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**CIC National Capital Branch, Africa Study Group**

**Presents: “On the Road to Food Security”**

**DATE:** Wednesday, February 25th, 2015

**TIME:** 17:00 pm - 19:00 pm

**LOCATION:** St. Paul’s university, Room G-103, 223 Main Street, Ottawa

**In Attendance:** 18

**Chair**: Louise Ouimet

**Guest Speaker**: Christine Ouellette, Vice President Programs - Canadian Hunger Foundation

Over the last 25 years, Christine has held leadership posts in Canada and overseas, strengthening organizations' ability to design, implement, monitor and evaluate their policies, programs and projects. Her work has focused on initiatives that reflect the needs, interests and aspirations of women and vulnerable groups in the world's poorest countries, and she has operated in humanitarian, conflict and post-conflict contexts. She specializes in sustainable and equitable development; poverty reduction; gender equality; women's empowerment; governance; multi-stakeholder processes and community development. Before working with CHF, Christine worked in diverse capacities and country settings for the UN (UN Population Fund, UN Women, and the Gender Standby Capacity project), CIDA, CARE Canada, Cowater International, and MATCH International Centre.

**Subjects Discussed in the Presentation by Christine Ouellette:**

As Christine Ouellette began her talk on Food Security, she spoke of growing up in Africa and how that shaped her. Her question for the kind of work she does is: how can we bring about the change which reflects the goals and aspirations of the local populations while there is only a little time to implement. Continuing her intro, she spoke of the success she had in Pakistan in mainstreaming gender in a difficult situation and how that kind of success can be achieved elsewhere.

Christine provided a brief background on the Canadian Hunger Foundation: a homegrown Canadian NGO dating back to the 1960’s, it’s focus includes ensuring economic wellbeing through agricultural production. The CHF tries to make its’ interventions sustainable through a variety of means: ensuring access to markets and the private sector, and working with cooperative groups with the goal of helping the target groups of its’ projects gain power in the marketplace. CHF is currently in 10 countries: 2 African (Ethiopia and Ghana) and 8 Caribbean.

Christine then went into detail on the projects CHF has in Ethiopia and Ghana. In Ethiopia, ORDA is a local partner, which started small and has grown substantially, affecting social change in the country. Christine highlighted the importance of not only looking at substance farming, but looking at how to consolidate gains through improving the economic wellbeing of households and overcoming hunger. There are still 870 million people who are undernourished in the world, and the FAO states that food production must increase by 60% to meet the demand for food. The issue to tackle is how to supply enough food to a growing population with less land and the growing challenge of climate change among other challenges.

Christine then reviewed the terms “Food Security” and “Resilience” and their importance for CHF.

The key objectives of CHF are (these are abbreviated):

 Improve the availability of food through sustainable agriculture production

 Increase stable access to food, sustainable sources of income

 Improve the use of food by diversifying diets

CHF seeks to help small groups negotiate with and develop their own cooperatives, distributing information and helping households shift from subsistence farming to sustainable agriculture. Once households have shifted from subsistence farming to sustainable agriculture, many more options are open to farmers. The idea is that CHF seeks to make markets work for the rural poor, but this requires a major cultural shift, and natural disasters continue to hinder the progress that has been made. Farmers need to be able to reach the markets, and to do this they need roads, storage facilities and other infrastructure.

Christine presented a detailed story on a cooperative in Ethiopia that decided to focus on Honey production with great success, showing cumulative efforts of working with a community over time.

Tying her talk back into gender mainstreaming, Christine spoke to the special needs of women farmers who are systematically at a disadvantage. To address this disadvantage, CHF programs include literacy training and help women have increased control over resources. For example in Ghana, CHF had results from a study about early marriage being a symptom of low food security (families could not feed everyone and so young ladies would be married off).

One issue that small and medium sized farmers have is that in formal markets, prices are determined elsewhere. Therefore CHF looks at organizing producer / buyer forums, ensuring that the agricultural products which farmers produce will have a buyer signed on to buy them. The goal is to strengthen the capacity of farmer unions and cooperatives to ensure stability for the famers.

**Question period:**

*Where does CHF get the funding for it’s projects?* Primarily, funding comes from the Canadian Government, which has awarded CHF with 5 large projects. These projects also require matching contributions from CHF. This has been a challenge however, as the Canadian public has been skeptical about donating to NGO’s because it is difficult to know where the money is going. CHF needs to diversify its sources of donor funding.

*How does CHF respond to corruption?* Mostly CHF is not working with governments, but instead civil society and cooperatives. This does not entirely avoid corruption, but it helps.

*Does CHF look for low-tech solutions?* Yes: they have low-tech solutions such as better mud ovens for cooking and solar lamps that can be easily recharged.

*Does CHF have exit strategies for the projects?* Yes, they plan exit strategies for all current projects and those strategies are being introduced now.

*How much of the “Digging / Planting” does CHF actually do?* They work directly with the community to teach farmers with field schools.

*What are obstacles to cultural change for projects?* Small farmers are risk-averse which makes them less likely to invest more labour and do not have trust in buyer’s promises. To mitigate this risk, CHF initiates projects with middle-size farmers; their success can then encourage smaller farmers.

*Is land grabbing an issue?* It can be, but it has not been for the CHF projects up until this point.

*What is the value added for larger agricultural organizations?* They are more capable in terms of humanitarian response and they may be able to have quick impact projects.

*What can we do when hunger or famine in Africa has been imposed by the state to control the population?* CHF monitors governments where they are working and they design their own projects.

*What does a CHF team look like on the ground?* That varies… in Ethiopia with ORDA, the staff is all local. In Ghana there are 5 locals and 1 Canadian.

*How does CHF choose projects?* CHF plays to its’ strengths, not submitting proposals “willy-nilly”.

*How can CHF ensure continued funding?* CHF diversifies donors and builds relationships with international organizations.

*How does CHF address the lack of transportation in project areas?* There is an example of schooners being built in the Caribbean to transport produce. CHF brings actors together to initiate conversation with governments for increasing the support for trade.

*Are there built in metrics are there to monitor benefits / income changes in farmers?* There are regular longitudinal studies, they collect data and a university analyses the data.

*How does CHF address address issues that women farmers face such as getting loans?* CHF builds on existing local saving mechanisms and loan groups then micro credit when possible.