World poverty – like global environmental change and a viable order of states – is both a political and a scientific challenge, writes Prof B.C. NINDI in this article contextualising the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

World events during the closing years of the 1980s and early 1990s have done a good deal to turn our basic perceptions of the shape and future of the planet and its people upside down. Though scarcely amounting to the “end of history” proclaimed in some quarters, the abrupt conclusion of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet state involved a more dramatic transformation of the basic parameters of world power and ideology than anyone expected this side of the millennium. Together with the increasingly awesome signals of the non-sustainability of current patterns of global resource use, these new factors in the international scene have reshaped the context in which we have to confront the other challenge to the future of the Earth. That is, the continuing and, in some respects, growing patterns of problems of human misery and localised environmental catastrophe, which we have become accustomed to but can no longer ignore.

The challenge of world poverty, like that of global environmental change and the construction of a minimally viable order in the international system of states, is both a political and a scientific challenge. Perhaps more clearly than the other issues, the problem of sustainable development is not one to which there are obvious solutions – because of vested interests. It is not a matter of it being there for the taking if only we can build up sufficient “political will” and impose a sufficient measure of collective survival strategy. To an important extent, even now after witnessing the palpable success of a few poor Asian countries raising themselves most of the way to “developed” status in the last two generations, we do not know how to bring about development and put an end to mass poverty. We do know though that it is not just a matter of trying. The challenge to the understanding is every bit as real as the challenge to the will.

Among those countries that have democratised as part of the “Third
Wave” are some with extreme levels of economic inequality. South Africa is one of these countries and it holds the undesirable record of having the most unequal distribution of income. Given that incomes in South Africa are distributed very unequally, it might be expected that the establishment of representative democracy would result in the adoption of redistributive policies. Yet overall inequality has not declined since the first democratic elections in 1994. This situation consequently has serious implications for gender, sustainable development, the environment.

The electoral and party system provides uneven pressure for redistribution. The fact that poor South Africans have the vote ensures that some areas of public policy do indeed help the poor. The post-apartheid government not only inherited a surprisingly redistributive set of social policies but has made changes that entail even more redistribution. These policies do little however to help a core section of the poor in South Africa: the unemployed, and especially households in which no-one works. Policies remain opaque, making it unlikely that poor citizens will use their vote to effect the necessary reforms.

A number of observations in development policy tend to show that policy limits women’s access to basic agricultural input and other resources. Opportunities are closed to them when access to inputs, capital, the market and the political arena is blocked. For example, in rural South Africa the disparity between those who farm and those who receive credit is due to institutional barriers and social constraints, including the legacy of apartheid. An additional constraint to female household heads’ access to credit is the fragmentation of their holdings, or their small farm size.

Insufficient attention to gender analysis has meant that women’s contribution and concerns too often remain ignored in economic structures such as financial markets and institutions, as well as in labour markets, economic and social infrastructure, families and households. There is scope for many remedial policies and programmes and enhancing the effectiveness of policies.

Although many women have advanced in economic structures, for the majority of women, particularly those who face additional barriers, continuing obstacles have hindered their ability to achieve economic autonomy and secure sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their dependants. Women are active in a variety of economic areas through voluntarism, which they often combine with wage labour, subsistence farming and fishing and involvement in the informal sector. However, legal and customary barriers to owning or accessing land, natural resources, capital, credit, technology and other means of production, as well as wage differentials, contribute to impeding the economic progress of women.

There are considerable differences in women’s and men’s access to opportunities to exert power over economic structures in South Africa and in other poor countries. Discrimination in education and training, promotion and horizontal mobility practices, inflexible working conditions and lack of access to productive resources continue to restrict employment, other opportunities and mobility for women, all of which makes their participation stressful.

The United Nations set an impressive set of development targets at the September 2000 Millennium Summit, most of which focused on halving the number of people living in extreme poverty. A major issue emerging ahead of the WSSD is whether additional targets should be established, mostly relating to environmental protection. Not everyone seems to agree that this should be done. Conflicting interests at the international level do come out clearly.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Getnet
Those opposed to additional targets argue that the Millennium Summit’s goals require formidable efforts in themselves, and that the world should concentrate on meeting these rather than on making new commitments. These countries, led by the United States, are also concerned that unnecessary emphasis is being put on the summit to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which deals with climate control and the emission of green house gases. Those opposed to a firm target, for example, will be happy to settle for a commitment that says the number of people without sanitation should be “dramatically reduced”.

Those wanting additional targets, among them members of the European Union, also want the Kyoto Protocol to be endorsed. They argue that only when there are commitments to firm targets will the world concentrate on meeting them. It is understandable why EU members should support the lobby for additional environmental targets. Europe has a tough regulatory regime to protect the environment, the result of a strong environmentally conscious civil lobby. But concern is growing that there is a hidden agenda to the push for environmental issues to gain the ascendancy at the summit.

