



# *Journey towards empowerment*

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT   
STIFTUNG**

Edited by :  
DAMYANTY SRIDHARAN

*Journey  
towards  
empowerment*



# *Journey towards empowerment*

*Edited by*  
Damyanty Sridharan

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
India Office

Published by: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
India Office  
K-70B, Hauz Khas Enclave  
New Delhi - 110016

Copyright: © Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2009

Design and Printing: Daanish Books Print Services,  
New Delhi  
[www.daanishbooks.com](http://www.daanishbooks.com)

ISBN: 81-7440-067-2

*For individual papers e-mail*

*FES India Office:* [fes@fesindia.org](mailto:fes@fesindia.org)

# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<b>Introduction</b> Damyant Sridharan	1
<b>Women's Participation in Political Processes</b> Damyant Sridharan	8
<b>Verdict 2009</b> <b>Does It Make a Difference to Women?</b> Kalpana Sharma	13
<b>Women's Reservation Bill in India</b> Damyant Sridharan	18
<b>Ensuring Inclusive &amp; Accountable Governance</b> <b>SCRIA's Way</b> Sunderlal & Team Members	21
<b>SOHARDs Story</b> Niranjan Sharma	46
<b>Training Women Councillors</b> <b>URC's Approach in Karnataka</b> Gururaja Budhya	54

<b>Organising the Marginalised</b>	<b>63</b>
Damyanty Sridharan	
<b>Contribution to Family and Farm Women Cultivators and YFA</b>	<b>67</b>
Venkat Ramnayya	
<b>Engagement with Displaced Persons ISED's Experience</b>	<b>78</b>
Balaji Pandey	
<b>Organising Informal Workers Nidan's Approach</b>	<b>95</b>
Arbind Singh	
<b>Domestic Workers' Plight CWDRs Strategy</b>	<b>104</b>
Renuka Bala	
<b>Youth, Democracy and Gender</b>	<b>114</b>
Damyanty Sridharan	
<b>Building Democracy through Citizenship A Personal Narrative</b>	<b>117</b>
Sharada Nayak	
<b>Articulating and Addressing Imbalances Vacha's Way</b>	<b>126</b>
Sonal Shukla	
<i>Contributors</i>	<b>141</b>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<b>145</b>
<i>Glossary of non-English Words</i>	<b>147</b>
<i>Select FES Publications</i>	<b>149</b>

## Preface

Often women's empowerment programmes fail to get documented due to their spatial spread and the variety of actors and stakeholders involved in the process. Further, it is contended that it is extremely difficult to capture the impact of such work in terms of its political and social impact as it is not easy to isolate the impact of programme activities and other external factors. However, it can not be denied that over time such interventions do hold many lessons. These learning's may be exemplary in terms of the process, the impact or in revealing the avoidable pitfalls. It is in this spirit of participatory learning and knowledge sharing that the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Women's Empowerment Programme (India office) along with select current partners decided to document such experiences. Broad terms of reference for write ups by partner organizations were jointly formulated, so as to have a common frame, with flexibility for allowing individual experiences to be reflected. Based on areas of intervention, this publication is presented in three sections a) Women's Participation in Political Processes, b) Organising the Marginalised and c) Youth, Democracy and Gender.

The first paper in the section on Women's Participation in Political Processes starts with an overview of the participation of women and the outcome of general elections held in India in



May 2009. This paper was part of a series of articles generated with FES partner Women's Feature Service, while monitoring the participation of women in the elections. In these elections we managed to get 10.7 percent women in the lower house of Parliament, so far the highest ever. This is nowhere near the 33 percent sought to be achieved through the Women's reservation Bill which has been pending in parliament since 1996. The fate of the women's reservation bill in India is elucidated in the next paper. The struggle of women to come up the political ladder in the wake of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (ensuring 33 percent reservation to women in local bodies) has been well documented in the next three papers through the experiences of SCRIA in Haryana, SOHARD in Rajasthan and Urban Research Centre in Karnataka. Section II takes up issues concerning organising the marginalized be they informal sector workers or persons displaced due to various industrial and mining projects. The papers in this section explain how a particular process in a particular environment can bring in inclusive development for the hitherto marginalised groups. It also shows that there is no universal strategy for organising the marginalised. The social, economic and cultural environment plays an important role in determining the right strategy. Here, the organizing strategies adopted by partner organizations concerning women cultivators (Youth for Action), women and men displaced due to the so-called development projects (Institute for Socio-Economic Development—ISED), informal workers with a focus on vendors and hawkers (Nidan) and domestic workers (Centre for Women's Development and Research—CWDR) is presented. The last Section III presents the work with partner organizations Education Resources Centre (ERC) Trust and Vacha under the theme of Democracy, Youth and Gender Justice. Given that an estimated 70% of the world's youth population lives in developing countries the majority of who is going to be in India in the near future, it is imperative to

engage with this segment of the population. The objective of such engagement is to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding about the role of civil society in nourishing the spirit of democracy with an emphasis on social justice to ensure that development is more inclusive. Gender sensitisation of young women and men is another crucial objective given the continued gender gaps in our socio-economic and political indicators and entrenched patriarchal norms existing in our society.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the contributors to this volume for their time and effort which they so willingly spared for this task.

December 2009

**Damyanty Sridharan**



# Introduction

Damyanty Sridharan

Given that democracy, justice and solidarity are the guiding principles of the activities of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), equal rights for women and men is an inalienable principle within this context. Activities promoting women have always been part of the project work of the Stiftung. The mid-1980s witnessed the launch of a number of pilot projects aimed specifically at women's empowerment in several countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The initial policies towards women's promotion aimed at improving women's opportunities through programmes for income generation and skill training. The same was the case in India and, accordingly, the Project titled Promotion of Self-help Initiatives for Disadvantaged People was conceptualised as a pilot project in the late 1980s with a focus on women.

Women in India suffer on two counts—first, because the society as a whole is impoverished, and second, because they are women. (Kumar, Shiva 1996)

Knowing the social, political, and economic marginalisation of women, it was felt that promotion of self-help initiatives at grassroots level and simultaneously facilitating sustainable

social and political transformation processes at the macro level could improve the living conditions of women. In order to ensure sustainability of project initiatives and their role in transforming social structures, activities at the micro-level are supplemented with advocacy measures aimed at influencing policy change at the macro level. In the face of strong patriarchal structures, all this is necessary though not sufficient. Changing mindsets of both men and women to bring in gender equality remains an ongoing challenge.

Women's empowerment is thus the touchstone for the Project. Keeping in mind this talisman, the Project endeavors to develop and support innovative programmes in a participatory manner with partner organisations. The activities facilitate the interaction between different stakeholders represented by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Policy-makers, research institutes, activists, politicians, media practitioners, and citizens' groups. Over the years, networking and policy advocacy have emerged as a crucial input across issues in the programme activities. Additionally, gender concerns are addressed as a cross-cutting issue in all FES India programmes. In keeping with these changes, the Project is now called Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Project.

### **Project Implementation**

A wide range of instruments have been identified for implementing programmes of the Project. The most successful and widely used instruments are:

- Workshops/seminars/conferences/round tables;
- Training programmes;

- Exposure programmes for representatives of partner organisations;
- Action-based research studies and publications;
- Training and education material;
- Professional inputs by consultants and advisers; and
- Distribution of relevant publications among erstwhile and present FES contacts.

## **Project Consolidation and Expansion**

The pilot phase provided the necessary orientation to develop clear-cut parameters for implementing programmes. The subsequent stage of Project consolidation and expansion envisaged an integrated approach to women's empowerment, combining direct programming at the micro level with efforts at the macro level to improve the framework conditions impacting on the socio-economic situation of women. Concrete steps for improving the working and living conditions of women were integrated with measures to support policies aimed at improving the status of women in society. Based on the experiences of the pilot phase, broad objectives for identifying and planning future programme areas were developed. While the objectives served to give direction to the project, the focus of individual programmes and expansion into new areas were adopted in view of social, economic and political developments and needs of the partner organisations and self-help groups over the years.

Subsequently, initiatives were designed to contribute towards achieving the following broad objectives:

- Improving socio-economic conditions of disadvantaged groups in the informal sector;

- Enhancing women's role in positions of power and decision-making processes; and
- Promoting a gender-sensitive media.

The overall objectives were supported by a range of so-called project objectives, which served to sharpen the focus of activities. Each overall objective was pursued through the following range of project objectives.

- Improving socio-economic conditions of disadvantaged groups was pursued through the following strategies
  - Improving income generation through skills training and natural resource management;
  - Facilitating access to financial resources and micro-credit;
  - Strategising with Self-Help Organisations for economic and social empowerment;
  - Organising and networking and lobbying for rights of informal sector workers; and
  - Capacity Building for Partner organisations.
- Enhancing women's role in positions of power and decision-making by
  - Enhancing women's participation in political processes;
  - Training for women in local governance;
  - Networking among decision-makers and Non-Governmental Organisations to strategise on equal participation of women in political parties; and
  - Strengthening women's assertiveness vis-a-vis their social, legal and political rights.

- Promoting a gender-sensitive media by
  - Strategising for framing a gender-sensitive media policy;
  - Developing a critical awareness among media consumers;
  - Using media as a tool for advocacy on development issues; and
  - Sensitising media practitioners to gender issues.

The choice of geographical location of the programmes has been influenced by the political, social and economic conditions, needs of the affected people and availability of credible partner organisations in the area. Bihar, one of the most backward States of India, where in contrast to the States in southern India, credit and savings programmes were not widespread, was the choice for establishing a Revolving Credit Fund. The launch of an NGO like ADITHI led by a committed women activist in Bihar was an additional factor for initiating a partnership in this area with this partner. Orissa's ranking among States with the maximum number of displaced persons and large-scale development projects due to the natural resources present, influenced the decision for working with the displaced in the coal mining areas of Talcher, Orissa. Although reservation for women in local bodies gave women across the nation an opportunity to participate in political decision-making, Haryana and Rajasthan's women, being historically and traditionally among the most conservative and discriminated, provided the rationale for locating several activities to enhance women's participation in political processes in these States. The credibility and trust gained by NGOs such as Social Centre for Rural Initiative & Advancement (SCRIA) in the project villages of Haryana even prior to FES involvement were also taken into consideration before initiating programmes with women in these



rural areas. Similarly, Andhra Pradesh's vulnerability to drought and desertification and Youth for Action's ongoing involvement with self-help groups gave rise to the project on natural resource management. In addition to working with reputed and well-established partner organisations, new organisations with innovative ideas and commitment such as Social Action for Human Resource Development (SOHARD) in Rajasthan and Nidan in Bihar have also been supported by the Project.

Following an integrated approach meant that multiple strategies needed to be adapted to promote economic, social and political empowerment with the help of various stakeholders, including the self-help groups. The example of street vendors and hawkers would serve well to highlight this point. Having surveyed the situation of vendors and hawkers in Patna, it became imperative to initiate measures to organise them, lobby for their rights and network with other like-minded organisations to enhance their bargaining skills. Programmes for legal awareness and awareness on cooperatives as a means of improving their economic conditions were also initiated. Nidan as an organisation was offered opportunities for capacity building through training programmes for staff members and visits to other organisations. Today, Nidan is at the forefront of an alliance of street vendors' organisations and is active in policy formulation at the national level, along with facilitating programmes for vendors at the grassroots level.

The World Women's Conference in Beijing (1995) needs mention here, as it redefined key strategies and goals for development. It was instrumental in highlighting critical areas for promoting women's development the world over and in providing goals and action plans to move ahead. Reflecting the altered perception towards development and experiences gathered at the micro level, which clearly showed that development was

not always possible by restricting planning to women, the Project in India was for some time referred to as the “Gender and Development Project”. However, the more significant aspect and impact of Beijing was the conscious decision and move towards integration of a gender perspective in all activities of FES India which still continues. While introduction of gender mainstreaming within FES as an organisation, and in its activities with partners, is still valid and essential, programmes aimed exclusively at women continue to be critical in a country such as India, where women are most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

The Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality Project in the past two decades has established itself as a continually evolving and expanding programme committed to strengthening women’s economic, social and political empowerment. The Project has played a pioneering role in identifying, developing and supporting innovative projects in a participatory manner with partner organisations and marginalised sections of society. It has evolved to meet the changing political and economic situation, whereby, the focus of certain programmes has altered. Some initiatives were even discontinued owing to altered framework conditions or shifting priorities of partners. The increased levels of awareness and confidence among women across issues be they in Haryana, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu, bear testimony to the success of the programmes. The flexibility of the Project in entering new arenas has lent it tremendous energy and dynamism.

## References

Kumar, Shiva. 1996. UNDP’s Gender-Related-Development Index: A Compilation for Indian States.

## **Women's Participation in Political Processes**

Damyanty Sridharan

In India, despite having a strong women's movement, women continue to be marginally represented in policy and decision-making processes. The Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law to all Indian women. Political equality for women and men is indisputable in this context. This equality includes not only equal right to franchise but also sharing power of decision-making and policy-making at all levels. The actual participation or even representation of women in various political institutions, especially in the decision-making positions, does not reflect the equality principle so far. Constitutional guarantees notwithstanding, the actual representation of women in parliaments and political parties is low. The prevailing culture in politics is generally male-oriented. The conventional notion of politics confines women's concerns to the private sphere of domesticity. It is against this background that programmes for enhancing women's role in positions of power and decision-making processes were conceptualised and implemented since the beginning of the Project.

The FES initiative in this field started with a series of State(s)- and national-level discussions in 1991–1992 to assess women's involvement in political and decision-making processes. Such consultations served to strengthen the process of networking

among NGOs working on the issue and strategise for enhancing women's participation. The efforts at networking also revealed that strategies for enhancing participation have to reflect the ground realities in the different States, which may vary from region to region. Over the years, it was found that visibility of women voters had increased, yet, their involvement in the political process remained questionable. A study was undertaken to identify the level of political participation among women by analysing the level of their political awareness and linking the background of the female voter in terms of caste, religion, family and class structures to her decision-making process. The study also attempted to ascertain the importance given to women by political parties, candidates and campaigns. It was found that in constituencies where there were women candidates, a greater effort was made to contact the female voter. Women voters also found women candidates more accessible as compared to men. Despite a general vote of confidence in favour of women candidates and a common perception that women should actively participate as voters and candidates, the study clearly showed that political parties and traditional value systems are male-dominated, and give very little space to women. The findings of the study were published under the title "Illusion of Power—The Woman's Vote". More recently, the 2009 elections have brought in the highest number of women in Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament) so far but still it is a dismal 10 per cent only. It has been the endeavour of the Project to continuously analyse and debate the situation through research and dialogues with various stakeholders, including political parties, women's activists, media practitioners and policy-makers to improve the situation. Our partners in this line of work have been the National Commission for Women, Centre for Development Studies and Action (CDSA) and, more recently, the Women's Feature Service, amongst others.

## Women in Local Self-Governance

*Panchayati Raj* (local self-governance) was introduced in India in 1959 in an effort to decentralise the existing democratic system and enable people at grassroots level to play an active role in self-governance. However, women did not play an active role in *Panchayati Raj* and tended to be marginalised. A sincere effort to facilitate participation of all communities and strata of society in local governments led to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, which came into force on 24 April 1993. With these amendments, it became mandatory for all States to make provisions for 33 per cent reservation for women at all levels of local governance. Subsequently, the amendments were ratified by all States and changes to the State legislations were introduced by the respective State governments. A fixed five-year tenure, direct elections and a compulsory three-tier system were introduced to strengthen the system. This brought nearly one million, untrained and a majority of illiterate women into local bodies. However, such a large number of women needed to be identified, politically empowered and trained. Lack of awareness on rights, inadequate training and patriarchal structures of society posed daunting challenges to women's effective participation in local bodies.

The question of illiteracy, incompetence and apathy were recurrent concerns in the context of reservation for women. While there was sympathy for enabling women to come out and vote, their ability to contest elections and perform effectively was questioned.

Understanding the new legislation was deemed essential to analyse its efficacy and identify training needs for women in order to equip them to participate effectively. A series of workshops in collaboration with the National Commission for

Women and the Centre for Development Studies and Action sought to address issues related to implementation of the Amendment and training needs of women. The findings of the workshop were presented to the Ministry of Rural Development in order to facilitate dialogue and initiate collaborative efforts with representatives of the government.

A larger presence of women did not have an immediate impact amongst local bodies for self-governance in terms of sensitivity to problems related to women. The FES study, published in 1995 under the title "Panchayati Raj in Action—Challenges to Women's Role" by Susheela Kaushik was an important contribution to the ongoing efforts for analysing policies and identifying areas for strengthening women in local governance.

In order to understand the evolving dynamics of the reservations and to support initiatives at the ground level, the FES collaborated with partner organisations working specifically on the issue. *Our continuous partners in this area of work have been SCRIA, SOHARD and URC. SCRIA and SOHARD are engaged in rural areas of Haryana and Rajasthan whereas URC has embarked on the task in urban Karnataka. The nature of this collaboration and the impact of this work are outlined in this section in the respective write-ups.* Starting from mere awareness generation regarding the Constitutional Amendments, the collaboration evolved to training programmes for effective participation, micro planning, and advocacy for policy changes along with addressing development concerns from a gender perspective. A clear shift in priorities has occurred with the increased and effective participation of women. Networking meetings with several voluntary organisations at the State level and periodically at the national level are also conducted from time to time in order to coordinate efforts and share information and experiences. Initiatives to encourage dialogue among

*Gram Sabha*/ward members, elected representatives and local bureaucrats further help to bridge the gap among the stakeholders and strengthen the working of local bodies towards development.

The network on *Panchayati Raj* and women has been particularly successful in focusing nationwide attention on the role, performance and challenges of the elected women leaders in India and in carrying across the borders to other South Asian countries. The South Asia (involving Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India) workshops on women in local politics have drawn all the five nations, their NGOs, and women activists together and have sensitised the important stakeholders.

The Project has been involved with the evolution of the training and awareness generation programmes through field visits and participation in consultative meetings with the self-help group members and staff of the involved organisations. Women's political empowerment has been pursued through a strategy aimed at creating a complementary and interlinked relation among three main components, viz., macro policy, empirical grassroots data and action for empowerment. Sustained support at the conceptual level of programme planning, measures for capacity building of partner organisations and multipliers, facilitating regular meetings amongst stakeholders have all led to long-standing partnerships and wide outreach.

## **Verdict 2009**

### **Does It Make a Difference to Women?**

Kalpana Sharma

One could not escape them before, during, or after these elections. Four women dominated the cut and thrust of Election 2009 to the 15th Lok Sabha: Sonia Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Mayawati and Jayalalithaa. In a country where women still suffer discrimination from birth, this in itself is remarkable—that women now run four major political parties, the Congress Party, the Trinamool Congress, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), respectively.

Apart from these four, women were everywhere—as voters, campaigners and candidates. Only 462 women contested as compared to 6,538 men. But 59 of them won, which is a much higher percentage of success than for men. And, for the first time ever, the number of women in the Lok Sabha accounted for 10.70 per cent of the total. The 14th Lok Sabha had only 45 women Members of Parliament (MPs), a mere 8.7 per cent of the total House strength. But 10.7 per cent is still lower than many other parliaments around the world. And it is less than a third of what women have been demanding for the last 11 years.

While increasing numbers and a few prominent women do suggest an increase in political participation, this will not



automatically translate into women-friendly policies or a government sensitive to gender concerns. Yet, the results of this election do bring with them a sliver of hope that women's participation in electoral politics could increase and be qualitatively different from the past.

For example, this time, apart from widows, wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters and mothers of male politicians standing from safe seats nurtured by the men, several women who normally would not have considered entering the fray have done so. Career women who do not belong to "political" families have chosen to either join existing political parties, or stand as independents. This represents a notable break from the past.

Take the case of one of Rahul Gandhi's young protégés, Meenakshi Natarajan, who stood from Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh and won. Annu Tandon of the Observer Research Group, who has a corporate background, won from Unnao, Uttar Pradesh (UP), again, on a Congress Party ticket. And even though she lost, well-known dancer and activist, Mallika Sarabhai made her presence felt as an independent challenging the might of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader L.K. Advani in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

The victories of women like Natarajan and Tandon do seem to suggest that women have a greater chance of success if they are supported by, or are candidates of, a political party, than if they stand as independents.

Unfortunately, political parties continue to pit women against one another. So in Lucknow, for instance, the Congress fielded their State party president, Rita Bahuguna Joshi, against the Samajwadi Party's Nafisa Ali. Both lost and the BJP candidate,

Lalji Tandon won. In one of the most high-profile contests, Telugu actress and sitting MP, Jaya Prada of the Samajwadi Party narrowly beat Congress's Noor Begum in Rampur, UP.

On the positive side, although many female relatives of male politicians won from safe constituencies, not everyone succeeded. When the Supreme Court ruled that people convicted of crimes could not stand for elections, several powerful MPs in Bihar fielded women from their families. Rakesh Ranjan, or Pappu Yadav, sentenced to life in 1998 for murder, fielded his wife Ranjit Ranjan and his mother, Shanti Priya. Both lost. The notorious Mohammed Shahabuddin, convicted for four murders, had his wife Hina stand from Siwan. She too lost. Vina Devi, the wife of Surajbhan, also convicted for murder, lost in Nawada. And in Sheohar, Lovely Anand, wife of Anand Mohan convicted for murder, failed miserably.

With an increasingly discerning electorate, it is evident that being related to a powerful man will not guarantee the success of women candidates. Such a change will work in favour of women who want to contest but fear confronting criminal elements in politics.

While women getting elected from political families and safe seats undercut the demand for a level playing field for women in politics, increasingly many such women are beginning to carve a distinctive place for themselves. The most obvious person in this category is Congress President, Sonia Gandhi. When she took office, no one believed her capable of managing India's oldest political party. Today, no one questions it.

Even amongst the younger women, we see signs of such capability. Supriya Sule, Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar's daughter, has had an easy time entering politics first

through the Rajya Sabha and now into the Lok Sabha by contesting from Baramati, a family fiefdom. Yet, Sule has already been noticed for articulating concerns such as the persistent malnutrition amongst children. She was part of a campaign by young MPs to draw attention to this problem.

