

FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP
A learning experience with peasant and gatherer women in Brazil

Moema L. Viezzer
Paraná, Brazil

Fifth Annual Dame Nita Barrow Lecture

Toronto, November 2001

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on Transformative Learning**

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Annual Dame Nita Barrow Lecture

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The Dame Nita Barrow Distinguished Visitorship in Women in Development and Community Transformation was launched by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) in 1997. The Visitorship recognizes the remarkable contributions of Dame Nita Barrow, former Governor-General of Barbados and graduate of the University of Toronto.

The Distinguished Visitorship creates an opportunity for a woman from the “majority world” to be in residence at the University for six months each year working in the Centre for Women’s Studies in Education and the Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology. Each visitor offers a course that calls on her particular area of interest and experience, dealing with the current issues of women in development, and community transformation in a global context and from a Southern perspective.

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Distinguished Dame Nita Barrow Visitor



DAME NITA BARROW

(1916-1995)

*“Lost is a true daughter of the soil”
- Erskine Sandiford, Former Prime Minister of Barbados*

The late Dame Nita Barrow, former Governor-General of Barbados, studied nursing at the University of Toronto from 1944 to 1948.

She served at various times as the world wide President of the Young Women’s Christian Association, the World President of the International Council for Adult Education, President of the World Council of Churches, and Barbados Ambassador to the United Nations. A member of the Global Fund for Women’s Board of Directors, Dame Nita was also a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Mission to South Africa in 1986 and the Convenor of the NGO Forum for Women at the United Nations World Congress on Women in Nairobi in 1985. In all these capacities Dame Nita championed the causes of justice, equality, peace, and the empowerment of women. With high government office, diplomacy, and statescraft, she linked grass roots initiatives and loyalties and was a tower of strength to local and world-wide movements inspired by her spirit of activism, compassion, brilliance, common sense and joy.

Dame Nita’s life was an outstanding example of dedication, commitment and selfless service to women, men and children, especially the poor, dispossessed and disadvantaged.

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Abstract

Nowadays, rural areas are undergoing many changes, with paved roads, modern cars, trucks, banks, agencies in rural properties, rural telephone systems, big farms producing food on a large scale, small farmers processing food for industries, and gatherer populations selling goods abroad. Viezzer shows that Brazilian peasant and gatherer women have a very direct relationship to the “international economy.” She argues that women’s conditions of life and their commitments have allowed them to emerge as inspirational leaders of a new politics which comes *from* women but is *for* the whole of humanity. This is a global politics, which enhances relations of equity between women and men in harmony with nature. These basic considerations are enough to justify transformative learning specially for and from peasant and gatherer women who are leaders or potential leaders in their communities. Everyone who believes that “*another world is possible*” knows that this is the new paradigm of transformative learning for every leader, no matter what place, space and level she occupies in the world, in this important moment of great transformations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women have a very special relationship to the international economy. On a worldwide basis, according to data provided by the United Nations, women, while being 51% of the world population, are responsible for 70% of the total working hours of humankind (including waged work, domestic and family chores and community management activities). Yet women earn only 10% of the wages and control scarcely 1% of the means of production. They represent only 4% of the officials within formal power structures. Likewise, women represent 75% of people living in poverty and constitute 66% of the illiterate population in the world. If we consider the situation of peasant and gatherer women, we find that illiteracy, poverty and lack of control of the means of production is worse still. Brazil has its own unique history and social situation, yet women there share common experiences with women from other parts of the world.

It is the Brazilian rural context in which I situate the learning experience of feminist transformative leadership among peasant and gatherer women. When I make reference to peasant women, I am speaking about small agricultural producers who harvest natural products from the fields and forests and process them without destroying or damaging the soil and the trees. Women from the rural areas and tropical forests of Brazil are generally

known to be among the poorest of the poor women, with little access to information, education, health, transportation and other public services. Little information is available about what these women actually contribute to the continuation of human and planetary life. But careful study reveals them as potential leaders of global social transformation.

Peasant and gatherer women deserve special attention nationally and internationally. Their conditions of life and their commitments have allowed them to emerge as inspirational leaders of a new politics which comes *from* women but is *for* the whole of humanity. This is a global politics, which searches for balance between the *production* of goods and services and the *reproduction* of life and, as a logical and natural consequence, enhances relations of equity between women and men in harmony with nature. These basic considerations are enough to justify transformative learning specially for and from peasant and gatherer women who are leaders or potential leaders in their communities.

The experience shared here is part of a reflection on the “Changing the World with Rural Women” leadership training project instituted by Rede Mulher de Educação, a non-governmental organization which I founded in Brazil in 1980. The project developed and acted upon the concept of feminist transformative leadership, which was found to be a better and more effective form of analysis than the old women in development and gender and development approaches.

