

MADRE

Empowers Women Around the Globe



Photo: Laura Flanders, MADRE

If Vivian Stromberg, executive director of MADRE, could convey one message to the world, it would be that every single person can make a positive difference. It seems to be the norm for charitable and humanitarian organizations to be headed by individuals backed by their own financial resources, but Stromberg asserts that commitment and courage

are far more important elements.

“Something inside of me makes me feel that thousands of young women think they can’t make a difference because they don’t come from means,” Stromberg says. “But they absolutely can. Every one of us can contribute something.”

Stromberg has certainly contributed her share. Pushed by sheer determination and an unwavering commitment to right the wrongs of social injustice, she rose from humble beginnings as part of a poor immigrant family to co-found and then lead New York City-based MADRE, an international women’s human-rights organization dedicated to building short- and long-term solutions to poverty, militarism and environmental degradation. MADRE partners with community-based women’s organizations worldwide to address issues related to health and reproductive rights, economic development, education and more. The organization provides resources, training and support to enable its sister organizations to meet the immediate, pressing needs of their communities while working toward long-term solutions for protecting basic human rights and dealing with issues that affect women and their families.

“We address issues that affect women, and that’s all issues: war, economic injustice, racism, climate-change challenges — you name it,” Stromberg says.

She goes on to explain that climate-change and biodiversity issues are the root of most of the conflicts her organization is currently involved with.

“In Kenya, for instance, indigenous people rely on their environment to survive,” she says. “When droughts come, their crops and cows die, and nothing will grow. Their living space shrinks, and conflict ensues. People tend to call it ‘tribal conflict’ when, in reality, it’s survival conflict. What’s happening in Sudan is a perfect example.

“And, unfortunately, one of the worst issues to arise from these conflicts is violence against women. Rape has been used as an instrument of war for centuries, because when you systematically rape women, you undermine the fiber of a community. MADRE teaches women in these conflict zones that not only is it horrifying to be raped and battered but that it is their right *not* to be raped and battered. We help them demand protection from their governments. We educate them about the human rights their governments have promised them and empower them to stand up and demand that those rights be upheld.”

MADRE has helped women communicate their plights since 1990, when Stromberg became director and organized the Mother Courage Tour. “We brought women from every country that had troops deployed in the Gulf War and took them across

America to tell their stories,” Stromberg recounts.

“We raised enough money to buy 10 tons of medicine, which we delivered along with milk by a caravan of trucks driven into Baghdad by women.”

Throughout its history, MADRE has provided more than \$22 million worth of support to women and families around the world. And you can’t even put a price tag on the tireless efforts of MADRE members. These individuals visit projects, conduct training, write letters to the local press to publicize the injustices being done and help secure speaking engagements at universities and other venues.

“We even have elementary school students helping in our cause,” Stromberg concludes. “They collect change, books, supplies — anything they can — and offer it for the children in the world who need it so badly. I answer every one of their contributions with a personal thank-you letter.”

What can you do to make a difference? Start by visiting MADRE.org to learn more about the organization, and then decide how your special talents or resources can help empower women worldwide.



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