

## **International Women's Conference**

### **Women Social Entrepreneurs – Innovation in Business: Workshop Number 6:**

This workshop, which was chaired by Jane Clark Head of HR Strategy and Change, Department for International Development (DfiD), and sponsored by DfiD, was delivered on the first day by Penny Newman the CEO of Café Direct and on the second day by Rita Patel CEO of The Peepul Centre. In her introductory remarks, Jane stated that women are changing the world and Penny and Rita certainly demonstrated this.

Penny Newman spoke of how, having spent her career in the cosmetic industry, including a period at Body Shop, she was invited to become CEO for Café Direct. Café Direct has grown from being a small enterprise with a staff of 4 based in a small house to a £20m business staffed by 31. The 'premium' that local growers now get from their produce is being fed back into their communities in many ways, acting as income, going into schools, medicine etc. As a rule, the men have been more interested in taking the salary, the women have better understood the principle of giving back to and enhancing the community. For Penny, this was a complete change of direction and she treats everything as a learning experience. Her principles and learning points were remarkably similar to those coming out of the second workshop: work in the area of your interest & passion; build credibility – do your homework, be fully prepared; network, listen to others around you; build partnerships – Café Direct was started by 4 charities working in partnership, and this in itself was a first; try everything; start small with a shared vision (even if in time this vision is being seen through different spectacles); harness skills by sharing this vision (often easier at the beginning than as you begin to make progress, and the different spectacles come into play).

Penny believes that change is frightening but energising and that what stops people doing it is what is in their own minds. She adopts Anita Roddick's motto 'If you believe in it go and do it'.

Rita Patel takes her inspiration from Mandela and Ghandi and her project has struggled for many years to get to its current position. The original concept of a centre for Asian women very quickly changed to that of a community centre, the over riding desire being one of social justice. The original centre was based in a terraced house in Leicester and 150 women joined on the first day. The Centre after a long and difficult struggle now has a purpose built facility, though even that had to be scaled back and is not large enough to house the really big Asian weddings which would have provided a large part of their income. Rita concentrated on giving practical help setting up an employment venture and assisting women to re-train. She aimed to provide permanent housing for the victims of domestic violence rather than just refuges.

Rita feels strongly that when you believe in people they rise to the occasion and greatness comes through; that the colour of success is about self-belief; that no-one is an enemy, everyone is a teacher, but that you have to know the system in order to manage it or to learn from your enemies. She talked of the necessity to forge alliances and to work in partnership; to network not just among your peers but further afield including internationally; to be tenacious; to have the stamina to maintain belief when the going is tough; to have the ability to take what others can offer – this is not always money but sometimes more importantly time, advice and support.

Another common thread in these two workshops was the support of Anita Roddick who meets with Rita every couple of months. Rita takes inspiration from Nelson Mandela who said 'Everybody has the right to let their light shine' and asks 'what are you doing to make a difference'

'Being the change that we want to see in the world'