RURAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Winter 2024-2025

BRINGING TOGETHER SCHOLARS AND ACTIVISTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO SHARE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY ON RURAL WOMEN, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Greetings from Grand Forks, North Dakota, USA, site of our 2027 RWSA conference!

It was delightful to gather with many of you at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas, for our 15th Triennial Conference in May. It's hard to believe that was over eight months ago already. We enjoyed four full days of presentations, film screenings, and informal conversations over shared meals. Throughout those activities I was impressed by the power of bringing our interdisciplinary work into dialogue, and our understandings of our own work is much richer as a result of those interactions.

Toward the end of our time together in Jonesboro, I shared with those gathered that our leadership team has been struggling to complete the tasks required to put on our triennial conference, which has been the centerpiece of our organization throughout its quarter-century history. We overcame malfunctioning technology, limited public transportation, misleading hotel contracts, and many other challenges to gather from across the United States and as far away as Ireland, Nigeria, and India, and I was frankly exhausted.

But at that meeting and in informal discussions throughout the conference, I was reminded of what makes this organization special and makes all the work required worthwhile: the importance of the community that we have built together. Several of you commented to me just what I felt the first time I attended an RWSA conference in Las Cruces, New Mexico in 2003: that the RWSA community feels like home, and that we had finally found "our people." While it would be easier to sponsor sessions at another conference, we agreed together that we want to continue the magic that I first experienced at a conference hosted in part by RWSA founder and (in my mind at least) honorary grandmother Joan Jensen.

We left Jonesboro with a new list of volunteers willing to share the burden and a renewed sense of vision for the organization. It truly takes a village to run a shoestring organization like ours. We are thrilled to have created a gorgeous new RWSA logo (thank you, Elyssa Ford!), and

launched a new website (ruralwomensstudies.org—started by yours truly and now managed by Jodey Nurse), and new central email address (ruralwomenstudies@gmail.com, overseen by RWSA treasurer Jenny Barker-Devine) that supports our renewed blog (edited by Jennifer Helton).

Since we gather in person only every three years, Elyssa Ford and Allison Mitchell have launched an exciting program of online virtual events to help us stay in touch more regularly. The planning for our 2027 conference, to be held at the University of North Dakota on June 1-5, has also begun. See the rest of the newsletter for more information on these upcoming events.

For more information and/or to volunteer, reach out via our new email address (ruralwomenstudies@gmail.com). Follow us on social media and keep an eye on our new website and blog.

Thanks for reading. I look forward to seeing you soon at our virtual programming and hosting you in Grand Forks in 2027!

Cynthia (Cindy) Prescott
President & Co-Chair

2024 -2027 RWSA OFFICERS

RURAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Cynthia Prescott, University of North Dakota

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- Canada–Jodey Nurse, McMaster University; and Meighan Mantei, Carleton University
- Europe–Margreet van der Burg, Wageningen University: and Mary Curtin, University of Limerick
- Africa–Olubunmi Ashimolowo, University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria; and Oluwaseun Boye, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, Ogun State Chapter, Nigeria
- United States–Tracey Hanshew, Eastern Oregon University

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- Corrina Neal, Arkansas State University
- Diane McKenzie, University of Lethbridge
- Sydney Giacalone, Brown University
- Meighan Mantei, Carleton University

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL RURAL WOMEN'S DAY:
The Impact of the Rural Women's Studies Association on Women in Nigeria

By Prof. Olubunmi Ashimolowo, Mrs. Oluwaseun Boye and Mrs. Abolanle Ogunlami.



Every year on October 15th, the world celebrates International Rural Women's Day, recognizing the invaluable contributions of rural women in agriculture, food security, and rural development. Rural women play a crucial role in local economies, often working on farms, managing family resources, and supporting community well-being. However, they face unique challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, land rights, and opportunities for empowerment.

In Nigeria, these issues are even more pronounced, given the country's large rural population and economic reliance on agriculture. One organization dedicated to improving the lives of rural women is the Rural Women's Studies Association (RWSA), which focuses on promoting research, education, and advocacy for rural women worldwide. This article will explore how the RWSA's work has impacted Nigerian women, highlighting its role in amplifying the voices of rural women and fostering positive change in Nigerian communities.