Similarly, Congress's Priya Dutt, daughter of the late Sunil Dutt, got elected from his seat when he died mid-term. Today, she has proved that she can win on her own steam, in a constituency with many new segments. In fact, she is the only one of the five Congress MPs from Mumbai who has won in all her six Assembly segments and the reason is her reputation for being accessible and involved with her constituents.

These elections have shown again that more women now want to be in politics. And not just in national politics. Thousands of women are already politically engaged at the '*Panchayat*' (village) and '*nagarpalika*' (municipal) levels. And even if not all of them are members of political parties, it is only a matter of time before they begin demanding space. In States like Bihar, the reservation for women in '*Panchayats*' and '*nagarpalikas*' is now 50 per cent. Political parties will not be able to resist this thrust from the grassroots and would inevitably have to field more women candidates for the assemblies and the Lok Sabha.

Even if the number of women elected has increased only marginally, their influence through the major parties has increased. Every party now routinely includes gender concerns in its manifesto. The last government instituted several policies specifically addressing women's concerns, such as the Domestic Violence Bill and programmes curbing sex-selective abortions and encouraging female literacy. The two non-Congress Chief Ministers who have done well in their respective States, Shivraj

Singh Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh and Nitish Kumar in Bihar, have actively pursued policies that benefit women. Thus, it is clear that addressing women's concerns does translate into votes.

With a higher percentage of elected women in the Lok Sabha and with many newcomers who might be less prejudiced and more open to the idea of reservation of seats for women, perhaps the Women's Reservation Bill will finally see the light of day. More women need to be in politics not because they make better politicians, which they very well could, but because women have the right to be represented in policy-making when they make up half the population.

## Women's Reservation Bill in India

Damyanty Sridharan

Addressing the joint session of Parliament, after the present United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government came to power, President Pratibha Patil chalked out priority policy issues to be tackled in the first 100 days. Significant amongst these was the promise to table the women's reservation bill. In the last elections, held in May 2009, 484 men and 59 women were elected, bringing the strength of women members to 10.8 per cent, the highest ever in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament). However, this is still nowhere near the 33 per cent proposed in the Women's reservation bill. The legislation to reserve one third of the total seats in Parliament and State legislatures for women was introduced in the Lok Sabha in 1996. Though it has been introduced in Parliament several times since then, the Bill could not be passed because of lack of political consensus.

FES in collaboration with Women's Feature Service had tracked the election campaign of some women candidates during the 14th Lok Sabha Elections (2009). The aspirations, struggles and, in some cases, the realisation of hopes were captured in a series of articles titled Women on the Power Track. As a sequel to this, at the end of 100 days of UPA in power, FES organised a discussion with eminent parliamentarians and journalists in collaboration with WFS and Indian Women's Press Corps to know what had happened to the Bill.

The Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee to which the Bill had been referred, in 2008, S Natchiappan (Congress) had very clear views. He said that until and unless there was a consensus on the Bill he was not prepared to submit the Committee's Report. Brinda Karat (Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Najma Heptulla (Bhartiya Janata Party) commended him on having made valiant efforts to move towards a consensus. However, they felt that the report should have been submitted even if it would have had a vote of dissent by a few. As a new government has now been formed, the Committee will again be reconstituted. The passage of the Bill involves certain technicalities as it is a Constitution amendment Bill. Besides the requirement of Parliament passing the Constitutional Amendment Bill with two-thirds majority, the measure would have to go to State legislatures as ratification by at least 50 per cent of the State legislatures is needed for it.

Participants including the male parliamentarians further shared their apprehensions regarding the Bill as they felt that a majority of the elected male Parliamentarians were not actually in favour of the Bill even though they would not admit it publicly as that would be against their parties' position. They felt a compromise in the form of increasing the total number of seats in Parliament through further delimitation of constituencies and then reserving 181 seats for women may work. 181 seats forms 33 per cent of the current strength of Parliament but would work out to 25 per cent of the increased total seats.

Since Independence, India has had various contentious legislations passed which have favoured women's empowerment and which have been a further step towards social justice by reducing the gender disparities, at least, by law. These include issues

relating to marriage, dowry, inheritance of property, violence, and employment. However, no legislation bringing in social change has ever come through without opposition. Striving for a consensus on the Women's Bill thus seems to be another ploy to derail, or at least delay, it.

# **Ensuring Inclusive & Accountable Governance SCRIA's Way**

Sunderlal & Team Members

SCRIA, the acronym for Social Centre for Rural Initiatives and Advancement, is a registered non-profit organisation. Since 1979, it is working towards comprehensive and sustainable development for villages, tackling the root causes of poverty and inequity and helping people to create self-reliant and sustainable societies. Despite the long-standing and vigorous women's movement, patriarchy remains deeply entrenched in India, influencing the structure of its political and social institutions and determining the opportunities open to women and men. Thus, since SCRIA believes that true social change cannot be expected to take place with the participation of only half the population, it mainly works with women from socially and economically disadvantaged rural communities by facilitating women's groups for meaningful participation in social, political, economic and developmental processes.

## **Outreach**

SCRIA works in over 1800 villages of southern Haryana and northern Rajasthan in northwest India. The districts covered are Rewari, Mohindergarh and Jhajjar in southern Haryana and Alwar, Bikaner, Churu in northern Rajasthan. Most of the region is semi arid while Bikaner and Churu districts are arid.



It is interspersed with sand dunes and barren hillocks of the Aravali ranges. The region has an agrarian economy. Nearly 95 per cent of the villages in the districts of Haryana and Alwar district in Rajasthan are dependent on ground water for irrigation while Bikaner and Churu are primarily rain-fed one-crop districts. Industrially too, the outreach area is backward, though a part of Rewari that is close to the national highway is getting industrialised. Roads connect most of the villages in southern Haryana, though it is not so in most of northwest Rajasthan. Other basic facilities like public transportation, health centres, means of communication etc., are in adequate numbers in southern Haryana but their number decreases rapidly as we move towards Rajasthan, where they are far and few.

The marginalisation of women in all decision-making processes in the private and public sphere in the region makes it imperative for women to be equipped and empowered to have an equal and a strong voice in the social, political, economic and developmental decision-making processes. Hence, since 1979, SCRIA is striving for meaningful involvement of women in these processes. Due consideration is given to women from landless and marginal farming families who are involved in subsistence agriculture. They are primarily from the socially disadvantaged community, do not have any sustainable source of income, and are willing to participate in social, political and economic development initiatives. Conscious effort is made to involve men—farmers and youth also from the concerned village communities—to lend support in community initiatives. Men are provided an opportunity to ‘understand and distinguish’ the gender inequities that they see every day and once sensitised most men address this anomaly. Two major protagonists in village development, the elected representatives of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions and the

electors—*Gram Sabha* (village assembly) members—are also important outreach constituents of SCRIA.

In the region, the rate of depletion of natural resources is many times greater than the rate of repletion. Women in specific and the community in general are given no sincere opportunity to manage and maintain their natural resources or participate in the development processes. The region faces a chronic shortage of water, the ground water table is very low and most of the ground water belts are highly saline and not potable. With no other source of water available, ground water is being exploited extensively for irrigation and industrial purposes, which is posing a grave problem in Haryana where the rate of decrease in ground water is over one metre per year.

Agriculture is the major source of livelihood for most people in the outreach area. No other alternative source of income is readily available. Unemployment is high due to extensive land fragmentation, increased competitiveness in the traditional employment avenues and lack of opportunities for training in employable skills. Sustainable livelihood is a big issue in northwest Rajasthan with a drought cycle of seven years.

The region also has a traditionally limiting and rigid patriarchal society, governed by the laws of Manu, the codifier of ancient Hindu law. The role of women is defined by their place within the socio-economic system. The arid conditions, prevalence of child marriage, very low rate of female literacy and one of the lowest sex ratio in the country, with 861 women per 1000 men in Haryana according to 2001 census, are some of the indicators reflecting the status of women. The women are naturally affected by the dominant ideology of the society,

but this does not completely insulate them against an awareness of their subservient position. In the political arena too, the strong patriarchal control over the political process effectively marginalises the participation of women.

## Initiatives

SCRIA's vision, mission and initiatives have evolved in concurrence with the outreach, its issues and national policies. The vision aims at 'sustainable rural development by rural communities' by building capacities of rural communities for their active and meaningful participation in self-governance processes for inclusive and good governance. For this, SCRIA has organised its work around three key issues that affect the largest number of people in the region—governance, livelihood and natural resources management. The three programmes related to them are known as *Svashaasan* (Self-governance), *Samridhi* (Livelihood) and *Sampada Prakritik* (Natural Resources).

Initiatives related to governance are spread over all the villages in outreach districts but focused initiatives in livelihood and natural resource management are limited to around 560 villages only.

## Approach

For a germane and just development, people must be involved in the process and must articulate and decide as per their needs. They must inquire, question and be instrumental in framing policies that affect their lives. For this, they have to be intrinsically involved in the decision-making processes at

all levels of governance. Hence, the linchpin of all of SCRIA's initiatives is self-governance. In order to create an enabling environment for the participation of socially and economically disadvantaged women and men in governance, SCRIA addresses their basic livelihood needs through its programmes on natural resource management and income generation. Livelihood issues are intrinsically linked with people's participation in governance processes, for when people are hungry and have no money for living, they cannot be realistically expected to think of the distant benefits of inclusive and accountable governance.

SCRIA works with communities with a firm belief in a participatory approach. For all programmes self-help support systems are institutionalised wherein women perform a major role as decision-makers. This also greatly assists in establishing community's ownership and in sustaining the initiated process to the best of their ability. For transforming the subjects of development from being passive recipients of development to initiators of the development process, SCRIA facilitates the process of women organising themselves in groups in all the outreach villages. These self-help groups, known as *Sangathans*, act as initiators of the development process in the region. They are also responsible for various development initiatives facilitated by the organisation in their respective villages. *Sangathans* also act as catalysts in promoting self and inclusive governance in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions.

Other than *Sangathan* members, SCRIA also works with elected women representatives, *Gram Sabha* members, *Gram Panchayats*, men and youth and civil society organisations. Women's groups in the villages promoted under various government programmes are also outreached through lateral village level networks.

## Constituency Building and Mobilising for Local Initiatives

In 1979, SCRIA started working for enabling women as equal partners in family and society by organising women's groups, building skills and capacity of its members and by motivating them to participate in decision-making processes for gender equity. SCRIA also facilitated schemes and programmes promoted by government agencies related to water, fuel for cooking, education, child care, legal camps for women etc. With all this, an immediate impact was achieved but it remained local. In the early 1990s, the emerging challenges in the society evolved social dynamics that required active participation and a sense of ownership from the society. The promulgation of 73rd amendment to the Constitution ushered in a new era of political inclusiveness and citizens' involvement at the grassroots level. To address these effectively, SCRIA, in active consultation with the community, adopted a change in its working strategy and process with a thrust on strengthening the people and the people's institutions.

In the second half of 1994, elections for *Panchayati Raj* Institutions [PRIs], in accordance with the latest amendment, were declared in Haryana. People and officials in Haryana did not know much about the nature of the Act or about its 'political-scene-altering' provisions. Seeing this lacuna, SCRIA embarked on a mission to ensure participation of women in PRIs in partnership with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [FES]. In the intervening two months between the declaration of elections and the actual elections, a sensitisation campaign was launched. Booklets, handbills, songs, puppet shows, street plays and slogans on the salient features of the Act were prepared and extensively used during village rallies, street-corner meetings and in monthly meetings of women *Sangathans*. Women were encouraged and motivated to stand for reserved seats in all the three tiers of PRIs. They were exhorted to oppose 'unopposed selections' of women

as members for PRIs, as unopposed candidates were mainly proxy candidates put up by influential men.

The results were mixed. In the new PRIs dispensation, there were women who were rearing to chart the uncharted territory but they were in a minority as the majority was of those who were cover candidates for male relatives or patrons from among the ruling elite in the village. Undaunted by this, post elections, SCRIA launched a training programme for the elected women representatives with support from FES and other partners. Classroom trainings on the Act and its provisions were organised. The response from elected representatives was good in the beginning but slowly it petered off as the stranglehold of men and other entrenched vested interests did not let them participate in the local governance processes. It was time for a change in strategy and SCRIA responded by including members of women *Sangathans* in the sensitisation process on issues related to PRIs. Just before the second elections to PRIs in Haryana a special pre-election training on the process, procedures and nuances of filling nomination papers, canvassing, booth management, vote counting etc., for women candidates and their supporters was organised. The election results were better than earlier and, as the State government had also started 'consulting' with PRIs on village development issues, special trainings were facilitated for PRI representatives and *Sangathan* members on micro development plans. Once again, FES collaborated with SCRIA. The impact of all these changes in strategy became apparent amongst the SCRIA outreach areas though it did not reflect significantly in the overall day-to-day functioning of the PRIs as awareness of the system and the ills prevailing in it was with a numerically insignificant few. These women could not be the tipping point for meaningful change. This called for a rethink in the strategy for inclusive and accountable governance. It was time to go beyond members of SCRIA-facilitated groups or elected women PRI representatives.

On an experimental basis, in 2000, SCRIA launched a *Gram Sabha* activation campaign in Rewari district. FES supported this pilot initiative. The campaign focused on rights and duties of *Gram Sabha* members and the role of *Gram Sabha* in village governance. The campaign included all and excluded none. It was a huge success, so much so that we had requests from neighboring districts also for a similar initiative. In 2001, *Gram Sabha* activation campaigns were held in 5 districts. Since then, with the assistance of FES and other partners, such campaigns have been scaled up, covering all outreach districts. They are a regular feature of SCRIA's governance programme and held before every *Gram Sabha* session. Campaigns are now facilitated in various formats and on various issues for sensitising and mobilising citizens. Rallies on foot or on bicycles, street corner meetings, songs, street plays, memorandum to the administration for pertinent action, street-side information booths, village-level information camps, information chariots (auto rickshaws, jeeps, tractors and camel carts equipped with loudspeakers that play out a taped message), information sessions with people on streets — in jeeps/buses, trains, distribution of posters/handbills/booklets and information broadcasting through local cable television networks are some of the diverse tactics employed.

Apart from campaigns, capacity building is also now situation specific and not general in nature. It is facilitated in a holistic way through classroom training, back-up support systems, institutionalisation of mechanisms like networks, creating enabling environment for greater gender-sensitive delivery of services and by building multi-stakeholder partnerships. For perspective building on issues of governance, workshops, study tours and development camps are organised. A mix of informative and interactive styles is followed wherein games, group work, street plays and movies are used regularly.

No amount of capacity building, skill development and strengthening of women's organisations' alone make much of a difference unless empowerment leads towards social, political and developmental justice, bringing qualitative and quantitative improvement in people's lives. For this, the empowered but disadvantaged people must initiate local action for the desired change. If this change is to be peaceful and non-violent an enabling environment is an absolute necessity. At SCRIA, 'Including all' is the bed-rock strategy for ensuring an enabling environment. Men, youth, *Panchayats* and *Gram Sabha* are regularly sensitised on issues of governance. SCRIA also organises discourses like interface or dialogue that provide a unique opportunity to village residents for a lively interface with those who are responsible for providing or facilitating services and initiatives in the villages. Many such pilot initiatives have been supported by FES.

In order not to limit people's involvement in governance process to the PRIs only, SCRIA facilitates opportunities for women, men and civil society organisations to understand governance and its working at the micro, mezzo and macro levels of governance. FES has partnered many such regional initiatives. With the objective of a greater impact for meaningful policy influence and advocacy, SCRIA is also actively involved in networking and alliance-building with like-minded organisations, groups, federations and intellectuals within the region as well as at the national level.

## **Local Initiatives**

For systemic changes in governance and to influence public attitude for it, organised efforts and actions over a period of time are required so that citizen advocates gain access and voice in the decision-making of relevant institutions. SCRIA



assists the empowered *Sangathans* in value-based local initiatives and ensures that the actions reflect the values of accountability, community ownership and benefit the deserving. The initiatives are for inclusiveness and accountability in governance and in public schemes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, action against gender violence, meaningful functioning of public services and institutions, creation of community-based assets and management of common resources. Discussions, community meetings, complaints to “decision-makers”, negotiations, public demonstrations, rallies for support from general public, memorandum to administration, voluntary labour, press conference and protest marches are some of the tools that *Sangathans* takes recourse to during local initiatives. SCRIA’s role in all this is limited to providing appropriate information and networking with appropriate bodies while ensuring that initiatives are within the spirit of law. The outreach region being deeply conservative and patriarchal, opposition to such women led initiatives often comes from the family while efforts in accountable governance and transparent implementation of development initiatives are opposed by entrenched vested interests in the implementing system. To overcome these hostilities, SCRIA employs diverse strategies that nullify resentment from the majority though at times it does not insulate the organisation or its team from hostility of a minuscule minority. But this is an expected reaction in a situation where the centre of decision-making power shifts from a few to many.

A significant share of success in SCRIA’s various initiatives could be attributed to the people who partner as volunteers with SCRIA. School children, youth, women and farmers come forward and willingly volunteer for local initiatives. Participation by volunteers in an initiative results in cost sharing that leads to its sustainability, ownership by community and increased

accountability. SCRIA gratefully acknowledges the support of more than 12,000 community volunteers without whose selfless devotion the mission would be incomplete.

## Setting the Agenda

Stories of women, from SCRIA-supported people's institutions, compelling *Gram Panchayat* and officials to hold *Gram Sabha* at a common place in the presence of all elected representatives and *Gram Sabha* members, are plentiful. This trend of activating *Gram Sabhas* and *Panchayats* started a few years back but has only recently become noticeable. In many villages,

In village Lalpur Dabana, Sarpanch Payal's responsibilities were 'looked after' by her husband and in spite of *Sangathan* members' constant encouragement Payal remained aloof from her duties. So, the *Sangathan* decided to take matters into their hands. Just before the Gram Sabha in November 2006 they strategised to ensure the presence of all elected women representatives, finalised the issues to be raised and publicised the date, time and venue of the Gram Sabha. On the day of Gram Sabha nearly twenty women reached the village school, the designated venue, before the appointed hour, three group members escorted women Panch while members Santosh and Krishna, went to bring Sarpanch Payal from her house. Santosh and Krishna found Payal's husband and *Gram Sachiv* (Panchayat Secretary) 'conducting' *Gram Sabha* among themselves. At this the two protested loudly insisting that *Gram Sabha* should be held in a public place among all village residents. *Sachiv* and *Sarpanch's* husband then shifted to school and started the proceedings. Again group members protested and insisted that the real Sarpanch for whom they had voted must lead the meeting. *Gram Sachiv* snapped saying, 'who do you think is this person who is standing in front of you'. The women retorted that, 'as *Sachiv* his job was to record

proceedings and not to talk unnecessarily'. The men present in *Gram Sabha* too protested against women interrupting the proceedings but the women remained determined to have the presence of real representatives in the meeting. Finally, Payal was called and chaired the *Sabha*. Thereafter, the women present in the *Gram Sabha* brought a resolution making the presence and participation of elected women representatives mandatory in all *Panchayat* meetings and *Gram Sabha*.

the revival of *Gram Sabhas* and inclusiveness and accountability in it, is visible though many hurdles remain. Women members of village *Sangathans* and other regional federations periodically contact officials at district and block level, urging them to step up their efforts in realising the goal of meaningful self-governance by ensuring proper arrangements for women to participate and articulate their issues in the *Gram Sabha* and by making certain that the government functionaries assigned to attend *Gram Sabhas* do so. The combined efforts of women, many *Panchayats*, and the district administration have resulted in *Gram Sabhas* being organised 'in open' in over ninety five per cent of the villages in Rewari district. People's participation in these varies from at least 5 to more than 250, with women averaging more than 50 per cent. In sixty per cent of villages, district officials participate in the *Gram Sabhas* and the attendance of elected representatives is usually over 70 per cent.

After initial resistance, a number of *Gram Panchayats* too are playing a significant part in activating *Gram Sabha* and *Panchayats*. Many women representatives of *Block Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* actively support *Sangathans* and other federations in activating *Gram Sabhas* and *Gram Panchayats*. A year

back, anxious by the forceful and assertive attitude of *Sangathan* and other federations for activating *Panchayats* and *Gram Sabha*, there was suddenly a spate of *Gram Sabha* postponements. People, women and men—elected and electors, protested against it. Dozens of complaints, in writing and verbally, were lodged with the district officials. When *Gram Sabha* members were not satisfied with the reasons given by officials for postponement, they applied for information under the Right to Information Act but did not give up on their quest for inclusiveness and accountability in governance.

Collective action by women's groups and various self-help support institutions promoted by SCRIA are a norm in SCRIA's outreach villages. These women are brave, determined, strong willed, energetic and resolute in their struggle for dignity and equality that comes from inclusive and accountable governance. Against great odds, adverse social circumstances and personal sacrifices, these women have sought justice, made their voices heard and, above all, have made a beginning in a conventional society and in a limiting system of governance. They have activated the *Gram Sabhas*, made many *Panchayats* inclusive, pro-actively addressed social issues concerning women, goaded dilapidated and deficient public services and facilities to deliver, have forced public authorities to be more responsible towards their duties and in many ways have influenced the style of functioning of the district administration, resulting in good governance.

Women have demonstrated that citizens have to act for systemic changes for renegotiating democracy so that democracy does not remain only a 'fashionable myth' but brings qualitative change in the lives of millions in this country. They have shown over and over that—We, the women, will make ourselves count and will make our lives better. As *Sarpanch*

Banto of Ibrahimpur village says, *'I may be illiterate but am not unintelligent or helpless. With the information I have now, I can and will improve the condition of my village and circumstances of its residents'.*

*Sangathans* and other self-help support institutions continuously enhance women's role in social, political, and economic decision-making processes, both within the family and in the society. The politically enlightened and active women participate in governance as informed citizens or enter the system for bringing about a meaningful change. Men having positive attitude towards women's participation in governance and development issues too join in the effort. They, enlightened women and men, motivate, support and ensure participation of elected women representatives in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions and in its functioning. In *Gram Sabhas* too, they facilitate meaningful contribution of women *Gram Sabha* members, ensuring issues affecting women are also discussed in earnest. In cases of violence against women, preliminary assistance to victim is offered by *Sangathans* and cases referred to *Shakti Parishad*—a council for victims of violence, for resolution. Gender sensitivity in village level development initiatives and public services is also monitored: when public services don't function as they should, public functionaries do not carry out their responsibilities responsibly, benefits and schemes meant for the public do not reach the public, when there is inequitable distribution of resources and services, when the common resources are exploited to benefit a few and the community ownership is usurped by the unscrupulous. In such dismal cases, members of *Sangathans* and other people's institutions protest and initiate action for justice. The most recent example of this is the process of identification of BPL (Below the Poverty Line) families.

