



# MATCH News

In this issue of MATCH News, we bring you two articles from MATCH partners working in Malawi and Nepal. Makoko Chirwa and Prativa Subedi wanted to tell readers about the context of the work of their organizations to improve the quality of life and status of women in their countries.

## The devastating impact of AIDS on Malawi

By Makoko Chirwa  
Women's Voice

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is devastating Sub-Saharan Africa, and Malawi is no exception. In Southern Africa, 25.3 million people have HIV or AIDS. Malawi has one of the highest levels of HIV/AIDS infection in Africa. In 1999, it was estimated that 16.4 percent of the 15 - 49 age group were infected with HIV, while the national total was 8.8 percent (National AIDS Control Programme 1999); 46 percent of all the new infections in 1998 were estimated to be in the 15 - 24 age bracket, and of these 60 percent were female.

There are many reasons why the scourge of AIDS is so prevalent in Malawi. First and foremost there is poverty. Many women become prostitutes to earn enough money to survive. Forced and early marriages also make young women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. According to a Women's Voice study in Nkhata Bay, some parents encourage their daughters to become independent at a young age or force them into marriage so that the family's poverty will be alleviated by the dowry paid to the parents.

For example, one respondent from the same survey mentioned that "girls who have reached puberty are capable of finding basic needs for themselves and never again depend on parents for their basic necessities".

Traditional practices in Malawi also contribute to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Practices like *chokolo* (wife inheritance) *mbirigha/syazi* (whereby parents offer their son-in-law another wife, a younger sister perhaps to the current wife, because of his good behaviour — "good" is perceived as providing for the family and being monogamous).

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## Towards equality in Nepal

By Prativa Subedi  
Women's Awareness Centre Nepal

The above quote is now heard frequently in the Kavre District of Nepal where years of community discussions and a proliferation of women's savings groups has resulted in women and men working more in partnership for development.

The work began in the late 1980s when staff and volunteers from MATCH partner Women's Awareness Centre Nepal (WACN) started going village to village in certain districts, holding community meetings. They led men and women in discussions of their roles and succeeded in creating understanding among many men of the advantage of women earning incomes and contributing to the household. This led to women in Kavre and other districts forming savings and credit cooperatives — 25 of them now, representing 12,000 women and a collective savings of US\$40,000. Men began to take notice of the work women were doing to

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Death cleansing is yet another practice in some parts of Malawi. This is where a woman is "cleansed" by having sex with another man in the village before she is free to return home or re-marry. The custom is called *kusudzula, kuchotsa fumbi* or *kupita kufa*. The belief is that if this is not done some misfortune might befall her.

*Fisi* (forced sex with a man) for young girls in some tribes (though now fading away) is a practice which is conducted as part of an initiation process when a girl is coming of age.

Arranged marriages, early marriages and polygamy are still practiced and culturally condoned and these have greatly contributed to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Malawi. These practices have to be done away with if we are to control the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In addition, there is a belief that if a man sleeps with a young virgin girl he will be cured of AIDS and this has led to the raping of small girls.

In most African countries, women are more vulnerable to HIV infection due to their weak status, especially in fertility and reproductive decisions. Malawi is no exception. Most women do not have control over sexual matters, especially those that promote safer sex, e.g. use of condoms. Furthermore, most men consider it taboo for women to talk about such matters with them.

Women also have the added burden of caring for others who are suffering from AIDS, whether or not they have the disease themselves — siblings, children, spouse etc.

Girls are often forced into prostitution to provide for their family after parents die of AIDS. Many children are being orphaned and live in orphanages or with foster parents or very old grandparents. Many roam in the streets begging for assistance.

In Malawi, the number of orphans has increased and orphanages are mushrooming to provide for as many children as they can.

In order to address the issue of HIV/AIDS and the vulnerability of women and children, Women's Voice is carrying out a human rights and HIV/AIDS awareness campaign and action project in Mzuzu and Nkhata Bay districts. The project provides HIV/AIDS education, using accurate messages on disease prevention that are culturally sensitive and which consider gender.