Who we are and what we did

Who are the women involved in the “Changing the World” project? The project involved participation by three groups associated with Rede Mulher de Educação:

1. Secretaria da Mulher Extrativista do CNS (Secretariat of Gatherer Women of the National Council of Rubber Latex Gatherers).
2. Associação Artesanal Rural, ‘Mãos Mineiras’ (Rural Handicraft Association, ‘Hands for Minas’).
3. Comissão Estatal das Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais da FETAEP - Federação de Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Paraná (State Commission for Rural Women Workers of the Federation of Agricultural Workers of Parana).

Let me provide a little more detail on the groups and their members:

1. Gatherer women who participated in the “Changing the World” project are affiliated with the National Council of Latex Rubber Gatherers - CNS. The Gatherer Women’s Secretariat of the CNS was created in 1995. It is now represented by a general coordinator, who is also part of the executive directorate of CNS and who works with a state coordinator in each one of the eight states of the Amazon Region. The main tasks of the Gatherer Women Secretariat are to promote consciousness about women’s rights, to monitor the implementation of policies for women, to facilitate the exercise of women’s citizenship, to build women’s capacity to improve the quality of their lives and to strengthen their organizations.

Gatherer women live in the Brazilian tropical forests of the Amazon Region in areas controlled by associations of gatherers, through the National Gatherers' Reserves Program (Reservas Extrativistas). Their objective is to preserve and cultivate the forests, living along with them. Gatherers harvest latex from the seringueiras trees, break and process coconuts of babaçu and Brazil nuts, harvest the açaí fruit and make houses with the palm of buriti. Gatherers formed association as a first step towards receiving land from the national government. Lands granted to these associations are large territories belonging to the federal government or properties of big landowners, cattle ranchers and lumber companies. The federal government expropriates and indemnifies these large landowners in order to force them to abandon the area and their exploitation of the ecosystem. Members of the gatherers' associations do not become owners of the land, but receive special titles which allow them to remain on the lands with protection and to gather and produce in the forests.

Women rubber gatherers, fishers, coconut splitters, flour makers, palm splitters and handicraft artisans are in the front-line of persons and communities who preserve and cultivate the life-conditions of their tropical forest communities. It is not an easy task since, in most cases, the reserves do not have electricity, running water, suitable health services, education or transportation.

It is important to outline that the Amazon Region represents more than one third of the whole Brazilian territory. There has been a considerable increase in the size and number of gatherers' reserves, within which populations organize into gatherers' associations and live from the cultivation and protection of the forests. All these aspects make gatherer women's organizations unique sites for potential transformative leadership in the forest.

2. The rural artisanal women of Minas Gerais were drawn from a group of 35 families living in the rural area of a small municipality in the mountains of the southern region of the state. Twelve years earlier, they had started a project to improve their incomes and their living conditions. They make handicraft products out of recycled paper and clothes, they process herbs and medicinal plants and produce homemade sweets and jam. They are organized in a cooperative and 20% of the funds raised through the sale of their products (nationally and internationally) go to the common fund of their organization. The other 80% is proportionally distributed between producers and sellers.

In this way, the Associação Mãos Mineiras develops women's capacity to raise funds using their traditional knowledge and taking care of the environment for a better quality of life. This association has also enrolled as a partner in the world market: they sell part of their products to a network called Cooperation for the Third World, which buys products directly from producers and sells them in 250 stores in Italy.

3. The peasant women of Paraná State are rural producers who earn their living from household agriculture. Frequently they must confront neighbours who are big

monoculture producers of soy beans, wheat and corn who often end up swallowing the women's small properties. Rural migration is particularly high in the area and few young people want to remain on the land. Most of the time, only adults and elderly people remain on the farms.

Peasants of the Paraná State are organized into 277 unions, grouped together in the Federation of Agricultural Producers from Paraná (FETAEP). In 1993, the State Commission of Peasant Women (CEMTRA) was created in order to work more specifically with women in the ten regions of Paraná covered by FETAEP. CEMTRA has already introduced changes and affirmative actions in the peasant unions for a more equitable participation of men and women.

How we worked together: The process of the project

The official starting point of the Changing the World project was a *Training Workshop for Project Management*. We say official, because many contacts and negotiation processes had gone on among all the participants during the previous six months to decide the main orientation and content of the local sub-projects, the choice of participants and the first draft of each sub-project. The informal processes which preceded the first training workshop brought into a common space the expectations and decisions of all. In March 2000, in the city of Toledo/Paraná, participants met to review the objectives, contents, time tables and budgets of each sub-project as well as of the project as a whole. As a result, a *Common Agenda* was written and contracts were signed between Rede Mulher de Educação and each of the three institutions. The first disbursement was delivered to start the execution of the local sub-projects and instructions were given for monitoring activities and budget control as well as communication through e-mail, phone and fax. Information from these sub-projects helped us to produce a leadership training kit containing ten booklets, a calendar with dates specially celebrated by women, and a CD with five radio programs and a video.