Inclusion of a family in the Below Poverty Line list has extreme importance in the lives of rural poor, as it is a tangible way for getting out of the quagmire of poverty by availing numerous state benefits. The interest among non-poor too for inclusion in the List is immense and the issue is very 'political'. When, in February 2007, the results of BPL survey in Haryana, done a few years back, were displayed for public scrutiny, women *Sangathans* and federations facilitated by SCRIA started protesting, at village, block and district levels, against glaring discrepancies, exclusion of genuinely poor families and inclusion of influential people or their kith and kin. Due to immense protest, the State government ordered a resurvey in April 2007. SCRIA launched a month-long information campaign on the selection criteria for BPL list in 886 villages of Rewari, Mohindergarh and Jhajjar districts. The highlights were printed in handbills, broadcasted through local cable network and a telephone help line was facilitated. More than 110 women and youth volunteers covered bus stations, railway stations, local markets and village bus stands etc., explaining the salient features of the survey to the people. As a result of this, vigilant citizens were supervising the survey work and protesting at any hint of unfair play. In December 2007, a new list was displayed for ratification. In Rewari district alone, in spite of nearly 90 per cent correct listing in most villages, the women groups declared a zero tolerance towards anomalies. From every village, there were voluble protests against the inclusion of non-deserving. Resurveys under the supervision of gazetted officers were ordered in the district. In numerous villages, resurvey was done upto 7 times! The process was finalised in July 2008, nearly one and a half years after the first display of the draft list. The active and selfless participation of women in the process has resulted in the selection of genuinely poor.

The positive results of local initiatives by women *Sangathans* impressed some of the elected women representatives of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions' so much that they formed themselves into a group called *Sakriya Pratinidhi* or active representatives, so that they could improve development status of their villages and fulfil the development ambitions of their electorate. This group primarily focuses on hurdles faced by women representatives in a patriarchal society, monitors inclusiveness in village governance, various public services and systems and acts as a pressure and lobbying group on various issues. Similarly, some *Gram Panchayats* have formed a network called *Sakriya Panchayat*. They too prioritise common issues for development and work collectively on it. When requested, SCRIA facilitates trainings, dialogues or linkages for them.

Since 2007, SCRIA has made participatory impact monitoring—a regular annual feature for its programme on governance to observe, monitor and critically reflect on the ultimate desired change, jointly with local communities. For this, the specific impacts to be assessed, the indicators and the tools for data collection and analysis have been established. Some of the impacts along with result-based indicators for 2008 given below amply demonstrate the effect on the community of various interventions for making governance inclusive and accountable.

**Impact:** Increased participation of women in local self-governance.

### Indicators

- SCRIA has reached 67 per cent of the total women representatives in the district of which 65 per cent are active in various initiatives.

- In 60 per cent *Panchayats*, 65 per cent women representatives participate in *Panchayat* meetings, an increase from 20 per cent in 2004, resulting in decreased involvement of *Sarpanch* and *Panch patis* (males acting for elected women representatives).
- On an average, an active woman representative introduced 7 proposals in a year. *Panchayat* accepted all with immediate action on 50 per cent of the cases.
- In 54 per cent *Panchayats*, active women representatives and *Sangathan* members are involved in *Panchayat* committees. 40 per cent members of these committees are women.
- 25 per cent of the issues raised by women representatives in *Gram Panchayat* are social issues related to women [e.g., female feticide, dowry, domestic violence, etc.].
- In 80 per cent of the *Panchayats*, 67 per cent of the elected women representatives attend *Gram Sabha* meetings.

**Impact:** Institutionalised support systems promoting advocacy for social, political and developmental justice.

### Indicators

- 585 women *Sangathans* in 470 villages are supporting elected women representatives and negotiating their entitlements in decision-making and resources of PRIs'.
- In 46 per cent of the villages, the *Sangathans*, *Manch* and Federation jointly plan and undertake local initiatives.
- Qualitative and quantitative increase in village-level facilities—infrastructure/services in at least 50 per cent



of the villages due to local initiatives by the women's groups and their network.

- *Shakti Parishad*, a forum of women leaders, actively assists women victims of violence.
- In November 2006, in 90 per cent of the villages, *Gram Sabhas* were held in 'open' while in May 2007 it was in 82 per cent villages. In November 2007 and February 2008, in over 95 per cent villages *Gram Sabhas* were held and in May 2008 in 90 per cent villages in spite of the *bandh* (literally means shutdown — it is strike to cause disruption — in this case of traffic movement by not allowing it to function) during the Gujjar agitation.

**Impact:** Increase in social-political initiatives by women.

### Indicators

- In 70 per cent villages, 15–160 women attend *Gram Sabhas* when held.
- 40 per cent to 70 per cent members of the women groups are involved in issues of gender and self-governance.
- In 70 per cent villages, on an average, 4 proposals per *Gram Sabha* per village are forwarded by women and taken up for action by the *Gram Panchayat*.
- Involvement of 5–30 people, other than *Sangathan* members, in various development initiatives is seen.
- *Sangathan* and elected women representatives undertook 1,100 local initiatives successfully in a year.

**Impact:** Inclusiveness and accountability in public services and facilities.

## Indicators

- Improvement in the quality of public facilities and services like the Public Distribution System, water supply and the Primary Health Centre etc., in 50 per cent of the villages.
- Palpable increase in responsiveness among officials towards citizens' needs. When district officials are approached by people about discrepancies or irregularities in public services, more often than not the matter is looked into and addressed immediately.
- In 50 per cent to 60 per cent of the *Gram Sabhas*, the assigned officials participate in the *Sabhas*
- Negligible resistance to women's participation in local governance process in a deeply patriarchal society is being encountered.

## Influencing Governance Processes

On 24 April 2006, the city of Rewari was gearing up for another hot and hectic day, little knowing the significance of the day or about the significance of the event that would take place later in the day. However, 238 women from the villages of five blocks in the district who were gathering at Rajiv Park in Rewari city knew that it was 'Self-Governance Day' and that even after 12 years of the 73rd amendment to the Constitution, self- and inclusive-governance was not a reality, at least not in their villages. The women gathering were elected representatives of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions, members of *Sangathans*, self-help support institutions facilitated by SCRIA and *Gram Sabha* members who had resolved to make self- and inclusive-governance a reality in their villages. They had left their homes very early in the morning so that they could collectively urge the district administration to fulfil its role in making governance inclusive

and accountable. The first step, the gathered women decided, was to activate in earnest the *Gram Sabhas*, and to protest against the phenomenon of proxy presence whereby the male relatives represent elected women representatives in all official matters. Accordingly a charter of demands was prepared and the assembled women proceeded in a procession to district secretariat where they gave the charter to district authorities. Copies of the charter were also sent to Department of Development and *Panchayati Raj*, Haryana in Chandigarh and to the Ministry of *Panchayati Raj*, Government of India.

In the history of the region, it was the first instance where women in large numbers had come together for a cause that involved the larger good of the society. The gathering of women surprised all in the city and, when informed of the reason, most people were left wondering why women from villages were talking about self-, inclusive- and accountable-governance. Some dissenting men mocked and established political persons delivered veiled threats but could not deter these women from their mission. The apolitical nature of the group and initiative too puzzled many. Electronic and print media of the district came out in full force and gave encouraging coverage to women's viewpoint. The district administration took immediate note of the charter and initiated steps for redressing the anomalies highlighted. The results were there for all to see. In May 2006, in most villages of the district, notifications for the *Gram Sabhas* were given, for the first time, to the people on time and the officials assigned to attend *Gram Sabhas* did so. Since then, the Deputy Commissioner of Rewari district and other officials are striving to ensure that the officials concerned with *Gram Sabha* fulfil their responsibilities.

During the last elections to parliament and assembly women/men from outreach villages prepared a development charter

for getting the views of the candidates on it. This surprised candidates, prompting some of the 'established' ones to leave the venue midway while canvassing. But the message that people are not mere 'sop dupes' and want accountability got through to some extent. SCRIA is now motivating *Sangathan* members to join political parties, assume positions of responsibility and be effective change agents. Many women have taken membership of various political parties and some have become office bearers. It is hoped that over a period of time, these women will make political parties more citizen-centric and responsive to citizens' needs, thus not limiting the role of citizens to being 'vote banks'.

## **The Road Ahead**

Over the years the participation of citizens in governance has been strengthened by various amendments to the Constitution. Still, in practice, in most places, people's participation in governance is limited to electing their representatives at the village, block, district, State and national levels. Citizens have virtually no say in the framing of policies, laws and national-international agreements that affect them the most in their everyday lives. The general top-down approach in governance ignores citizens' participation with the consequence that the mind-set of people is attuned to acting as passive recipients of government handouts and programmes. In several regions in the country, at the micro level, efforts have been made to bring about meaningful inclusiveness and accountability in the process but much more needs to be done. Many more citizens are to be provoked, motivated and activated for systemic changes in renegotiating democracy so that it brings qualitative change in the lives of millions in this country. The challenges to make self-governance a truly self-determination process for the

greater good of citizens are many but they are not insurmountable. Some steps that SCRIA feels are most necessary and require legislative sanction, for making PRIs effective local government bodies, have been recommended to the State government. A selection is listed below.

- Articles 243G and 243W of part 9 of the Constitution clearly refer to PRIs as Local Government with 'such power, authority and responsibilities as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of Self Government'. In reality this is not so. PRIs role is more like that of implementers than that of a policy-maker or a monitor. To rectify this, the state must implement the Constitutional provisions in practice and spirit at the earliest for which,
  - PRIs must have financial and functional autonomy;
  - There should be exclusive functional jurisdiction or independent sphere of action for each level of governance AND State government should not exercise any control over this sphere except for setting broader guidelines;
  - *Panchayat* at each level is an institution of local government; hence, there should not be a hierarchical relationship between *Zilla Panchayat*, Block *Panchayat* and Village *Panchayat*; and
  - A very clear-cut and lucid activity mapping is required for various line departments of the State, detailing the policy-making and monitoring roles of PRIs at different levels.
- Village *Panchayats* are the primary units of local government and hence must be given regulatory functions like registration—of birth and death, marriage, domicile, voters; issuance of certificates—of birth and death,

marriage, residence/domicile, caste, and character; enforcer of motor vehicles regulations like speed control, helmet norm, seat belt and seating capacity norms etc.; and regulate the establishment or removal of liquor vends and its business timings if a vend is established.

- For removal and suspension of elected representatives of PRIs' on the ground of abuse of office/corruption/irregularities or other complaints related to the affairs of PRIs' and its representatives, a separate office/body '*Panchayat Pal*' be established. Public officials must not have the authority to remove elected representatives of PRIs.
- For financial accountability of PRIs, there should be a separate office by the name of Accountant General Local Government on the pattern of Accountant General's office. This office must be made responsible for auditing of *Panchayats*.
- To make PRIs more effective and efficient in planning and implementing need-based measures, special budgetary provisions are needed, e.g., untied funds to the extent of around 50 per cent out of the total revenue/tax collection of the State; specific loans and grants from State must be forwarded directly to PRIs.
- A separate local government cadre must be established to fulfil staff requirement of PRIs, who must have the freedom and power to set norms and deal with all staff matters and minimum wage regulation must be followed scrupulously.
- With utmost priority, district planning committees must be meaningfully constituted and made responsible for timely, fair and hassle-free allocation of financial resources. Total financial allocation for all development

and welfare initiatives in the district must be routed through the DPC.

- To integrate rural and urban local governments, a provision in the local bodies act must be made for sending 2 or 3 members from *Nagar Parishads* to *Zilla Panchayat*. The Chair of the ZP should then represent the whole district as the head of the district government.
- PRIs' must be monitored and guided by the *Gram Sabhas*. Approval of all work plans/proposals and financial requirement for proposed work, certification of satisfactory completion of work and facilitation of social audit must be done by the *Gram Sabhas*. Besides this, recommendatory powers for recalling and suspension of elected PRI representatives must also lie with *Gram Sabhas*.
- The Additional District Commissioner and CEO of the DRDA must be restructured as the CEO of the *Zilla Panchayat* with the District Development and *Panchayat* Officer as the Deputy CEO of *Zilla Panchayat*; the offices of District Revenue Officer, Special Collector and Tehsildar must be totally abolished; and, finally, many boards/commissions at the district level must be abolished/dissanded as they are duplicating or splitting simple tasks, hindering progress rather than aiding it. All these will save a lot of tax payers' money which could then be utilised for constructive and citizen-friendly activities.

Some initiatives that are needed to improve governance in general and which require active participation of the civil society organisations are:

- The concept of self-governance must not be limited to only PRIs. Civil society organisations must ensure that

action for promoting self-governance includes governance processes at State and national levels too.

- Similarly, there is intensive focus on accountability and inclusiveness in PRIs but this should be there for the governance processes at the State and national levels too.
- Women are nearly half of the total population; hence, their role in various processes of governance must be ensured through 50 per cent reservation of seats across all levels of governance.
- There are numerous successful efforts for making governance inclusive and accountable but as these efforts are at micro level they remain ineffective at mezzo and macro levels. The time has come to scale up these efforts in a big way, covering at least 3 to 4 districts per State at a time so as to make a meaningful impact. This scaling up will ensure a numerical figure that will be the 'tipping point' for desired change/modification in the system.
- With regard to PRIs, the capacity building must not be limited to elected representatives only. Due attention should be given to *Gram Sabha* members also, as it is the *Gram Sabha* that can provide an ideal enabling environment for PRIs to function effectively.

Activation of *Gram Sabha* results in enlightened citizens who ensure that PRIs work effectively. Hence, *Gram Sabha* activation is a must and greater efforts, than what's been done at present, are required for it.



## SOHARDs Story

Niranjan Sharma

Social Action for Human Resource Development [SOHARD] came into being in the year 1987 as a field centre of the Haryana Social Work and Research Centre [HSWRC], and began work in the region to provide technical assistance for natural resource management. In 1990, SOHARD became independent of the HSWRC and was registered as a society. Anandpur, where SOHARD is located, has a topography characterised by soil erosion, rainwater wastage, and sprawling wastelands. After some initial work with the community on providing local communities with technical assistance, our focus shifted to a more active promotion of sustained community-based socio-economic development through the empowerment of women. Overtime, SOHARDs work expanded and now it works with several socially and economically disadvantaged groups in society, especially with women and children. Our main focus is on women, with a conscious effort to empower them keeping in mind the practical and strategic gender needs. Under the over all aim of improving the political participation of women and men towards effective and decentralised governance, activities undertaken by SOHARD include capacity building and skill development, fostering participatory processes to tackle water, health, and livelihoods issues, action and action-based research and advocacy.

Our approach to interventions is firmly based on the belief that the community has to eventually appropriate the initiatives. Our first step is to bring the community together on a common problem and create awareness about its relevance. Once a satisfactory level of mobilisation and motivation is achieved, we launch interventions that lead to the logical fulfillment of dire-felt needs. Over a period of time, we have adopted a 'cluster approach' to interventions, and have found this to be very effective in accelerating the development of the region. Simultaneously, we have always adopted a very enthusiastic and supportive approach to joint network action strategies for the all-round development of the region.

## **Decentralised Governance and SOHARD**

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which marks a turning point in India's history of strengthening the democratic processes, came in April 1993. It made 33 per cent participation by women in Local Self-Governance Institutions mandatory through reservation. When this amendment came into force, SOHARD, with its grassroots base and its firm belief in the relevance of micro-planning for regional development, recognised the potential that this landmark legislation offered in transforming the very character of the region. In its endeavour to successfully fulfil and realise the objectives and expectations invoked by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment for furthering local self-governance and grassroots democracy, SOHARD reorganised and re-equipped itself for working in this field. This is the time when we initiated work on the Women in Local Self-Governance Project in the Neemrana Block of Alwar District, Rajasthan. This is also the time when our partnership with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung commenced. This project was specially designed and developed for the region, with the express view of both qualitatively and

quantitatively enhancing the participation of women in the *Panchayati Raj Institutions* (PRIs-rural local bodies).

Initially, there was no experience to draw upon, on how to effectively bring women into local-level politics. So as a first step, a series of consultations with likely stakeholders and partners in the region were held. The consultations helped in charting out basic strategies for achieving set objectives. These included a participatory approach through contact drives, and the understanding that in order to empower women we needed to create women-based cadre of village-level change agents in the region. Thus, we sought and motivated talented local women, gave them adequate training and orientation, and got them to work at the village level as social change agents.

These efforts continued and are now ongoing, and we have so far trained at least 5,000 women in the block, since 1995 (post first elections). Currently, all activities and interventions are carried out by women. Based on the experiences gained in this process, a 'cluster' approach to interventions was adopted, which has helped us immensely in scaling up as well as decentralising our economic and socio-political interventions, aimed at empowering women politically. Presently, for the 25 *Panchayats* in Neemrana Block covering 60 villages, SOHARD has formed six clusters comprising on an average 10 villages each. For this, Sohard has trained 60 village-level animators and 24 cluster-level trainers. These 84 women leaders (60 village animators and 24 cluster-level trainers) comprise the field-level social agents of change.

To give an indication of the success achieved through our outreach activities, during the last elections to PRIs, we managed to exceed the 33 per cent reservation provided under the

Constitution, to reach 40 per cent in the Neemrana block. This means women contested and won even from unreserved, general category seats, defeating entrenched male candidates who had money and muscle power.

SOHARD has also tried to adopt an outward looking approach which led to networking with other organisations, the NGOs as well as the civil society organisations and community based organisations in the region. This aided in maintaining a channel of communication that is always open for the adaptation of best practices across the board in all interventions.

Efforts that were undertaken under the aegis of this project have also been instrumental in facilitating the creation, establishment and sustenance of at least 200 women SHGs which are active today. These SHGs have an estimated credit-worthiness and net worth of more than Rs. 35,00,000, which has gone a long way in empowering them economically.

For the past five years, we have been moving several activities to the grassroots level (cluster-level), in an effort to promote community appropriation of the initiative. We have had good successes on this front too. Several orientation and training activities now get done at cluster levels by the CLTs/VAs. SOHARD is being seen by the community, elected women representatives and women *Gram Sabha* members more and more as a resource centre, rather than as an intervening agency.

## **The Impact of the Project**

The project has had a positive impact on the society, as well as on the mindsets of men and women in the region. The empowerment of women has had a salutary effect on the well-being

of the communities here. Although it is not feasible to capture all aspects of empowerment, some tangible outcomes in terms of economic impact and socio-political impact are as follows.

### Economic Impact

- There has been a perceptible increase in wealth creation activity—our SHGs have been strengthened and some micro enterprise clusters have come up.
- Women PRI members have been instrumental in creating several social and material assets in the form of roads, school infrastructure and waterworks.
- Microplans have been developed for all the 60 villages falling in the intervention area. This is a first step in achieving sustainable developmental and growth.
- *Panchayat* properties, PRI resources and funds are being spent in a more thoughtful and efficient fashion after the advent of women into *Panchayati Raj*.
- Networking among women is now very strong.

### Social and Political Impact

- Some women elected representatives have excelled in their vocation and have garnered both esteem and recognition. Examples include Suvidha Yadav and Sarbati Devi, who have won acclaim and accolades at the State and national levels, based on their excellent performance in *Panchayats*.
- In the eyes of the men and the community, women are now accepted as legitimate contenders for the

- management of community resources, and as part of the new polity.
- More than 40 per cent of the *Panchayats* in the block have women leaders with women contesting and winning in unreserved and general seats as well.
  - Proxy *Sarpanches* (elected Chairperson) and *Panches* (elected member), which was the norm in many cases during the first term, is no longer prevalent. Women are now capable of handling and managing their *Panchayats* on their own.
  - Recognising the contribution of women to the PRIs and rural development, the State government of Rajasthan, has enacted a law to give women 50 per cent representation in PRIs across the State. The PRI elections in 2010 January will be held under this provision ensuring at least 50 per cent representation of women in *Panchayats*.

## Lessons Learnt

Working on the issue of women in local self-governance led us to create a strong and sustained cadre of women social workers in each outreach village. This resulted in involving ourselves with developmental initiatives at the village and *Panchayat* level. Helping people make their own micro-plans, enabling women through capacity building and then watching them go and work within their communities has been an eye-opener for us too, and we have learnt a lot in the process. Here are a few lessons we have learnt from the project.

- Training and Capacity Building play a key role in women's empowerment. It brings out the latent potential in many women who need such motivation and support.

- Economic activity and income generation is the first glue that binds women together, and SHGs are the best starting point for this.
- An adequately equipped nodal resource centre is important for sustaining and maintaining the momentum of change.
- Women, once organised and equipped with the necessary skills, are the most potent agents of change in semi-insulated economies and communities of the rural belt.
- Rural women who come forward to take part in self-governance need to be made a part of a larger forum, in order to give voice to them at the larger district and State levels.

## **Networking Efforts**

Networking has helped us immensely in achieving some uniformity, high levels of coordination, and the delineation of best practices from among partner interventions in the area. Regional-level networking among NGOs has helped us in presenting a unified face at advocacy forums. The coming together of elected women representatives for Rajasthan State is one tangible outcome of these efforts. The institutional shape of this initiative is still evolving.

At the same time, networking efforts at the inter State-level and national level with partners like FES accrue immense benefits in terms of influencing policy, and lobbying for legislation, that can benefit these myriad efforts to bring gender equity into politics. From our perspective, one significant result of such networking is the fact that at least five States in the Indian

Union have enacted legislation in their respective State assemblies to ensure parity (50 per cent participation) for women in *Panchayati Raj* institutions.

## The Tasks Ahead

SOHARD has always felt the need for self-introspection in all its programmes and activities. In fact, this has become a part of the ongoing engagements. Based on such self-examination we feel that in the near future we need to focus on the following.

