

## Reflections on a panel – War and natural disasters

*by Bonnie Diamond*

As part of our 2007 AGM activities, MATCH hosted a panel discussion to address the reality of women surviving wars and natural disaster. We were treated to poignant presentations by experts from the field: Judith Wedderburn from Jamaica, Isabel Duque from Chile, and Dorothee Gizenga, originally from Africa, now working with Partnership Africa Canada. Some common themes emerged.

Women connected to MATCH partnerships play a major role in the recovery of populations when war or natural disasters shatter communities. No matter where we look, we cannot ignore the consequences for women of catastrophes like these.

The panelists confirmed why.

Isabel described how armed conflict changes the geography and economy of a country, often resulting in upheaval for residents, destroying homes, and obliging populations to flee.

All panelists agreed that women and children constitute the majority of victims of conflict. As modern warfare is waged more against civilian populations than between soldiers, women are increasingly victimized. The poor have less chance of withstanding the stresses

of war – and since women and children make up the majority of the poor, we know they are impacted disproportionately.

Panelists brought to life a reality known as WAR WITHIN A WAR.

Dorothee spoke of unimaginable atrocities inflicted upon women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where rape as a weapon of war is so systematic and brutal that even DRC doctors now classify it as WAR INJURY.

Isabel told us that women are routinely subjected to sexual violence in conflicts in Latin America, many while displaced within their own countries or as refugees elsewhere.

*Sexual violence has come out of the shadows to become entangled in the policies and strategies of war.*

Judith said Jamaican women are being used as targets in wars of a different sort: TURF WARS over drugs, guns, and political power. Rivalling factions use violence against women as a weapon with one group threatening another with “defiling their property”, meaning the women and children of their families.



Panelists, Dorothee Gizenga, Judith Wedderburn, Isabel Duque

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Natural disasters affect local populations similarly. Women surviving a tsunami, drought, flood or hurricane are often left with no resources.

Judith transported us to Jamaica where hurricanes strike with winds of up to 160 kilometers an hour and intense rains last for hours or days [see inside this newsletter for an update on how women in St. Thomas are recovering after Hurricane Dean].

Communities battered by natural disaster become perfect environments for diseases like typhoid and malaria. And with incomes gone, there is an immediate danger of malnutrition.

Once again, destabilized circumstances breed violence against women. Women often fear accessing public shelter, having survived previous experiences of rape and sexual harassment of themselves and their daughters.

**Presenters reminded us of the RESILIENCE AND SURVIVAL INSTINCTS of women, and of women working together to solve problems in the face of catastrophic events.**

And when a natural disaster hits a war-torn area, the results are even worse. Dorothee recounted how in the DRC, many women died from famine and disease because the war rendered impossible the delivery of care and relief. Women were afraid to work in the fields to produce food for fear of rape, and were often forced into prostitution to provide food and protection to their families.

As we listened to the panel, it would have been easy to give up hope. But presenters reminded us of the RESILIENCE AND SURVIVAL INSTINCTS of women, and of women working together to solve problems in the face of catastrophic events.

MATCH and our partners believe that any peace or reconstruction process must take into account the specific realities of women. We support women to train and participate in decision-making such as this.

Judith summed it up succinctly: MATCH is vital as it provides not only badly needed financial resources, but also reflects the moral support and encouragement of Canadian women - which is what MATCH support really represents.



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MATCH is a non-profit, non-governmental development agency that concentrates its support on women through overseas project funding and education in Canada.

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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## What happened at the last MATCH AGM? Here's a glimpse...

On September 21, 2007, MATCH supporters gathered on Parliament Hill to discuss Women Surviving Natural Disasters and War, and to attend the MATCH 31<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting.

At the AGM, MATCH founding president Norma E. Walmsey and co-founder Suzanne Johnson honoured participants with firsthand accounts of the origins, struggles, and early work of MATCH.

We bid a fond farewell to Ceta Ramkhalawansingh who left the MATCH Board of Directors after serving in many capacities over the past



Gertrude Mathieu a long time MATCH supporter attended the AGM.

twenty years. Though Ceta has left her Director's position, we know she will continue to support MATCH in countless ways.

We welcomed Sharmini Fernando of Toronto as Ceta's replacement on the Board (meet Sharmini on page 7 inside).