The fear is that the EU could use disagreement around additional environmental targets to manoeuvre itself out of a pledge it made at the World Trade Organisation meeting in Doha to dismantle trade barriers. Europe is notorious for its protectionist measures and policies subsidising its farmers to the tune of more than R12 billion a day. These developments and disagreements have serious consequences among the poor in South Africa, mostly for female-headed households.

The proposed additional targets are around sanitation, energy subsidies, renewable energy, waste and pollution. On energy subsidies the call is for developed countries to phase out environmentally harmful subsidies, so cutting the use of fossil fuels which pollute the atmosphere and promoting clean forms of renewable energy. Critics argue that those fossil fuels are only cheaper than renewable resource because they are heavily subsidised. Oil-producing countries oppose the proposal, arguing that if renewable forms of energy are promoted their countries should be compensated for losses in revenue. Some observers assert that the success or failure of the conference could be determined by the US, which is rejecting all demands even from the European Union that binding development targets be set and clear programmes of action be agreed to.

These differences will not be resolved easily but the summit may offer a platform for the debate to start implementation. After the Bali meeting a number of NGOs called on the UN secretary general to raise the political stakes to stop the summit turning into “Rio minus 10”. Clear targets and timetables for preventing further environmental damage are needed. Ten years after the Rio summit which first put the environment on the global agenda, the main issues at the Johannesburg summit, also known as “Rio Plus 10”, will be poverty and the environment, energy policy, water, globalisation and sustainable development. The summit is likely to waffle its way through empty statements without firm targets or implementation measures to save the planet from environmental disaster. Without firm targets, finance and enforcement mechanisms the Earth summit threatens to be no more than hot air.

Professor Nindi is head of the sociology department at the University of the North
Sustaining poverty not development

BY MOHALI PHEKO

There are many opportunities and challenges for women in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Perhaps it is worth reflecting on what our forebears had in mind when they conceptualised freedom and emancipation for the African people.

The word most commonly associated with development during decolonisation and the struggle to destroy apartheid, was self-determination. What has happened to this discourse? What is the difference between sustainable development and self-determination? It is critical to reflect on this in order to locate the gender perspectives in the summit.

Self-determination is the right to determine our own future, to shape and nurture it in ways that reflect our desires, goals and aspirations as African people. Self-determination opens the space for us to innovate, experiment with new ideas and fail – and from our failures reconceptualise our destiny until it fulfils the vision we have as a people. The vision and hope is of preserving the sky and the land, and placing adequate food on the table for everyone not just a few; physical, mental and spiritual security and, above everything, a peaceful stable environment where everybody can earn a living. Some people call this idealism and are sceptical about attaining such equilibrium.

Sustainable development is a new term. It takes on different nuances depending on who’s articulating the concept. How do women fit into this agenda? What sort of development are we sustaining? Is this notion of sustainable development a context that can promote gender equality?

The summit chairperson’s text raises a number of concerns:

• The concept of sustainable development as framed by the WSSD repositions development perspectives within economic globalisation. This is problematic for women because research is showing that women have experienced globalisation more negatively than any other sector of society. There is increasing feminisation of poverty and increasing flexibility of labour among women, with more women entering the informal sector. The privatisation of services like water, electricity, healthcare and education has increased rather than reduced women’s work as more people fall through the social security safety net. All of this adds up to a novel form of sustainability that sustains rather than eradicates poverty and sustains debt relief rather than providing debt cancellation.

• The chairperson’s text reinterprets sustainable development within the neo-liberal trade paradigm and the liberalised trade system. This against the background of Africa experiencing the worst terms of trade, for example, industrialised countries with 15 percent of the world population, control 68.4 percent of global trade.

• Developing countries with 75 percent of the world population control 27.5 percent of global trade. Africa’s share of this is 1.6 percent, with 11 percent of the world’s population on the continent. Africa produces the bulk of raw materials in the world. Women, for example, produce sugar, corn, coffee, cotton, tea and many other products, yet the prices of these products have declined steadily in terms of the way they are traded. It is not the producers who set the prices, but the stock exchanges in London and New York. There is no access for women farmers to these institutions and women have no power to negotiate the price of these products. The returns on their products in monetary terms are not sufficient to sustain livelihoods or bring about development.

The repositioning of development by the WSSD also creates a relocation of development issues for the United Nations. The World Bank and the World Trade Organisation are taking over the development agenda as we once knew it. Within the new trend of global governance. WTO in particular is attempting to take on issues of environment, labour and agriculture, to name a few. In the meantime the World Bank is whittling away the power of the state through their policy advice. It is advising countries to privatise basic social services by introducing user fees for healthcare and education, and to sell water, electricity and telecommunications to the private sector. Using the efficiency argument, they are convincing governments that the state has no capacity to provide basic services and that this function should be taken over by the private sector. Their argument is that the private sector has a tradition of running business more efficiently than governments and that governments are corrupt. This dysfunctional ideology of placing...
Only when enough people begin to work for a new economic order based on mutual collaboration for the benefit of all, will sustainable development become a real possibility, writes MARC WEGERIF.