- Women-to-women links at the *Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samiti* and *Zilla Parishad* levels need to get further strengthened for better cohesion
- Networking efforts between NGOs working on Self-Governance at the block, district and other regional levels of the State will need to be strengthened in order to ensure better coordination of efforts and effective lobbying.
- Consistent focus will need to be provided on training and capacity building, for broadening the base of competent women in Local Self-Governance Bodies
- Actualise SOHARD's potential to be an active and responsive resource centre for the women of the region, as well as the NGO partners in the network.
- To serve as an effective nodal organisation committed to women's empowerment in all walks of life.



# **Training Women Councillors**

## **URC's Approach in Karnataka**

Gururaja Budhya

**U**rban Research Centre (URC) is a registered society, a non-profit organisation working on issues of governance and citizen participation in urban areas of Karnataka. The main aim of its activities is to bridge the gap between local groups and elected representatives through participatory planning. The focal issues addressed are urban governance, citizen participation, gender and capacity building. URC started its work in the year 2000. Presently, the women councillors training programmes cover the entire urban areas of Karnataka. Various stakeholders like citizens, local associations, women's groups, school children, elected women representatives, municipal officials, and municipal councils are outreached as part of the activities. URC first began by studying small and medium towns on the aspects of civil society, governance and local economic development. Its action-based programmes started in Mangalore and Udupi towns of Coastal Karnataka. URC recognises that in its area of work, one of the key and important stakeholders are the elected representatives in municipalities.

The Councillors grow through the experiences of conflicts within the political party structure. They face stiff competition based on party politics and gender bias (particularly the women councillors). The party leadership and higher

government structures view Councillors as 'soldiers' to manage small 'urban' territories. *The extent of their involvement in policy matters and the extent of consideration of their opinion on policy matters are negligible and not clear.* The internal party processes impede the scope of Councillors involvement in furthering the principles of democracy. The situation creates a loop, where in Councillors are busy performing their jobs and engaging in local 'political' fights. This restricts their avenues of outreach and scope for growth. The situation of Women Councillors is more worrisome in this scenario. Still, it was seen that women councillors have been playing an important role in addressing the issues concerning women, especially women hawkers, petty traders, elderly women, the abandoned, the harassed, and those living in poorer areas.

Realising that women elected representatives in Udupi started showing more interest in learning, URC went ahead in the direction of organising training programmes. Over a period of six years, URC addressed the capacity building of elected women representatives by providing sharing and learning platforms through training programmes. URC also organised state-level seminars to bring together women in politics and women in other professions to build a consensus on the issues of women in politics and decision-making.

## **The Process—Development of Training Programmes**

URC evolved a two-fold strategy—working with select women councillors in Udupi and organising regional trainings for women councillors from all over Karnataka. The work with select women councillors was mainly carried out during 2002–2006, during which women councillors were engaged in testing

many ward management techniques and tools (like carrying out ward walks, using issue documentation format to note complaints, organising ward meetings, preparing ward plans etc).

As a first step to understand their constituency, we began with a survey of all municipal councillors of Udupi. The survey revealed the challenges facing the Councillors such as how to identify and plan development activities and then how to implement priority schemes in their wards. We were able to pursue a few women councillors to prepare ward maps with infrastructure facilities like water supply, street lights, waste bins etc. With many intensive interactions we came to know that most of the councillors have less information and lack self-confidence. It was found that women councillors have a lack of self-esteem and feel insecure too, given the gender positioning within their party and the society. Above all, we realised that it is necessary to provide spaces of learning, i.e., trainings to women Councillors that improve the self-confidence of women elected representatives

### **Development of Training Programme**

URC organised the first training programme at Udupi in 2003, especially for women elected representatives from Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts. Nearly 52 councillors attended this programme. Gaining confidence from this activity, we organised a state-level seminar in 2004 in Bangalore, a study in 2005 and continued our trainings through 2006, 2007 and 2008.

URC initially tried out a three-day training schedule (2003–2005), moved on to a four day schedule (2006) and finally the

five-day schedule (2008 and 2009). URC has carried out 23 trainings and trained 801 women councillors and 175 men. These trainings aimed at increasing the confidence levels and to sensitise Councillors on relevant social issues. During 2006 and 2007, we also invited the women representatives of NGOs and party members to attend the trainings along with women elected representatives.

A new component of 'Study Circle Meetings' has been introduced in 2008. About 15–20 women councillors and the NGO representatives who attended URC training programmes since 2003 have been identified to attend five Study Circle Meetings (on Constitution, Socialism, Democracy, 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment and Gender etc.). These select women Councillors are expected to function as a core group of trainers. They would also be involved in advocacy work.

In the last three years (2007, 2008 and 2009), we also organised annual state-level seminars along with Self-Help Group members, political parties' members, representatives of NGOs and the Legislators. The purpose of the seminars has been to bring engaged women and men in politics and in other professions on to a single dais on the topic of 'Decentralisation, Womens' Empowerment and role of urban local self governments in policy making'.

## **Identifying Needs of Women Councillors**

Working with Women Councillors, the project experiences in Mangalore and Udupi and our efforts to bring Women Councillors on a platform (initially, at the regional level and now at the State level) drew our attention to the core issue of 'Needs of

## Women Councillors and Role of the Political Party in facilitating the performance of the Women Councillors’.

In order to understand this, a study was carried out in 2005 in five towns (Madikeri, Mangalore, Udupi, Tumkur and Hubli-Dharwad cities) of Karnataka to

- study the issues concerning Women Councillors in the Council and the Political Parties in urban areas.
- examine factors affecting Women Councillors in policy-making in urban areas.
- understand the support measures available for Women Councillors within parties and the government.

Many of the present women councillors, who have been elected mainly from reserved constituencies face the possibility of their ward being opened out as general (open) constituencies in the next elections. This would raise a few questions for those who seek to re-contest. Women councillors have been playing an important role in local self-government. But we found that most of the women councillors depend on their close relatives like father, husband, and brother etc. They do not get adequate support from their respective political party. The constraints that prevent women elected members from effective participation at the local level, are as follows

- Women Councillors have quickly gone into the role, but also into the party culture.
- Women Councillors (some) have quickly mastered the role. The nearest role model for work is Men Councillors and party elders.
- Inconveniences exist for Women Councillors (financial dependence, movement, guidance for ward works,

participation in council meetings, position in the party etc.). These inconveniences are acknowledged by the women themselves and the men too. But measures are not taken by the Party and fellow men Councillors to deal with this. The government on its part seems to be totally ignorant to the situation.

- Officials perform men Councillors' works on priority due to pressure. Women Councillors are neglected.
- Each category says they are making efforts and blame the other.
- No role clarity, ignorance about duties, responsibilities and rights (in both cases).
- Each category has assumptions on other category.
- Non-Cooperation by the other category is a constant response.
- Officials feel Councillors must follow rules; Councillors say Officials do not know the field realities.
- Men Councillors acknowledge that women can work, but feel that men are better.
- The (political) Party is pre-occupied with politics and converts the entire 'system' to suit their interests, resulting in poor support for Councillors to perform their role.
- Social concerns are not reflected in the municipal agenda and there is a very limited understanding about their role in policy-making.

So far, URCs approach has been to organise trainings to provide learning spaces for women Councillors. Unlike any other conventional training, URC focuses on confidence building, exposure to social issues, practical skills to decision-making in

Council meetings and the role of Councillors. Some forays have been made into involving political parties in playing a constructive role in training Councillors.

## **Impact on Women, Men and Society**

The training programmes developed with women Councillors' active participation have ensured that they now clearly understand the ward management tasks. They also realise that knowledge and training on leadership skills will empower them and strengthen their position in the municipal bodies. Many of them show a keen interest in training and are very concerned that they should perform better at the local level as elected members. They have gauged that elected representatives in urban local bodies have a special significance in the delivery of municipal services having a direct impact on women. The perceptible impacts of the training programmes are:

- Improved self-confidence of women councillors.
- Most of the councillors who attended trainings actively involve and speak in council meetings.
- Trainings are organised for women elected representatives at party level on regular basis (found in Udupi).
- Influenced the BJP manifesto to give priority to women development (last Assembly election).
- An intercity discussion initiated and carried out in Udupi between Councillors by themselves.
- Women councillors now focus on women welfare such as widow pension, *Bhagyalaxmi* scheme (scheme for the girl child) etc., identify the beneficiaries in their ward and help them to get such facilities. They also give more priority to women issues such as drinking water.

- Women councillors take initiative to conduct ward meetings.
- Number of field visits of ward Councillors, especially women, has increased.
- Most women councillors who improved their self-confidence in training programmes contested a second time even on open seats which had no reservation for women.
- Percentage of women Councillors increased in Udupi in the last election to nearly 50 per cent against a reservation of 33 per cent.
- Women Councillors have enough confidence to handle their ward without any support from men.
- Women Councillors keep in touch with ward citizens; they visit their wards on a regular basis.
- Now urban local bodies themselves take initiatives for training programmes for newly elected women and men Councillors. This is a major impact.
- The impact on policy is more indirect and mainly through networking efforts involving political parties and NGOs

## **Future Outlook and Challenges**

In the last few years, many training programmes have been organised to facilitate learning spaces for women Councillors. These trainings have given us a good start to get clarity on the content, schedule and the scope of trainings and we are being recognised as an organisation involved in the capacity building of urban women Councillors. We found that the following gaps still exist and need to be facilitated.



## **Training spaces**

- Regularise the trainings on a regional basis every year.
- Streamline the involvement of parties to nominate women Councillors for training.
- Motivating the parties to initiate an experimental capacity building programme at unit level.
- Make the trainings self-sustaining through active contributions from the participants or parties.

## **Networking**

- Organise discussions between women councillors, Assembly and Parliament members.
- Organise annual seminars to provide sharing spaces between women in politics, women in movements and women in other professions.
- Policy influencing through the women in power.

There are many challenges when one is engaged in meaningful interventions that generate threat perceptions from unknown directions. Besides these, at URC we are still grappling with the challenges of meeting the scale of training requirement geographically, connecting women in politics with women in other professions and motivating/pressurising the party and the government to start taking concrete measures for capacity building.

## Organising the Marginalised

Damyanty Sridharan

Even during the ongoing financial and economic crisis the world over, India has had an enviable growth rate of around 7 per cent per annum. However, this growth is not benefiting all workers in the same way, as along with this growth we have an increasing informal economy. In India, 93 per cent of the total workforce is employed in the informal economy. For women, the percentage is still higher at 96 per cent. Majority of agricultural workers (nearly 99 per cent) are in informal employment. In the non-agricultural sector too, informal employment predominates with 86 per cent women and 83 per cent men being thus employed. The informal sector workers include agricultural labourers, marginal farmers, forest workers, fisher women and men, construction workers, vendors and hawkers, domestic workers, home-based workers—and many others involved in innumerable trades and other employments. Labour laws are not applicable and social security measures are inaccessible to these workers. The size of this sector has also been growing over the last few decades, as in 1971 it was estimated to comprise 89 per cent whereas today it is 93 per cent. This increase is the result of casualisation of the organised sector, along with very limited growth of employment opportunities within the organised sector. In the next few decades, the predictable change is going to be the higher growth in non-agricultural workers in the informal sector. With the projected urbanisation, trends of migration

and the growing infrastructure and industrial development, this is the future scenario.

Along with a majority of women in the workforce being employed in informal employment, they face unequal access to school and vocational education and control over economic resources (landownership rights, lack of control over means of production). All these factors further impact on the socio-economic status of women in the country. Improving the working and living condition of women is thus an important objective of our work. Besides looking at women in the informal sector, in order to improve the socio-economic situation of women, it is essential to focus on specific groups which are disadvantaged. In the context of growing industrialisation and the inherent exigencies of development, many such groups are facing displacement. Thus, supporting the processes and strategies to overcome social and economic disadvantage gains special significance. As various studies have proved—there is a differentiated impact of large-scale development projects on women and men. This aspect needs to be reiterated time and again while addressing this issue.

It is a gigantic task to organise the informal sector workers so that they are equipped to bargain for their rights as workers and to ensure social security measures for them. However, it is still a very significant task which cannot be ignored due to its problematic size. The FES collaborates with partner organisations (Youth for Action, AIFWA, ISED Nidan/NASVI, and Centre for Women's Development and Research to facilitate the organising process towards this objective and by engaging various stakeholders in a dialogue to address issues of the informal sector workers. FES, with partner organisations, supports initiatives and engagements which try to build a framework which is not only just but

also gender just. In this section the cooperation with partners in this line of work is elaborated.

With Youth for Action, FES is presently collaborating in organising and strengthening women agricultural workers under the network of AIFWA (All India Women Farmers Association). Youth for Action (YFA) has undertaken significant work in the areas of conservation and regeneration of natural resources through effective people's institutions to check large-scale migration in drought prone areas, creation of employment and income generation, education, and health. Involving women from poorest sections in all these activities has been a major focus of YFA. Although the organisation is based in Hyderabad with its field office in Mahbubnagar district, its major achievement has been in networking with other organisations working on these issues through out the country. This has helped in lobbying and advocacy work in a big way.

The Institute for Socio-Economic Development (ISED) may be described as an action-based research organisation drawn into action-based programmes on the basis of the findings from its myriad research. Although it is working primarily in Orissa on the issues of displacement and rehabilitation, networking for advocacy throughout the country amongst NGOs, affected persons and activists working on this issue has been its ongoing endeavour. In its work with FES, the focus has been at looking at the issue of displacement from a gender perspective. Despite being amongst the worst sufferers of displacement, there is a dearth of information on the specific concerns of women. ISED is also involved in strengthening PRIs through trainings, information dissemination and advocacy in Orissa.

Organising, lobbying and advocacy for informal workers, especially vendors and hawkers, has been the mainstay of the

partnership between Nidan, an NGO based in Bihar, and FES. Presently, Nidan is at the forefront of various initiatives to protect the rights and improve the living conditions of hawkers and vendors under the aegis of National Alliance of Street vendors, India (NASVI)—a coalition of trade unions and voluntary organisations spread all over India. The journey of Nidan presents a unique and successful example of organisational growth with improvement in its members' well being, geographical expansion, balancing sectoral activities, and collaboration with multiple stakeholders.

CWDR, one of the few women-headed NGOs in India, works mainly towards improving the living and working conditions of domestic workers in Tamil Nadu. Isolated in individualised situations in other people's homes, the labour of domestic workers goes unrecognised, unseen, undervalued and not covered by any labour laws. They are one of the most exploited groups of unorganised workers. A rough estimate says that there are about 15,00,000 domestic workers in Tamil Nadu and Chennai city alone has 6,00,000 domestic workers, most of them belonging to Scheduled Caste. Organising, training, ensuring minimum wages for domestic workers are some of the immediate challenges. CWDR has been engaged in all this and in trying to form a trade union to better represent their issues. FES has been collaborating with them in some of its capacity building, networking and advocacy efforts.

## **Contribution to Family and Farm Women Cultivators and YFA**

Venkat Ramnayya

**Y**outh for Action (YFA) is a Non-Governmental Organisation based in Hyderabad, which started in a modest way, more than two decades back. Over the years, it has established itself in the field of natural resources management, as well as effective organisation of human resources, to fulfil aspirations of resolving collective problems. Women and underprivileged sections of rural community remain its main target groups. Over time, it has gained valuable experience in micro credit and in implementation of eco-housing projects in partnership with the local population. As the area of operation of the YFA included several water-scarce districts, its activities have stressed on the efficient management of natural resources in an integrated manner. This includes the watershed management approach, and the strengthening of people's institutions, owned and managed by women, who represent half the community.

The participation of women and men at different stages of the development process has assumed paramount importance in YFA's vision. This finds expression in the method adopted for problem identification, prioritising the needs, exploring strategies for problem mitigation, assumption of responsibility for activity implementation, as well as in sharing the results of these activities in a collective manner. The direction to the

collective force is given by *Sanghams* (women self-help groups) and is provided through numerous trainings in value education, leadership and communication skills, and technical literacy, by YFA personnel at the field offices as well as at the village and cluster (of villages) levels. These have benefited the *Sanghams*, especially the *Karyakarthas* (group leaders), to successfully involve themselves into the social and political process of the community. Today, many *Karyakarthas* have assumed significant positions of *Sarpanch* (chairperson of local elected body), Market yard Committee members, and ward members. Some of these *Sanghams* have successfully clinched contracts for development activities in the villages like laying of roads and construction of school buildings. At the same time, the YFA has given emphasis to involve young men and women, and identified a number of livelihood options for them which include capacity building, occasional training and livelihood promotional activities. At the national and international levels, its approach has been to actively collaborate in networking with civil society organisations such as RIOD, which has a presence in 14 States of India. Similarly, it has partnered with various institutions such as South Asia Partnership-International for coordinating the activities relevant to peace and development in the South Asian region which is of paramount importance to the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable groups. Another major initiative of YFA is the formation of AIFWA (All India Women Farmers Association) involving women in agriculture.

## **AIFWA—Background and Process**

In its diverse engagements with women in its core area of work and all over the country, YFA realised that the predicament of women involved in agriculture is very tenuous.

It is often asserted that as farm labour is increasingly becoming unviable due to which men are migrating to cities in search of jobs, the burden of work on women has increased manifold as they now have to work both at home and on farms. The multiplicity of roles that a woman plays far exceeds those of her male counterpart. As soon as she is able, the female child becomes a major nurturant of younger siblings, fetches water, collects fuel, takes food to her parents at work, cleans, sweeps and helps her mother in cooking, and thus acts as a helper homemaker. When married, she is again overburdened with the added responsibility of child bearing and rearing, working in the fields and for making living comfortable for her husband and in-laws.

Under these circumstances, the participation rates of women shown by Census data as also by National Sample Survey are believed to be grossly underestimated. In fact, women play a wide variety of roles which are either preparatory or supportive to agriculture, animal husbandry and craft etc., but since most of their work is informal in nature and is interrupted and since there is no wage attached to it, it does not satisfy the employment criteria and hence is not accounted for while estimating participation rates. Further, in rural areas, economic activities, particularly those concerning farm work, are performed on family basis. Hence the participating group always remains fluid, both in terms of number of members and number of persons who are not normally engaged in active work. Furthermore, even those outside the working age group are drawn into agricultural and other production activities. The participation ratio of women is found to be far greater among Scheduled Castes and in areas where peasant castes dominate and self-cultivation is practised.



The social constraint in female labour utilisation is evident from the fact that whereas women themselves play a dominant role in deciding about their participation in production activities on family farms, the question of their wage employment is decided by males. Evidently, it is considered more safe and prestigious if women confine their work to the household itself or at best on the family farm. Self-cultivation is found to be widely prevalent and production activities are organised on family basis. With the introduction of high-yielding varieties, improved farm machines, intensive cultivation and other similar changes, requirements of labour to perform farm jobs have increased tremendously. Neither can all tasks be performed by men nor can they afford hired labour to perform them and, therefore, the family members, not normally expected to work on farms, are also drawn in for carrying out agricultural and other related tasks. YFA thus believes that two third of the total workforce of the country is in agriculture and about 81–83 per cent of female workers are engaged in this sector. Although a substantial proportion of women contribute to the agriculture sector, they face disparities in various aspects like wages, land ownership, social structures and so forth. The government policy emphasises on participatory planning. It is remotely achieved in the case of women participating in decision-making, either in crop planning or management of natural resources. They remain as mere labourers. A majority of 96 per cent of the women agricultural labourers are unorganised and hence are facing the disparity in obtaining equal wages. Apart from this, there are other issues such as biased social structures and lack of access to government programmes due to illiteracy and ignorance. In a patriarchal society, women have less power and authority in decision-making. Collective action is always beneficial for the women to resolve their issues and make their voice heard at the policy level.

This calls for a need to organise this workforce and to enable them to represent their interest collectively. Only then can they influence the policy-making and gain from the existing policy provisions. Hence, the formation of AIFWA, the All India Women Farmers Federation was conceived. Its main aim is to bridge the gap between the policy-level perspectives, its implementation and the actual benefits reaching women involved in agriculture.

During the year 2002, Youth for Action, RIOD and other collaborating agencies organised a first-ever large women farmers fair at Hyderabad, which had a representation of women farmers from almost all the States, including Jammu & Kashmir. In the concluding session, the participants voiced the need for establishing and initiating a platform for women in agriculture. The women and men participants felt that there is a dire need to establish such a platform which is not political in nature. Initiating a lead from the first farmers' fair, it was decided to organise several regional and State consultations for identifying priorities, choices and needs of each region and then converge and consolidate for relevant action. One important suggestion was to enrol the membership of women and men farmers from the village level to the national level so that a large mass base can be mobilised for relevant collective action for policy assessment and livelihood development. Thus, AIFWA came into being and a vision statement prepared for collective action.

## **Vision**

‘Institutionalise, organise, empower women in agriculture, politically, socially and economically in India’

## **Mission**

The Mission of the Federation is to initiate activities, products, projects and programmes such as relevant policy actions, advocacy, network, livelihood action, information dissemination, training and grassroots-level actions to achieve the vision.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of AIFWA are to

- create awareness in rural women in general and farm women in particular about their role, responsibilities and rights.
- organise farm women into self-help groups and promote economic activities for their employment and income generation.
- Build technical capacity of the farm women for improving their effectiveness and efficiency in farming and reducing their drudgery (material labour).
- organise farm women cooperatives to ensure access to farm inputs for them and to promote marketing of the products.
- bring policy issues before the government and non-government organisations and develop advocacy programmes.
- educate, motivate and encourage farm women for their active participation in the activities of the Federation and in other developmental programmes.
- promote participatory mode of working and decision-making in the Federation and in their families.
- undertake community services in the interest of the public.

- promote national and international linkages and relationship with various government and non-governmental organisations to support the activities of the Federation.

