

## **Lorena Gibson**

***NZFGW Fellow 2008 in Kolkata (India) and Lae (Papua New Guinea)***

**Research Title:** *Projects of Hope: Women Organising for Grassroots Community Development in Kolkata (India) and Lae (Papua New Guinea).*

### **Research Progress**

My research is about grassroots women organising for community development in urban, poor areas of Kolkata and Lae. I am interested in the ways in which women at the grassroots level work collectively for wellbeing in their lives and communities, and the agency that arises from these relationships. This research takes these women's hopes and desires for community development seriously and explores issues of immediate concern to them: education and income-generation. How women work to achieve their goals is the focus of this study –the processes they engage in, their capacity for collective action and agency, and the larger social and structural factors that they must negotiate.

I am (at the time of writing this report) at that difficult stage of analysing and writing up my findings, which has involved deciding upon the story I want to tell, which will be based on the women's stories of hope, and developing appropriate theoretical frameworks. I used to describe this process to my friends as 'trying to make it sound as if I know what I'm talking about' until one friend replied that he often heard his female friends talk about their PhD work in a self-deprecating manner. Now I make sure that I describe my work with the confidence I feel, a confidence that has been boosted through being awarded an NZFGW Fellowship.

Overall, I am making good progress towards my research goals. The NZFGW Fellowship has been instrumental in helping me to develop my ideas. I used some of the Fellowship money to attend the Australian National University's Asia-Pacific Week in January-February 2008 and, at the conference, presented a paper that will form the basis of a chapter on class, social capital and women's agency. The paper was very well received and I made good contacts with PhD students and academic staff working in the Asia-Pacific region during the week I spent in Canberra.

I am excited about attending the combined conference of the ASA (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth), the ASAANZ (Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand), and the AAS (Australian Anthropological Society) in Auckland in December 2008. I have had an abstract accepted for the panel 'The Postgraduate Showcase: New Ideas, New Talent' and will use my Fellowship money to fund my attendance at this week-long conference. This is a wonderful opportunity for me to present my work to an international academic audience and to gain timely and critical feedback on my ideas before submitting my thesis in 2009.

Presenting my work in public forums also helps me in my long-term goal of becoming an academic and lecturer in the field of social anthropology. Public speaking is an important skill for this career path and in May 2008 I gave two seminars at Massey University with the goals of sharing my work with my colleagues and increasing my public speaking abilities.