In July I spent a day at hearings into human rights violations in farming communities which were held at Regorigile, a township outside the small mining town of Thabazimbi in Limpopo province.

Regorigile is a typical township with dusty roads and a few new tarred roads, built since 1994. It has some old township houses, a couple of large new houses belonging to the more affluent members of the community, many one-roomed RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses – each less than 30 square metres in size – and a sprawling informal settlement, occupied mostly by people evicted from farms in the area over the last few years.

Thabazimbi depends on extensive coal mining and the mines are the only significant employers in the area other than farmers. The coal reserves are expected to last for merely another eight years and then the town will surely die. The Limpopo province has a Human Development Index comparable to that of Zimbabwe and Namibia. Only 22 percent of the adult population have formal employment and 69 percent live in poverty.

The Regorigile Hall remained cold, despite the hot sun outside, as different organisations and government departments gave presentations to the panel set up by the SA Human Rights Commission.

As I prepared and made a presentation based on the experiences of the Nkuzi Development Association in working on land reform issues, I was reminded yet again of the misery of people’s lives and how little we and other well-intentioned structures like the Human Rights Commission are managing to do for the most vulnerable in our society. On the farms we see the continued violation of almost every right contained in the Bill of Rights of our Constitution. I am saddened when reminded of the death of two small children in separate accidents on just one farm in the last five years. Their mothers were not given maternity leave and in order to try to survive had to return to work, endangering themselves and their children.

This memory is made more painful by the fact that no-one has been brought to justice for the senseless ending of those young lives, nor have we managed to get any kind of compensation for the parents.

The stories go on and much as we have had some successes there are so many other cases where we have not been able to help.

I am just as confident that whatever fine words governments and elite NGOs come up with at the end of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) there will be no meaningful improvement in the lives of the poorest of the poor and there will be no sustainable development. There were promises 30 years ago in Stockholm and more commitments made 10 years ago in Rio de Janeiro, and yet here we are still faced with the same situation.

On the farms we see the continued violation of almost every right contained in the Bill of Rights.
years ago in Rio de Janeiro, but we continue to destroy the environment and build inequality and poverty in the world. The problems are not new, they are well known. If we rely on events like the WSSD and the leaders sitting in them – who have proven their commitment to defending the current economic order – there will continue to be no real solutions. This is certain because there will be no discussion about any radical change to the current economic order. Instead there are plans – through initiatives like the New African Partnership and Development – to confirm support for an economy based on never-ending growth and capital accumulation by a few. All businesses try to get in more money than they spend and every new venture is financed with new debt; the banks with their increasing grip on the economy want to earn interest on all the debt they sell to borrowers. South Africa wants to attract foreign investors with assurances that they can take out of the country more in profits than they ever put in as an investment. All of this relies on an economy that is constantly growing. Constant growth within the finite set of physical resources available on our planet can never be sustainable. Ongoing accumulation by some will always be at the expense of others and it cannot be a base for a just and equitable distribution of resources.

The communities that Nkuzi is helping to claim land taken from them as a result of the racist laws of the past will only get their land back if this does not disturb big business interests. Even those who do get their land back will struggle to keep it if they cannot be as effective as commercial farmers in extracting the last cent of profit from the land and exploiting the last drop of their own and other workers’ sweat. The workers who experience gross exploitation will continue to suffer as long as farmers are forced to produce for profit within a global economy that values currency and stock market speculation above food production. Giving birth to and nurturing a child will continue to be an unwanted expense if people are only valued for the contribution they make to debt payments, company profits and government revenue. Women, who still carry these essential responsibilities for the reproduction of society, will remain at the bottom of the pecking order in this profit-driven society that cares for instant profits, not future generations. Land and other natural resources will never be safe from destruction as long as they are treated as commodities and valued only for the size of return on capital that they bring.

WSSD or no WSSD the victims of the current economic order and their allies need to raise awareness of the causes at the heart of the problem, to build organisation and act decisively for real change. Women need to be organised to assert their rights and ensure that social movements do not become a new terrain for male domination. If protest actions and parallel events at the WSSD can contribute to this then there will be some potential benefit. It is only when enough people are acting for a new economic order based on mutual collaboration for the benefit of all, that the empty promises will end and sustainable development will become a real possibility.

Marc Wegerif is Executive Director of Nkuzi Development Association based in Pietersburg, Polokwane

Museveni out of tune at historic feminist gathering

Getnet board member Amanda Gouws reports on the Eighth Interdisciplinary Congress on Women held in Uganda in late July.