The details of new and amended bylaws adopted by the participants can be found on our website – [matchinternational.org](http://matchinternational.org). Mailed hardcopies may be requested by contacting 613-238-1312. In accordance with Canada Corporations Policy, the bylaws now await approval of the Minister of Industry Canada before coming into effect.

## Introducing the 'Women Defining Peace' project

In December 2004, a now legendary tsunami devastated the coastal areas of 13 out of Sri Lanka's 24 districts. What's more, Sri Lanka has been embroiled in a 25-year civil war in which women, as in all conflict, are affected in particular ways yet largely unheard in decisions about peace and conflict.

Recognizing the differential impact of the tsunami on women and how reconstruction efforts affect gender relations, a new Canadian initiative was developed to support the integration of gender equality concerns and women's rights into peace-building and (post tsunami) reconstruction, as well as to strengthen prevention, intervention, and advocacy on gendered violence.

Women Defining Peace (WDP) – a CIDA-initiated project managed by MATCH, WUSC, and Co-water – is designed to support collaborative action on issues related to national peace.

WDP subscribes to the conviction that for women, a peaceful existence means freedom from violence; as well as peace in a country, peace is also an eradication of gendered violence in the household, workplace, and community.

While large amounts of funds from around the world were pledged for post-tsunami reconstruction in Sri Lanka, not all of the funds disbursed were properly utilized, fostering mistrust of donor initiatives and NGOs, as well as of government. Lack of coordination and consultation in the reconstruction process has been noted from the beginning. Within this low level of people's participation, consultation with women has been even lower.

As a two-part fund, WDP will provide resources, guidance, and capacity-building support to NGO partners for sub-projects. 'Women and Peace' funds focus on peace-related activities and the overlap between conflict response and disaster management while 'Rapid Response' funds enable timely interventions on violence against women, tsunami reconstruction, peace-building, and women's rights in the context of peace.

MATCH is pleased to take part in this important partnership, and in doing so, contribute to the progressive realization of women's human rights in Sri Lanka. We believe that WDP will help eradicate gendered violence experienced by Sri Lankan women and develop a sustainable peace that benefits women and men equally.

## Starting over after Hurricane Dean

Nestled amidst breathtaking rolling hills in southeast Jamaica is STWAI (St. Thomas Women's Agricultural Initiative) – a committed group of women farmers till 30 acres of cassava, plantains, pumpkins, and other vegetables while maintaining a shade house of seedlings and a small farm building.

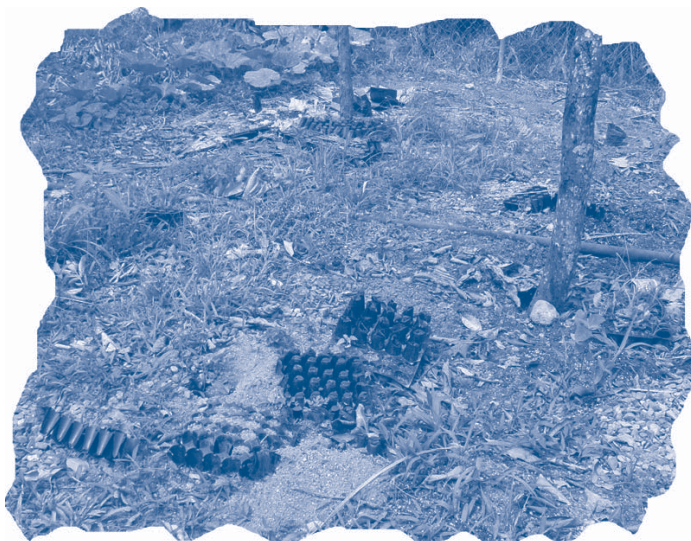


Before: Women farmers working with seedlings.

Always eager to assist initiatives that address issues of rural poverty and women, MATCH began supporting the STWAI project in 2005 after learning of the inspiring work these women do to improve their lives in this rural community. STWAI allows women to undertake all aspects of sustainable farming, farm management, and product marketing. Technical and management expertise is furnished by the Women's Bureau of Jamaica, an arm of the government's Women's Issues and the Rural Agricultural Development Agency (RADA). When Hurricane Dean paid a dramatic visit to Jamaica in August, the parish of St. Thomas where

STWAI is situated experienced severe rains, winds, and structural damage.