In the State of Paraná, the chosen theme was women's participation in rural labor unions linked to FETAEP. Interviews were conducted with leaders of the Federation. Six peasant women leaders were taught participatory research methods and worked as assistants to the principal researcher. They, together with another 25 people trained for that purpose, interviewed rural women and men through the application of questionnaires. In a period of six months, 454 persons were surveyed, among them, men, women, labour unions directors, municipal authorities and unionized workers. The results indicated that the effective participation of women in the labor unions requires structural changes in the organizations. Further, the surveys indicated that a change of mentality and traditional attitudes was necessary concerning the sharing of information, power, technology and capacity-building.

In Minas Gerais, the participatory project on women's work was implemented by the Associação Rural Artesanal Mãos Mineiras in partnership with the Women's Studies Nucleus of the University of Juiz de Fora. The results reinforced studies already conducted: the simple fact that women are organized and earn more money does not represent, necessarily, advancement in the transformation of gender relations. But the research

showed also that relations between men and women from Manejo, the locality where this study took place, noticeably changed once women organized. For example, they do not have to depend on their fathers or husbands to purchase necessary items, to pay for studies or to get adequate medical service for them and for the children. They may negotiate sharing of domestic work. They have increased their autonomy and receive more recognition for the work they do. Organized women have also improved their relationships with other groups and have entered into webs of social solidarity.

In Tocantins, the Secretariat of Gatherer Women used the project to start to recover the history of gatherer women's organizing efforts during the past 15 years, from the creation of the first women gathers' association in Tocantins. This initial map of women's groups showed the diversity as well as the common paths in the development of women's struggles. In the process of the research, there arose many questions about the situation of gatherer women, their links with trade unions, gatherers' associations, autonomous movements of women, churches, NGOs. This first survey about organized women facing the present process of devastation in the State of Tocantins was very important also to understanding the multiple initiatives of groups dedicated to preservation of people's lives and the environment within this unique ecological zone.

Let us now consider the principles by which we worked, the challenges addressed by this project and the lessons we learned.

II. PRINCIPLES OF FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Rural Brazilian Context

In Brazil, the rural areas and the tropical forests are going nowadays through profound changes which have a deep impact on women. Land conflicts, struggle against genetically modified food, significant positive experiences of conservation of the forests, production of medical plants and herbs, production of organic food which significantly changes the diet of rural and urban consumers ... all of these are part of the 'women's world' of Brazil's rural areas.

The number of women working in agriculture is very high. In Brazil, 35.8 million people live in rural areas and more than half are women. Over 60% of women living in rural areas are 'household agricultural workers'. Only 20% earn a salary. More than half of the women begin to work at the harvest before they are ten years old. The working hours vary from 12 to 16 hours a day. An average of 60% of women working in rural areas get pregnant between 15 and 21 years old. About 50% conceive more than five children, while 20% bear more than nine children. Most rural women do not know any way of preventing pregnancy, even when they do not want to become pregnant (Data from IBGE – Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics and CONTAG - Confederation of Workers in Agriculture, 1999).

Peasant and gatherer women are actively engaged in creating their own organizations at all levels. Some of the national organizations of women include, the National Articulation of Rural Women Workers – ANMTR, an autonomous organization of women with branches

in almost all states of Brazil; the National Women's Commission of the National Confederation of Workers, representative of the 27 State Federations of Rural Trade Unions; the Gender Nucleus coordinator of the National Movement of the Landless People and the Gatherer Women's Secretariat of the National Council of Rubber Latex Gatherers. These offer strong potential for changing the present situation and strengthening women's leadership in Brazil.

The growing importance of the peasant and gatherer women's movements in the last five years is evident during the marches and camps organized every March 8th, International Woman's Day. In the year 2000, the strength of peasant and gatherer women's movements could be seen in a still more expressive way during the "Daisies March" (Marcha das Margaridas) on August 10th, the anniversary of the death of Margarida Alves, a rural labor union leader murdered in 1990. Around 20,000 rural women workers came from the north and south of the country to Brasilia to take part in this national march, sometimes as far as a two or three day trip, showing to the world what the "*World March of Women Against Poverty and Sexual Violence*" meant for them. They presented to different ministries their concerns, issues and proposals dealing with rural development, labour rights, social benefits for women, education, generation of income, reproductive health and prevention of violence against women.

All these facts constitute motivating grounds for engaging in the process of learning for feminist transformative leadership among peasant and gatherer women. This was precisely the main objective of our project, which was also a privileged moment for its participants to reflect about their own situation.

