

# Community to Community Exchange



*“We have not come here to give relief materials, but we have information to share on how we dealt with the earthquake, said Mangal Patil, leading a band of women with similar experience after the Latur quake (1993)”*

After the earthquake, in Maharashtra, women’s groups were asked by the government to motivate people for repair and reconstruction of houses. Mangal Patil was appointed by her village group as a communication assistant. “I went door to door to explain how house owners could get involved in designing and constructing their houses. Men always said, what do women know about construction? We proved them wrong. We made collective arrangements - to procure materials, hire masons, hire transport and supervise earthquake safety construction”.

Women are often the first responders within communities. At every stage, women’s collectives once organized have used indigenous knowledge and resources to restore livelihoods and rebuild shelters after earthquakes. When groups meet and exchange information, it creates best practice and trains women in new disaster sites to act as resource persons.

After the Gujarat earthquake (2001) and now in Bam (2004) large numbers of women’s groups with previous experience from Latur (1993) and Marmara (1999) visited survivors armed with information on coping measures. Their continued effort resulted in increased capacities for women to organise themselves, address credit, livelihoods and governance issues.

To illustrate - In February 2002, members of the Groots International and Huairou Commission a global network on women and habitat with Foundation for the Support of Women’s Work (FSWW) an NGO and grassroots women leaders who survived the Marmara quake and leaders from Latur travelled to Gujarat India to observe the post earthquake recovery progress. Coinciding with this, a three way two week exchange and Dialogue Workshop with officials and 175 grassroots women survivors and NGOs

was convened by SSP. For the first time, women's collectives evaluated their own performance as well as that of the government.

Community to community exchanges among peers cut across boundaries and cultures. Most important they are at the heart of diffusion of lessons and innovations in dealing with disasters locally and globally.

In the last three years, hundreds of women are part of a growing resource pool facilitated by GROOTS International and similar networks to transfer lessons and experience in a unique disaster to development strategy.