The Interdisciplinary Congress on Women was started in 1981 in Israel when Professor Marilyn Safir decided that there was a need for feminist scholars to work across disciplines and national boundaries. The first congress in Israel was attended by only 100 scholars. The eighth congress held at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda from 21–26 July this year was attended by over 2 000 delegates from 98 countries (many from South Africa). Previous congresses were held in the United States and Costa Rica. The congress is held every third year and the next one will be in Korea in 2005.

Prof Safir noted that the congress in Uganda was extraordinary in that it was attended by so many politicians. (To my mind this was the biggest problem of the conference). Also, holding the meeting in Africa gave many scholars from the African continent the opportunity to attend.

Papers were delivered in the following categories: gendering agriculture and environment; women, culture and creativity; gender, the economy and the workplace; gender and education; gendering the family; gender and globalisation; gender and health; gender and higher education; gendered identities/construction of gender; gender, law and human rights; women, information and the media;
When President Museveni and his wife attended the conference, on separate days. The president delivered the opening speech on the first day of the conference and cars were stopped and delegates searched before his arrival. He arrived in the middle of Amina Mama’s very informative keynote speech on “Gains and Challenges: Linking Gender Theory and Practice” and she had to put her speech on hold until all the formalities around welcoming the president were concluded. The president’s opening speech was greatly disappointing, with him still linking women to the private sphere as mothers, sisters and daughters and concluding with the remark that on a disempowered continent everybody is disempowered. Does this mean that women’s liberation should not be prioritised? When Mrs Museveni came to launch a book the guards would not let the food trucks in and the delegates had to go without food.

Why do the organisers of women’s conferences find it necessary to involve top politicians in these conferences? As one delegate aptly remarked: “Feminism meets nationalism and women have to step aside.” To interrupt a keynote speaker in the middle of her speech is already unforgivable. But to act as though this is normal procedure turns the feminist principle of the “personal is political” on its head, or into the “political is personal”. Presumably we have these conferences to highlight women’s progress towards political autonomy, not to kowtow to heads of state.

Why is it also that a few keynote speakers did not turn up to deliver their papers and many delegates were absent from the panels where they indicated they would give papers? Could the sightseeing not wait or did they shrug this off as just another “conference in the third world”? The importance of having this congress in Africa cannot be over-emphasised. It provided the space to engage with the problems of gender in Africa and to talk about strategies and solutions. For those who really care about this there was a lot to learn.
In the last issue of this newsletter, in April, we explained that Getnet had started the year off with a thorough review of its training programmes, resulting in new materials and content in some cases. Several months down the road, we would like to share with you some of the issues that are coming up in our trainings and in the relevant sectors in general. Getnet runs three programmes: Men and Masculinities; Gender Coordinators; and Local Government. Each of these programmes develops training materials, runs workshops and conducts research, to ensure that our training materials are relevant to the South African context and speak to the issues facing those sectors.

Men and Masculinities in South Africa

The last decade has seen an increasing interest and grappling with the issues of masculinities and social relations of gender from a male perspective in South Africa, both as an academic project and at the level of activism.

In the tradition of the new men’s movement internationally, South Africa has seen the springing up of men’s organisations in the form of informal volunteer men’s forums and NGOs. Men are mainly organising around how to motivate themselves and encourage other men in the community to look at their role in the eradication of violence against women and in curbing the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Central to this process is questioning men’s traditional gender identities, the construction of new masculinities and redressing the unequal power relations between women and men.

At the academic level, we are seeing an increasing number of intellectuals and students engaging in research and creating new knowledge on what gender and masculinities look like in the South African context.

However, activists and academics are still not seriously grappling with how the discussions on masculinities relate to gender and development debates. This has led to our analysis and policy and planning tools remaining largely women-centered. It is a challenge that we need to begin to address.

Issues from Getnet’s masculinities programme

Getnet has been running a three-day men’s only workshop series. It looks at how men have been socialised in South Africa and at the role culture, tradition and religion plays in the creation of men’s identities and in the power relations between women and men. The participants comment that they are sitting down and examining their lives for the first time from this perspective – and they are astounded by what they see! A look at the different cultural and religious rituals, and the role men are expected to play in such contexts, often throws up a cost-benefit analysis of what it means to be a man. There are tensions and internal struggles as they strive to continually uphold and conform to socially prescribed roles and behavioural expectations. Some of the costs include increased stress, health problems, aggression, isolation and substance abuse.

When participants examine the different kinds of power and social power relations, they observe that men also benefit from the socially constructed power relations between women and men. This is often an eye-opener for participants and they often feel extremely challenged. Another interesting issue that emerges is...
that not all men benefit equally from their male identity: differences such as race, class and sexuality also create inequalities and imbalances between men as a group.

The workshops explore how these identities and power relations have a direct bearing on traditional conceptions of male sexualities and the spread of HIV/AIDS and how the identities also lead to violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence.