What is feminist transformative leadership?

More than ever, a new way of exercising leadership is needed in order to build a more humane world and to face the main tendencies in the international scenario at the beginning of this century: economic globalization, violence and war. The women's movement (within which the feminist movement is a specific current), is largely recognized as the major social movement of the world in this moment of history, along with the environmental movement. In the last decades, it showed clearly that it aims to transform human relations and to transform development agendas around the world. Women have demonstrated that "sharing power increases power," and fought against tactics of "divide and rule." As such, feminism became a source of new theoretical approaches, new strategies and new visions of leadership (AWID 1999).

The concept of feminist transformative leadership arose in this context. But, what does it mean?

First of all, it means much more than putting women in positions of power, even if it is important to have women as promoters of change in power positions. It is transformative in the sense that it challenges the existing structures of power; it is inclusive, in the sense that it takes into account the needs, interests and points of view of the majority of the marginalized and poor in society; it is integral, in the sense that it attends to all forms of social injustice.

Feminist transformative leadership can be exercised, given impulse or defended by women and men, young or old. It is not by chance that in the various countries of the world, groups of men are now organizing themselves to put an end to the institutionalized violence against women. Nor is it by chance that within the international development agencies a growing number of men lead initiatives and actions committed to the promotion of human rights and equality between women and men.

What, then, is a feminist leader? Participants in the conference, *Global Development of Feminist Leadership* held in South Africa in 1997, pointed out the qualities of transformative leadership. Feminist transformative leaders work to eliminate all kinds of social inequalities. They put gender analysis at the centre of their attention. They take affirmative actions which lead to the transformation of the present inequalities between women and man in all forms and at all levels of society (AWID 1999). Members of Rede Mulher de Educação have additionally identified the following characteristics of feminist transformative leadership:

- It challenges the idea of the “innate” leader. Women and men can learn to be leaders, committed with self-knowledge and with values, attitudes and postures related to the humanization and democratization of social relations.
- Leadership can be exercised in many ways and with different attitudes. It is something plural, structured and situational and must take into account the environment and movements in which it develops and the characteristics of organizations and people with whom it is related. It is not necessarily a permanent exercise of one single person in a community or social group. According to the challenge to be faced, a leader can be one or another person who embodies the most appropriate conditions at a given moment.
- Transformative leadership is organically connected to groups, communities and institutions. It perpetually builds and rebuilds its vision of society and social processes.
- The subjective aspects of the exercise of leadership also play a central role and are as important as learning to analyse contexts, develop strategic visions and use instruments of action. When not worked out, these subjective aspects often generate deep contradictions and structural problems, preventing the advance of the desired transformation. A large number of social leaders speak about transformation, but live with authoritative or centralizing habits. More than ever, it is necessary to produce learning processes that reveal people in their totality, in their multiple dimensions and with their complex needs.

Power ... for what?

There are many levels and forms in the exercise of power. Even if it is hard to believe, empowerment for many rural Brazilian women must begin with being recognized as citizens of our country. Inequalities faced by women who live isolated in rural areas and in

the forests are linked with very basic questions.

Until recently, women were not granted recognition as “peasants” but were registered as “domestics” or “housekeepers.” This was also written in their marriage certificates, one of the few documents they possess. When they get old or sick, they have no right to a pension. Their only treasures are the many children and grandchildren they have borne and raised. Will the syndicate or union help? Most women have never been to a meeting, because it was understood that only men should go, as only men were legally affiliated. Politics? It was considered as a dirty thing, out of women’s universe, because rural women were literally ruled out of the society’s recognized spheres of power. Even the national census figures hide inequalities.

Many women who are already local leaders do not possess identity documents. They must get them before they are able to attain formal power. Without documents, women leaders face all kinds of difficulties when they have to deal with situations such as travelling for meetings from one state to another, asking for loans, opening bank accounts and acting as coordinators in their local associations and networks. The situation is so serious that in the last five years, peasant and gatherer women’s national organizations have implemented campaigns with the slogan: “No Woman Without Documents.” This first step is indispensable to other empowerment processes, which include women’s participation in local, regional, national and international spheres of public power.

In Brazil, a few rural women have been elected to the National Congress and the state parliaments. And rural women who attain power face many risks. For example, a peasant woman leader of the “Landless People Movement” was recently elected mayor of a municipality in the state of Mato Grosso. She was assassinated by local reactionary forces.

Transformative women leaders do not want power just for power. They want a model of power which allows them to exercise leadership in a more horizontal and less competitive way, based on group acknowledgement and trust. They need to be able to delegate responsibilities, to communicate, to create networks and to foster a good environment for working together.