## Formalising AIFWA

The idea of establishing a collective forum of farm women was institutionalised during the National Women Farmers Fairs in Hyderabad and Ahmedabad. In between, several meetings were conducted and three crucial issues were iden-

### Issues and Interventions planned by AIFWA

<i><b>Issues</b></i>	<i><b>Interventions</b></i>
Recognition of farm women and women agricultural labourers as 'farmers'.	<p>By organising women through AIFWA.</p> <p>By giving land rights to women.</p> <p>By Inviting/Involving women in decision-making structures.</p> <p>Projecting women farmers' contribution/ accounting in Census records.</p> <p>Sensitisation of policy-makers and relevant institutions at the national level.</p>
Participation of women in decision-making structures at local/national level.	<p>Participation of women in Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat meetings.</p> <p>Trainings for leadership development.</p> <p>AIFWA advocates/lobbies for promotion of women's leadership at district/State and national level commissions, committees, corporations and institutions such as District Rural Development Agency, and agriculture/ forest committees.</p>
Right to property and equal wage.	<p>Women should be made aware about the equal property rights given to son and daughters.</p> <p>Joint right of women for property/land.</p> <p>Equal wage campaign .</p>

tified by women farmers. The first one related to recognition of women farmers' contribution to agriculture and National GDP and thus equal recognition of woman as 'farmer' so that her involvement in decision-making can be ensured. It was also felt by the members that once they are recognised as farmers then may demand their rights to be involved in various decision-making bodies, both at the local and the national level. The other major issue was the right to property and equal wage to farm women, which is still a distant dream in spite of several acts and constitutional provisions. The members of AIFWA & RIOD partners thus planned several interventions to achieve the objectives on the basis of the identified issues.

## **The Impact of Interventions**

Issues pertaining to women farmers and agricultural workers require persistent efforts. Thus, the interventions resulted in some immediate short-term benefits rather than policy impacts. Ganga Mane and Nisha Shah felt that the immediate benefits include a sense of being associated with a national-level people's forum (AIFWA) and a feeling of strength and solidarity, togetherness, unity and confidence.

The linkage established among local-level women farmers and *Panchayat* workers to State- and national-level bodies achieved the objective of learning, knowledge sharing, information dissemination and advocacy for their rights. Even though the objective of recognition of women as 'farmers' may take a little more time, realising the benefit of such collective action for common benefit has been achieved. In other words, the identity of women farmers' contribution to agriculture and the recognition of her

identity as farmers have been promoted both at local and national levels.

The members of AIFWA time and again requested YFA & RIOD partners to assist and highlight the issue of violence against women participating in *Panchayat* elections. AIFWA organised several capacity-building programmes and trained women about their Constitutional and legal rights, and the 73rd/74th Constitutional Amendments. One of the important issues addressed was equal wage to women workers and this issue needs sustained campaigning both at the local and national level. An attempt has also been made to establish local watch centres so that these centres can provide counselling or solidarity support, especially in cases involving violence against women. Campaigning was undertaken at the local level to involve the members of AIFWA in decision-making processes and such campaigning resulted in inviting the members of AIFWA for consultations by various ministries in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttaranchal and Bengal. Such campaigning strategy needs to be continued in various States and regions to consolidate the ongoing engagements. At the same time, it is heartening to see that the network partners involved in the process have promoted a large number of local-level livelihood activities such as insurance and asset building, provision of housing in joint names and building linkages with ongoing efforts of government programmes. Finally, as Sudesh Devi of Himachal Pradesh said, women workers cannot get their recognition unless they are organised and have knowledge to participate and bring changes at the policy level. In her perception and knowledge, AIFWA is the only 'Forum' or initiative articulating and advocating the rights of women farm workers and women agricultural labourers. Even NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) initiative looks at participants as labourers rather than equal partners in the process.

The social, political and economic impact of the initiative of organising women in agriculture is captured in the following table. Further, recommendations for follow-up actions are also highlighted.

### Impact Indicators

<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Follow-up</b>
Social	Recognition of AIFWA at the national level and invitation extended to AIFWA by National Commission on Farmers, Ministry of Environment, MORD (AP), Ministry of Women & Child Development, Uttarakhand. Replication of AIFWA in Nepal and intensive consultations with AIFWA office bearers.	The work needs rigorous follow-up at “policy level”, initiating and advocating the need for ‘inclusion’ of farm women and women agricultural labourers at various decision-making structures.
Political	Farm women and equal wage campaign achieved some positive results in A.P, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka; participation in Panchayat elections and increased knowledge about the process, highlighting political violence and establishing few women watch centres.	Needs, inputs and support for highlighting violence at the national and local levels, women and equal wage campaign needs to be continued in various other States, as also the analysis of NREGA work and replication of women watch centres.
Economic and personal growth	Various consultations, round table meetings, State-/local-level meetings contributed in enhancing awareness about their rights, new skills about farm work, political rights and relevant technologies for improving incomes and livelihoods. Few projects linked with local government/ institution are contributing in economic improvement and income generation. Empowerment activities of registration of joint ownership of housing units in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.	RIOD Network partners need to continue this model and replicate it in their work locations. Land/property membership rights campaigning and advocacy work need to be continued.

## Replication

The initial work of organising woman farmers is replicated in nine States of India where in State level bodies have been

established. Recently, a delegation from Pakistan and Nepal visited India to learn and see how a similar process could be undertaken in their respective countries. Later they requested Kalavathi Behan, Kamala Devi, Shanthamma, Madhuri Devi of Madhya Pradesh and Reena Jha of Bihar to visit Nepal and inaugurate the Nepal Women Agricultural Federation.

## **Conclusion**

Even though the movement has recorded good progress in terms of organising woman farmers, raising their awareness levels, enhanced confidence of the members and establishment of a formal institution—the members of the Federation feel that the policy work is very time consuming and requires long term engagement. The primary demand of the woman farmers is to “recognise” them “as farmers” and involve them in decision making structures at the local and National level. We have seen that women farmers are seldom consulted or involved in any decision making structures. Agriculture policy is prepared by the policy making bodies with hardly any involvement of women farmers even though they contribute more than 50 percent to the GDP accruing from agriculture including the food security of families. Both the policy and programme machinery deals with women as target beneficiaries of the programmes implemented at the local level.

Hence, we at AIFWA feel that the task is huge and demanding and requires long term commitment, adequate resources and energy.



# Engagement with Displaced Persons

## ISED's Experience

Balaji Pandey

The Institute for Socio-Economic Development (ISED) aims to accelerate processes of socio-economic development and empowerment of the poor and the marginalised, especially women, in Orissa. Since its inception in 1987, ISED has been working in close proximity with grassroots organisations to acquire a deeper understanding of the rural areas in order to highlight their issues and concerns through social research. Its core areas of activities include mobilising poor and marginalised people at the grassroots level through self-help groups or *Sanghas*; strengthening *Panchayati Raj* institutions by trainings, information dissemination and advocacy; and undertaking research and organising seminars and documenting social issues and advocacy and networking with NGOs, social activists and research institutions working for the poor and the marginalised in Orissa and outside.

ISED's main objectives are to

- promote, organise and undertake research and programmes for integrated development and for improving the quality of life of the poor and the marginalised;
- create a forum for research on developmental issues and socio-economic progress with emphasis on both theoretical and applied aspects;

- provide support services to field-level activists and organisations for building their capacity for effective functioning and working together; and
- disseminate information about the *Panchayati Raj* system in simple language and organise orientation and training programmes for *Panchayati Raj* Institutions' members, laying emphasis on Scheduled V areas (Schedule V contains special provisions for the administration of specific areas where ethnic communities (loosely termed tribals) reside).

## **Displacement and its Impact on Women**

Development-induced displacement has resulted in widespread and traumatic psychological and social consequences. These include dismantling of production systems, desecration of ancestral sacred zones or graves and temples, scattering of kinship groups and families, breaking down of informal social networks that offered mutual support, and disruption of trade and market links to name a few. There is also a loss of social relationships, which provide avenues of representation, mediation and conflict resolution. The very cultural identity of the community, and that of the individual within it, is eroded, causing immense physiological and psychological stress. Thus, displacement brings in its wake certain adverse effects and risks, which have economic, social and communal implications.

According to an estimate, the country's development programmes have caused displacement of approximately 20 million people over about four decades, i.e., from 1950 to 1990. Notable development projects in Orissa which have caused displacement on a large scale include the Rourkela Steel Plant,

the National Aluminium Company (NALCO) at Damanjodi and Angul, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), irrigation projects like Hirakud, Rengali, Upper Kolab, Machkund and Samal Barage etc., the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), the Talcher Thermal Power Station (TTPS), the Ib Thermal Power Station (ITPS), the Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) at Ib Valley and Talcher. Together, these projects have displaced 93,318 families, and 6,22,463.94 hectares of land have been acquired to provide sites for these projects as reported by official documents. Irrigation projects alone have displaced 3,80,000 people, of whom Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes together constitute 50 per cent. Significantly, Scheduled Tribes alone constitute 35 per cent of the total number of people displaced by the dam projects in the State. It may be mentioned that many scholars and social activists claim that the number of displaced persons and the land acquired for the projects are much higher than what has been reported in official documents.

Ironically, these projects have not adopted any special measures to look after women and children who have been displaced. In the resettlement and rehabilitation policies adopted by various projects, women and children, who were most adversely affected, were not given any special attention. The Land Acquisition Act, 1894 amended in 1984, is gender-biased and merely reinforces the existing situation of women, who lack ownership of land and property. All the policies relating to resettlement and rehabilitation in the country focus upon the 'ownership' of land or property, while determining the amount of compensation to be paid. This reinforces the gender bias. Land documents are generally made out in the name of men in the family and women rarely own lands being acquired by the project. This has therefore serious implications for equal right to resettlement and rehabilitation benefits for women, and

men and adversely impacts on compensation given to women, if any.

Women displaced by development projects lose their right to cultivate traditional crops. As forests are cut down to make room for the projects, they are also unable to collect forest produce for consumption or for sale. The opportunities for tribal and rural women for earning cash by selling of forest produce and by breeding livestock are disappearing rapidly. In many situations, seasonal migration is resulting in work insecurity, breaking up of familial relations and exposing people to various social hazards. Women from landowning communities have been forced into wage labour which, for them, is a socially and economically humiliating shift. Similarly, in the context of rehabilitation, one of the most glaring instances of gender disparity occurs in the area of giving compensation: as men are treated as heads of households, compensation in terms of either cash or land is invariably awarded to them. Single women or widowed women find themselves particularly vulnerable in this situation. Available literature on women and displacement highlights the following key issues affecting women in the wake of displacement.

- Increasing drudgery in collecting fuel, fodder and drinking water, loss of earnings and gleanings from the forest, agricultural land and other common property resources, and from non-farm activities like handicrafts, cottage industries, petty businesses and livestock rearing—all of which used to be essential aspects of their rural way of life in the past.
- Devaluation of their status in the family due to the loss of their traditional sources of earning since the

compensation payments are usually made only to the male heads of the displaced households. The female members of these households get deprived of the rights they used to enjoy at home in the pre-displacement period. The compensation amount converts the collective assets of the family, which the women members also partly owned, into cash to be owned solely by the male heads. This exposes the women and children to a higher risk of deprivation.

- Women are neglected by both the project authorities and their male family heads, since they are never taken into confidence when plans are drawn up for resettlement and rehabilitation.
- Health hazards and diseases are common in the new sites where the oustees are resettled. Women and children are more vulnerable to such hazards, and malnutrition, from which both tend to suffer. This further aggravates their health condition. Still, neither the project authorities nor the family heads pay any attention to these problems.
- Besides, the rising trend in prostitution is often associated with rapid industrialisation. In the case of families ousted by development projects, displacement leads to the drying up of legitimate sources of income for women, and, out of despair, some of them resort to prostitution to make their living. In some cases, they are forced to do so in the course of their working as domestic help in the houses of other people. *Difficulties in arranging marriages due to increased demands for dowry, disappearance of traditional source of earning, decline in opportunities for self-employment, devaluation of the status of middle-aged women who find it difficult to find employment, little help from employed*

*sons, and the concerns and worries about the future of the children are among the reasons behind the increasing trend in prostitution.*

## **Interventions of ISED**

For addressing the issue of adverse consequences of displacement for women, ISED in partnership with the FES, initiated multi-pronged activities that included research and documentation, mobilisation, workshops and seminars, networking and intervention in the process of policy formulation in Orissa as also at the national level.

## **Research and Documentation**

ISED's intervention began with conducting an in-depth study in open-cast coal mining areas of Talcher. Open-cast coal mining creates numerous problems like ecological imbalance, air and water pollution, water crisis, land degradation, noise pollution and a series of health hazards. The numerous adverse effects on women identified by the study were: disharmony in the social system, breaking down of the family structure and declining family cohesion, increasing frustration among the unemployed members of the family leading to violence and crimes against women, disruption of crucial social and cultural linkages, and health hazards. With the ongoing coal mining in Talcher blocking up existing avenues of economic occupation, the economic condition of more than 85 per cent of the women has deteriorated drastically. A majority of them have become vulnerable to severe health hazards after displacement and resettlement at the new site as a result of polluted water

discharge. In order to publicise the human cost of such displacement and the shortcomings in implementation of rehabilitation programmes, especially for women, the study titled, '*Displaced Development: Impact of Coal Mining on Women*' was published for wider dissemination.

To highlight the plight of displaced women in Orissa, two video documentaries were produced, namely *The Burning Mines* focusing on the adverse impact of open-cast coal mining on women and *The Uproots of Rengali Dam*, depicting women's plight in a resettled colony of Rengali Dam oustees. The videos were widely shown within the State and outside, especially in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, where the problem of displacement has assumed alarming proportions. A special show of these videos was organised at Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi for the media, the representatives of World Bank and concerned civil society members.

It is significant to note that although women have been at the forefront of all protest movements against land acquisition and displacement, their role and sacrifices were hardly given the recognition they deserve. In view of this, ISED conducted a study to assess women's contribution in various struggles against displacement and identify the factors responsible for the failure and success of these movements. The projects covered under the study were those where people's protests against the project became a national concern, namely, Utkal Alumina International Limited, Bharat Aluminium Company, National Missile Testing Range, Baliapal, Tata Iron and Steel Company in Orissa; Koel-Karo Hydel Power Project, the Subarnarekha multi-purpose project and Netrahat Field Firing Range in Jharkhand; NMDC Iron and Steel Plant, and Achanakmar Sanctuary in Chhattisgarh; and Almora Magnesite and Tehri Dam projects in Uttarakhand. The findings of the study

were shared at different forums that are engaged in protesting displacement.

The study revealed that, although women participated in large numbers in these movements, they were mostly used invariably by male leaders, to swell the numbers. The women were placed in the forefront during *dharnas* and *morchas* (sit-in agitations and strikes) to protect the men from police atrocities. At the time of decision-making, however, these women were rarely given any meaningful role. For example, the 32-member steering committee of the Baliapal struggle, a decision-making body, had only one woman. Her token presence was a mere formality, as she claimed. The situation is more or less similar in other movements like the Koel Karo and Netrahat, where women were almost absent in core committees. Similarly, the role of women who led the Achanakmar sanctuary movement for securing rights of Baiga adivasis is yet to be recognised.

Movements are generally male dominated. When women's services are required they are treated as 'Durga' but when it comes to hogging the limelight they are pushed into the margin. Take for example, the Indian People's Tribunal's report published on the 2nd February 2001 on Tapkara incident. When the report was open for debate at hotel Chinar in Ranchi, not a single woman was called to the meeting. (Rose Kerketa)

Ironically, the leadership of these movements accepted the fact that women's involvement strengthened the cause to a great extent as they had better skill in dealing with contentious issues in discussions with the project management and in resolving the crisis situation. *In spite of this, the mindset prevailing among a majority of them was that women were frail, good at doing household chores with utmost dexterity but not in a position to deal with larger issues such as displacement and land rights.*



## Organising

Along with research and documentation, ISED organised village-based awareness and motivation camps for women in eight villages in Talcher coal fields, namely, Langijoda, Lachhmanpur, Anantabereni, Hensmul, Talbeda, Madanmohanpur, Balugaon Khamar and Balugaon Rawat. Each camp, as a follow-up, initiated processes of women's group formation (*Mahila Sanghas*), small savings, and collectively forcing authorities to ensure regular supply of drinking water, minimising the frequency and the intensity of blasting during mining, and promotion of learning centres.

While organising the camps, it was observed that the local administration including the police harassed women whenever they raised their voice against the misdeeds of the mining authorities. Many of them were arrested by the police (generally male) under fabricated charges. In view of such a persisting problem, ISED started promoting legal awareness among the activists of the *Mahila Sanghas* involving local advocates and sensitive junior police officers. This helped in familiarising the activists with the functioning of the police, court, revenue administration, *Panchayati Raj* system, Land Acquisition Act and the Resettlement and Rehabilitation Policy.

The initiative helped women's groups in many ways. United, strong and confident, they stood firmly in front of the MCL management demanding redressal of their grievances. *Mahila Sanghas* of Balugaon Rawat, Balugaon Khamar, Talabeda, Madanmohanpur and Lanjijoda villages stopped mining activities in the Lingaraj mines for three consecutive days. The mining authorities were forced to accept their genuine demands and started supplying drinking water and provided them with big size water tanks for storage. In addition, they repaired

village roads, started sprinkling water for absorbing mining dust and reduced the frequency of blasting considerably. This positive precedent led to similar demands being accepted by the authorities of Bharatpur mines too. Besides, *Mahila Sanghas* of eight villages set up learning centres in their villages and also took the responsibility of replicating the process in nearby affected villages.

### **Networking and policy-level impact**

In continuation of ISED's engagement with the issue of displacement, a series of workshops were organised involving people displaced/affected by various development projects established during 1948 to 1995 in Orissa, notably, NALCO, Samal Barrage, NTPC, Rengali and Hirakud dams, Ib Thermal and coal mining in the Ib Valley area. The workshops highlighted gross negligence of the project authorities in delivering what was due to the affected women and men in terms of compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement. At the same time, the dialogues helped in creating an environment for working together for securing the genuine rights of the affected people which were brazenly denied to them by the administration. The workshops made a number of suggestions to provide alternatives to displacement. Alternative development paradigms promoting harmony between human beings and nature were suggested. In cases where displacement was inevitable, involvement of the affected people, including women, and transparent and effective rehabilitation and resettlement measures were advocated.

In order to broad-base the endeavour, ISED organised four regional workshops at Konark, Udaipur, Mussoorie and Hyderabad. Participants in these workshops included activists

### **Phula Pradhan**

Phula, a woman belonging to Balugaon Rayat, a village completely destroyed by Lingaraj open cast coal mines under Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL), was living happily in a joint family for 25 long years since her marriage. During these years she was actively engaged in cultivating 4.5 acres of fertile land that her family owned. She also tended a herd of cattle, on which the prosperity of her family largely depended. Besides, she was so efficient in household chores that she became a central figure in her family and was very popular among her neighbours.

Phula's happy life suddenly started crumbling when she learned that the monster called MCL was to acquire the entire agricultural and homestead land not only of her family but of the whole of her village. In 1990 her village was served a notice for land acquisition. As a majority of the people in her village were semi-literate they were initially unable to comprehend the destructive message underlying the notice. Since Phula unlike many others in her village had completed primary level education, she could grasp the imminent threat to their survival. Taking advantage of the uncertainty, MCL authorities started their operation and within a couple of years the entire agricultural land of her village was acquired and mining became operational. In a short time, mining activities reached their doorstep; blasting, pollution, acute water scarcity, new types of diseases affecting animals and human beings became an everyday experience. The grim situation got compounded with a total disruption of all activities related to earning a livelihood.

In such a situation Phula seriously looked for a way out for her family and for her near and dear ones. While exploring a way out she came into contact with ISED, which was conducting a study in her area. ISED initially involved her in their ongoing activity of consultation on displacement issues at Angul. The consultation broadened her perspective and inculcated in her a sense of solidarity with large

numbers of displaced persons—victims of not only mining but industries and irrigation projects.

Becoming aware of the traumatic experiences of so many displaced persons, Phula resolved to challenge the might of mining authorities in and around her village. She mobilised a large number of women to demand adequate supply of drinking water, repair of roads damaged by heavy trucks, and considerable reduction in the intensity and volume of blasting, which was damaging their dwellings beyond repair. Since the authorities paid scant regard to the demands, women under Phula's leadership intensified their agitation and stopped mining activities in Lingaraj mines. Realising long term repercussion of this act of defiance, authorities reluctantly accepted some of her demands. However, no concrete measures were taken for quite some time, which compelled Phula and her associates to resort to agitation with greater vigour. This time, authorities singled out Phula for attack and suspended her husband who was an MCL employee. She did not buckle under pressure and sustained her campaign against the misdeeds of the mining authorities.

Phula's village was completely engulfed by mines in 2002 and she shifted to a new place. However, she has not withdrawn from her chosen path of joining hands with victims of mining and continues to mobilise them against the misdeeds of mining authorities. She is now a natural leader championing the cause of the victims of mining, raising resources for schooling for the deprived children. Now, at the age of 55, she is keen to join people engaged in movements against displacement.

who have been organising people against land acquisition causing large-scale displacement by the government and private companies. The workshops aimed at facilitating a debate for collective action for improving the quality of life of the affected women and to initiate a process for networking

among various groups and individuals engaged in protesting displacement.

The workshops unanimously resolved to evolve an alternative development model which, instead of destroying the eco system, fosters harmony between man and nature that does not destroy the livelihood of people, but rather, makes them self-sufficient and enhances their self-respect and creativity. In addition to rejecting the mainstream development philosophy, the workshops outlined strategies for the struggle against displacement and suggested that the agitations would succeed if they are under the leadership of affected people and not under people having vested interest, and if women play an active and decisive role in them. In addition, proper coordination is required during critical periods between the organisation/activists working with the displaced/affected people, and there should be a national forum of displaced persons.

Participants in the northern regional workshop at Mussoorie, at the end of their deliberations, decided to form an ad hoc State-level organisation to lend support to struggles of various groups in the State (Uttarakhand). It was named VANAD-HAR—an Association of Communities Engaged in Struggles to Ensure People's Rights over Natural Resources, their Protection and Conservation in Uttarakhand.

As a follow-up of the regional workshops, a national workshop was organised at Konark to consolidate the process. Representatives from 41 organisations covering eight States, namely, Orissa, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi, attended the workshop. All participants expressed the view that, since their movements and struggles were by and large localised, their voices were not heard at national and global levels. In order to achieve success,

most participants decided to enlist support from all those who have sympathy and concern for the displaced and the marginalised. To initiate the process, two participants from each State formed a committee named '*Visthapan Mukti Karya Dal*' (Displaced Persons' Action Group). The committee was assigned the task of broadening the ambit of the struggle involving various movements.