The Significance of International Rural Women's Day

International Rural Women's Day was established to honor the achievements and resilience of rural women, who are often the backbone of rural communities and agriculture. According to the United Nations, rural women make up nearly 40% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries. However, they experience higher poverty rates and lower access to resources compared to their male counterparts. In Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by gender inequalities, insufficient rural infrastructure, and cultural expectations that limit women's empowerment.

Through celebrating this day, stakeholders globally and locally have the opportunity to recognize and advocate for policies and programs that support rural women, helping to close the gender gap in agriculture and rural development. It also provides a platform to showcase the progress made by organizations like the Rural Women's Studies Association in advancing the rights, education, and empowerment of rural women.

The Role of the Rural Women's Studies Association (RWSA)

The Rural Women's Studies Association (RWSA) is an international organization dedicated to fostering a deeper understanding of rural women's roles and struggles through research,

conferences, and educational initiatives. By promoting cross-cultural learning and the exchange of ideas, the RWSA seeks to address issues of poverty, gender inequality, education, and leadership among rural women globally. In Nigeria, the RWSA has become an instrumental force in bringing attention to the challenges rural women face and encouraging local partnerships to address these issues.

RWSA's Impact on Rural Women in Nigeria

In a significant boost for women's empowerment and poverty alleviation, a coalition of NGOs, including the Rural Women Studies Association (RWSA), GENDI Initiative, and the Ogun State Chapter of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), recently provided training and support to women in the Soremekun Community, located in the Alabata area of Ogun State, Nigeria.

Professor Helen Bodunde welcomed the community members and highlighted the collective goal of the program: to empower women, alleviate poverty, and support the education of young girls. She urged the women to be active participants in household decision-making and to work as partners with their spouses, emphasizing the importance of family and societal support. Reflecting on her experience with students, she explained that her passion for supporting women's development led her to join forces with other organizations to address the unique needs of women in underserved areas.



In her keynote speech, Professor Olubunmi Ashimolowo, of the Federal University of Agriculture and chairman of the Rural Women Studies Association, Africa, recounted the decade-long journey of the empowerment program. She noted that through the establishment of a cooperative group, women in the community were encouraged to save portions of their earnings, fostering a culture of financial independence and mutual growth. This cooperative model has enabled many women to grow their small businesses and expand their farming operations over the years.

"A cooperative society was initiated alongside other capacity-building programs, such as soap-making, teaching children how to make reusable sanitary towels, providing farming funds, and boreholes for neighboring communities," Ashimolowo explained. She also praised the women's progress and highlighted the cassava waste-to-wealth project, which has become profitable for many participants.

The event also featured a goodwill message from Prof. Comfort Onifade, who emphasized the organization's mission to foster peaceful homes and a prosperous nation. She pointed out that

educating children, especially girls, is crucial for sustainable development and long-term national growth.

Mrs. Oluwaseun Boye, co-chair of the Rural Women Studies Association Africa Chapter and Ogun State NIPR Chairperson, stressed the role of women as critical drivers of the economy, citing the increasing number of women in leadership positions worldwide. She encouraged the men present to support their spouses and provide equal opportunities to the girl child, underlining that women's voices and contributions are essential for a thriving economy.

Beneficiaries of the initiative, like Odunayo Somefun, expressed gratitude for the training and support that has helped them become financially independent. Another participant, Noimaot Kolade, a farmer, noted that the program's financial literacy training has transformed life in Soremekun, teaching women to save and reinvest rather than waste resources. She applauded the cassava waste-to-wealth initiative as a valuable addition to the community's resources.



Overall, 16 women were empowered during this round of the intervention This impactful program marks a positive step towards economic empowerment, skill development, and sustainable growth for the women of Soremekun Community.

WALKING IN SILENCE:

Advocating for the Silenced at Kuto Market, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria

By Prof. Olubunmi Ashimolowo and Gender Development Initiative Team

On October 29, 2024, the Gender Development Initiative (GenDi), in partnership with the Rural Women's Studies Association (RWSA), joined forces to organize an impactful outreach program at Kuto Market in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The event, titled *Walking in Silence*, aimed to raise awareness about the devastating impact of gender-based violence (GBV) and to honor the lives of victims, including those silenced by abuse.

Through a quiet yet powerful walk, the program showcased RWSA's commitment to its vision of amplifying rural women's voices and fostering communities where women and girls can live free of violence and inequality.