It is not easy to break down the many barriers of prejudice. Courage and patience are required. Women who occupy coordinating positions in syndicates and associations are often pointed out as “vulgar intruders.” During election periods, some women are listed as candidates only because there is a legal obligation to include a certain percentage of women. When this percentage is not fulfilled, men reason that women are not qualified for this kind of responsibility. Many men say that women only know how to “administer the bed and the oven.” These arrogant attitudes frighten many women and prevent them from applying for positions where they could exercise leadership.

III. CHALLENGES TO FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

In Brazil, women represent 41% of the national labour force and this situation opens new possibilities for women. But it represents also new requirements for those who want to join the labour market. For rural women the double and triple days are well known realities.

Besides taking care of the family and housework, women work hard on the land itself, take care of domestic animals and extract products from the forest for their families' subsistence.

Nowadays, women perceive that they urgently need to be recognized as citizens in order to realize themselves as people, to obtain their own rights and social benefits, to participate in and occupy new spaces in communities and organizations. But then, the inevitable question comes up: how to deal with so many roles and functions without losing the joy of life? This is a road without return and it changes many things in personal, family and social life. It requires much new learning in order to decide what is more important; to plan and think in the short or long term; to avoid physical, mental and emotional stress; to have discipline in order to maintain equilibrium between personal concerns, professional tasks and social and political activities. All this must be done without losing the connection with other women rooted in their rural origins.

Beside that, rural women need family support to succeed in transformative leadership. Social roles and functions attributed to men and women, husband and wife, son and daughter, come naturally to the day-to-day agenda. How can women who seek leadership deal with the unequal division of labour in the home? How can family members learn to share tasks inside and outside of the domestic unit? Who earns money for the maintenance of the family? Who does the cooking, cleaning and washing? Who takes care of the children and elders? Who is responsible for family health care? Who attends to the kids' scholarly activities? Who pays the bills? Who participates in communitarian events, religious activities, meetings and assemblies of the syndicate, cooperative or association?

To implement needed changes in the division of labour means, indeed, "a household revolution." For many men, it is not easy to share activities linked to the household and the reproduction of life. For many women, it is difficult to divide the responsibilities they have assumed during their whole lives as an inheritance from their foremothers. Such a change requires that rural men discover the pleasures of responsible paternity. Women and the community at large must value men for assuming it. Women, likewise, need to be valued for assuming functions of leadership outside of the home.

Self-esteem

The theme of self-esteem deserved special attention. Most rural women are still ashamed to present themselves as peasants or gatherers. Actually, they have many reasons for that, particularly because of the way they are treated when they go to the city for different purposes.

"It is very important to raise our self-esteem. We are the ones who put good food on the table of that lawyer who is going to judge our cause, of that medical doctor who will nurse our sickness, of that teacher who will teach our children. And that is great! We are the people who help to sustain this country. Because no one can live without food" (Jacy Vans Perin, coordinator of CEMTRA/FETAEP).

Three main causes of women's low self-esteem were pointed out during the course of our project: sexism, bad working conditions and difficulty in the exercise of citizenship.

Sexism is still very strong in the rural area. Men, educated to be the “family heads,” have difficulty sharing family responsibilities as recognized in the Brazilian national constitution. This attitude is repeated in the gender relations inside rural peasants’ organizations.

Domestic violence exists in rural areas, even though not much is mentioned about it. And not only physical violence exists. We met women who never leave the countryside but are infected with AIDS or STD due to their husbands’ sexual infidelity during visits to the city to buy and sell products or to participate in meetings of trade unions, associations and cooperatives.

Work conditions in rural areas and in the forests are particularly precarious. In 1998, the National Institute for Economic Applied Research (IPEA) revealed that 80% of women rural workers did not receive any kind of payment for their work, which instead is considered only as “cooperation” with the paid agriculture activities done by men. Most children also go unpaid for their labour.

As for the exercise of citizenship, women lack satisfaction of the basic needs and the means to satisfy these needs, such as good land to cultivate, credit, access to technology, potable water, schools and health services. Besides all these aspects, they are inadequately attended to when asking for services to which they have rights as citizens. Often, in bank offices or public institutions, women are not attended to if they are not accompanied by the “family chief,” even when they are unmarried.

The increase of self-esteem means, undoubtedly, a great deal for women and brings implicitly the necessity to continuously nourish the physical, mental, emotional, socio-communitarian and spiritual dimensions of human beings.

Communication

Rural women face a great challenge in relation to personal communication and the use of communication media. Many rural women abstain from speaking in public, because they fear being subjected to men’s mockery and contempt. They are also afraid of being misunderstood and so they keep quiet in public places, even if they are able to express themselves very well in women’s groups and in their communities.