Ironically, though the issue, 'women and displacement', is a crucial area for gender-concerned scholars, the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) did not consider it a pressing issue calling for debate, discussion and research in their national conferences till its 10th National Conference. ISED persuaded the IAWS governing body to incorporate a sub-theme, *Development-Induced Displacement: Impact on Women* in their 11th National Conference held at Goa. 57 persons including scholars, activists and students participated in the deliberations and many of them contributed papers on the sub-theme. The thrust of the two days of deliberation was on the increasing marginalisation of women in the wake of accelerating implementation of development projects. The citizenship of women in rural tribal and urban India has consistently and invisibly been eroded due to the development policies of the country.

The deliberations highlighted the costs women are paying for the patriarchal approaches of the state to development during the post-Independence and post-liberalisation period. All participants condemned the ongoing process of development and felt that the basic gender justice concerns must be addressed by the women's movement in India. Various campaigns and struggles need to utilise existing mechanisms and instruments at local, regional, national and international levels in order to promote gender justice in the development paradigm. In the last plenary, a resolution was moved and passed unanimously

urging IAWS to promote research, analysis and activism on the complexities of displacement and its impact on women and other marginalised groups. Besides, the resolution also urged upon the IAWS to facilitate a civil society engagement with displacement issues through dialogue and discussions at all possible levels.

ISED's continuous endeavour in highlighting displacement issues through research and advocacy at various forums is being gradually noticed by major stakeholders, especially key government and project authorities in Orissa and Jharkhand. Partners in Jharkhand are actively engaged in Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) policy formulation by the State government. In Orissa, the State government has entrusted series of assignments to ISED during R&R policy formulation that included reviewing existing R&R policy and Land Acquisition and Coal Bearing Acts in the context of ongoing coal-mining operations and conducting 15 consultations with displaced/affected persons covering the Rengali irrigation project, Samal; Jagannath open cast coal mining project, Talcher; NTPC, Kaniha; Rengali multipurpose dam project, Rengali; Ramial medium irrigation project, Dhenkanal; Nilachal Ispat Nigam Limited, Danagadi, Jajpur; Gandhamardana iron ore mines, Keonjhar; Kalta iron ore mines, Sundergarh; Lakhanpur open-cast coal mining project, Jharsuguda; Hirakud dam project, Sambalpur; Hariharjore irrigation project, Sonapur; Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary, Nuapada; HAL, Sunabeda; NALCO, Damonjodi and Balimela multipurpose dam project, Malkangiri. These assignments were undertaken to bring out the aspirations of displaced/affected people for consideration while formulating new R&R policy.

To operationalise the new R&R policy, the State government engaged ISED to assess capacity building needs of various

stakeholders responsible for implementing the policy and to prepare training modules in accordance with their needs. The stakeholders included selected Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly, government officials, project authorities, PRI members, NGOs/CBOs and displaced persons. Besides, ISED is also entrusted to conduct capacity building training for 270 PRI members for effective participation in the process of R&R implementation. The training is being conducted in nine districts namely, Angul, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Jajpur, Dhenkanal, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Bolangir and Rayagada.

In recognition of sustained campaigning of the displacement issues, ISED became part of the working group on 'Land Relations for Formulation of the 11th Five Year Plan' constituted by the Planning Commission. ISED also prepared a working paper on 'women and displacement' for National Commission for Women (NCW) for their consultation and policy recommendation for national R&R policy formulation.

## **Future Outlook and Challenges**

With liberalisation of the Indian economy since early 1990s, aggressive economic growth and development have become the hallmarks of the current development paradigm. With the introduction of the Special Economic Zones Act in 2005, marginalisation of people has taken place in an unprecedented scale.

In the context of gender positioning, women are facing extreme hardship under the might of the aggressive growth model which erodes their sources of livelihood quite rapidly. The worst sufferers are tribal women, because it is their habitats that are



currently being targeted for mining. It is significant to note that the Central as well as State governments are promising all kinds of facilities to the investors and inviting them with open arms for investing in the mining sector. This investment has no human face. As a result, tribal women are compelled to face unprecedented impoverishment and marginalisation. In the absence of any mechanism to protect their lives and livelihood, a majority of them have become extremely vulnerable.

In view of this, ISED conducted a study covering five States, namely, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand to highlight the implications of the aggressive growth-centric development on women's livelihood sources which are being taken away or expected to be taken away in the near future. After completing the study, ISED organised a series of workshops in these States involving concerned persons for sharing the study and to evolve a collective strategy to arrest the fast depletion of women's livelihood sources.

Currently ISED is engaged in organising women affected by industrial and mining projects in Chhendipada and Banarpal blocks of Angul district in Orissa in the post liberalisation and globalisation era. The process involves series of village based awareness and motivation camps, leadership trainings and formation of women's organisations in the affected villages enabling them to face together various problems affecting their lives adversely.

# **Organising Informal Workers**

## **Nidan's Approach**

Arbind Singh

### **How it all Began**

In 1995, armed with a High Court order, the Bihar State Government undertook a massive anti-encroachment drive. Poor vendors were the 'soft target' and the administration focused on their eviction without taking any steps to rehabilitate them. They suffered more because of their unorganised nature. This senseless step evinced interest in those who were, then, part of Adithi, an NGO based in Bihar. It was decided to galvanise this unorganised section and offer them formidable clout to raise their voice against State's indifference and hostile stance.

Around the same time, Ela Bhatt of SEWA was trying to mobilise the civil society institutions to include issues of unorganised street vendors. She shared her concern with Viji Srinivasan (founder of ADITHI) who followed this by an important consultation with various like-minded individuals/institutions. The response was electrifying and people expressed solidarity with this unorganised section of the society. Organisation of street vendors became a project of Adithi. Coincidentally, Adithi was undergoing restructuring and Viji found this an opportune time to get an organisation dedicated to this cause. So, what began like a project of Adithi was immediately registered as an

independent institution—with the key objective of dealing with issues of the street vendors.

Both Adithi and SEWA were the rallying points for Nidan and they stood by it. In Nidan, they found a young institution with young collective leadership committed to the cause. They nurtured and hand held the nascent organisation systematically and offered all the capacity-building opportunities for the young cadre. More than financial security, they offered them tools and methodologies to conduct their activities in a scientific manner.

To have good grasp of the issues, Nidan initiated a large-scale survey of street vendors of Patna covering nearly 6,000 street vendors. Wherewithal and technical support for the survey was offered by SEWA. Ela Bhatt sent a team to help conduct the survey. As it was a large-scale survey, street vendors from all over the city came in contact with the Nidan team. The exposure helped the team to understand the situation of street vendors in particular and the urban poor in general. As a result, a very humane relationship with the people was established and the vendors and hawkers responded very well to this. The survey revealed, besides other facts, the complex exploitative informal lending mechanism among the urban poor. Only 44 out of 5,960 respondents had ever been sanctioned a bank loan. Everywhere there was a craving for friendly institutional finance. This offered an apt opportunity and Nidan's tryst with micro credit and access to finance for the poor began right here.

## **Evolving Institutions for and by the Poor**

Self-help groups (SHGs) have become familiar names, now, but it was not so during the mid-1990s in Bihar. Nidan started with

three Self-help groups way back in 1997, not to access subsidy of the government, but as an institution of the poor to help them express their collective clout. This turned the poor from a position of 'insignificance' to the status of being 'credit worthy'. Response to SHGs was substantial and the three SHGs created substantial ripple to spread to three more blocks of Patna, Danapur, Phulwarisharif and Patna City. This prompted the banks coming forward with credit support and beginning with a paltry sum of Rs. 47,000 to 47 women vendors in 1997 the banks acknowledged their credentials of credit worthiness by developing a strong partnership. By 1999, Nidan spread to Fatuah block of Patna. The relationship with the people has matured, now, and Nidan enjoys acceptance and trust. 'This is an organisation which does not only talk but also delivers'—people would invariably remark!

The year 2,000 saw Nidan's spreading to other districts—Vaishali and Katihar. The focus on saving and credit continued with women being the key target. The credentials and track record attracted institutional support to an unbelievable extent—Rs. 58,00,000 credit support from Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) proved a quantum jump. Sanctioning a first time loan of Rs. 58,00,000 to any new partner was unprecedented for RMK. The support was followed by another loan of Rs. 60,00,000 in the year 2004 from Rashtriya Mahila Kosh. This created a bolstering impact and Nidan moved to Muzaffarpur and Samastipur. Credibility of Nidan attained significant heights and it took little time to decide—should Nidan move to the national capital, Delhi? Nidan made its presence in Delhi in 2004, followed by Rajasthan and Jharkhand (Bokaro). Presently, there are more than 4,800 Self-Help Groups being nurtured and promoted by Nidan.

Promotion of Thrift and Credit Co-operatives also emerged as an important strategy supplementing the Self-Help Groups. While

credit support was able to meet the loan requirement of the informal workers, the astonishing phenomenon of even the meagre income or savings not being able to be kept safely in banks or any other institutions forced Nidan to set up thrift and credit co-operatives, beginning with the *Sanchay* Thrift and Credit Co-operative in Patna. Thrift and Credit Co-operatives were then set up in all areas of Nidan's work, making them an important strategy in providing financial services to the informal workers.

Nidan's work started with organising the informal workers beginning with street vendors. Over time, the organisation of street vendors and other informal sector workers has taken various forms—market committees, neighbourhood groups, self-help groups, federations, co-operatives, registered society and trade union and, when need arose, networks and coalitions. Nidan, in fact, took a very consistent and progressive approach to organising informal workers and its efforts have led to around 50 such organisations having been registered and functioning. They have their independent existence and are at different stages of sustainability. A lot of innovative and interesting efforts have gone into organising and promoting the workers' organisations. Many forms of trainings have been organised and many interesting materials, aimed at promoting organisations of informal workers, have been brought out.

Nidan has also been one of the major organisations (along with SEWA) which has been instrumental in formation of National Alliance of Street Vendors in India (NASVI). In 1998, at a workshop in Ahmedabad, vendors resolved to form their own National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) with its secretariat in Nidan, Patna. The idea was to bring together the street vendor organisations of India to collectively struggle for macro-level changes to support the livelihood of around 10 million vendors. It was registered in November 2003. Three hundred sixteen

organisations representing more than 3,00,000 street vendors from 20 States of India have taken its formal membership.

NASVI has been focusing upon creating

- A policy environment;
- Interventions at State level;
- Strengthening of member organisations;
- Development of systems of social security; and
- Mainstreaming of women street vendors and creation of NASVI women's Cells.

## **Setting the Agenda: A Self-Evolving Process**

Nidan began work with street vendors in 1995. In 1997, they started with home-based workers. In 1998, it began an education initiative for the children of informal workers. This programme took Nidan to the slums and gradually issues of slum dwellers, i.e., shelter, water, health and sanitation, occupied their agenda. Issues of domestic maid servants were raised. From 2002, we also began working with waste pickers. In the same year, Nidan also expanded to rural areas to cover jute workers, agriculture workers, landless, artisans and the like. Addressing various vulnerabilities—livelihoods and social security—of informal workers became the core concern and expertise of the organisation. The year 1998 witnessed a severe cold wave in rural areas which forced the poor villagers to migrate to urban areas. Nidan faced the challenge to deal with the crisis situation and this brought disaster, as one of the vulnerabilities, on Nidan's agenda. The recent Kosi river deluge has again been most challenging, requiring multiple interventions. The micro-finance

programme portfolio also increased considerably. The insurance programme as well received a very good response. As SHGs got institutionalised and consolidated, members wanted to scale up by collective business. Collective enterprises based on trade or service of informal workers, thus, became an important intervention to influence unfair practices in the local market and to increase considerably the income of members. Nidan also developed and became a part of networks to intensify its impact.

## **The Success and Achievements**

Nidan's success offers an interesting case study on how issue-based interventions can influence policy prescriptions which in turn attract collaborators (including financial donors and technical support). Expansion of outreach and coverage is what logically follows. This seems an interesting paradigm which characterises Nidan's success.

Nidan's galvanisation of the street vendors and flagging off the issues faced by them, challenged the policy-makers. The huge conglomeration of the determined street vendors forced the policy-makers to listen to them. The scale of mobilising led the then Chief Minister to assure livelihoods opportunity and policy support to the cause of the street vendors. To follow-up its commitment to assured livelihoods for the street vendors and assured credit, the Micro-Finance programme of Nidan was a welcome intervention. It treaded a new path which was not touched by other NGOs. Beginning with a small loan of Rs. 30,000 in November 1996 to 30 women, the credit programme offered a new face of the NGO in Bihar which has almost been missing. The community-based micro-finance programme is unique in its orientation and nature.

The poor and unorganised face serious vulnerability caused by sickness and untimely death. The micro-insurance programme of Nidan protects the street vendors and other members of the unorganised sector against this vulnerability. Starting with a small initiative covering 200 members in 1999, the micro-insurance programme today covers more than 50,000 poor. This programme provided a unique example in Bihar while covering complicated issues of health and poverty. Combined with this Nidan also organised health services for the unorganised groups it works with.

One of the greatest vulnerabilities that the poor face, in Bihar, relates to natural disasters. Starting from 1998, during the severe cold wave to the recent Kosi flood, Nidan has shown its organisational commitment and capacity to offer timely relief to the poor and also to work out long-term strategies for mitigation. In the recent flood, Nidan organised relief, ran schools and counselling centres and interfaced with the state agencies. It has been a unique learning experience to develop a long-term perspective on disaster management.

A large segment from among the unorganised community is engaged in urban sanitation. Their livelihoods, however, is uncertain. Setting up of waste management by waste pickers by building their own capacity is another major intervention by Nidan. The success of this programme can be seen in its capacity to generate broad based revenue—through user charges from the households and institutions, income from vermi compost and recyclables.

Street vendors suffer a lot due to lack of awareness about the legal aspects of their exploitation. Offering them legal aid is one of the important interventions by Nidan. There have been numerous cases of violations of rules by the different agencies. Legal aid clinics enable any member to protect oneself and also



to protest violations. The setting up of the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) can also be seen as a success of Nidan as the issues pertaining to human right violations have been ceaselessly been pursued by Nidan.

## The Impact

What has Nidan's initiatives led to? To answer this question, we tried to see whether we have had a broad-based impact on the groups with whom we work. In this respect, Nidan has been actively involved in the following:

- Setting up of National Task Force for Street Vendors and subsequently the National Policy for Street Vendors. Nidan also did considerable work in getting the policy implemented across States including pushing for a law for street vendors.
- Becoming an important partner for the national organisation NASVI and a national partner of the international organisation Street Net.
- The setting up of the Welfare Board for Construction Workers in Bihar. This is another example of policy support offered by the government to the issues espoused and followed up by Nidan,
- The Unorganised Workers (Social Security) Act passed by the parliament is another example of fruitful advocacy efforts by Nidan. Along with many other organisations, Nidan participated in creating consistent pressure on the Government for the same. In this the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna (National Health Insurance Scheme) took important lessons from Nidan's health insurance programme.

- Patna Municipal Corporation took steps to integrate waste pickers organised by Nidan, by providing contracts and also by appointing 10 persons in each ward of the city from among them.
- Nidan's interventions proved to be models for many initiatives of the Bihar Govt such as waste management, cooperatives, insurance and self-help groups.

# Domestic Workers' Plight

## CWDRs Strategy

Renuka Bala

**C**entre for Women's Development and Research—CWDR was initiated in 1993, by three women activists who had been working with different NGOs till then. They realised that in India only two per cent of the NGOs are run by women and that most of the women's development programmes are designed and implemented by men. The idea was not only to create a woman-headed organisation but to create a women-friendly organisation. At present, the CWDR is working in 85 slums in Chennai and 23 villages of Edaikazhinadu *Panchayat*, situated 100 kilometres away from Chennai city on East Coast Road, covering nearly 60,000 families. Recently, we have also initiated a State-level network of domestic workers. CWDR promotes women's rights, leadership and empowerment of women through issue-based campaigns and community-level activities. CWDR's field-level interventions focus on three highly vulnerable groups of women: domestic workers, single women and adolescent girls. We have initiated a trade union 'Manushi' for domestic workers, 'Maithri' an association for single women and 'Snehidhi', adolescent girls' groups.

## Organising Domestic Workers

Domestic work is one of the oldest and important occupations for millions of women around the world. There is no reliable

source of data about domestic workers in India. Different studies estimate the total number of domestic workers in India between 80 million to 100 million. Domestic labour constitutes one of the country's largest job categories, next only to farming and construction work. With the nuclear family system gaining ground and more and more middle class women pursuing careers, domestic workers have become a necessity. In the scenario where household and caring work is not shared by men, domestic workers become indispensable. The increase in number of domestic workers is also linked to the shift from an agrarian-based economy to manufacture and service-based economy. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), 'A domestic worker is someone who carries out household work in a private household in return for wages'. ILO also estimates that worldwide domestic work is the largest employment category for girls under the age of 16 and still there are no international standards to regulate the condition of work or the wages of domestic workers. There are three kinds of domestic workers: part-time workers, live-in workers, who usually come from rural areas and live in the house where they work, and migrant workers who go to foreign countries to work. CWDR is working only working with part-time domestic workers who live in the slums with their families and go to work on part-time basis in more than one house.

Millions of these domestic workers start their work early in the morning. They have to do their own household work before rushing to their workplace to perform similar work. They sweep, swab, clean, wash, cook, they take care of the children, elders and even pets and plants in their employers' homes. Yet, they are unseen, undervalued and denied their rights as workers and women. Domestic work is often a modern form of slavery, hidden and silenced in private houses. Isolated in individualised situations in other people's home, the labour of domestic

workers goes unrecognised, unseen, undervalued and not covered under any labour laws. There is no proper job description for domestic work and no recognition of necessary skills or qualifications. Domestic work is normally characterised by low wages, excessive hours of work with no extra pay, overwork, lack of benefits or social security, unfair termination of employment and employer abuse. Sexual harassment of domestic workers is a common complaint. They are one of the most exploited groups of unorganised workers. The real issue is that domestic work, whether performed by house-workers or housewives, is erroneously perceived as non-economic and non-productive—not considered as work.

In Tamil Nadu, an estimate says there are about 1.5 million domestic workers and Chennai city alone has 6 to 8 lakhs of domestic workers. Nearly 25 per cent of the domestic workers are girl children below 18 years; most of them are children of domestic workers. We realised that domestic workers are the poorest of the poor in the slums, and 30-40 per cent of the domestic workers are single women, that is, widows or destitute women.

Initially, our struggle was to pressurise the government to recognise domestic work as paid work. The Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of work) Act was passed in 1982. The rules under the Act were framed in 1986. 12 employments in the unorganised sector were brought under the schedule of the Act. Based on more detailed studies by three committees, 43 new employments were added, in 1998, to the schedule of the 1982 Act. Still, domestic work was not included under this Act. After continuous advocacy and campaigning by organisations like ours and trade unions, the government included domestic work in the list. In 1999, the Tamil Nadu Manual workers Welfare Board was created under

the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers (Regulations of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act 1982, for 54 categories of unorganised sector workers, and domestic work is also included in that. It is a big victory for the domestic workers movement. To become a member of the welfare board, a worker has to go through a trade union or the employer has to enrol the worker. No employer is willing to spend time on enrolling the domestic worker in the Board. Another problem is that most of the part-time domestic workers work in 2–3 houses; so, there are 2–3 employers. They are called unorganised workers because they have no trade unions. So we started enrolling them through the Tamil Nadu Unorganised Workers Trade Union, and simultaneously tried to register a separate trade union for domestic workers. The Registrar of Trade Union simply refused to recognise such a Trade Union saying that domestic work is not a government-recognised work. In 2005 July, we organised a State-level consultation meeting and a seminar on the situation of domestic workers and also presented a memorandum to the Governor of Tamil Nadu to take the necessary steps to recognise domestic work and regulate it. After this meeting and our continuous efforts, finally we were able to register a trade union for domestic workers, 'Manushi' in September 2005. Manushi members have provided leadership in the struggle to achieve adequate recognition for the work of domestic workers. There are about 3,000 members in Manushi trade union. Each slum has a local-level Manushi unit, which has its own president, secretary and treasurer. They organise their own slum-level meetings, trainings and also address other issues like violence at home, work place, and domestic workers' children's education. At the slum level, Manushi members meet once in a month to discuss various issues, review and make action plans. CWDR organises regular monthly training programmes to help them understand the plight of domestic workers and women and also to help them understand the importance of being part

of a trade union. They also learn the leadership skills needed to run the trade union. In addition to that, we also organise monthly training programmes for the slum level office bearers of Manushi. The executive committee members also meet once in a month to review the actions taken and to plan future activities. Once in a year, the general body meeting is held and new executive members are elected. Manushi has an elected executive committee of 9 members. To become a member of Manushi, initially a domestic worker has to pay Rs. 105 out of which Rs. 60 is the yearly subscription, Rs. 20 for their photo and Rs. 25 is for medical benefit. If they continue as a member for two years, in case they fall sick they get Rs. 300 to go to hospital. The main problem in Tamil Nadu is that most women are part of Self-Help Groups formed to avail benefits from government programmes. Thus, they expect loans or doles from CWDR too. In Tamil Nadu, the government is also providing a lot of free things like Televisions, gas connections, and rice at one rupee per kilogram. Thus, one of the major tasks is to educate these women about trade unions and to help them come out of the culture of dependency.

Manushi actively advocates for government regulation of domestic work and initially demanded that the government should create a separate welfare board for domestic workers. The government of Tamil Nadu ultimately did form a separate welfare board for domestic workers in 2007. However, still domestic work is not included in the Minimum Wages Act 1948. As many as 83 employments in the unorganised sector were included in the Minimum Wages Act 1948. States may extend its application to domestic workers through State legislation. In Tamil Nadu, to implement the Minimum Wages Act 1948, the Tamil Nadu Minimum Wages (Madras) Rules were framed in 1953, but only recently domestic work has been included under these Rules. For this, the Tamil Nadu Government has set

up a committee to fix minimum wages for domestic workers. In this committee no domestic worker is included despite our efforts.

