

New Voices: New Politics

Caroline Andrew and Fran Klodawsky

It is January 2005 in the Council Chambers of the City of Ottawa. It is budget time. All day the council has been listening to public delegations. The early evening has been taken up with a well organized series of presenters — both female and male — making arguments for cutting taxes and cutting services. All have been elderly, white and relatively well-off. One especially well-documented presentation was about dramatically raising public transit fares.

Then, up gets a group of twelve women. The contrast could not have been more striking. They were diverse women who spanned every dimension of visible difference. They brilliantly illustrated the diversity of Ottawa that is in the process of becoming more visible in all realms of community life but is as yet unrecognized in formal decision-making spheres. All were wearing peach coloured scarves as a symbol of their solidarity amidst differences. They began with a song:

*We've come to talk
To share our views
Cause when we vote, we'll think of you,
We are women across this city
We represent communities*

*Please take the time
To see our views
We are the city that cares, includes
Please bring alive the 20/20
In our budget Two thousand Five*

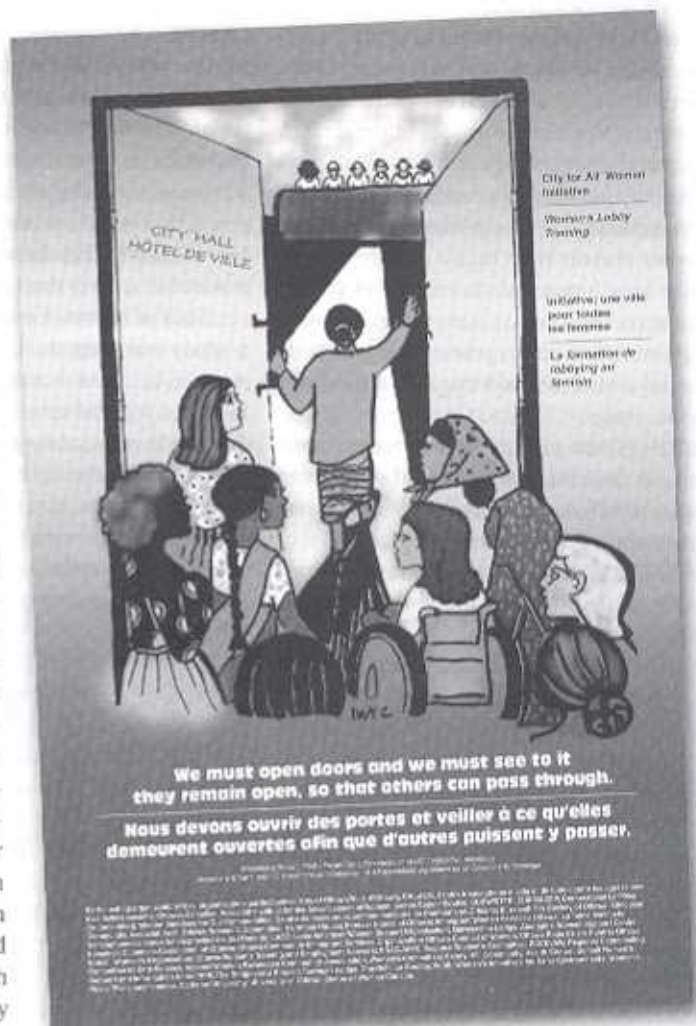
*Nous sommes les femmes
De toute la ville
We'll be happy if you will
20/20 will work just fine
In our budget Two thousand Five.*

The song was followed by two hard-hitting presentations: one, about the importance of grants to community groups, and the second, about the impor-

tance of good and accessible public transportation for the daily lives of women, their families and their communities living on low and fixed incomes. The presenters were eloquent about the isolation and marginalization imposed on them and their families when the costs of public services, such as recreation and public transportation, prevented them or their children from involvement in public life and activities. Both linked the relatively progressive 20/20 plan for Ottawa's development with its abandonment by the City Council in the light of their perceived budget crisis.

The impact of the presentation was palpable. The song had woken up those who were dozing, worried some that the rules of procedure were being broken, and energized others. The presenters had succeeded in making the point that this group was really speaking for many communities and families and women in Ottawa.