Men by this point are quite keen to begin addressing how they can change and explore the different ways of bringing about the desired change, which is obviously not an easy task. The participants develop visions of a “new man” and jointly construct mission statements which are then translated into practical activities to continue the process of unlearning their gender conditioning and addressing their power in relation to women.

Way Forward
These workshops are often quite emotional and draining because the men are doing work on themselves for which there is no space in other areas of their lives. They often ask for follow-up support to take their individual processes forward. Getnet is looking at various options, including establishing a support network of ex-participants with the assistance of a person who has the skills to deal with the deeper emotional and identity issues that fall outside the scope of the workshop. Another option is hosting a seminar series on the workshop topics to provide an arena for wider discussion and debate on the challenges of creating new masculinities in South Africa.

What are the questions that arise in terms of future research? At the end of 2001 Getnet produced a training guide for facilitators entitled “Masculinities in the making of gendered identities” which outlines key concepts and tools for analysis; it also highlights case studies related to masculinities, workplaces, organisations and institutions and looks at some of the issues in transformation. Getnet is considering making a video to show what South African men are thinking or doing in the areas of identities, culture and tradition. Such a video will also reflect on the power relations between women and men and how these relations are linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. An alternative is to look at the issue of men’s strategic gender needs: to explore in more detail what men consider to be their strategic and practical gender needs and what relevance this would have for Getnet’s work in mainstreaming gender in organisational change processes.

We are also planning a seminar early next year to bring together men’s organisations, academics and ex-participants to map out the advances in our strategies to date and to explore some of the key areas for future work. Such networking and sharing of perspectives is invaluable for consolidating our efforts and creating a more focused way forward.

Gender Co-ordinators Training Programme

Our Gender Co-ordinators training programme is directed at male and female government staff in the Gender Focal Units (GFUs) at national and provincial level. They have the task of promoting the integration of gender concerns in the line functions of their departments. We also target NGO members who are responsible for gender in their organisations. The training consists of two five-day workshops. Participants are taken through the social construction of gender and also look at the interface between gender and HIV/AIDS, poverty and gender-based violence. Within the context of gender and development debates, they are familiarised with gender mainstreaming and planning frameworks, strategies and techniques and they also do a gendered analysis of governmental budgets.

Issues facing the sector
What is clear is that for gender co-ordinators and gender activists in general, on paper South Africa has a marvellous enabling context for gender equality and women’s empowerment. The South African government has ratified the
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Cedaw) and adopted a Programme of Action emanating from the Fourth World Conference of Women held in Beijing, China. Our Constitution, which includes a commitment to equality for all and enshrines the country’s commitment to non-sexism, together with the plethora of legislation, provides a positive environment to further our struggles for women’s equality.

To translate these commitments into practice the government has developed a gender policy framework (SA Gender Policy Framework) containing its strategies to work towards gender equality and women’s empowerment. However, the process of establishing the gender machinery has been uneven and slow. In practice, the GFUs are not located high enough in the governmental hierarchy for it to have the necessary political clout to effectively fulfill its mandate. This, coupled with the lack of an adequate budget and limited personnel, has seriously hampered a thorough gender mainstreaming process at all levels of policy, programmes and projects.

In spite of the fact that South Africa rates favourably in comparison to other countries in terms of the number of women parliamentarians (30% of MPs are women), it is clear that women politicians still are on an uneven playing field with their male counterparts.

On a social level, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the crisis of violence against women are a direct result of unequal power relations between women and men in the country. The social norms surrounding women’s sexuality and their lack of power to negotiate safer sex practices, in addition to their biological vulnerability, have led to women’s infection rates being higher than men’s, especially those of younger women.

Gender-based violence has been characterised as a health crisis in the country with statistics revealing that one in six women are killed by their partners and that one woman is raped every 36 seconds. Women’s organisations have a long history of organising around these issues and the Network on Violence Against Women has launched a number of campaigns, including the call for a presidential pardon for battered women who took the lives of their partners and the “every six days” campaign to promote public awareness of violence against women.

A positive gain for women has been the Domestic Violence Act and the revision of the Sexual Offences Act. Additionally, the police has made violence against women and children one of five priority crimes and has established a victim empowerment programme. However, in spite of these positive developments, the problem of violence has not become part of our everyday public consciousness, nor has the government allocated sufficient money to ensure that the Domestic Violence Act is effectively implemented and enforced.

Another issue of increasing importance to the government and NGOs, is the relationship between gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS.

Issues from Gqetnet trainings

Through experiential learning and reflecting on their own lives participants concluded that our socialisation and the resulting unequal power relations between women and men in our society, is still very alive and present in our cultures. Although there have been some changes and advances, the social values underpinning cultural practices still point to the old gender order.

However, women and men have become more conscious of the need to challenge and transform the messages they have received, to unlearn our gender conditioning and change the different institutions in society, including the family, the community, the state and the workplace. Religion and culture were identified as key areas to be addressed.