The Vision Behind Walking in Silence

The *Walking in Silence* initiative embodies the Rural Women's Studies Association's mission to promote research, education, and advocacy for rural women globally. Partnering with organizations like GenDi, RWSA leverages such events to educate communities, engage

stakeholders, and create lasting change. Inspired by the legacy of Dr. L. Green-Williams, a cultural anthropologist who founded the Domestic Violence (DV) Walk in honor of her daughter, this program not only honors victims of abuse but also seeks to empower women to advocate for justice and equality in their communities.

Program Highlights
The outreach commenced at 9:00 AM with preparatory arrangements by the GenDi team, supported by volunteers and representatives from organizations such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Initiative for Peace and Comfort (IPC), Child Protection Network (CPN), and Cooperative Women (LEME).

Participants walked silently through the bustling market, holding banners and placards bearing messages advocating for women's rights and denouncing GBV. This silent walk created a powerful visual narrative, drawing attention from market-goers and fostering discussions around the need to protect women and girls from abuse.

Speeches and Key Messages
The program featured several impactful addresses:

- **Prof. Olubunmi Ashimolowo**, Executive Director of GenDi and Chairperson of RWSA Africa, inaugurated the program by emphasizing the importance of addressing GBV in rural and urban communities alike. She highlighted the annual *Walking in Silence* event as a call to action for all to stand against violence and work toward a safer society.
- **Mr. Adefolarin**, a representative from Child Protection Network, called on men in the community to adopt peaceful methods for resolving conflicts, stressing that violence harms families and destabilizes communities.
- A representative from NAPTIP discussed the dangers of human trafficking, particularly for women and children. She explained the legal repercussions for traffickers and urged the public to report suspicious activities to authorities.

Community Engagement
The event also included a discussion with the market head, who shed light on the prevalence of domestic abuse within the community. She reaffirmed her commitment to ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable and expressed support for initiatives like *Walking in Silence*, which bring such critical issues to the forefront.

Conclusion
The program concluded with a vote of thanks from Prof. Ashimolowo, who commended the dedication of her team, partners, and volunteers. She expressed gratitude to the participants and community members for their active involvement and underscored the importance of collective action in combating GBV.

Through initiatives like *Walking in Silence*, RWSA and its partners continue to inspire hope and drive change, affirming the belief that empowering women is integral to building peaceful, thriving communities.

FEATURED ARCHIVE: THE KERALA MUSEUM

By Dr. Teena Antony, Kerala Museum



The Kerala Museum, a vibrant cultural space in Kochi, located on the south-west coast of India, announces its new digital programme on Kerala history.

Venturing outside the physical limits of the Museum, JANAL, meaning window in Malayalam, is a programme that creates engaging digital exhibitions by drawing on historical archives, as well as the oral, intangible, and tangible histories of people and communities from Kerala.

JANAL is envisioned as a medium for a more participatory history that facilitates a conversation between micro-histories and the larger narrative. It is designed towards a more inclusive retelling of Kerala's multiple pasts and presents and seeks to involve multiple perspectives and stakeholders to better communicate with diverse audiences.

In our endeavour to create an interactive format that encourages exchange between academic disciplines while opening up scholarly research to artistic and creative expression, we invite scholars and community knowledge holders to come on board as contributors either by:

- Initiating conversations and establishing scholarly networks so that interested persons can contribute to the programme
- Contributing articles, illustrations, photo collections, photo essays, and other materials to the archive

To contribute to the JANAL Archive, send us an email at info@keralamuseum.org with the subject "JANAL CONTRIBUTION." Confirm your interest and specify your area within Kerala Studies. Include a brief bio and your contact details (phone and email).

Know of a great archive to feature in our newsletter or blog? Contact Jennifer Helton jhelton@ohlone.edu

WOMEN'S WORK, THE DOCUMENTARY FILM

By Audra Mulkern, Executive Producer, Women's Work, Founder, The Female Farmer Project®



We're excited to share an update on *Women's Work: The Untold Story of America's Female Farmers*, a documentary that continues to shine a spotlight on the vital and historic role of women in agriculture. We are grateful for the support of the Rural Women's Studies Association and were honored to present a work-in-progress screening at the May 2024 conference.