These districts were chosen because of the HIV/AIDS rate. They are in a tourist area in northern Malawi. As of 2002, there were 9,414 known cases of HIV/AIDS in Nkhata Bay, of which 45 percent were women. HIV/AIDS was increasing at an annual rate of 8.14 percent, with the most affected age group being between 20 - 29.

The project involves volunteers, traditional chiefs and traditional healers in community advocacy to address those cultural practices that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Traditional healers are called upon to do HIV/AIDS prevention education and they are given advice on helping AIDS patients. Women's Voice is also raising awareness of HIV and AIDS through village-to-village campaigns.

These efforts are complemented by the Ministry of Health, which offers basic awareness and counselling services, as well as some training of volunteers in HIV/AIDS education and treatment of those infected. On all home-based AIDS care, the Ministry, Women's Voice and other NGOs coordinate their activities.

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The aim of this publication is to engender thought and discussion about various development issues. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of MATCH as an organization and are those of the author(s) alone.

MATCH is committed, with our Southern sisters, to a feminist vision of development. Such a vision requires the eradication of all forms of injustice, particularly the exploitation and marginalization of women.

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Another challenge for people with HIV is the lack of access to antiretroviral treatments. These drugs are not offered free of charge by the government. Hospitals in three cities do offer the drugs, but at a subsidized fee of US\$30 per month which is not affordable to a common Malawian.

At Women's Voice, we too, are reeling from the impact of AIDS. Some employees have lost spouses and relatives, while others have less money to support themselves and their families since they are paying for antiretroviral treatments for their spouses and relatives.

The AIDS pandemic is affecting the whole Malawian nation — the very fabric of day-to-day life and the economic development of the country. Women and children are the hardest hit and do not see any light at the end of the tunnel. We really need to double our efforts in this battle against AIDS. Women's Voice recommends:

- Access to cheaper antiretroviral treatments.
- Nation-wide HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention education.
- The fostering of orphans so they can have a normal family life. The government and NGOs could provide foster parents with a minimal allowance so that parents can send these children to school and look after them. The government could also help by making secondary education for orphans free.
- Feeding centres need to be opened for orphans to have at least one meal a day. This would also be an opportunity for the system to monitor the children and ensure their needs are being met.
- The home-based care program also needs to be strengthened, with proper coordination between doctors, hospitals, care providers and patients.

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raise money and saw how this could benefit them and their families. Now more women and men are working together in the fields and in the homes. Although there is still much work to be done to achieve equality and overcome poverty and discrimination, progress is being made.

Another example of progress is the work of the Ugtratara Bhaketwsort Nari Chetna Savings and Credit Cooperative Ltd. in one village district committee in Kavre. The 286 women members also carry out development projects, such as in community forestry (tree planting and forest management). They belong to a committee that protects the interests of those using public forest land. Recently, the group won a battle against large landowners who were trying to encroach on public forest land. Since the women were already united in their committee and in their cooperative, they mobilized to take action. They went to court and won their case; however, the landowners still caused trouble. WACN, the chief of the forest office and journalists participated in a meeting of all relevant parties. The issues seemed to be resolved and women are carrying on with their work. In addition to the forestry and cooperatives activity, they are managing sustainable soil projects. One group is teaching farmers about vegetable cultivation and organic pest management. Another group is setting up a goat insurance program. The money comes from funds set aside from savings. It reimburses someone whose goat has died, so they can buy another one.

At WACN, we are proud of the accomplishments of the thousands of women who have been touched by our work and who are carrying out initiatives of their own. They, like the WACN staff, volunteers and like-minded community and political leaders work amidst great challenges. The political environment is tense, making it risky to carry out community development. People's needs are great, as they struggle to survive. New demands are created as Village Development Committees expect WACN to also build their district offices. Of course, funding is limited.

Two-thirds of WACN's funds are generated by the staff and women who participate in WACN programs (through their savings groups). The remainder comes from donors, namely MATCH, Helvetas Nepal, and the Canadian Cooperation Office based in Kathmandu. We need donor funds to support work in emerging areas such as health care.

With MATCH's support, we were able to extend our work into the Chitwon and Kavre districts. We have mobilized women, formed savings and credit cooperatives, provided education, and helped women develop their capacities and carry out their vision of development. We are now also working in Sindhupalchowk and Kathmandu and being asked to come to other districts. To do so requires more staff, training for them and a building from which they can work. We continue to try to fulfill our goals in solidarity with the women's movement.