Access to information is also very difficult for peasant and gatherer women. For women living in the forests, travelling to participate in the activities of their organizations is a kind of adventure. In the forests, travelling is often done by canoes or motorboats, with donkeys or mules, or by foot. And women have always to plan and negotiate about what to do with children and household tasks while they are away.

New technologies in communication are still far from the daily lives of most rural Brazilian women. Few have access to telephone and fax. Even fewer have access to the internet. Many of those who do have access to computers lack the training required to use them and the technical assistance required to ensure good functioning, especially in areas where electricity is precarious. Finally, for peasant and gatherer women, learning to be internet

navigators should not cause them to lose direct contact with their rural origins and with their organizations. To best serve their own communities, they cannot become mere advisors to outside agencies.

There are other challenges to communication in rural areas. The relation of rural women with time, their codes of language, their ways of sharing ideas are quite different from those of women in the urban areas. All this should be taken into account in training programs to ensure good results for transformative leaders.

Conflicts and negotiations

The Changing the World with Rural Women Project made clear some special situations of women in rural areas and gatherers' reserves. For example, peasant and gatherer women have had to dispute scarce possessions such as land and potable water. They have dealt with diverging interests within their families, within their associations and also within public and private institutions which deal with agrarian questions.

Moreover, various women leaders from the rural areas and tropical forests have been involved in conflicts which directly threaten their lives. Some participants of the project must be continuously accompanied or escorted because they have been targeted with death threats and a price of three, five and even ten thousand dollars has been put on their heads.

Such is the case of Maria de Carvalho Rosas-Mariquinha. She is a gatherer woman and a leader who lives in the Amazon Region, in the State of Pará. Large-scale commercial farmers who still live in the place which is now the Gatherer Project called Praia Alta Piranha have put a "price" on her head. In one of our meetings, she explained her situation and asked:

"How can my life be valued for such a price? I don't want to die. I want to live. I have two children to raise. I have my husband. I love working with our communities. I know that many people rely on me. And I don't want to leave the community because, if I leave, they will soon point out and kill others. We need an end to this war and this murdering of people who protect the forests and populations living in the forests."

In these kinds of conflicts which include death threats, what does "negotiation" mean for transformative leaders? Negotiation may not be possible with killers. But it is possible and necessary within peasant and gatherer families, who usually ask menaced leaders to give up their responsibilities and walk away. It is possible and necessary within the organizations which, many times, don't have any strategy for leaders whose lives are under threat. Negotiation is also possible with public institutions involved in land conflicts. But such institutions have been slow to implement decisions in the past, such as to give compensation to the big landowners and oblige them to leave the territory immediately. With the police, negotiations are needed, since they are responsible for security. But often, policemen are paid for "keeping the peace" only on behalf of big landowners and the gunmen under their command.

Income generation

In Brazil, tax incentives for “household agriculture” are receding while the cost of living increases. There is a need to raise earnings, but the size of farms is not increasing. What to do?

It is interesting to note that many crops and small scale manufactured goods which were considered “women’s things” and were produced only for household consumption, were transformed in the 1980s into small profitable local businesses: sweets, canned goods, handicrafts, ponds for fish, vegetable gardens, fruit gardens. This is a new phenomenon, very important for women rural leaders and for transformative learning. In Brazil, in 1992, the earnings of the small farmers coming from the traditional “household agriculture” were twice as high as earnings from non-agricultural production for the global market, such as tourism and handicrafts. In 2000, the earnings from these agricultural activities, which are mainly “female labor,” exceeded the earnings from “traditional” agriculture and brought approximately US \$500,000,000 (five hundred million U.S. dollars) into household economies.

Nowadays, labor and land are not enough to get results. Women are forced to enter the market to get more earning. The market requires capital, access to technology, organization and planning. This is a challenging task for women in rural areas, especially for women leaders, since the majority of them do not have access to an advanced level of instruction and have only limited knowledge of business.

Women and New Technologies

New technologies may benefit the local population or can, instead, kill their secular knowledge and know-how, especially women’s traditional skills. The internet has been useful for organizing in rural areas. In Brazil, many new technologies are more beneficial to the rich who can buy land, heavy machinery, “engineered” seeds and their accompanying pesticides and fungicides. They are the few who have access to bank loans. Small farming families, on the contrary, face an increasingly difficult economic situation due to land impoverishment, lack of technical assistance and lack of access to loans. The consequence is massive rural-urban migration. In the state of Paraná, for example, in a period of 10 years, 97,000 small farms were abandoned or sold to big landowners and more than half a million of people migrated to the cities.

