic system that is caused by tobacco sales or oil spill clean ups—not exactly the measure of a healthy society.

Because our conventional economic systems fail to value and support the most essential human work of caring and care giving, basic human needs are increasingly neglected. This leads to despair, social conflicts and ecological destruction.

Eisler defines real wealth as

continued on page 6

An Inspiring Story From Varanasi

by Fran Peavey

This is a story of conflict transformation. In these times when the newspapers are full of stories of ethnic conflict, we wanted to share this upbeat story from our friends in India. Sometimes in life, an event which is intended to cause harm actually results in positive effect. Such was the case when the Sankat Mochan Temple was bombed in 2006. Our dear friend Dr. V.B. Mishra, who heads up the Sankat Mochan Foundation, is also the venerable priest (mahant) of the Sankat Mochan Temple (known as the Hanumanji Temple.) On March 7, 2006 shortly after 6 p.m. there was a bombing at this prestigious Hindu temple. The response by Mahantji kept a dangerous situation from getting out of hand. People had been killed and injured at the temple, and it was full of smoke. More bombs were found around the city, and intercepted. Hindus expected the normal evening prayers would have to be cancelled. Everything was tense.

Mahantji insisted that the prayers must begin as usual at 9 p.m and went to the temple. He convinced the police to open the gate, and a hundred people came in to join the evening prayers – called arati. All the media filmed this ritual, and these images brought comfort across the city and in the nearby villages.

Just as prayers were ending, they were informed that the head of the Congress Party and Parliament member Sonia Gandhi (wife of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi who was assassinated while in office) had arrived at the airport, and was on her way to the temple. About 12:45 a.m. Ms. Gandhi arrived at the main gate, with all the press. Mahantji's eldest son Bedu led them in. Ms. Gandhi went to the site of the bombing. She saw the bloodstains, the broken things. News was that four people had

died, and more had been injured.

Ms. Gandhi then paid her respects to the Hindu god Hanumanji and joined Mahantji. He asked her: "What should we do? There are no police present. The magistrate, the commissioner and other officers are all out of station. The only thing I am sure about is that the temple services should not be obstructed. We will start again at 4:30 a.m." He assured her that they would manage to keep things under control. "We'll keep the peace."

Ms. Gandhi's presence there was comforting to all present and to the whole nation. She visited the temple, the hospital, and other bomb sites before returning to the airport. By 4 a.m. she was on her way back to Delhi in an Air Force plane. She remarked as she left on the plane, "It's very surprising. From one end to the other I don't see any police in the city, yet the city is peaceful."

That next morning others started arriving: a union official, chief minister, religious leaders, activists. The Mufti of Varanasi, head of the city's Muslims came, as did Swami Agnivesh, a prominent progressive Hindu religious activist. Javed Akhtar, the famous film lyricist married to the actress and activist, Shabana Azmi - both Muslims - was very emotional. He said, "You've saved the city and the country."

It was assumed at this time that the bombings were the work of Muslim extremists. So all the political parties sent people to see Mahantji. People wanted to be seen on television at the scene of the bombing. Vinay Katiydar, from the conservative Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party came and said, "I will sit in the temple. We'll start something here (meaning trouble)." Mahantji replied: "Nothing doing, this is a place of worship. Don't do that."

On the day after the bombing (March 8) there was a total bund,

or closure of the city, including the Muslim area. Amazingly, on the 9th everything returned to normal. It was a protest against the blast, a complete strike, but not a political one. There had never been anything like that before. Varanasi protested in its own way, in silence.

People appreciated the way Mahantji had responded to the crisis. The Mufti came back to the temple on the 9th, went to worship and took charanamrit. (Charanamrit is the holy water used to bathe the Hindu deity.) In strict Islam, this is a controversial act, since Islam forbids idol worship. The Mufti had gone out of his way to support the cultural forms of Hinduism. He and Mahantji subsequently went to many meetings together

As Mahantji tells the story, he has become dear to the Muslim community. "They are giving me more time and attention than the Hindus. You should have seen how they came, thousands of them, to hear us. I used to say at the meetings: 'Ek dindar imandar musalman ek bedin beimandar hindu selakh guna achchha hai — One truly religious, sincere, honest Muslim is 100,000 times better than an irreligious, insincere, and dishonest Hindu.' And the Mufti turned it the other way around and said it back to me."