In relation to the issues of gender-based violence, poverty...
and HIV/Aids, participants painted a bleak picture of women and men in the country, with poor rural women bearing the brunt of the crisis.

Participants have been extremely critical of processes surrounding the establishment of the gender machinery. In spite of the SA Gender Policy Framework pointing to the need to locate Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in the Director General’s (DG) office in the different departments, participants report that DGs do not want this responsibility. Consequently they find themselves in units located lower down in the organisational structure, which means they lack decision making power to influence policies and the rolling out of governmental programmes. Additionally, they are under-resourced in terms of funding and staff.

This situation, coupled with the fact that GFPs are also responsible for youth and people with disabilities and HIV/Aids, seriously undermines any attempt to ensure that gender issues are integrated into service provision and internal departmental operations.

They also speak about the need for a co-ordinated national gender action plan. In the absence of such a plan the struggle for gender equality is being reduced to celebrating key dates and writing reports to comply with government commitments to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action.

After analysing the government budget from a gender perspective, participants are quick to point out that without money, government policies will remain just that – policies on paper, and not result in services to redress the imbalances between women and men.

Another issue that has come up is the lack of a strong independent women’s movement in civil society and the poor relationship that exists between women’s NGOs and sector specific NGOs and the gender machinery.

Strategies were developed to address these problems and hopefully these initiatives and many other existing efforts will begin to chip away at the challenges facing us. Through the workshops participants also become equipped with analytical and implementation skills which will hopefully put them in a position back at their workplaces to address the challenges with more energy and commitment.

Way Forward
Getnet has identified the need to develop an additional workshop in this programme so that some areas of the work can be approached in a more in-depth manner. This workshop will follow the introduction to gender issues and mainstreaming gender. Another need is for more specialised modules on the issues dealt with in our workshops.

In the medium term, research will be developed into the processes of mainstreaming gender: the impact of the gender machinery in this regard and progress with the integration of gender in governmental policies, programmes and projects.

Local Government and Gender
We ran a very successful Local Government and Gender training with councillors and officials from Overstrand, Drakenstein, Breede Valley, Breerivier and Overberg. The workshop was implemented in two phases and took participants through a general understanding of gender and gender issues in relation to local government. The gender dynamics of the different components of constructing an integrated development plan (IDP) are dealt with as well as performance budgeting for local government. We also look at the challenges that face councils in improving the representation of women in structures and ensuring that their councils operate in a gender-sensitive fashion.

Issues facing the sector
With regard to institutionalising gender at local government level and setting up gender machinery, there are very few local councils with gender focal units in place, let alone councils grappling with the gender needs of their constituents.

There are very few councils with gender focal units in place, let alone councils grappling with the gender needs of their constituents.

Councillors did get enthusiastic once they had explored the meaning of gender and could begin to grapple with their work from a gender perspective.
is complicated by the fact that the legislation does not provide clear guidelines on how and when councils should integrate gender, both in its internal functions and procedures and in service provision, making sure that women’s and men’s needs are taken into account.

The gender machinery and the key stakeholders are also not providing clear direction and impetus for this to happen.

When local government comes to mind, it is not a big leap to think of crossing the floor legislation. The latter has created a dynamic that impacts on how councils operate, involving disruptions, insecurity about the future and jockeying for positions and alliances. This uncertain political scenario negatively affects councillors’ ability to do their work, which is to deliver services to the community, and it has become a key focus for many.

A further issue is that councillors and officials are often ignorant about the processes and procedures of the IDP and Budget. This makes it difficult to raise gender concerns within key phases of the processes. Another factor that has a bearing on effective service delivery is the lack of funding.

As with other levels of government, there is uneven political commitment and will in local government to do things differently and redress the imbalances of the past.

**Issues from the training**

One of the key issues that has come up in our training is the ignorance of councillors and officials about the IDP and Budget processes described above. Budgets are even said to have been drawn up without clear links to development plans. With development plans drawn up by external consultants, there can be a lack of ownership or knowledge among councillors and officials. Another consequence is inadequate community participation, including participation of women’s organisations to ensure that their needs are covered by the IDPs.

In the training councillors and officials were also not clear about what gender was and what the gender concerns of their constituents were. But they did become enthusiastic once they had been taken through the process of exploring gender and could begin to grapple with their work from a gender perspective.

Getnet saw the workshops beginning to break down the idea that integrating gender was something that was “nice to have”. People instead started coming to the realisation that gender was of central importance.

A related development was that councillors and officials expressed the need to link up with the gender machinery at provincial and national level for the purpose of drawing up future development plans and ensuring that monitoring and evaluation processes are gendered, especially the key performance indicators.

**Way Forward**

In light of the serious obstacles facing the integration of gender issues at local government level, Getnet has decided to hold a conference on the subject of gender transformation in local government later this year (See Page 15).