Raimunda Gomes da Silva, Coordinator of the Women Gatherer Secretariat of CNS stated that,

Here, people thought it was enough to struggle in order to conquer land. We didn’t think about conquering resources for planning and planting, for health and education. Today we have to do all this. And today technology is advanced. Years before, in order to write a letter, you used a typewriter. Today, everything has to be done with a computer. Before, we used to go to the bank and there were many people attending. Today, even if the queue is long, there is only one cashier. Because there is a computer. What about those who used to work there before? Unemployed. Technology advanced, but also fired many people from work. Do you imagine what will happen with our sons and grandsons if we don’t struggle

for an education appropriate to our reality?

Peasant and gatherer women leaders also face directly two other questions linked to the new technologies in the field of food: agro-toxics and transgenic food. Brazil is the third largest consumer of agro-toxins in the world. According to the World Health Organization, for each registered case of poisoning with agro-toxins some 50 others go unreported. Agro-toxins harm not only the people who spray them, but also women and men who fulfill other tasks in the field, and even those who wash the clothes used by people who spray agro-toxins. Some women have lost their fingernails twice or even three times, as a result of washing the clothes of their husbands or sons who had sprayed agro-toxins in the fields. Scientific studies unveiled other harmful effects caused by the use of agro-toxins such as miscarriages and various kinds of cancer. Research done in 1997 in the state of Paraná, showed that in 90% of the cases studied, mothers' milk was partially poisoned because of the intake of food containing residues of agrochemical products.

The other question concerns transgenic food. In the United States, in 2000, some 56 agricultural transgenic products were already catalogued. In Brazil, it is widely known that there are transgenic plantations in many areas. Studies and campaigns against this matter are ongoing, mostly by NGOS and social movements. They reveal the consequences of using transgenic food, particularly in matters of human reproduction. The pesticides that are used on these engineered crops are known to kill and deform unborn children. The majority of rural workers do not have authority to control the use of these products in the workplace. But they do avoid using agro-toxins and transgenic seeds on their own small farms.

What kind of technological future do women want? While corporations try to impose transgenic seeds on Brazil, which is already flooded with agro-toxins in different regions, organic products are making their way on the market as well. Markets for organic products are still narrow in Brazil: organic crops represent only 2% of agricultural production. But the growing awareness about the consequences of pollution caused by chemical-intensive and transgenic agriculture opens the possibility for the growth of other markets. Low impact and low cost technology is used in organic agriculture and it is much easier to involve women and young people from a sustainable agriculture perspective.

In Brazil, small farms represent 85% of the rural properties. More than half are cultivated exclusively by family members. But the prices of the products on the market generally do not include the value of the "invisible work" of women and children.

Rural women have difficulties getting acquainted with new technologies for several reasons. First of all, technology is viewed as a 'man's tool.' Training courses in technical matters take place while women are taking care of the children and of the household. Moreover, the language and the general behavior of the technical assistance institutions are directed to men, the "chiefs" of the family. Women are only taught "housewife's tasks:" dress-making, knitting, embroidery, drapery and culinary art. Very little technical assistance is offered to women in order to improve specific household productive activities, such as rearing domestic animals, gardening, planting fruit trees and processing medicinal herbs. Why? Because women's work is not considered as having value even though it

contributes immensely to families' subsistence and well-being.

For transformative feminist leaders, all these factors show the importance of documenting and making visible what women are doing in agriculture. Brazilian women in the groups involved in this project have specific knowledge and practices which are very close to the concept of sustainable agriculture, based on environment protection and quality of life for all. Women are more and more conscious that before investing in a new technology they need to ask themselves: it is a "clean technology?" Is it based on knowledge of producers with respect towards community experiences and the environment? Is it capable of bringing economic benefits for both women and men?

IV. CONCLUSION

These observations arose from some of the many "women's talks" we engaged in during the tenure of the project. Learning how to become a transformative leader includes: acquiring new consciousness, incorporating new habits, developing abilities and participating in decision making processes. All these issues are important for women's empowerment, but they often conflict with the current culture of male domination and the global market.

The concept of feminist transformative leadership calls for a review of men's leadership, as part of our conviction that "*another world is possible.*" We are all invited - women and men - to exercise this 'other way of being' by sharing power, knowledge, pleasure and well-being with new gender relations based on equal human rights, social transformation and reciprocity.