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**Norma E. Walmsley Award for International Understanding**



Ana Renart



Alison Simonetti

For the eighth year, MATCH International Centre awarded the Norma E. Walmsley Award for International Understanding to two students, **Ana Renart** and **Alison Simonetti**. MATCH established the award to honour its founding president, Dr. Walmsley, for her outstanding contribution to the international community. The award supports students at Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (master's program) whose work will further international understanding among women in Canada and in developing countries.

**Ana Renart** is in the international trade and policy stream of her program. She holds a bachelor of social science from the University of Ottawa and is pursuing a joint MA/LLB program at Carleton University and the University of Ottawa (Common Law School). Ms. Renart is interested in the contribution of Latin American women to improving social and economic conditions in their countries.

**Alison Simonetti** earned her bachelor of arts in international relations from Okanagan University College. She is in the "national and sub-national aspects of development" stream of the master's program. She plans to carry out research on the role of Mayan women in Guatemala's development.

**Jubilee Medal Award**



Senator Raynell Andreychuk, Madonna Larbi and her son Kwesi

Madonna Larbi has received a Jubilee Award for her contribution to women's issues in Canada and the developing world, especially in her role as Executive Director of MATCH International Centre. The awards program commemorating the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty's accession to the throne as Queen of Canada recognizes distinguished service of Canadians to their fellow citizens, their community or to Canada. Ms. Larbi received her award in the Senate of Canada. Congratulations, Madonna!



## Getting to Know Our Donors



Teaching English in Japan in the 1960s, Toronto native **Barbara Burnaby** found herself captivated by the joy of experiencing other cultures and the power of language. So began a career devoted to promoting language as a tool for personal development (through education) and for improving quality of life.

Dr. Burnaby, a professor who holds a

PhD in education theory from the University of Toronto, has taught English to new immigrants, developed curricula and teacher training programs for First Nations languages, advocated for literacy organizations and worked for the flourishing of Indigenous languages.

"It's all about getting people to talk to each other," says Dr. Burnaby, organizer of the seventh "Stabilizing Indigenous Languages" conference held in Toronto in 2000. "I consider myself to be a facilitator. I can bring Aboriginal people together, but they have the expertise to go out and do the work and can learn from each other."

At a time when few First Nations children were able to receive instruction in their Native language in Ontario schools, Dr. Burnaby's doctoral thesis stressed the importance of language and identity to learning. She helped the federal government's Indian and Northern Affairs department develop curricula and prepare teachers.

Her work has taken her to every province and territory in Canada. Dr. Burnaby cherishes her memories of the north, in particular a contract assessing Aboriginal languages in the former Northwest Territories (now divided into Nunavut and the Northwest Territories) and her work with the Labrador Innu to preserve language and culture and enhance education.

She has also advocated for language assistance to new Canadians, keenly aware of the contribution of immigrants to Canada. Dr. Burnaby was among the pioneers of the English as a second language (ESL)

profession in Canada. She watched it grow and then suffer from government budget cuts in the 1980s and 1990s. She is impressed by the hard working, dedicated and underpaid ESL teachers and volunteers who continue to assist refugees and immigrants. She says it is the same spirit that drives non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as MATCH, which she has been supporting since its earliest days:

"NGOs are truly the backbone of this country. Just as women have traditionally been the care givers in society, so too are many NGOs — from soup kitchens to ESL workers, groups assisting new Canadians and those working abroad to improve the lives of people."

Dr. Burnaby says she likes the perspective of NGOs on issues, including on how to improve the status of women: "It's the kind of insight that makes a difference. I especially like MATCH's partnership relationship and that the organization brings its partners' views to the table."

Dr. Burnaby keeps abreast of MATCH's work and international development issues. In this field, too, she stresses the importance of language. As president of Teaching English as a Second Language in the 1980s,

Dr. Burnaby oversaw projects funded by CIDA: "I argued then and I remain convinced that CIDA needs to offer language training to refugees in camps before they come to Canada. Language is also a key factor in

how CIDA staff and contracting

agencies conduct themselves in their development work; they need language training to work effectively in the diverse countries they are assisting."