Susan Holland-Muter is the Training Manager of Getnet

**Notes**

1. Domestic Violence Act, Termination of Pregnancy Act, Employment Equity Act, to name a few.
2. Within the executive sphere there should be an Office on the Status of Women at national level (located in the President’s Office) and at provincial level (located in the Premier’s Office) to develop policy guidelines, to co-ordinate and monitor implementation. Gender Focal Units in each of the line functions of the departments at national and provincial level are to ensure the implementation of the gender action plans. Within the legislative sphere there is the Joint Standing Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life of Women and the Parliamentary Women’s Caucus. Finally, there is the independent body of the Commission on Gender Equality.

Local government workshop in Franschhoek.
For the past three months Getnet has been working with the Special Programmes Unit of the Department of Social Development in the Eastern Cape to assist them with integrating gender considerations into the policies, practices and services of this department. The task at hand is to firstly consolidate the departmental staff’s understanding of gender and gender issues, and how this impacts on the way in which they provide services to their various communities and target groups. Secondly, the Special Programmes Unit’s vision is to see the incorporation of gender considerations at project level, so that service delivery in the department can become gendered.

This department works in 24 districts, with a co-ordinator heading each of the districts. Getnet has conducted training with the department’s staff in all but one region of the province, the last workshop having taken place in late August. The Special Programmes Unit intends exposing all districts to gender awareness training in order to stimulate discussion and implementation of gender throughout the department.

The services the department provides to communities can play a dynamic role in transforming the lives of women. However, projects are often conceptualised to address only practical gender needs, without a further consideration of strategies that would begin to address the strategic gender needs of women and men.

During our workshops, staff started rethinking projects that involve job creation, victim empowerment, and counselling services to women and men who have been affected by gender-based violence. They also reflected on the behaviour of women and men within the department, and made the following observations:

- Although the department employs more women than men, men still mostly occupy management positions and other decision-making positions. The Department of Social Development is a good example of the gender division of labour. Social work is still considered as typical “women’s work” and there are therefore many more women than men working in the department. Although the employment statistics of another department like the Department of Defence might be very different, the gender representation in decision-making positions will not differ much.
- The department needs a policy on sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as a commitment to implementing affirmative action policies. Staff felt that these policies, accompanied by action plans for transformation, would bring more awareness of women’s position in the workplace.

Staff felt that policies accompanied by action plans for transformation would bring more awareness of women’s position in the workplace.

- Gender awareness workshops are mostly attended by women in the department, giving it the appearance of a “women’s issue” – although gender is about both women and men. Management, who are often men, also do not often participate in these types of workshops or activities.
- The integration of gender considerations at project level needs to take into account the impact of culture on gender relations. Discussions on gender and culture in the workshop focused on how women experience certain cultural practices in the Eastern Cape, and how these experiences were in conflict with their conceptions of a society supporting gender equality.

The task of the Special Programmes Unit in this department seems very big. The unit is

\[ \text{(image of workshop participants)} \]
staffed by only two women. Working in such a vast province with poor infrastructure the successful incorporation of gender into projects depends entirely on the support and commitment of the various district co-ordinators. The work of the unit is aimed at making gender transformation a reality in the department and their strategy of awareness raising and consultation with all districts is praiseworthy. However, the poor attendance of men – especially managers – at these workshops means that gender mainstreaming will stay the responsibility of women while ideally everyone in the department should be sharing it.

Our government’s vision of a gender equal society seems admirable on paper, yet it is implementation that will make this vision a reality. Perhaps a closer look is needed at the level of support and budget allocation that structures such as the Special Programmes Units are given, both within their respective departments as well as in broader government structures.

Celeste Fortuin is a trainer with Getnet

Sustaining poverty?

From page 4

profit before people’s development, and gender equality particularly, reinforces the exclusionary manner in which states treat women.

Linked to the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad), this new development framework offers the same market-oriented economies that are incompatible with the protection of women’s rights and do not promote gender equality. Framed by neoliberal thinking, this plan strengthens the principle of private property and African women have never had any entitlement under this paradigm. Nepad does not address the social relations in the market that affect the access and control women have in terms of resources.

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Refugee women bring gender on board

In May, Getnet, in association with Aresta, hosted a workshop on gender awareness for the gender committee of Sisonke organisation, a support structure for refugees which was formed by women and men refugees living in South Africa.

The 12 participants, all women and members of the committee, came from countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Kenya and South Africa. The committee was established in 2001 to empower women and to assist them to become self-reliant and find employment. However, the committee needed to learn more about gender and gender-related issues to be effective and develop activities to their objectives. The participants also played a key role in identifying the objectives of the workshop.