*New Times bring...
New Themes, that demand...
New Practices, based upon...
New Values, in order to achieve...
New Conquests, which mean...
New Challenges...
for more equitable, enriching, healthy and happy relations.*

Lessons Learned

*"People of rural areas need more, you know? Because, at the same time that a leader passes on what she learned, she needs herself more information, more training and more learning. She needs to know what is happening in the world, what are other women doing. She needs to meet other people to evaluate herself and to know if what she is doing will work out effectively. She needs to share experiences for better leadership learning"
(Marucha Vetorazzi, Paraná).*

Peasant and gatherer women constitute a very special social group, but they deal with the same basic situations of the majority of women in the world. Looking at the patriarchal system that historically gives much more importance to men than to women, we pointed out numerous lessons that are interrelated and nurture each other. Some of the lessons

learned in the 'Changing the World with Rural Women' project include:

- No one becomes a leader all of a sudden and for ever. Transformative leaders are permanent learners. Their commitment must also be permanent to ensure their continued growth and their facilitation of others' transformative learning.
- Peasant and gatherer women need special attention, since they are so isolated.
- Learning how to manage projects, including the monitoring of activities and control of finances, *is a challenge* for rural organizations, still not very familiar with this kind of complexity and especially for rural women assuming power positions.
- The development of strategies for the transformation of leadership at the top of the organizations - the directors who define the course of activities - *is a sine qua non* condition for the development of women's leadership in the organizations and institutions to which they belong.
- Synergy of interests and the establishment of clear and explicit relations at interpersonal, institutional and inter-institutional levels are fundamental for the development of transformation leadership.
- Diagnoses of rural women's reality is the first step to ensure realistic learning processes. It is the best way to establish strategies for transformative leadership.
- Dialogue, exchange and networking are sources of richness and are necessary to understand the great dimension of the proposal that women and men of the rural areas are making for transformative leadership.
- Work in remote areas via telephone, fax and internet and in areas with poor conditions for communication, is a serious challenge that rural women face and must solve for their own benefits.
- Feminist transformative leaders can facilitate rural women's capacity to confront the world problems related to the production and consumption of food and the protection of environment. Neo-liberal social and political structures, including structural adjustment programmes, are a part of the sexist violence that women face in their daily lives.
- Feminist transformative leadership is an issue pertinent also for institutions that provide technical support, as well as those that define public policies related to rural realities. It is crucial for these institutions to learn how to make visible women and their needs, interests, potentialities and to have the courage to build new strategies for women and men dealing with agriculture and the protection of the tropical forests.
- Networks, forums, lobbies of peasant and gatherer women need more support from social movements and NGOs. The inclusion of peasant and gatherer women groups with their specific approaches, needs and interests is still a challenge for the feminist

movement.

- Social relations of gender have to be worked in to all aspects of social reality. It is crucial for men to embrace women's interests and issues. In that way, the process of learning new leadership patterns can increase equality.
- Dialogue and networking amongst social actors committed to the advance of real democracy are necessary steps to the processes of facilitating and encouraging transformative relations between women and men.
- We have to make visible the work done in isolated local areas by transformative leaders and groups, so that our mosaic of actions, little by little is multiplied and crystallized into another design of harmonious social relations of gender at a global level.
- Stereotypes that make gender issues boring and old, or extremely disturbing, have to be transformed into something current, necessary, beneficial, attractive and - why not? - exciting, so that men and women amplify their mutual potentialities while being together in the world.
- Transformative learning for feminist leadership must become a process for exchanging and sharing successes, mistakes, advances, doubts and new discoveries.

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MOEMA LIBERA VIEZZER is a Brazilian feminist, with a Master of Sociology and Adult Education, specializing in Popular Education and leadership learning. Her work focuses mainly on themes of gender relations and environmental education. Moema is known worldwide for her concern for feminist and women's movements and she has contributed to the start-up and development of several websites, forums, councils and local, national and international NGOs. In 1980, Moema founded Rede Mulher de Educação (RME), a Brazilian women's network dedicated to popular feminist education. She was a co-founder of the Brazilian Instituto ECOAR para a Cidadania (São Paulo/Brazil), an NGO dedicated to Environmental Education and she is a co-founder of the Instituto de Comunicação Solidária (Paraná/Brazil), dedicated to building the capacity of grassroots groups and social movements dealing with communication media. Among her publications the following are most well-known: *Let me speak... Domitila* (Siglo XXI Editores, 1976 – translated into 18 languages); *Women Are Not The Problem* (Ed. Cortez, São Paulo, 1992); *Latin American Manual for Environmental Education*, with Omar Ovalles and Rachel Trajber (Ed. Global, São Paulo, 1995). She is also organizer and co-author of many types of educational materials (documentary videos, radio programs, booklets, periodicals), among which the most outstanding are the training manual on "Gender Relations in the Cycle of a Project" (Rede Mulher de Educação, São Paulo, 1995) and the KIT of educational materials, "Changing the World with Rural Women" (Rede Mulher de Educação, São Paulo, 2001). She has received honourable mentions from the International Council for Adult Education and the Baha'i Foundation for her contributions to development of popular education and citizenship action. Presently, Moema is director of her own consulting enterprise MV Consultoria and works as a national and international consultant. She is also coordinator of Programs at the Instituto de Comunicacao Solidaria. She lives with her family in Toledo, Paraná, Brazil.