To further complicate the situation, on 4 March 2008, the Government of Tamil Nadu issued a G.O. (Government Order) 23 transferring the unorganised sector workers' welfare boards, including Domestic Workers Welfare Board, from Labour Department to Revenue Department. This was done without any consultation with trade unions, Welfare Boards or the Advisory Committee. This move has come as a big shock and disappointment to the unorganised sector workers and trade unions. The government ostensibly took this step as members are claiming welfare schemes from more than one welfare board. By delegating the functions to the Revenue Department, the objective of the government is to delay the registration which would further delay the benefits from reaching domestic workers. Computerising the data of Welfare Board members would have easily stopped duplicate benefits, if any, accruing to members. Actually, even to get genuine benefits under the welfare schemes takes years. The fact that women get their marriage welfare support only when their first child is born, or their maternity benefit only when the child starts going to school makes a mockery of the system. Though the benefits under the welfare schemes are very little, the recognition of domestic work as paid work is important. CWDR, on its part, organised network meetings with other trade unions, undertook signature campaigns, held press meets and lobbied with elected representatives and government officials to revoke the order. Finally, the government stopped the G.O. 23. All these advocacy lobbying and campaign activities to revoke G.O. 23 were a rich experience for Manushi members as it helped them to realise their collective potential.



During 2008, Manushi was extended to other districts of Tamil Nadu by initiating a State-level network. In the Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Board, only 55,000 domestic workers became members and most of them were from Chennai city. Thus, we realised the importance of extending Manushi to other districts. The network was expanded through other NGOs and Manushi was extended in 16 districts of Tamil Nadu and nearly 5000 domestic workers were enrolled in Manushi. Unfortunately, during this time, the government transferred the Domestic Workers Welfare Board to the Revenue department and stopped enrolling domestic workers in the Welfare Board. There is also a lack of infrastructure at the district level to enrol the unorganised sector workers in the welfare boards. At the same time, the district level units and the additional number of domestic workers were of great strength and help in our advocacy and campaign activities, particularly in revoking the G.O. 23 and in pressurising the government to fix minimum wages for domestic workers. We are now networking with other State and national-level networks to strengthen domestic workers' movement.

The domestic workers in our working area earn between Rs. 500–1500 per month. In addition to demanding the government to fix minimum wages, we are also running income-generation programmes for domestic workers to increase their income. We are providing entrepreneurship skills training and also help them get some loans to start their own business. Most of them have started part-time businesses like cooking and selling food, making flower garlands, selling cloth and making cleaning solutions like phenyl. CWDR has also initiated some business activities like catering services. Under this, breakfast and lunch are supplied to offices and individuals. They also prepare and supply food for all our trainings and meetings. We

have also initiated a job placement agency for domestic workers and are upgrading their housekeeping skills. The idea is to provide proficient and trained domestic workers so that they can demand a higher wage. Another business is producing toilet and washing soap and cleaning solutions and market them to employers in the houses where they work. All these business activities are in their early stages

## **Impact and Outcomes**

In the last ten years, rapid changes have come in the lives of domestic workers. The government has included domestic workers in the Tamil Nadu Manual Workers Welfare Board, later a separate welfare board for domestic workers was formed, and now the Tamil Nadu Government had formed a committee to set up minimum wages for domestic workers. The Central government, on its part, has passed the 'Unorganised Workers Social Security Bill 2008' in parliament in December 2008. We are really happy and proud that we are part of these achievements. We are one of the few organisations working with domestic workers and are one of the few organisations which have initiated a trade union for domestic workers. Manushi provides leadership opportunities for women and such experience will help them to take leadership in solving their problems and create a gender just society. Presently, Manushi has only 3,000 members which is a small proportion of the total 1.5 million domestic workers in the State. Its significance however lies in its advocacy efforts, right from gaining them recognition to improving their work and living conditions. After seeing Manushi, many NGOs have started trade unions for unorganised sector workers. Manushi has also expanded to 16 districts of Tamil Nadu, reaching out to domestic workers in small towns. Being a membership-based

organisation, it can sustain itself even after NGO support is phased out eventually.

During our Tsunami rehabilitation work, we found out the difficulties of single women. In Tsunami affected fishing villages, we found out that most of the rehabilitation materials were not given to single-women families. That is because, in the fishing village, the men will have to pay a tax to the village council for fishing, usually a percentage of the catch, but in single-women's family no one is going for fishing; so they will not pay any taxes to the local village council, and usually women are not allowed to participate in the village council meetings even as observers. Initially, the local village council people insisted that they could give relief materials only to the tax payers, but after several meetings and discussions they started giving the materials to single women. This helped us to look into the single women's issue more deeply. We have conducted a study on single women in our working slums and, based on that, we have decided to implement separate programmes focusing on single women. This was the impetus behind starting 'Maithri' in which there are about 1,500 single women as members. Most of these women are also domestic workers and so also part of the Manushi group. Through Maithri groups, we are providing entrepreneurship skills training for single women and also provide them loans so that they can start their own business and become economically self-sufficient. Single women need more psychological and emotional support and Maithri helps them as a forum where they can share their feelings and experiences. Most of the government programmes address only widows. Thus, we are also involved in advocacy and campaigning to bring in suitable policies and programmes to address single women's issues. We are also sharing our experiences and learning with other NGOs so that they can also start working with single women.

We are in the process of initiating a network to address single women's issues.

## **Future Plans**

Providing a dignified life to domestic workers is possible. For this, organisations supporting domestic workers and comprising domestic workers need to be strengthened. To achieve this, Manushi needs to expand and consolidate. At the same time, CWDR has plans to promote a placement agency for domestic workers which will be owned by the workers themselves. Unlike other agencies, here the domestic workers will be share holders. Fair wages and adequate social security would be the touchstone for its success. In the coming years, we also wish to build CWDR as a resource centre for women's empowerment, so that other NGOs, activists, trade unions and research scholars can use it.

## Youth, Democracy and Gender

Damyanty Sridharan

Despite being the largest democracy in the world, a vast majority of women and men in India have a great apathy towards politics. Given that 51 per cent of our population is below 25 years of age and about 66 per cent is under 35 years, such apathy amongst the youth, is a cause for grave concern. There is a general sense of disillusionment with all political parties and leaders, which spreads across regional boundaries. Several organisations and individuals accept that they are engaged in 'social work'. However, most of them see themselves as 'apolitical' — and want to remain so. It is unfortunate that in our formal education system there is no room for addressing such issues and concerns. Thus, the FES, in collaboration with partner organisations the Educational Resources Centre (ERC) Trust, Vacha and others, tries to address this apathy of young women and men to politics through various engagements. Over time, workshops on Youth and Democracy were held in different regions of the country. In the course of these workshops, it was felt that gender sensitisation of youth is another neglected area. Gender stereotypes still loom large in the mindsets of both women and men. Thus, gender awareness became a crucial element in these activities.

Under this line of work ERC, Vacha and FES have been working together to increase awareness and to sensitise young women and men on their role in politics and the development issues

and concerns faced by the country. Gender is integrated and viewed in the context of democracy and human rights. Dialogues on identity, pluralism, diversity, rights and social justice form the basis for engagement. More specifically, in the interactions, issues like Human Rights and Social Justice; Peace and Communal Harmony, Democracy in Political Parties; Role of Youth in tackling Millennium Development Goals; and Right to Information are taken up. Different sessions clarify participants' views on democratic values, practices and attitudes with a gender perspective. They also aim at understanding pluralism and constitutional values and to reflect on an individual's role as a citizen. There is a high degree of participation, leading to learning through sharing. In order to have a larger outreach, ERC took the initiative to develop a curriculum for Democracy Forums with college teachers. Subsequently, different ways of implementing it evolved in the different colleges all over the country as part of this engagement with youth. Vacha, on its part, has developed much needed materials for trainings which it continues to build with its networking efforts with various organisations involved in gender issues. This section on Youth Democracy and Gender elaborates on the work of ERC and Vacha. ERC's initiatives are outlined in the form of a personal narrative of the author and her observations on their work and its impact.

One spin off effect of the various engagements with young women and men has been the formation of FES Young Leaders Think Tank (YLTT). Believing that a network of engaged young people could contribute to the development of society in a just and democratic way, FES Young Leaders' Forum was formed in 2007. The forum consists of a group of young professionals from diverse backgrounds and different parts of the country. A majority of the members of this Forum are young women and men who had earlier participated in FES and partner activities.

In 2009 June, the Forum was renamed as FES Young Leaders Think Tank with the aim to discuss and develop strategies on political, social and economic issues from a youth perspective.

There is a lot that needs to be done in order to strengthen democracy and civil society, at all levels, from the local to the international. Every effort is valuable and links up people who believe in democracy, inter-cultural understanding, justice and harmony. The FES engagements with young women and men are one such initiative.

# **Building Democracy through Citizenship**

## **A Personal Narrative**

Sharada Nayak

**T**he Educational Resources Centre Trust was launched on my retirement in 1992. My goal was to reach out to young Indian adolescents, college undergraduates to be specific, because at that stage in their lives they need guidance and a reaffirmation of values, and a commitment to social betterment. As they leave the protective environment of high schools, teacher and parental nurturing, there seems to be a need for mentoring and emotional anchoring.

The ERC Trust completed a ten-year project on issues of diversity on Indian college campuses in 2004 (funded by Ford Foundation). In this project, we learned a great deal from our interaction with undergraduate students in over 50 colleges and 5 universities all over India. We found the reactions from undergraduates to diversity—whether it is caste, religion, gender or the urban-rural divide—stemmed from a basic alienation of the adolescent from society. The pressures from parents, the lack of communication with college teachers, and insecurity due to lack of job opportunities, all combined to viewing diversity as a problem. Students lacked coping skills to deal with problems of social diversity, leading to frustration and, sometimes, violence.

ERC then launched a series of workshops for students and their teachers on self-development. Under the guidance of



renowned behavioural scientist Dr. Udai Pareek, a training module was developed and several workshops conducted with perceptible impact on the student population. The acceptance of this model of training by the faculty gave us the means of intervention in colleges with a diverse undergraduate population.

## **The Process**

Our relationship with FES grew out of this commitment to undergraduate students, and our experience with student groups in a wide spectrum of colleges was a natural platform to build our contacts. We were therefore ready to take on the challenge of trying to further our initial success by introducing the FES objectives of developing political awareness among students. In our work on the diversity initiative, we had identified four broad themes: religious diversity, caste discrimination, gender issues and socio-economic differences. FES, with its emphasis on the gender perspective, suggested the theme for our first collaborative event—Women in the Political Process. We began in 2002 with four workshops in the four regions of the country on this theme. We included male and female students because we firmly believe attitudes are influenced by an atmosphere of open interaction and dialogue between both sexes.

Well-known women activists spoke to students and we visited sites where women NGOs had launched successful programmes. At the end of the year, we invited selected students from the four regional workshops to Delhi for a national workshop. The students met prominent women in political life—Chief minister of Delhi, Mrs. Shiela Dixit, the Deputy Speaker of the Rajya Sabha, Mrs. Najma Heptullah,

and had discussions with professors of women's studies in Delhi's universities. The feedback from the participants was encouraging but we felt much more could be achieved through more activities and discussions among the participants, despite the inspiration and open dialogue with the outstanding women who met and spoke to them. There was also parental restraint on some of the girls from smaller towns and conservative families—especially, Muslim girls—who were restricted from travelling outside their home towns.

We felt that the parents could be persuaded by committed teachers, especially women faculty from women's colleges. Our next workshops were for faculty members from colleges in the four regions. In these workshops, we included faculty from Muslim women's colleges in Lucknow and Aligarh Muslim University in Aligarh.

The commitment of the teachers had a definite impact on the outcome due to their influence on students. For instance, we had initially met considerable resistance from parents and principals in including Muslim girls to participate in our programmes. I recall the case of Zakira from Jai Hind College who was persuaded by her Principal to attend our national workshop in Delhi. A brilliant student who had topped her class in B.Sc. Microbiology, she had a fine mind and confidently took part in the conversation with the two women politicians they met in Delhi. When the workshop ended and the girls were getting ready to leave for the station, I saw that her father had come to Delhi with her, stayed in a city hotel, and had come to escort her home, despite the fact that there was a women teacher escorting the students. I met him and complimented him on his daughter's performance in the workshop. He smiled and said, "Yes, but we cannot forget our tradition. We have

brought her up to live up to our culture and tradition and we are confident she will not let us down”.

I subsequently heard that though she wanted to continue and do her graduate work in Microbiology, her parents had taken her out of college and sent her to a school for interior decoration run by a Muslim women’s group, prior to her marriage that they had arranged. Hopefully, she carried with her some of the self-confidence we had instilled in her that would impact on her role as wife and mother.

## **Impact on Men and Women Students**

Seeing my disappointment about the lack of involvement of Muslim women students, the faculty from Women’s College, Aligarh Muslim University assured me that their students would participate—and they did. The first group came to Nainital, escorted by a woman teacher. In our ice-breaking session, one of them refused to shake hands with a male student, much to his dismay. She said, ‘It was against her culture’. I told the boy not to take offence and to carry on without showing any resentment. On the first day of the workshop, the girls, their heads covered in ‘*hijab*’, sat together apart from the male students. However, by the end of the second day they were mixing freely, participating with an open and friendly dialogue. By the end of the workshop, all barriers had indeed been broken and there was close interaction and a warm friendship between all the participants, male and female. The male students showed a new respect for the views expressed by the Muslim girls. Of all the women participants, the girls from this conservative Muslim women’s college showed deep understanding of current issues, debated without inhibition and showed great enthusiasm for the workshop

sessions. When asked in their Evaluation Report, what they found the greatest gain from the workshop, one of them wrote, “The fact that I was able to persuade my parents to let me come here and participate! It was a wonderful experience!” There was no doubt in my mind that a wall had been knocked down.

I subsequently visited the Aligarh Muslim University, Women’s college, thanks to the initiative taken by the teacher Ms. Munira of the English department. She had formed a Democracy and Youth Forum (DAY), which met once a month on Saturdays. The girls, almost all from Muslim background, were active and enthusiastic in their discussions with me. Taking the initiative, they had raised many issues with public authorities—better transport facilities for girl students, complaints of harassment at the police station, and volunteering for social services in schools in slum areas. We continue to be in touch with them. The only hiccup has been the recent retirement of a liberal Principal, and her successor is not willing to see the value of the workshops. It remains for us to convince her that her students will benefit from this extra-curricular activity.

Seethalakshmi Ramaswami College, a privately managed women’s college in Trichy (Tamil Nadu) has regularly participated in our workshops. A conservative management has, through our interaction, overcome its scepticism. Seeing the positive feedback from the students, the college has realised the value of these workshops. Coming from largely lower middle class Hindu background, the girls have not been exposed to programmes in other parts of the country, due to their modest economic status. While college education is considered desirable, the wider horizon of careers and job opportunities in metropolitan cities was hardly seen as within their reach. We have had several reports from the principal and

teachers on how girls who have participated in our workshops have a new self-belief, know their rights and responsibilities and speak out with a new self-confidence, expressing their desire to take professional courses. Personnel managers of multinational companies have commented to the principal that the girls are articulate, eager to learn and committed to their careers. The Principal said these successes can be attributed to exposure programmes like our gender sensitisation workshops, and faculty support. Today, this college has the largest number of students in their 'Democracy Forum', all eager to participate in FES workshops.

At the end of each workshop, we give the students a Certificate of Participation. One girl, Uma Maheshwari announced to her group proudly that she had produced her certificate at a job interview with Tata Consultancy Services and the Managing Director had told her this was the first time he had interviewed a candidate who displayed a certificate on 'Democracy and Citizenship' with such pride! She claims that this certificate got her the job with such a prestigious company.

Another South Indian college, St. Xavier's College, Palayamkottai, has many rural youth, sons of poor farmers with small land holdings, fathers who have a deep desire to see their boys educated and prosperous in well-paid jobs. We asked a group of these boys how our workshops and the interaction with students from other parts of the country had affected them. They commented that learning about gender issues and hearing from the girls about the discrimination they felt within the family as well, had brought a new awareness.

One boy recounted how when his father wanted to discuss financial matters with the sons on how they should spend their

family income, he had told his father that his mother should be part of the discussion—something his father had never considered in the past!.

Subsequently, we took up issues of conflict resolution, with efforts to understand and discuss with young people the need to conciliate inter-religious violence and the issues of tribal violence in the eastern States, including minority rights.

## **Impact on the Colleges**

Faculty training is an essential part of student development and our training of teachers gave us a core of committed faculty who were willing to make the learning from these workshops a foundation for developing student activities on their campuses.

The faculty of some of the colleges has a firm belief that the college curriculum should include the elements of Democracy, Citizenship, Leadership values and that every undergraduate should take such a course. While they are convinced of the value of such an 'add-on' course, appended to every major subject/discipline, they are realistic about their limited influence on the broader system. The pressure on the students to graduate with high grades and enter the job market is very intense. Parents have great expectations of their wards. The value given to professional courses such as engineering and medicine is so great that other avenues of studies are largely neglected. Many students will decline the opportunity to take an extra course, without academic credit, as they have no time to spare after their intense preparation for exams. It is therefore very encouraging that many of the colleges we work with have accepted a short-term course on Democracy

and Citizenship as a recognised course in their list of extra short-term courses. The course has been listed in their prospectus at St. Xavier's College, and students are willing to pay a small fee to join the Democracy Club because of their interests in inter-collegiate programmes and opportunities for self-development. In Chowgule College, Goa, students have incorporated the elements from the workshops into a theatre group where they perform plays on the themes of democracy and rights that they write and produce. Most importantly, all students in these Democracy and Youth campus groups are involved in outreach work, volunteering for social service in their neighbourhood.

In 2007, a group of faculty from six colleges met and developed a curriculum unit. It is our hope that as our idea gets publicity others may be interested in adopting this approach to further student development.

Considering the size of India and the diversity of institutions of higher education in the country, our effort is small. It would be a necessary step to persuade the University Grants Commission to accept the need of designing a compulsory course at the undergraduate level.

At present, the study of the Indian Constitution has been introduced in many States as a 'Foundation Course' which undergraduate students are required to take. This is a paper, which is allotted 100 marks in the first year exam, but with no experiential learning, and without any applicability to other study programmes, or applied science disciplines. In our vision, the study of democratic institutions must necessarily incorporate human rights, including gender rights, political participation, and youth involvement in civic issues, so that civil society is geared to raise its voice whenever social injustice and any aberrations

of political parties and election rhetoric is highlighted in the media. Our efforts may seem small but by throwing a pebble in stagnant waters we hope that we have raised ripples of ever-widening impact.



## Articulating and Addressing Imbalances Vacha's Way

Sonal Shukla

Vacha is a women's resource centre established in 1987 by a group of women who were active in women's movement groups. It was registered formally as a trust in 1990. Its original activities were running a library of women's issues as no such library existed at the time. Its other activity was to reach out to literacy-deprived women through music, theatre, storytelling and other forms of expression. Thereafter, Vacha soon got involved in training and research. From 1995, one of the major focuses of Vacha has been girls' empowerment through training in life skills including self-expression. The organisation works through schools, colleges, NGOs, CBOs and women's groups. It is located in Mumbai and its wider area of work is in Maharashtra and Gujarat. In Mumbai, its activities cover ten *bastis* (slums/poor neighbourhoods) and nine schools and colleges. Vacha organises gender training, educational fairs on health and gender, career information displays, film screenings and discussions through these centres. It has also organised local and national-level seminars on gender and aging, gender factor in education of girls and on youth and gender. Gender sensitisation of youth has been one of its main objectives from the start. In the last few years, its gender training programme received support and guidance from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and is much appreciated by several institutions and civil society groups.

Vacha has produced a number of resources such as games, songs, posters and banners, audio albums and video films , and booklets on issues like health and child rights,. Two important resources that serve as training materials, viz., a gender quiz book for youth and an album of women's empowering songs have been produced in the past in partnership with FES. Starting with 400 books, Vacha today has over 5,000 books. In interactive programmes with readers/users, Vacha has organised meetings with many authors including, among others, *Gyanpeeth* award winning author Mahashweta Devi, feminist activist and writer Gloria Steinem and dalit writer Urmila Pawar.

## **Gender Sensitisation**

In India, the gender gap in all indicators of development is glaring. India is among the top twenty nations that have the worst gender gap. It is at number 114 in the Global Gender Gap Report 2009 published by World Economic Forum based in Geneva. Of the four criteria selected for assessment, India stands at 127 in Economic participation and opportunity, at 121 in Education, and at 131 in Health and survival. It is only in Political rights that it shows good performance, its position being 25, largely due to the fact that we had a woman prime minister for several years in India and political equality is guaranteed by the Constitution of India. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 that provide for 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in local self-government is a step ahead in women's political participation but on all other fronts India has dropped further in the already dismal performance of the previous years. Many poor and developing countries in Asia and Africa are ahead of India in closing the gender gap.

Son preference in India is disproportionately high. With the use of medical technology, female foeticide has reached alarming proportions. Female population in 0–6 in some districts is as low as 750 girls for 1,000 boys. The declining sex ratio is affecting all classes of people. It is very high among urban middle class and middle caste communities. Bride purchase from poor families is reported in Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat. As the disproportionately higher male population gets older, imbalance in gender ratio can have serious impact in the form of increase in kidnapping and rapes, forced prostitution and compulsory polyandrous marriages for women.

All development indicators show wide gender gaps which means that at every stage there are problems of enrolment and retention of girls in schools and colleges. Girls and women suffer from poor nutrition and as many as 70 per cent pregnant women are suffering from anaemia. And, according to one report, 62 out of 1,000 women in India are teen mothers (*Times of India*, 14 November 2008). This is an outcome of early or child marriages.

This alarming status of women in India is due to traditional patriarchal values that are sometimes recast with a modern mask with dangerous implications for development and policy planning. Since this orthodox value system has existed for centuries, its manifestations appear to be 'natural'. Women also internalise and perpetuate these values. Men get a sense of entitlement with regard to property and social status. Women and men become victims as well as perpetrators of an unjust value system that has been inculcated through important social institutions like family, religion, caste, language, literature, art and other forms of culture as well as through economic and political institutions. These institutions impact

women adversely and thus also adversely affect lives of families and communities. They result in low wages for women, lack of child care facilities and unequal images of love and romance among many other things. All of them are obstructions to human rights endeavours. Men are also under a strain in a patriarchal society which demands that they be better than women in height, body mass, in studies and in money-making capacity. Men are always expected to be brave and never emotional. The situation is grave when we see that decision-making at every level, from family to the top law-making bodies, is made from a culture of patriarchy, from a lack of gender awareness as well as from a lack of democratic values in society. In this scenario, the need for gender sensitisation of all sections of society cannot be over emphasised.

