

The meeting room was packed with color, mostly women and some men, bustling with energy, armed with technology, and ready to network and share their experiences. The introductions traveled around the table (and the globe) with representatives from India, Senegal, Guinea, Namibia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Cambodia, Albania, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Spain, Finland, Australia, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Austria and more. At my turn, I chimed in “Berkshire Women for Women Worldwide, Western Massachusetts.” Only one of the two US groups present. The introduction reported in 2009 an increase of 53% in proposals and 63% in grant requests as compared to the previous year; awards of 10.5 million dollars were granted to 13 initiatives in 18 countries and territories. Their mission: “to channel expertise and resources into grants for initiatives to support the implementation of laws, policies and action plans. Grantees, comprising governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN Country Teams, engage diverse actors, especially women’s groups, as well as human rights organizations, men’s and youth groups, indigenous and rural communities, religious and traditional leaders, and the media.”

To demonstrate the accomplishments gained through the Fund’s strategic support, three grantees presented their programs:

- Lawyers Collective: Women’s Rights Initiative in India (Indira Jaising)
- Center for Domestic Violence Prevention/ Raising Voices in Uganda (Tina Musuya)
- Women’s Association “Refleksioine”/ Network against Gender Violence and Trafficking in Albania (Gulden Turkoz-Cosslett)

In brief, the *Women’s Rights Initiative* is grounded in the belief that law is a tool of nonviolent resistance and social transformation. Their grant was used to work towards implementing the country’s first Domestic Violence law. A follow-up grant allowed them to study the law in action to determine if it was working and being implemented accordingly.

*Raising Voices* in Uganda mobilizes local communities to prevent violence against women and children. Gender aspects of power and the link between violence against women and HIV/AIDS are explored with an innovative methodology termed SASA: Start, Awareness, Support, and Action.

*Refleksione* aims to influence the policy environment on domestic violence by putting in place legal framework and creating civil society initiatives. Their grant first concentrated efforts on implementing Albania’s newly adopted Law on DV at the local level through the governmental, judicial and educational institutions and NGOs and to develop a coordinated response to prevent and eliminate DV. An extension of the grant allows them to improve and upscale this with provision of services, establishment of counseling centers and shelters, develop an assessment system and a strategy to engage men and boys as change agents in ending violence against women and girls.

It was an energizing experience to hear the ground-breaking work being done in these countries and to know that our Berkshire voice is heard in unison with many others to end violence against women.