



***4th World Congress of Rural Women held in Durban
South Africa
23 to 26 April 2007***

UNITED IN OUR DIVERSITY: Working together towards the total emancipation of rural women from poverty and hunger.

The World Congress of Rural Women occurs at 4 yearly intervals. The first in Melbourne 1994 was instigated by Mary Salace, a dairy farmer from Victoria; Washington USA in 1998, in Madrid Spain in 2002 and Durban, South Africa hosted this years Congress at the International Convention Centre. This Congress was organized by Women in Agriculture and Rural Development

The main aim of the Congress is to discuss universal and wide-ranging issues that are confronting issues of rural women, and to give the delegates the opportunity to exchange views on their own countries' experiences and solutions in dealing with challenges facing those pursuing the advancement of rural women today.

- Globalization and eradicating impoverishment.
- Peace and stability.
- Governance for rural development at all levels
- Environment security and access and control of resources
- Health

The outcome of the congress will be used to elevate the plight of rural women and will influence policy recommendations that positively impact on the economic situation of rural women.

The Congress was over 3 days with a Mayoral Beach party and an Official Dinner. Expected attendance 2000 but have heard 6000. The Congress was very user friendly and the music and singing of the Zulu women was outstanding.

35 women from Australia attended – 15 from South Australia. All South Australian delegates wore arkubra hats and were easily recognized not only by the delegates but all the South Africans knew we were the Aussies. (Australia played South Africa in the cricket during that time). We were greatly appreciated for instigating the first Congress to discuss rural womens issues and were given a standing ovation when at the closing ceremony on the big screen were the words We Are One. Aussies stood and sang the verses, waving their scarves and arkubras.

I was interviewed on Agro African Air by presenter Sydney who has forwarded his weekly edition of the program. After the interview he pleaded for me to go to his country of Malawi to work with the women.

Obviously Poverty and Aids were huge topics from Africa but what I found very interesting was the Minister from Palestine who told us about women in her country were reluctant war warriors; the Indian Minister who announced that child brides were outlawed and if caught the celebrant and guests also went to jail.

Overall the congress was gob smacking.

The 5th World Congress of Rural Women will be held in India – with the Minister saying that she will be waiting for us – BUT also bring your daughters.

*Liz Ballinger
12th June 2007*





One Week in Ingwavuma, Zululand

In 2003 I attended a breakfast weaving the Spiders Web held in Adelaide. It was a meeting to greet 3 women from South Africa who displayed products from the women in their town Ingwavuma. One of the women being Beni Williams who I shared samples of my lavender products.

Previously Gosia Hill from Adelaide funded by the Australian Government had spent 12 weeks with the women of Ingwavuma, South Africa to stimulate micro businesses to alleviate poverty.

As I knew the next Congress was being held in South Africa, I mentioned to Beni that I would piggy back on that and visit the Ingwavuma Women's Business Centre – I kept in touch with Beni by email and the visit came to fruition after the Congress. I was billeted with Beni and Maryna Heese.

Beni, a doctor's wife living on the hospital compound had gained funding to build a 2.8m Rand (today 100Rand is A\$17.00) Women's Business Centre in Ingwavuma. The building consisted of 3 B&B's, Commercial Kitchen, IT Room, Woodwork Room, Office, Craft Shop etc. It is also used as a business incubator. Over 1000 women benefit from the centre. The centre has survived since 2002 without any real funding though encourages volunteers.

Since this great achievement Beni has gained funding for the Home based Care and the Pensioners Program with Care for the Elderly.

I also spent time writing a support letter for Beni in the Prestigious Award Shoprite Checkers/SABC2 Woman of the Year within the Social/Welfare Category.

Maryna another Doctor's wife, business at www.fancy.org.za began at the Business Centre (incubated) but has expanded rapidly consequently moved to larger premises. I have 2 shipments of product arriving by surface mail.

Ingwavuma is a rural town in the mountains in Zululand near the Swaziland border, population of 120,000, 40% Aids, 70% unemployment and no unemployment benefits therefore subsistence farming by the women as husbands work in the mines in Johannesburg and only return once or twice a year. In the Zulu culture it is acceptable that the man takes several wives. The life expectancy is 40 years of age.

The women and children carry buckets of water on their heads or place buckets in a wheelbarrow for their drinking and washing water; also carry bags of food on their heads when shopping. No cars and many live in the roundavels. Women were always neat and cleanly dressed and took great pride in their hair styles of many plaits.

I was able to visit the Mosvold hospital 250 bed, 10 doctors (1 from Aust) and realized that we are really in the lucky country.

It was a lifechanging experience – gut wrenching – I would like to return to spend time at Ingwavuma Women's Business Centre as I feel I have skills that would benefit the women in the commercial kitchen and the sewing room etc – all helps to alleviate the women from poverty.

Liz Ballinger
12th June 2007