The film had its broadcast debut in September on KSPS PBS, followed by a broadcast in November on KBTC PBS. Both stations are based in Washington State and have a broadcast reach throughout Western Canada. We've also held several small farm audience screenings, and we've been thrilled by the response. Additionally, we were invited to COP29 in Azerbaijan for an international debut. However, due to scheduling conflicts, we requested a year's delay and are now working toward a screening at COP30 in Brazil.

We are continuing to work hard to bring these powerful stories to a wider audience! We would be honored if any of our screening audience members would be willing to share a quote or blurb that we could include in our national/international broadcast pitch packet. (email below)

Again, thank you for your support. To stay up-to-date on upcoming screenings, events, and ways to get involved in celebrating and supporting rural women in agriculture, please visit our website, join our Substack community or email womensworkdoc@gmail.com.

GRANT AND PRIZE OPPORTUNITIES

Agricultural History Society Award for Public Engagement Nominations for this new award (which may include self-nomination) are due by January 31.

Charles Redd Center: The Charles Redd Center at BYU provides a number of grants for researchers working on the American West. DEADLINE: March 15, 2025

The American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming offers several grants appropriate for scholars of rural women in the United States. DEADLINE: March 31, 2025.

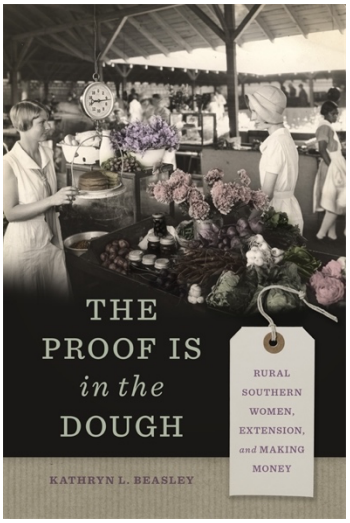
Know of a grant or prize opportunity that would be useful to our members? Please contact Jennifer Helton jhelton@ohlone.edu.

INNOVATIONS IN TEACHING

Elyssa Ford's undergraduate class Practicum in American Local History at Northwest Missouri State University spent the Fall 2024 semester researching elements of religious history in the region.

Following their research on topics that include rural women (such as Catholic sisters at two convents), they developed exhibits, websites, and lesson plans for the Nodaway County Historical Society Museum and held an exhibit grand opening on December 4th. Click here to see their exhibits.

MEMBER PUBLICATIONS



Congratulations to RWSA member Kathryn Beasley, whose new book, *The Proof is in the Dough: Rural Southern Women, Extension, and Making Money*, was published by the University of Georgia Press on January 15, 2025.



Elyssa Ford had a short co-authored piece come out in the Middle West Review: "Artistic Reflections on the Midwest: Julie Blackmon," Middle West Review 11:1 (Fall 2024): 277-283. This was a fun, interdisciplinary perspective where a historian and artist worked together to discuss Blackmon's artistic approach and use of the Midwest in her art.

2027 UPCOMING CONFERENCE NEWS

We have begun planning our 16th triennial conference, to be held in 2027. RWSA President Cynthia Prescott will serve as your host as we meet jointly with the Agricultural History Society at the recently built student union on the beautiful University of North Dakota campus in Grand Forks June 1-5, 2027. We will benefit from a larger gathering with many experts on agricultural and rural history, while maintaining the intimate RWSA spaces we crave.

Grand Forks is located on the North Dakota-Minnesota border. We are an hour north of Fargo (of film and TV fame) and 100 miles south of the Canadian border. Average high and low temperatures in June are 77° / 53° F (25° / 12° C) with lots of sunshine. The university is hard at work renewing the campus in preparation for your time here.

2027 CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

2027 Conference Local Arrangements Chair & Host: Cynthia Prescott, UND
Program Committee Chair: Elyssa Ford, Northwest Missouri State University
Program Committee Members:

- Cherisse Jones-Branch, Arkansas State University
- Mary Curtin, University of Limerick
- Jennifer Helton, Ohlone College
- Holly Kent, University of Illinois Springfield
- Corrina Neal, Arkansas State University
- Sydney Giacalone, Brown University
- Oluwaseun Boye, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, Ogun State Chapter, Nigeria

RWSA VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Looking to get more involved in the RWSA? We would be grateful for support in the following roles. Email ruralwomenstudies@gmail.com to find out more.

2030 Conference Host: We are looking for a site to hold our 2030 conference. If your institution would be interested, please let us know!