Gender awareness and gender training are thus crucial for youth—as young women and men will be future decision-makers. They need to look at gender issues in a personal way and see how gender affects individuals and institutions in society and they need to see how positive changes can take place. They need to be inspired to integrate gender awareness in all personal and collective actions.

## **Vacha's Approach**

Vacha has worked with a gender perspective in all its activities. The focus groups are young students, teachers and social activists. There are components on democracy, communal harmony and civic issues in a programme but the main sessions are related to gender and patriarchy and their manifestations in public and private lives. For focused action for gender awareness, the organisation has two kinds of programmes. One is to

conduct gender training workshops and the other is production of gender training material.

## Gender Training

In the gender training workshops organised by Vacha (in partnership with FES), Gender is viewed in the context of democracy and human rights. Identity politics based on religion and language have made it clear that human and democratic rights and awareness of peace issues are important in the understanding of gender. Gender is mediated by caste, class, ethnicity and various other social divisions that are used for domination, oppression and exploitation. A programme of gender sensitisation cannot ignore the context within which gender discrimination takes place. Vacha itself participates as a women's group in campaigns for Right to Education, Right to Food and in public protests against violation of people's rights. This is not only to situate gender issues within other human rights issues but also to ensure that these campaigns integrate gender concerns within their objectives and programmes. The trainers are mainly from our own staff and have undergone gender training at Vacha and also received it from other organisations such as Jagori, CREA and FES itself. Senior staff is encouraged to enroll in a one-year part-time course on gender and development conducted by the Research Centre on Women's Studies of the SNDT Women's University. Gender training programmes also invite field experts to conduct some of the sessions. The participants are students from National Social Service (NSS) programmes, teachers—including teacher trainees, social activists and NGO/CBO staff. They are seen as potential change agents in society and the training they receive can have a multiplier effect. With one exception, more than

90 per cent of participants have been under 30 years of age in all gender trainings. The exception was in case of Municipal school teachers from the teachers' union who had specially requested Vacha to undertake gender training.

## **Pedagogy**

During sessions the methodology used includes sociogramme, home budgeting, question-answer sessions, readings and discussions, film screening, games and quiz, songs and theatre activities. The theatre activities are in the form of poetry readings and role plays. This methodology assures better interaction with the group and better participation of individuals. Handouts are given during sessions and a kit with relevant resources is provided to participants. The assignments take the form of preparing the workshop bulletin, making posters thematically and creating slogans and poetry on gender issues.

## **Material Developed**

Over the years Vacha has developed training material as well as acquired resources from other sources. It has created and/or collected material in Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and English. Here, we would like to mention that use of selected poems on women's issues and on communal harmony is truly appreciated by participants. Impact of one collective performance and dramatised recitation of an anti-nuke poem has been particularly strong as per experiences shared by participants who have also had discussions on other poems from gender and peace perspectives. Yet another selection is from stories selected for each group from text books and from other literary works including protest poetry. These are given as

assignments during sessions. A set of films are selected for participants to view and discuss so that gender issues can be raised. Vacha has translated *A Letter to the School Teacher*, a modern day gender response to the famous letter to the headmaster by Abraham Lincoln when his son was first admitted to school. The original gender response document by a woman is in Marathi. Vacha has translated it in Hindi and Gujarati for dissemination to multilingual groups for discussions during training. Similarly, it has translated from English a small but important Japanese document titled *If World Is a Global Village* that effectively raises issues of poverty, consumption, war, conflicts and democracy. It shows the global situation in numbers as if one is actually living in a village with 100 inhabitants. This is done in order to show where you as well others stand in terms of access to housing, electricity, education, democratic rights, freedom from torture and safety in life.

Songs and poetry make an emotional impact and not just appeal to reason like many other training tools and resources. India has an old tradition of collective singing that is also very popular in action and movements on gender justice and in various other human rights groups. Vacha has developed four albums including songs of girlhood, Gujarati *garbas* (traditional folk songs and dance) for new messages. The quiz book *Women's Question* (produced in partnership with FES) is another resource developed by Vacha which has proved to be a very effective training tool. The quiz book has a series of questions pertaining to women and categorised under titles Literature, Politics, Science and Technology, Sports, History, Religion and Mythology. There are questions like 'what is the eighth star in the Seven Star constellation called?' (The stars are names after seven male *rishis* (Hindu sage) and eighth is named after *Arundhati*, partner of a male rishi but herself a powerful *rishi* too.)

These questions and the quiz game arouse much excitement among young women and men. It also makes them realise that some very obvious details about women and well-known facts of women's achievement have been ignored in the body of knowledge we receive. This provokes them to think "why"?

### Training Approach

As our emphasis is on youth and gender training, our approach is to select college students, teachers and teacher trainees and CBO/NGO activists. Students' groups can be all-women or mixed groups. Once we also had an all-male group. Content and methodology are adapted accordingly. Preference is for NSS students since these young women and men have already shown an inclination for going beyond their routine syllabus and to work for the community. Since they already undertake some social projects, helping them acquire a gender perspective can be potentially fruitful. There have been students from various women's colleges as well as male students from Mithibai College in posh Juhu Scheme area and poor and dalit students from Dr. Ambedkar college and mixed students from B.Ed. colleges that are teacher training institutes. There have also been college students from local colleges in Jamnagar and Valsad in Gujarat and Sangli in Maharashtra. One of the more recent groups to receive gender training is a group of *adivasi* (tribal) girls in a tribal district in southern Gujarat that is close to Maharashtra border. Content and material have to be adapted to suit requirements of each cultural group. College teachers are also encouraged to attend trainings as co-participants.

The other group of participants are from NGOs and CBOs. These are young outreach workers. They may be from literacy groups,



anti-tobacco drives, child rights campaigns or working on HIV/AIDS issues or involved in any kind of development activity. Many of the outreach workers themselves live in bastis and are also active on basti issues which they raise during training. An entire training was organised once only for two basti-based residents' groups.

Language used in training is generally Hindi, Marathi or Gujarati.

It is pertinent to note that usually almost all participants from every kind of group lack a gender perspective. Not even teachers' colleges or social work colleges have a compulsory component on gender in their course. There is a compulsory paper on women's studies for one year at under graduate level in the SNDT University. Despite this, one sees very little understanding of gender issues among students and teachers. Their initial reactions during training can range from consternation, dismay or hostility to elation and excitement. The training team has to prepare for this and deal with such situations in a patient and balanced way. Some critical situations and a description of how they are dealt with are given below.

- Young women feel vindicated as some of the more obvious manifestations of unjust and anti-women practices begin to be articulated and challenged. They also begin to assume that they are somehow morally superior. It takes a while for them to accept that women themselves are also products of the patriarchal system and have developed a mindset that makes them perpetrators of the same system. The training process has to help them move from glorifying victim hood to wanting to become agents of change themselves.

- Young men often feel upset and believe that gender awareness is male bashing. It helps to point out how men too are victims of patriarchy and that most men are also powerless in an unjust society. They need to realise how expectations of them for heroic actions or superior physical and financial strength can be unfair and oppressive.
- One issue that inevitably comes up from men and women is the myth of 'women being their own worst enemies' and maintaining that as the reason for women's lower status. Discussion over this leads to understanding that no class of people have 'to deserve' justice and that perfection is not to be expected of people, including women, who struggle for their human rights. In Vacha trainings, one way to deal with inevitable examples of traditional Indian mothers-in-law oppressing daughters-in-law is to lead the discussion towards the analogy of relations between workers, supervisor and factory owner with that of daughters-in-law, mother-in-law and the patriarchal head/s of the family. A supervisor or mother-in-law enjoys reflected powers of the top boss and, many times, oppresses those below them in exchange of small privileges from the final authorities. Of course, this is a simplification as all arguments by analogies are but it shows the structures of power in family and at work. Another way is to raise a question—Is men killing fellow men over property, in personal fights or in war seen as men being men's own enemies? Participants inevitably conclude that such phenomenon has to be viewed in its specific context.
- Interesting comments come up on the 'democracy wall' we create with blank poster size papers for participants

to express themselves. On topics like 'Ideal Girlfriend' men have written about how she should be modern, attractive and someone who does not make them spend money. On 'Ideal Boyfriend' girls have written he should own a scooter/motor bike and have a Tata or Reliance cell phone (because of free calls facilities if both sides have the same service provider). Obviously, there is a comfort and status symbol requirement in girls' expectations. The girls have shown more or less the same expectation of a boyfriend and a husband ('He should understand me') whereas these differ in case of men who wish for a woman who would be supportive of them ('Stand by me in difficulty') but be generally submissive as wives but sexy and glamorous as girlfriends. These wall papers sometimes lead to interesting debates.

- In an exercise game on home budgeting, almost always all participants, whether women or men, ignore needs of the woman who, in this case of a fictitious working class family, is the main wage earner. This happens even after some introductory sessions have taken place and the exercise is more in a way of revision and reflection. Evidently, it takes many efforts to bring even some gender awareness due to the many elements and forces that have constructed gender.

## Issues Covered

The broad issues covered in the trainings include sessions on

- *Language/sayings/terms of abuse and degradation*  
Some of these issues are dealt by listing perceptions of certain professions or characteristics as male or female. It

is commonly known that professions or positions with power such as administrators and engineers etc., are seen as men's area or kindness and charity etc., as female characteristics. With one batch of participants many had put Principals as Males even though their own college principal was a woman.

This written exercise is followed up with discussions on sayings in various languages that degrade women. There are common sayings that say 'a woman is a show to be on/under one's feet', 'a women's brain is at the site of her feet' and so on. The point raised is why is there this need to propagate such messages constantly through traditional sayings? This is connected with the use of propaganda to make a lie sound like truth or wisdom. Verbal expressions mentioning vagina or incest with mother or sister is also discussed in this context.

- *Gender and Question of Identity*

This issue is dealt with through a sociogramme in an early session. Constructed as a game, it has the dual purpose of highlighting participants' gender experience and situating one's self in multi-cultural set ups. The issue of patrilineal society and inheritance rights come up as property goes in the name of male heirs, which are recorded and remembered. Rites for ancestors performed only by sons among Hindus also come up for discussions.

An important issue covered through this exercise is of plural identity that one has and how this is crucial to harmonious and democratic living. Participants are never divided by their language, caste or religion that may form the basis of identity politics. Instead they see themselves as part of a group with housing problems

and next time in a working women's group or as a group of students. Discussions lead to perception of one's place in a multicultural society as persons with common interests across religion, caste or linguistic groups.

- *Politics, Civil Society and Family*

As women's political participation in local self-government has received a fillip through *Panchayat Raj*, local power structures and administration are covered through presentations and films. Leadership games are also part of these sessions. Women's leadership roles and the impediments they face are part of this issue.

As family is the first contested area with regard to gender issues, a lot of points about family are covered along with laws, customs and traditions.

- *Peace and Communal Harmony*

Peace poems, theatre activities and analysis of stereotypes of communities in popular cinema touch upon these issues that actually require separate workshops to cover them in detail. Here, the issue is covered so that gender justice is not seen as exclusive of other human rights.

## **Impact**

It is not easy to measure impact that can only be seen through attitude change in individuals. Still, the immediate impact can be noticed during sessions and also found in the evaluation done by participants at the end of the training. Most participants find the content and pedagogy relevant personally and for their work and are excited by the experiences and insights gained.

There is a multiplier impact through participating institutions. For example, after gender training sessions, *Gandhi Shikshan Bhavan*, an educational institute, has added gender awareness as part of its academic and social work programmes.

*Shikshak Sabha*, a major teachers' union, asked for gender training of its senior members. The union organises special development programmes for municipal school students and has made gender awareness an integral part of it. They have also undertaken a project of studying how schools can be made free of gender discrimination.

There is an increasing demand for the materials produced for gender training. There is a constant demand from NGOs. State governments as well as UNICEF have acquired a great deal of gender training material from Vacha in the past. UNICEF has recently asked for more material too. All these impact upon institutional and government policies directly and indirectly.

## **Future Challenges**

There is a constant challenge to upgrade training, make it up-to-date and include issues as they surface. Currently, the biggest challenge is to cover issues of terrorism, threat to democracy and secularism and the global recession in ways relevant to gender. How do men and women participate in or oppose terror politics? Why are democracy and secularism crucial to gender justice? How does economic recession affect status of women? These issues have to be included in gender training content.

At the execution level, there is an urgent need to create a network of gender trainers at local levels in all towns and cities

where there are colleges and youth organisations. At least, NSS bodies should be persuaded that their programmes and schedules must include gender training. There is always a need for a variety of gender training resources. Production of such resources has proved to be fruitful. More such material should be made available.

## Contributors

**Arbind Singh** is a social activist working on development issues of informal sector workers in India. He is Executive Director of Nidan an organisation based in Bihar. . Nidan works intensively with working poor on livelihood, collective enterprises and social security. He is Co-ordinator of the National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) a federation of Trade Unions and NGOs working with street vendors in 16 states of India. He occasionally writes articles on issues of informal economy workers and has published articles in reputed journals.

**Balaji Pandey** is Director at the Institute for Socio-Economic Development. He has been working as a social development specialist with over 15 years of experience in coordinating and managing a variety of development projects in Orissa. His extensive work on gender, new economic policy, environment, displacement and Panchayati Raj has given him excellent working knowledge of the issues faced by the rural poor in India and the complex institutions, policies and processes that impact both positively and negatively on rural livelihood.

**Damyanty Sridharan** is Senior Adviser in the Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Project at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, India Office. She has been working in different capacities in the Development and Finance sectors for more



than 20 years. The positions involved advisory and hands on experience in dealing with Development Projects, Finance and Banking related tasks and Research in the same areas.

Her areas of interest include gender, capacity building, women and work and women in politics. She has published several articles in eminent journals and newspapers and has co-edited a publication titled “Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling – Women and Local Governance in South Asia” (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, India Office, 2004).

**Gururaja Budhya** is Secretary and Chief Functionary at the Urban Research Centre (URC), Bangalore. He has undertaken studies related to women urban councillors and other issues related to local governance and civil society. URC works in the State of Karnataka, with its project offices in Bangalore, Mangalore and Udupi in Coastal Karnataka. The URC is presently working in Mangalore and Udupi towns focusing on ward based participatory planning, bridging local groups and municipal councils.

**Kalpana Sharma** is a renowned journalist, columnist, and writer based in Mumbai. She regularly contributes to leading newspapers on gender and development issues. She is author of “Rediscovering Dharavi: Stories from Asia’s largest slum” (Penguin, 2000).

**Niranjan Sharma** is the Director of SOHARD (Social Action for Human Resource Development), an NGO working in Anandpur village in Alwar district. The mandate of the organization is to promote sustained community based socio economic development with participation of the people. Natural resource management, watershed management and training women to take active part in local politics are the major focus areas of their work.

**Renuka Bala** is the Director and Managing Trustee at the Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR), a Chennai based NGO. She initiated CWDR in 1993 to raise issues concerning women and education of girl child. Till date, she has published four books in Tamil, which highlight the issues of politics, adolescent girl, single women and human rights for women. She was awarded "Outstanding woman" Award by Rotary club and Lions club of Chennai.

**Sharada Nayak** has served as the Executive Director of the United States Educational Foundation in India for several years. She is now Director of the Educational Resources Centre (ERC), a non-profit trust based in New Delhi, committed to making education meaningful and relevant to all students. She is well known for her commitment to inter-cultural education and understanding. She has been invited to several international conferences on multi-culturalism.

**Sonal Shukla** is presently the Director of Vacha a Women's Resource Centre. Development of training material and providing gender training is one of the core competency of the Centre. Sonal has been on the Board of Governors of the Indian Council of Basic Education, an institution for propagation of Gandhian values in education and teacher training for several years. She is a founding member of Forum against Oppression of Women, Mumbai, and worked with it for nearly twenty years. She has written extensively on women's and other social issues in Gujarati and in English.

**Sunder Lal** is the Director of Social Centre for Rural Initiative and Advancement –SCRIA, an NGO based in Haryana working on issues related to sustainable rural development through community initiative. He has been member of several reputed Committees like the District Level Project Advisory Committee

nominated by Governor of Haryana for the scheme of “ District Rehabilitation center” , Haryana Social Welfare Advisory Board (Govt. of Haryana), CAPART and others.

**Venkat Ramanayya** is Executive Director at Youth for Action (YFA), Hyderabad. He has been associated with several research and consultancy programmes and projects involving different civil society organisations. At YFA he is involved in ongoing capacity building and training programmes. His area of expertise includes gender, natural resources management, women in agriculture and trainings. He is part of several NGOs network in Asia and other regions with an objective of networking and to promote stakeholders participation in the development sector.

## Abbreviations

AIADMK — All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, formerly a ruling party in Tamil Nadu and now the principal Opposition party in that State.

AIFWA — All-India Women Farmers Association.

BPL — Below the Poverty Line.

BSP — Bahujan Samaj Party, the party which is in power in Uttar Pradesh.

CBOs — Community-Based Organisations.

CLTs — Cluster-Level Trainers.

CSOs — Civil Society Organisations.

CWDR — Centre for Women's Development and Research.

DPC — District Planning Committee.

DRDA — District Rural Development Authority.

DYF — Democracy and Youth Forum.

ERC — Educational Resources Centre.

FES — Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

HSWRC — Haryana Social Work and Research Centre.

ISED — Institute for Socio-Economic Development.

MoRD — Ministry of Rural Development.

NASVI — National Alliance of Street Vendors, India.

NGOs — Non-Governmental Organisations.

NREGA — National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

NREGS — National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (now renamed as MGNREGS, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme).

PRIs — *Panchayati Raj* Institutions, the structure of rural local bodies.

RIOD — Réseau International d'ONG sur la Désertification — The International NGO Network on Desertification and Drought.

RMK — Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, a government scheme to support women.

SCRIA — Social Centre for Rural Initiative & Advancement.

SEWA — Self-Employed Women's Association.

SHGs — Self-Help Groups.

SOHARD — Social Action for Human Resource Development.

UPA — United Progressive Alliance, the Congress-led alliance ruling India at the Centre.

URC — Urban Research Centre.

WFS — Women's Feature Service.

YFA — Youth for Action.

YLTT — Young Leaders Think Tank.

## Glossary of non-English Words

*Adivasi* — Tribal.

*Bandh* — Shutdown.

*Basti* — Slum.

*Gram Sabha* — Village Assembly, a general body meeting of all adult members of the village where, *Gram Panchayat*, the lowest unit of the rural local bodies structure called *Panchayati Raj* in India, gets its annual plans approved.

Gujarati *garbas* — Traditional folk songs and dance.

*Hijab* — Head scarf

*Mahila Sanghas* — Women self-help group.

*Maithri* — An association for single women.

*Manch* — Platform.

*Manushi* — Trade union for domestic workers.

*Nagarpalika* — Municipality, urban local body.

*Nagarparishad* — Town municipality.

*Panch Patis* — Males acting as de facto, proxy substitutes for elected women representatives.

*Panchayati Raj* — Rural local bodies structure comprising three tiers.

*Panchayat Samiti* — The intermediate-level in the rural local bodies structure at the block/tehsil level.

*Rastriya Swasthya Bima Yojna* — National health Insurance Scheme.

*Rishi* — Saint.

*Sakriya Panchayats* — An informal and non-official parallel network of elected *Panchayats*.

*Sakriya Pratinidhi* — A group of active elected women representatives of *Panchayats*.

*Sampada Prakritik* — Natural Resources.

*Samridhi* — Literally it means prosperity but in this book it refers to livelihood programmes.

*Sangathan* — Literally it means organisation but in this work it concretely refers to self-help groups promoted by SCRIA in some districts of Haryana and Rajasthan.

*Sarpanch* — Head of the village *Panchayat*.

*Shakti Parishad* — A council for women, who are victims of violence, promoted in the SCRIA work area.

*Snehidhi* — Adolescent girls' groups.

*Svashaasan* — Self-governance.

*Zilla Parishad* — District-level *Panchayat*.

## Select FES Publications

### Women and Politics

- Bose, Tarun Kanti, and Chakravarthi Suchindran. 2005. *Changing Dimensions in Grassroots Politics*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Voices of Women in Panchayati Raj*, 2004. Compiled by Centre for Development Studies and Action, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Sridharan, Damyanty, and Vesna Rodic. 2004. *Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling: Women and Local Governance in South Asia*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Jain, Devaki. 2001. *The Vocabulary of Women's Politics*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Kumari, Abhilasha, and Sabina Kidwai. 1996. *Crossing the Sacred Line. Women's Search for Political Power*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Kaushik, Susheela, 1996 (rev. ed.). *Panchayati Raj in Action. Challenges to Women's Role*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Kumari, Abhilasha, and Sabina Kidwai. 1994. *Illusion of Power. The Women's Vote*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Kumari, Ranjana, and Anju Dubey. 1994. *Women Parliamentarians. A Study in the Indian Context*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung through Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi



## Women and Economy/Livelihood Strategies

- Pandey, Balaji. 2009. *Women's Alienation — Land Less Development*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi.
- Rao, Nitya (ed.). 1999. *Owning their Land. Rights of Santhali Women*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi.
- Pandey, Balaji. 1998. *Displaced Development. Impact of Open Cast Mining on Women*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi.
- Rao, Nitya, and Luise Rürup, (eds.), 1997. *A Just Right: Women's Ownership of Natural Resources and Livelihood Security*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi.
- Rao, Nitya, Luise Rürup, and R Sudarshan, (eds.). 1996. *Sites of Change. The Structural Context for Empowering Women in India*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Sen, Ilina. 1995. *Sukhvasin — The Migrant Women of Chhattisgarh*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi

## NGO Capacity Building

- Murthy, Ranjini, and Nitya Rao (eds.). 1997. *Addressing Poverty. Indian NGOs and their Capacity Enhancement in the 1990s*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Gupta, R.C. 1995. *Seeking Institutional Finance: Guidelines for NGOs*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Gupta, R.C. 1994. *NGO Experiences in Social Security*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi

## Organising Strategies

- Jain, L.C. 2005. *Development Initiatives*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Sridharan, Damyanty, and Sita Jayaraman (eds.). 2000. *Women as Equal Partners. Natural Resources Management*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi
- Pandey, Balaji. 2000. *Displacement. A Case Study from Orissa*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New Delhi
- Nidan. 1998. *Street Vendors*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, New Delhi