A translator was used to ensure that everyone participated and followed the discussions. The discussions reflected how earnestly participants were developing an understanding of gender, and the contributions were marked by respect for different views and perspectives. Towards the end of the workshop participants were able to express their own understandings of gender and gender issues. The group hopes to establish a panel of trainers within Sisonke to facilitate ongoing learning and the holding of workshops in their own languages.
Local government is the sphere of government that is the closest to people. Through the services it provides, local government has the potential to bring meaningful change to the quality of life and status of communities, especially women. Over the past three years, Getnet has targeted policymakers in local government with the objective of building their capacity to integrate gender considerations into their work.

Through our research and training programmes, we became aware that there was either no dialogue about gender mainstreaming in the local government sector, or that it was a silent dialogue. One possible explanation for this is that the link between our country’s gender machinery and local councils is relatively undefined. Another reason is that the laws that currently govern local government are fairly vague on how gender should be integrated by this sphere of government.

The Gender and Local Government Transformation Conference, to be hosted by Getnet in Cape Town from 1–5 December 2002, has the following aims:

• To highlight the importance of mainstreaming gender in local government
• To build on the strengths and insights of Getnet’s Local Government Programme to introduce gender into municipalities’ practices, policies and service delivery
• To bring key role players in the local government sector together in a discussion forum.

At present there is no gender policy framework for local government, although individual councils have begun to formulate their own gender policies. However, the absence of a policy framework and undefined links between the supporting structures that form part of the national gender machinery, impacts negatively on the formulation, implementation and monitoring of these policies. Notwithstanding this, some local councils have started initiatives to integrate gender considerations into their work and functions. Another objective of the conference is to present case studies of gender work within municipalities, and to discuss and reinforce best practice in this sphere.

The integrated development plan (IDP) is a potential tool for integrating gender into local councils’ structures, policies, finance and service delivery. An important part of an IDP is compiling a needs assessment of the community, so that a municipality can be in a position to address the diverse needs of, for example, women in the community. However, without gendered key performance indicators in the IDP regulations, the onus is currently on municipalities to take the initiative in incorporating gender concerns in service delivery. Dialogue and debate is needed about the gender blindness of local government legislation and regulations and how to address the problem.

The conference will be an ideal opportunity for all role players and stakeholders in the local government transformation process to network, share information, and develop implementation strategies. Getnet hopes that stakeholders will develop partnerships and a better understanding of the roles they have to play in the gender transformation of local government. The next issue of our newsletter will focus exclusively on gender and local government.

More information about the conference can be obtained from Elizabeth Schutter at Getnet.

Celeste Fortuin is a trainer with Getnet.
GETNET’S TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES

The Gender Education and Training Network is a non-governmental organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. Our vision is to work towards the empowerment of women in the context of the democratisation of society. We work nationally and in the SADC region.

We have three programmes and a consultancy service.

**Gender Co-ordinators Programme**
The Gender Co-ordinators Programme equips men and women with the understanding and skills to mainstream gender within their organisations.

The programme is aimed at:
- Gender Co-ordinators
- Gender Focal Persons
- Gender Practitioners in NGOs/Organised Labour/Private Sector
- Men and women interested in deepening their understanding of gender in order to apply it in their organisation and community.

Through a two-phase workshop of five days, the programme covers:
- Social construction of gender
- Interface between gender-based violence, HIV/Aids and poverty from a gender perspective
- Gender mainstreaming strategies
- Tools of gender frameworks and analysis
- Gendered analysis of government budgets

**Local Government Programme**
The programme aims to enhance the competencies of councilors and officials to develop and implement gender sensitive integrated development plans (IDPs) and budgets. Additionally, issues of gender equity within councils are addressed.

The programme is aimed at:
- Councillors from municipal and district councils
- Local government officials

Through a two-phase five-day workshop, the programme covers:
- Gender awareness
- Gender issues in the formulation of IDPs and service delivery

**Masculinities Programme**
The aim of the masculinities programme is to promote men’s active participation in the search for gender equality. Based on discussions of the men’s own experiences, the workshop provides a secure and non-threatening environment for men to reflect and discuss a range of gender issues relevant to their personal lives, work and community.

The programme is aimed at men who are:
- Transformation officers
- Diversity trainers
- Human resource managers
- Members of men’s groups or forums
- Interested in gender work

Through a three-day workshop, the programme:
- Enables participants to reflect on how their socialisation, culture, tradition and religion affects relations between women and men.
- Examines the intersections between gender, HIV/Aids and violence against women.
- Promotes social relations that contribute towards equity between women and men.
- Assists individuals, organisations and institutions to formulate plans for change interventions.

**Consultancy Services**
Getnet offers its existing training packages to NGOs, private sector and governmental departments at national, provincial and local level.

We also offer tailor-made services on request in the following areas:
- Gender awareness workshops
- Diversity workshops
- Gender analysis of policy
- Development of gender policies
- Gender and organisational change
- Gender audits

For more information about our programmes and consultancy services, contact our programme administrator or visit our website at http://www.getnet.org.za.