Not only did Mahantji's quick thinking save the city from communal riots between Hindus and Muslims, it renewed his connection to Ms. Gandhi, and allowed the Swatcha Ganga campaign to build stronger ties with the Federal Government.

Thank-yous

Amy Mar again updated our mailing labels and Abby Zimberg helped get the newsletter onto these pages. Our mailing crew gathered on a Saturday morning to stuff envelopes and get it on its way to you, our Crabgrass family. We also depend on the steadfast guidance of our board members and thank them for their service to Crabgrass.

Crabgrass Addresses UN Millennium Development Goals

Initiated in 2000 and continuing vigorously since then, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a singularly significant program of action. The MDGs, with governments' promised cooperation, actually have the capability to improve life for most if not all of the earth's inhabitants, including those in the U.S. Our country was one of the 192 UN member states that adopted the MDGs, each realistically developed and carefully planned to encompass the present and future needs of the people living everywhere in the world, be they in urban or rural areas or in well-developed or least-developed countries.

There are eight goals, which in shortened headline form, are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

The adoption of this ambitious program came with staged deadlines that take into account such practical matters as feasibility and funding. Some of the eight goals are more immediately realizable than others. And, to be sure, some of the countries have put far less effort behind their commitment to fulfilling implementation goals and deadlines than have others. For example, the US, as stated by President Bush, agreed to put 0.07% of the U.S. GNP towards the Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding. To date the U.S. has come nowhere close at less than 0.02%.

This brief commentary focuses only on the seventh MDG "Ensure environmental sustainability" As part of the seventh MDG, each government commits to "Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation." Per capita water availability is reaching critical thresholds in many parts of the world, with the additional issues of desertification and soil deterioration in Sub-Saharan African.

Crabgrass is actively cooperating with other NGO's in organizing the African Women and Water Conference to address this goal. The Conference, taking place in Kenya early in 2008, seeks to build relationships and self-reliance to support technology transfer that will make safe water more of a reality in East Africa.

An invaluable resource: *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals* (2005; U.N. Development Programme/Earthscan UK&USA) is a report of the UN Millennium Project to the UN Secretary-General by Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs of Columbia University. In the report's readable 300-plus pages is presented a breakdown of each component of the MDG's, including civil society's partnership, gender equality, and scaling up service delivery.

Book Review cont. from page 4

"the contributions of people and nature" and she advocates for the development of economic systems that give support to people, demonstrating the right underlying values for a healthy society. How did we create a system where child care workers, taking care of our most precious societal resource, are compensated at \$10.00 an hour and plumbers are valued at \$50-\$90.00 an hour? We now know that early care affects our brain development. Shouldn't this knowledge translate into social and economic policies to ensure the best brain development for our future generations?

She describes how to put her model of Caring Economics into practice through new government and business policies and practices, using innovative economic indicators that incorporate caregiving activities. There are inspiring examples in the book of efforts that are now underway to document the true value of social contributions.

This is a timely book that is underscoring the fact that the possibility now exists for a major shift in how we measure what matters in the economic systems of the world. She has practical ways for us all to be involved in advocating for this shift, and has a web site where people can get involved in her efforts to build the movement for a Caring Economics. (www.partnershipway.org).

Need to do any last-minute shopping?

Crabgrass encourages you to purchase our hand-knitted socks made by women in Serbia. Trace your foot and send the outline along with



LASTAVICA

\$16 for adult and \$10 for baby socks. They come in a variety of colors and designs. You can also order potholders at \$8 each. Include \$3 for postage. Send check to: Crabgrass, 691 Minna St., San Francisco, CA 94103.