According to Shirley Vernon, coordinator of STWAI at the Women's Bureau in the Office of the Prime Minister, "The farm was totally devastated, the shade house with all the seedlings was completely destroyed, the young pepper plants in the field were blown flat and flooded, and there was lots of other damage to crops from high winds and flood water."



After: Seedlings in ruins after the storm..

Clean up has begun. A six week recovery plan that includes reconstruction of the shade house, removal of debris, and re-establishing new crop beds has been initialized.

"The women of STWAI appreciate the concern showed by MATCH," said Vernon, "They will definitely need financial assistance towards the clean-up phase."

MATCH is doing what we can to support the recovery of STWAI and the women who benefit from it.

As always, your feedback on the newsletter is welcome.

Please forward any comments or suggestions to [tjones@matchinternational.org](mailto:tjones@matchinternational.org)

## Natural disaster in Ghana

Floods ravaged Ghana this August, and in particular, it's three northern regions. Not only did the floods destabilize economies, they caused a humanitarian



terms of intensity of devastation per capita, and even declared the three northern regions a 'Disaster Zone' in September. Floods devastated thousands of homes, disrupted water supply systems, and loss of cropped farms and livestock. Public infrastructure like schools and road networks suffered, including the collapse of roads and bridges.

The numbers paint a troubling picture:

Internally displaced = over 90,000 people

Confirmed dead = 37 people

Destroyed = 15,000 houses, 14,000 metric tones of food, 12,000 hectares of farmland, 54 roads, 58 bridges, 93 dams

MATCH proudly stands alongside the brave people on the ground in northern Ghana, including our friends at CENSUDI, as communities and dreams are rebuilt.

crisis the magnitude of which the country has not experienced in many years, if ever.

Why are Ghana's northern regions its most food-insecure and impoverished? Firstly, there is declining agricultural productivity: agriculture accounts for more than 95% of the area's household income and a majority of farmers are at subsistence level and rely mainly on rain-fed agriculture. Secondly, there are high levels of illiteracy, especially among women.

Helping alleviate the additional burdens caused by the unexpected flooding, CENSUDI (the Centre for Sustainable Development Initiatives) – a MATCH partner – strives to improve conditions for women in the impoverished Upper East Region of Ghana.

Ghana's government considers the Upper East Region most affected by drought and floods, in



A woman sits in the field with her possessions after losing her home (as shown in the picture above).

For MATCH on-line  
See [www.matchinternational.org](http://www.matchinternational.org)

## Q & A with MATCH donor, Nayyar Javed

MI: How long have you been a MATCH donor?

NJ: Nearly 20 years.

MI: Why do you choose to donate to MATCH?

NJ: I attended a MATCH conference some time ago and heard Rosemary Brown – one of my personal heroes – speak about the work she was doing then on the intersection of race, gender, and class. That presentation really influenced me. I've been a MATCH supporter ever since.

I am involved with many other women's groups whose efforts focus mainly on Canadian women. MATCH is one of the few women's NGOs in Canada pursuing development work on an international level, a mandate I believe is vital.

**“Women's equality work is absolutely critical if we want to change this world.”**

MI: What part of MATCH'S work particularly inspires you?

NJ: MATCH's recent efforts in Sri Lanka have really impressed me. And when I hear of MATCH projects in parts of Africa that help organize and mobilize women, I know we are making a difference.

The work of developing and empowering women's capacity is so needed, and the work of MATCH is changing the lives of so many women while strengthening the women's movement in the Global South.

MI: What would you say to someone considering becoming a MATCH donor?

NJ: You should contribute to MATCH because women's equality work is absolutely critical if we want to change this world, if we want to eradicate poverty, if we want to eradicate violence in general – and violence against women in particular. The work of MATCH is absolutely fundamental in achieving those broader goals.

## Meet MATCH donor, Hunter McGill

It was a former colleague at CIDA [the Canadian International Development Agency] who initially piqued Hunter's interest in the work of MATCH – her commitment to the MATCH mandate inspired him to become a dedicated MATCH supporter.

That was over ten years ago.

After 35 years in development cooperation, Hunter has concluded that unless gender is taken into consideration in development, there is little prospect of achieving significant, sustainable outcomes:

“Too often, women are not allowed to be part of the decision-making and power structures in some countries, and consequently, development investments have far less chance of succeeding than they would if women had equal voice and influence in decision-making and in the whole political evolution of developing countries.”

