

DIMITRA Relaunch Workshop – 24 October 2002
Speech of Ms H el ene Ryckmans

Representative of the Network ‘ Palabras ‘ of organisation ‘ Le Monde selon les Femmes’ and President of the Women and Development Commission delivered at the King Baudouin Foundation, Brussels,

‘‘The importance of working in North-South-South networks’’

I would like to thank the Dimitra project for having invited me to this meeting of the Dimitra network and ask all the participants to accept my apologies for not having been a more active participant this year as I was two years ago. The culprit is my workload.

I would like to focus my contribution on the fundamental necessity to network in order to develop partnerships.

Networking has some specific characteristics:

- Interactivity a) between actors : from North and South, NGOs and officials ; b) between levels of intervention macro-meso or micro.
- Flexibility of functioning
- And ideally a non-hierarchical system.

Women's networks

Furthermore, I think there are elements of the feminist working methods that are specific to feminist networks, like commitment and everyday experiences, and highlighting the common stakes for South/North and South/South.

These specificities are

- visibility
- social and political recognition
- women’s rights
- the will for change for equality between women and men
- taking gender into account systematically and cross-sectorally.

Why are people showing interest in these networks today?

In a global society, where information circulates in many different ways and very fast we are aware of the urgent need to increase not only the amount of exchanges but also the relevance of these exchanges.

It means that information circulates on the most crucial issues: respect for the physical integrity of women, ending the social justice denial which unfortunately is still a daily reality for women, in the South and the North.

Networks against one-track thinking

This necessity is, on the contrary, the fruit of globalisation, of the furious acceleration of economic and goods exchange. It pushes us to increase exchanges between people and ideas to fight against the one-track thinking which is currently dominating the planet.

The networks are there to give sense to the commitment. They help define:

- lobbying, common arguments for North and South, precise lines of argument, relayed from the South towards the North and from the North towards the South.
- citizen’s action, lobby, which suggests lines of action for changing mentalities and policies.

And these South/South and North/South networks are particularly lively amongst women, I am thinking of course of the Dimitra network and of the network of the world women's march in 2000, against poverty and violence against women which articulates the local, the national and the international.

Two networks: the Women and Development Commission (Commission Femmes et Développement) and the Palabras network

The Women and Development Commission (WDC), implemented in 1994, is a consultative body to the Belgian Secretary of State at the Development Cooperation. Its objective is promote taking into account the gender aspect in the projects and cooperation policies of the Belgian international cooperation.

The mission of the WDC is to develop opinions on the development and creation of an international cooperation policy concerning women and development, to emit advice on its own initiative on any question related to the Women and Development sector, to support initiatives and activities in this sector through coordination, concertation and exchange of information and promoting public awareness-raising activities on the women and development issues.

The WDC is in some ways a Belgian North/South network, it offers a unique place for exchanging views and dialogue between experts, development NGOs, women's NGOs, Universities, the DGIC and the Cabinet for Development Cooperation.

The WDC plays a triple role:

- An advisory role and cooperation policy for taking gender into account. It gives legally required advice on the political and strategic directions of the Belgian Cooperation.
- A role of interpellator, of reflection and of guidance (lobbying), to strengthen (notably by training) integrating gender and the inclusion of a gender equality aspect in the projects and programmes of the cooperation.
- A role as public awareness raiser, from the reflections and struggles of the women of the South. Hence the WDC has recently focused on the role of Afghan women in the reconstruction of the country, on the world march and its follow-up at the level of the Belgian Parliament (by organising the women's Parliament on 8 March), by raising awareness amongst decision-makers of sustainable development or children in war with a gender perspective.

The WDC is presently concerned with creating a base of people and women's associations from the South, able to contribute to and develop cooperation strategies in Belgium's partner countries so that no one can say "there are no women".

The Palabras network is an initiative of le Monde selon les femmes (M/F), it results from the journal of the same name.

The Palabras journal proposes positive experience exchanges led by women's groups from French-speaking Africa, Latin America and South Europe. Each time sharing the same theme the women's lives of groups are presented by the women themselves. It involves visualising the positive, strategies and innovation. To ensure internal strengthening through an external view and to allow for an understanding of the central and identical stakes that all the women come up against: discrimination, difficulties in controlling resources, resistance to inequality, mechanisms of social change.

The informal network is involved in a partnership process:

- getting to know ourselves (we organise annual meetings)
- getting to know ourselves again in the same process and in the desire for a common policy

- fix the terms of the cooperation : where do we want to go together and how?

From this network 'le Monde selon les femmes' intends to create a learning and community action network. The apprenticeship comes through the sharing of information and training. The action comes about through the implementation of common actions and campaigns to go beyond words and create another world, a world according to women.

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Palabras journal

Number 0 : "Quand une femme dit non c'est non" ("*When a woman says no it's no*") resumes stories from Argentina and Belgium.

Number 1 : "Cultiver l'égalité aux champs" ("*Cultivating equality in the field*") includes stories from Brazil, Senegal, the Dominican Republic and presentations of French and Belgian associations.

Number 2 : "Sans travail, pas d'argent; sans argent pas d'indépendance" ("*Without work, no money, without money no independence*") including stories from Belgium, Burkina Faso and l'Uruguay, with the presentation of an association from Peru.

Number 3 : "La liberté prend corps" ("*Freedom takes shape*") includes stories from Morocco, France, from Equador, with presentations of associations from Belgium, Congo, Bolivia and Burkina Faso

Number 4 : "Le droit d'avoir des droits" ("*The right to have rights*") reprend des récits du Chili, du Portugal, du Burkina Faso, de Bolivie et du Mali.

Number 5 : "Les femmes dans la ville - De l'oppression à l'expression" ("*Women in the city – from oppression to expression*") takes up stories from Spain, Mexico, Burkina Faso and Cameroon.

Number 6 : "Organisations et réseaux d'appui aux femmes" ("*Support organisations and networks for women*") includes stories from Colombia and from Burkina Faso

Number 7 : "Marche mondiale des femmes" ("*World women's march*") presents in a short and incisive format the mobilisations against violence and poverty that took place in various of Palabras' partner groups.

Number 8 : "L'art au féminin" ("*Feminine art*") presents different associations active in the domain of art and creates the link with equality (Portugal, Haïti, Nicaragua, Senegal).

Number 9 : « Formations : des portes s'ouvrent » ("*Training: opening doors*") describes training for women and gender equality training (Chile, Spain, Democratic Republic of Congo).

Number 10 : Femmes en migration ("*Women in migration*") proposes stories of migrant women: in the South and towards the North (with stories of migrant women from the Dominican Republic and Niger to Belgium).
