

International Korner

Center for International Social Work Studies

Written by: Cari A. Carter

3/4/2002

Community Organization

International Women's Day March 8th, 2002

Community organizing is one aspect of social work that easily expands beyond the profession itself. It reaches around the globe to create communities with a passionate concern for the welfare of its people. This can be seen in one of the up and coming movements focused on the concept of globalization. Globalization has been defined as "international economic integration", but its reach has extended beyond just economics. In a statement made regarding the mass protest against the WTO (World Trade Organization) in Seattle in 1999, the finance minister of South Africa, Trevor Manuel said "*One of the most important lessons of Seattle is that there are now two visions of globalization on offer, one led by commerce and one led by social activism.*" Social workers and others around the world are creating local, national and international movements to address the socio-economic issues of globalization. In addition to these movements, volunteers and professionals nationally and internationally are developing community based programs to combat the effects of globalization. With the combination of community building and social action, community organizers are igniting social change throughout the world.

In honor of *International Women's Day* the following profiles are of women who are organizing around the numerous issues of globalization. The names may not be familiar to you but their passion is shared by all who believe creating empowered communities will lead to social change.

Profiles of "Everyday" Organizers

Vandana Shiva is an Indian environmental activist, educated as a physicist and director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy in Delhi. Shiva explains the concept of globalization in terms of rice, "*Rice...to many of the people of Asia, is life itself. This is why the ongoing corporatization of rice varieties is such a tragedy. Rice must be owned and controlled by the small farmers – the people – and not by foreign corporations.*" The continuous corporatization of traditional agricultural crops has left many small farmers around the world, including the United States, without jobs due to the lower prices of the corporate producers. Shiva and a group of small farmers took on a Texas corporation that acquired a U.S. patent for a specific type of rice grown in India for centuries. A combination of community wide awareness

and protests won a small victory for the farmers of India by limiting the Texas corporation to a much narrower patent. Shiva considers this a victory but notes that the farmers are going to continue to oppose any other foreign patents on their traditional crops. The next move for Shiva and the farmers may be toward a European corporation that has asked for a patent for the *neem* tree, which is a source of traditional Indian medicines. Shiva concludes with a statement illustrating the slow but intense effects of corporate globalization: *“People have survived the Third World because in spite of the wealth that has been taken from them...they still have biodiversity. They still have that last resource in the form of seed, medicinal plants, fodder, which allowed them access to production. It allowed them to meet their needs of health and nutrition. Now this last resource of the poor, who had been left deprived by the last round of colonization, is also being taken over.”*

Naomi Klein is a Canadian journalist and former ‘consumerist’. Klein is the author of a “corporate-busting manifesto” called *No Logo*. *No Logo* is a no nonsense critique of the direction globalization is taking. Klein’s summarizes her manifesto as *“...the relentless commercialization symbolized by logos, ‘the closest thing we have to an international language,’ are deadening our culture, and the mounting corporate power behind them is slowly warping society.”* In other words, Klein’s stance addresses the ever increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor around the world caused by inequitable trade policies that are led by large corporations. Anti-globalization activist and organizers from around the world have used this manifesto as a guidebook to activism. Klein states that the challenge of the movement is *“...to prove globalization is built on ...destroying protections to health, housing, schools. We need to focus not on trade, but on trade-offs.”* Profiles are from *UTNE Reader* Nov-Dec 2001 issue, article entitled **Another World is Possible** by J. Walljasper.

Needed: Community Organizing Skills

The anti-globalization movement has many different faces, ranging from economics to environmentalism. Throughout the world, communities are mobilizing to react to the effects of globalization. The action used to describe these efforts is **community development**, a term most often used when referring to international community work. The goals of community organizing and community development are the same; catalyst for change, assist communities in defining needs and empowering communities. However, community development takes on a community building approach while community organizing is often associated with a social action approach. For example Peace Corp volunteers in the Philippines work with communities on business advising, program development, educational/prevention activities and search for funding sources. In Ecuador, volunteers work at a grass-roots level to assist communities with development needs such as nutritional deficiencies, school drop-out rates, high unemployment, environmental exploitation (200,000 *hectares* of forest are destroyed each year) and economic problems associated to political instability. In Nicaragua, development efforts have been targeted on issues around employment, over half of the population in the country is unemployed or underemployed. The aforementioned issues can be linked to the process of globalization, just take a look at the label on the shirt you are wearing and you will see one of these countries name **“made in _____”**. From the

efforts of Peace Corps volunteers to the activism of “Everyday Organizers”, social work, specifically the skills of community organizers, plays an active role in the up and coming movement targeting globalization. In an article entitled *Research and Popular Movements: Igniting ‘Seeds of Fire’* by Elizabeth Whitmore and Maureen Wilson, the authors describe the anti-globalization movement using a metaphor associated with the biological reaction of pine cones exposed to heat. The cone is known to reproduce best following a fire, creating “seeds of fire”. The following description of globalization takes in account these “seeds of fire”:

“As the economic globalization process, led by transnational corporations, burns community life and destroy the social fabric of our societies, new forms or variations of old ones are coming to life. History tells us that ‘hard times’ can produce conflict and turn people against each other, or they can bring people together, in a recognition that collective action is the only way to survive. If we liken the current forces of globalization of capital to a vast forest fire sweeping the globe and destroying established social and political relations in its wake, we can think of popular movements as ‘seeds of fire’, germinating and growing most effectively in just such an environment. Ironically, the almost total domination of ‘free’ markets and transnational corporations may be an ideal environment for nurturing transitional popular movements.”

The “seeds of fire” are what make organizers, by finding ways to ignite a community to save itself from exploitation and/or neglect. Whether your passion is neighborhood organizing, development of community based programs or social activism, you will easily find a place in the international community. *“Workers, community people, women, environmental and civil rights groups, and church-based and ecumenical coalitions are working to address political and social issues that are arising as the globalization process speeds ahead”* (Whitmore and Wilson).

Reading Suggestions:

1. Globalization, Social Work and Social Welfare
Journal: European Journal of Social Work
Author: R. Pugh and N. Gould
2. Globalization, Social Exclusion and the Possibilities for Global Social Work and Welfare
Journal: European Journal of Social Work
Author: S. Penna, I. Paylor and J. Washington
3. Labor Versus Globalization
Journal: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science
Author: G. Ross
4. Community Work: Partnerships in a Global Context
Journal: Community Development Journal
Author: H. Babacan and N. Gopalkrishnan
5. Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction From the Bottom Up (book)
Author: J. Brecher and T. Costello

References:

- Whitmore, E. and Wilson, M. (1999) Research and Popular Movements: Igniting Seeds of Fire. *Social Development Issues* 21 (1) p. 19-28.
- Wood, B.D. (2000) The Globalization Question. (Delegation of the European Commission) *Europe*, p.12.
- Brecher, J., Costello, T. and Smith, B. (2000) Globalization From Below: International Solidarity is the Key to Consolidating the Legacy of Seattle. *The Nation* v.27 i.18 p.19.
- www.peacecorps.org *Community Development-* 3/4/2002, *Nicaragua-*3/4/2002, *Ecuador-*3/4/2002, and *Philippines* -3/4/2002