Dr. Burnaby is a professor in the faculty of education at Memorial University. She also taught at the University of Toronto (department of modern languages) and at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, where she chaired the Department of Adult Education and taught in the Modern Language Centre.

"MATCH appreciates its long association with Dr. Burnaby and her generous donations to the work of MATCH's partners," says MATCH Executive Director Madonna Larbi. "It is fascinating to learn about the evolution of her career and her advocacy on issues so important to improving the quality of people's lives in Canada and around the world."



Ruth Mandel (left) with her mother, Judith Mandel, daughter Ziva and son Tai'o

As **Ruth Mandel** inhales the cool, clean scent of a rose, she muses that this must be the way our air and earth would smell if only there were no more pollution, pain, danger or violence for anyone. That's the dream. Instead, she says she can't look at a rose without conjuring up images of the worker in a developing country who cultivated it and was likely exposed to pesticides.

Despite her sensitivity to the world's woes, a characteristic she developed at a young age as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Ms. Mandel works towards her vision of beauty, attempting to keep feelings of dread at bay. She does it through her poetry, textile crafts, volunteer work, donations to organizations such as MATCH and in her role as a mother, daughter, partner and friend.

"My poetry explores what happens when a person or a people is hurt. It hurts forever. That hurt gets passed on, indirectly. And in direct way, it is reinforced by current experiences of pain and fear," says Ms. Mandel. "I wish people would just stop hurting each other. Doesn't it seem so achievable? To just stop the deprivation, the pollution, the weapons, the rage?"

Idealistic though that statement may sound, Ms. Mandel is anything but naïve: "People sometimes think that the horrific stories they hear regarding tortures and mass murders, for example, are dubious. Yet, I have never doubted or underestimated the occurrence of one-on-one, face-to-face violence."

Ms. Mandel's father was born in Poland and lost many members of his family in the Holocaust. He was about seven years old when he was separated from his nine-year-old brother, and hid with his mother and father in the apartment of a Polish woman and her young daughter. Although Ms. Mandel says her father

attempted never to burden her with his painful memories, it was to no avail. Legacies of such a terrifying nature create the kind of vulnerability and raw conscience that prompts her to do what she can to try to prevent their recurrence and suffering for generations to come.

Like her parents and two brothers, Ms. Mandel is grateful for the kindness that comes her way and gives back. Ruth Mandel's parents have a real estate business and also donate money to MATCH, other organizations and to the Polish family who rescued Mr. Mandel.

Ruth Mandel's mother Judith heard about MATCH from Ruth when Ruth was a member of the MATCH Toronto Committee, organizing a benefit cabaret for MATCH in Toronto in 1988.

"I like MATCH's close association with partners," says Judith Mandel. "MATCH knows what the needs are."

Daughter Ruth adds: "When an organization works in the right way, there is a ripple effect. I, myself, don't know what ripple to start, but there are certain organizations such as MATCH whose judgement I trust."

Ruth Mandel also shares MATCH's feminist perspective and recalls embracing feminism in high school as the approach that best lent itself to her views on acceptance, humanitarianism and egalitarianism. She heard about MATCH at an International Women's Day fair in Toronto and strongly values such events, even if many consider them as "preaching to the converted": "There's always that 0.1 percent like me

**"Doesn't it seem so achievable? To just stop the deprivation, the pollution, the weapons, the rage?"**

who will learn something new and be changed by it and go on to affect others and start a wee, growing ripple of their own!"

MATCH Executive

Director Madonna Larbi says, "We at MATCH are so pleased to learn that our outreach efforts succeeded in attracting Ruth Mandel, whose views and volunteer work do so much good. Our supporters come from all walks of life and we are grateful to count Ruth Mandel among them."

With two young children, Ms. Mandel says she is more of a donor than an "action activist" these days. She supports causes she thinks the government should be fully funding, including MATCH, food banks, human rights groups and her daughter's school: "Charitable donations receive a tax credit, albeit too small, and it pleases me that through my donations I am forcing the federal government to have a hand in such important work! There is something nicely subversive about this indirect way of getting the government to "donate" to organizations of my choosing that appeals to me."