RWSA Co-Chair: We are searching for a co-chair to assist the President with managing the organization.

2027 Conference Silent Auction Coordinator: We need a volunteer to coordinate this important fundraiser.

2027 Conference Program Committee Members: We would love a few more volunteers to support the development of the 2027 program and agenda.

UPDATED WEBSITE AND CALL FOR RWSA BLOG SUBMISSIONS

Thanks to the hard work of Dr. Jodey Nurse, our website has been updated. Be sure to head to https://ruralwomensstudies.org to see the new site!

Looking to get your work out into the world? We invite submissions to the newly reformatted RWSA blog.

Writing a blog post is a great way to publicize your recent work, promote your event, spread the news about upcoming grant opportunities, or practice writing for the public. Grad students are especially welcome!

We invite submissions on any topic related to rural women, gender and/or sexuality. We accept book excerpts, conference abstracts, and informal reflections about research, activism, and rural life. We are also looking for posts on archives, research opportunities, and teaching resources.

Our blog posts typically range from 200 to 2,000 words in length, and photos or other visuals are appreciated. Send contributions and queries to Jennifer Helton jhelton@ohlone.edu.

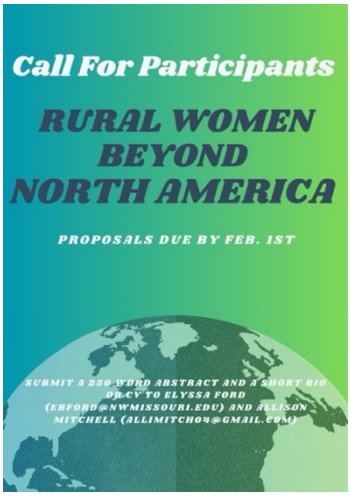
FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

Instagram: @ruralwomenstudies

Twitter/X: @RuralwomenSA

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/rurwom

RWSA VIRTUAL EVENTS



While chatting in the hotel lobby during the Jonosboro conference, several RWSA members lamented that the three years between conferences made it hard to stay in touch with the RWSA community. And thus, the idea for RWSA virtual events was born.

Chaired by Elyssa Ford and Allison Mitchell, the Virtual Events Committee kicked off with a monthly crafting hour during the fall. In October, the committee sponsored a talk entitled "**Talking in Conversation: Bringing Academics and Professionals Together,**" which featured the work of Sydney Giacalone, an anthropology doctoral candidate at Brown University.

A great slate of events is also being planned for the spring. Currently, Elyssa and Allison are looking for proposals for our Rural Women Beyond North America panel to be held this semester. Send a 250 word abstract and short bio / CV to Elyssa Ford ebford@nwmissouri.edu and Allison Mitchell allimitch04@gmail.com. We are looking forward to sharing your work with the RWSA community.

Be sure to check our blog for upcoming events!

RWSA MEMBERSHIP FORM

RURAL WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM

MEMBER INFORMATION

FIRST NAME LAST NAME

_____

AFFILIATION

_____

MAILING ADDRESS (please circle: Work or Home)

_____

CITY STATE ZIP / COUNTRY CODE

_____

COUNTRY E-MAIL PHONE FAX

MEMBERSHIP AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO RWSA:

ANNUAL DUES:

- Income under US$50,000 – $10.00
- Triennial Dues (conference to conference)–income under US$50,000 – $30.00
- Annual Dues–income US$50,000+ – $25.00
- Triennial Dues (conference to conference)–income US$50,000+ – $75.00
- Annual Dues–Contributing Member – $50.00
- Triennial Dues (conference to conference)–Contributing Member – $150.00

JOAN JENSEN-MARY NETH FUND:
RWSA welcomes contributions to the Joan Jensen-Mary Neth Fund to help offset registration fees for invited speakers and international participants. Memorials may be made to the Fund as well.
Please designate the name of the person being memorialized.

DUES AMOUNT ENCLOSED: _____

JENSEN-NETH FUND DONATAION: _____ IN MEMORY OF _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

Please mail a personal check or international money order made out to RWSA to:
Jenny Barker-Devine, RWSA Treasurer
Dept. of History, Illinois College
1101 W. College Avenue
Jacksonville, IL 62650

(RWSA is a 501C-3 non-profit organization, and all donations are tax deductible.)