These women were all "graduates" of training organized by the City for All Women Initiative/ Initiative: une ville pour toutes les femmes (CAWI-IVTF), on how to influence decisions at City Hall. Representatives had been selected from



community-based women's groups and the training had included preparing meetings with individual councillors and making the budget presentation. CAWI-IVTF is the second phase of a Status of Women Canada funded project in Ottawa (the first phase was described in *Women and Environments* 62/63, pp.49-50) whose objective is to increase diverse women's access to municipal decision-making and to promote gender inclusive practices that are respectful of diversity in Ottawa.

Even while CAWI-IVTF projects a model of an alternative politics and a transformed city, it also works in collaboration with the City of Ottawa. As an organization, it argues for bread and roses;

bread in the sense of using municipal services to achieve greater re-distribution of resources to marginalized citizens/residents and roses as the recognition of the equality and the dignity of these citizens.

The CAWI-IVTF women had carefully thought out the budget. The song was intended to make the point that, although they knew the rules for public presentations, they did not intend to be constrained by them. They signalled that the standard approach to citizen consultation in the City of Ottawa could not capture what the women needed to convey: that cities profoundly affect lives, especially when the texture of those lives is 'different.' The women were keen to establish that life is also about singing and caring and recognizing that culture is an integral part of what a city should be about.

The presentation was oppositional both in content and in form. It argued for greater re-distribution of quality urban public services to equalize life chances for communities and individuals living on low and fixed incomes. And it acknowledged different dimensions of marginalization — ethno-cultural diversity, race, Aboriginality, women, disability, and Francophone status. It argued that the current budget proposals of the City of Ottawa were not working towards a more inclusive city and were not in the interests of the communities, families and women that CAWI-IVTF spoke for.

CAWI-IVTF is about the emerging script of municipal politics in Ottawa. It is about the recognition of diversity and particularly about the recognition of the multiple dimensions of diversity — about intersectionality. It is about women from new immigrant communities, about single mothers and about rural teenage women. It is about better services and about voices being heard and being recognized. It is about diverse women's involvement in decision making at the municipal level. ❧

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Further Reading

Beth Moore Milroy, *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 13-1, Supplement 2004.

Water for African Cities

Integrating a Pro-poor Gender Analysis in UN-HABITAT's Water for African Cities Programme Phase II

Prabha Khosla

Forty to 70 percent of urban Africans live in slums, informal settlements and peri-urban areas. Most of these settlements are not recognized by planning acts and laws and thus not provided with basic municipal services such as water, sanitation, solid waste removal, drainage, roads, schools and health clinics. Depending on the age, location, and population density of the slum, living conditions in informal settlements can honestly be called deplorable.

Slums are also where the urban poor live; and increasingly, the poor are overwhelmingly women and child-headed households. In the cities of Accra, Addis Ababa, Bamako, Dakar, Dire Dawa, Jos, Kampala, Kigali, Lusaka, and Ouagadougou all partners in UN-HABITAT's Water for African Cities (WAC) II Programme, recent research indicates that poor women and children are beginning to represent much larger proportions of the slum populations than previously thought. For women as managers of homes and domestic services, not having access to safe, affordable and accessible water and sanitary facilities close to their homes makes daily living even more arduous than it already is due to poverty and lack of income-generating options.

"My mother and I are having sleepless and uncomfortable night on Saturdays as we will be waiting for the pipe to be

opened so that we can store water for our family."

— a school girl in Teshie, Accra.

In this part of Teshie, water from the water main is only available on Saturday nights. There is no water nearby the rest of the week.

In a primary school in Cynafi, Kigali, 1500 children share 1 tap of water. There are very few toilets, and girls and boys have to use the same toilets.

In many slums, women have been attacked and sexually assaulted at night when they are out alone and away from their homes trying to relieve themselves.

In Uganda, as in many other countries, young girls of menstruation age drop out of school due to the un-affordability of sanitary pads, the lack of private and clean toilets and lack of water in schools. This has prompted the African Women Educationalists to launch a campaign to break the silence around menstruation and menstruation products and to organize for separate toilets in schools so girls can continue their education. Depriving much of the female half of the population from social, cultural, political and economic engagement due to lack of education is very costly for Uganda. To provide safe and affordable water and toilets would be much cheaper than the cost of ill health and the loss of girls' and women's rights