As a former senior official in the Canadian government in the areas of humanitarian aid and peace-building operations, Hunter has seen first-hand the struggles of internally-displaced persons and the challenges to countries who host refugees. Seeing so many women and children represented disproportionately among those marginalized populations was “telling”, he recalls.

**“I believe that in the long term, this is really what counts and will make a difference.”**

Believing in the potential for greater success in development and cooperation, Hunter chooses to help an organization like MATCH do what it can, with its partners, to advance the cause because “There is a lot of need out there.”

What fuels Hunter's commitment to MATCH? “While it is extremely difficult to measure progress in the areas in which MATCH works, I believe that in the long term, this is really what counts and will make a difference. There are no quick or easy solutions to the problems we are tackling.

I'm glad to be faithful with my support.”

## Meet the newest members of the MATCH Board of Directors

### Patricia Harewood

A lawyer with Department of Justice Canada, Patricia practices administrative and constitutional law. She holds degrees in common and civil law from the University of Ottawa and a degree in geography and international development from McGill University.

A former Community Developer, Patricia has worked with women to advocate for affordable housing, higher minimum wage, and food security. She also coordinated focus groups for an Ottawa-based research initiative that documented women's access to municipal services and supported women's increased participation in municipal affairs. She has done legal research for the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) in the areas of pay equity and religious arbitration in family law, and currently serves as a NAWL Board Member.

Among other volunteer activities, Patricia co-hosts 'Black on Black', a current affairs program on CHUO 89.1 FM that looks at issues affecting Ottawa's diverse Black community.

### Sharmini Fernando

With extensive experience as a community development worker and activist at the grassroots level with immigrant, racialized, and queer communities in Toronto, Sharmini is a founding member of both the Coalition of Agencies Serving South Asians and the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention, with whom Sharmini continues to pursue capacity-building initiatives with diverse, community-based organizations. After leaving her position in 1994 as the Executive Director of Toronto's South Asian Women's Centre, Sharmini returned to her birthplace of Sri Lanka where she established one of the country's first community-based sexual health education projects for women.

Now a Diversity Consultant in Toronto, Sharmini remains active within the Sri Lankan human rights movement and is the founder of the Canadian Sri Lankan Women's Network, a peace initiative focused on ending the war in Sri Lanka.

### Mita Meyers

A certified chartered accountant and presently an auditor at the Office of the Auditor General, Mita works exclusively with crown corporations and government departments. Formerly with Welch and Company, an Ottawa accounting firm, Mita's industry experience includes working in construction, consulting, and the not-for-profit agricultural sector with government contribution agreements. As an external auditor, she has presented financial statements in understandable terms to many annual general meetings.

An active volunteer, Mita has taught English to Russian immigrants and donates time to tax preparation clinics.

### Elisabeth Barot

Elisabeth holds a doctorate in Études Ibériques et Ibéro-américaines from l'Université des pays de l'Adour, Pau, Académie in Bordeaux, France and has an extensive background in education, culture, and international development.

Presently a program officer with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, Elisabeth has done extensive teaching, outreach, liaison, and programming for the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the University of Ottawa, and for the Canadian International Development Agency.

Elisabeth is frequently invited to speak at conferences on topics ranging from women's rights to the role of international organizations. She is actively involved in the development of a Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against racism and discrimination, intended to encourage dialogue among partners, share lessons learned in Canada, and reach out to international networks of UNESCO.

**Yes! I Support Women's Efforts**  
 To end violence, poverty, inequality, and injustice globally!



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**'Tis the season – Give the gift of MATCH**

That hectic time of year has returned. Contemplating your holiday gift list? What to get for all those hard-to-buy-for people?

Consider giving the “gift of MATCH”.

Here’s how it works. You make a donation in the name of a relative or friend – we notify them of your choice to give a gift that keeps on giving. Your present will help us reach women around the world whose very lives symbolize our holiday wishes of hope and inspiration. As ever, you will receive a tax receipt for your contribution. What’s more, your donation will be extended by a matching amount from CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency).

Here at MATCH, the holiday season reminds us of the generosity of our supporters who continue to make our progress possible. It is in this spirit we send you our own simple but sincere holiday message: Thank You So Very Much. Best wishes for the season to you and your family, and a Happy New Year.

Terri M. Jones  
 Marketing & Development Officer

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