Right Sharing of World Resources
Report in Spring 2012 Newsletter by Roland Kreager
Abridged and submitted by Karen Morris

The scene has been played out many times in the 19 years that I have visited RSWR projects. After the visit, which consists of being greeted as the honored guest, viewing the income-generating projects, speaking to the group, and then some discussion with the women, we would drive away from the village. To start a conversation with the NGO director in the car, we would ask some variation of the question, "How did you come to do this work?" In virtually every instance, the response was, "This is my village."

The world of grassroots organizations with which RSWR works is led almost entirely by people who have been able to get some education and move from their home village. These people are also the ones who have committed their lives to going home to help people in their village improve their lives. These men and women are passionate about this mission and deeply competent in their hard work of helping very poor women and their families improve their lot in life.

RSWR has been, and remains, committed to new, small organizations working with the poorest of the poor (women and children), for three key reasons:

• There are very few international funding sources to which these grassroots organizations can turn. In many instances, we are their only hope.

• In addition to funds, the work of empowering women via economic development requires technical competence, personal connection and dedication. Small, grassroots organizations certainly have the passion and commitment to assist the villagers (sometimes their fellow villagers) build a better economic life. They do not, however, have the technical competence, personal connections and access to funding sources that large funding organizations require. For example, RSWR's policy is that we will not fund organizations with annual budgets over $16,500. Most large funders will not fund organizations unless their annual budgets are at least twice that amount.

• RSWR places emphasis on personal contact and passion as part of a project. The aim of a RSWR-supported project is women's empowerment (with economic development being the means). Therefore, personal contact and passion are critical to the project's success. Helping poor people rise out of poverty and empowering women and their families requires meeting the people where they are, understanding their needs and being able to offer genuine, respectful guidance to assist them to grow in their own sense of power and accomplishment. Organizations which are known and trusted by the people, and which are able to be in relationship with the people with whom they work are in a unique position. These are the organizations in Kenya, India and Sierra Leone which RSWR supports.

Last October I traveled in Tamil Nadu India to do some site visits but, more importantly, to hold a series of three, one-day consultations with current and recent past project partners. The purpose of these consultations was to listen and learn. A part of what I learned was that it is increasingly difficult for new and small NGOs to get started, due to increasing governmental regulations in a post-9/11 world. This

makes the life of an NGO director very hard. I asked many of them why they don't take their skills and move to a larger NGO which would provide stability and resources that are not available when working with the grassroots organizations. To a person, the answer was that … it would take them away from their close connection to the poor people in the villages.

Working for RSWR for the past 19 years has been a tremendous blessing in my life. When I came to the organization, RSWR was a program of Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas. The RSWR office was in a former linen closet at Community Friends Meeting, in Cincinnati, Ohio. I was the only paid staff, and was part-time. My primary focus was reviewing and preparing grant proposals for the RSWR committee's consideration for funding. RSWR's annual budget was about $95,000 at the time.

In 1999, when FWCC devolved RSWR, we became a free-standing nonprofit organization with a board of trustees rather than a program committee. New staff has been hired over the years, and we have developed field staff programs for our in country work in Kenya, India and Sierra Leone. RSWR is now able to offer training and support which help to make the projects more successful and sustainable. Our annual budget has increased 275% in these almost 13 years.

It has been an extreme privilege to work with RSWR these past 19 years. My life and the life of my family has been deeply touched by hundreds of project partners with whom I have been blessed to walk and talk. As I begin a new work, back to the inner city of Cincinnati, I will carry all that I have learned and experienced in my heart. My prayer for RSWR is that we maintain this same commitment to working with passion for economic justice, and personal and community empowerment for the poorest of the poor. As we say in all the grant award letters, "Together, we can build the world of peace and justice that God desires."

Roland Kreager