From the Selected Works of Professor Vibhuti Patel

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Professor Vibhuti Patel

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Dear Members,

Greetings from Women Power Connect!

This year, Women Power Connect held two very successful consultations on the issue of child marriage in India. Prevention of child marriages has been one of the core issues taken up by WPC since its inception. Child marriages disproportionately affect women by reducing their negotiating powers in the household and contribute to domestic violence, low female literacy rates and health issues for young mothers. The two national level consultations helped draw up a plan of action for NGOs / CSOs working on the issue and identified key points of advocacy that need to be taken up with the government.

In addition, WPC received a grant from The Asia Foundation for conducting a research study on an assessment of services available for victims of human trafficking in India and Nepal specifically looking into services dealing with repatriation and rehabilitation. An online resource directory is part of this project and as soon as the online directory becomes “live”, the programme team will share the link with all of you.

Further, we remain committed to increasing the number of elected women representatives in India and we hope that all of you will help with this ongoing campaign. WPC is an active member of the National Alliance for Women’s Reservation Bill and has helped in drafting a “Womanifesto” (along with other members of the Alliance and women’s groups) for all political parties that is available online.

Please do keep engaging with the programme team at WPC through mails or phone calls. We look forward to hearing from you regarding issues that you believe we should be taking up, any technical or substantial difficulties you face in your work that requires support from a network, or sharing information about work that you have done. A network needs continuous support and engagement from its members, which I am sure you will give to WPC.

Dr. Ranjana Kumari
Chairperson, WPC
Dear Members,

Greetings!

I congratulate all of you for sustaining the network and adding value to all our initiatives. The Organisation has completed fourteen years of joint effort of women groups holding high the touch of aspirations of women of this great country. We have seen success as well as challenges. But the spirit never got dampened. The resolve got reinforced with every challenge. My journey with WPC started from its inception, as a founding member, member of the Governing Body and I also served as the Executive Director of this esteemed Organisation. I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to work with all of you which I enjoyed and cherish.

WPC has always strived to work towards creating a gender just society. Towards this goal, various issues that concern women have been taken up with a constant effort to strengthen the network.

This year, one of the initiatives of WPC in strengthening its association with its members, has been of bringing out a blog – which one can access at https://womenpowerconnect.wixsite.com/blog.

This blog profiles the work being done by WPC members. It also provides opportunity for sharing articles and write ups on networks and alliances functioning in India. We invite all the members contribute to the blog sharing your work, profile and write-ups. WPC team will be delighted to receive your contributions and publish in the blog. Prevention of child marriage and strengthening of services for victims of human trafficking were the two main issues WPC worked on this year. In addition, our ongoing work with the youth (through holding “genderlogues”) continued through a session at the India International Center with students and faculty. A genderlogue on “body image” was held thereafter at Janki Devi Memorial College. We hope to be able to carry forward our learnings from this year in the year to come.

WPC as a part of women coalition is working towards enhancing women representation in Parliament and other decisions making bodies.

Our joint efforts to create a better world for women will continue till we achieve our goal. Let us strive to scale new heights in the coming year.

Dr. N. Hamsa

President, WPC
Programme Activities

I. National Consultation on “Working Together to End Child Marriages”

WPC in collaboration with Girls Not Brides and Oxfam India organized a two-day national consultation, “Working Together to End Child Marriages”, on April 24th-25th in New Delhi. The goal of the consultation was to strategize advocacy initiatives that CSOs and NGOs in India can take to end child marriage and to draw up an action plan to achieve this goal.

The participants of the consultation (partner organisations of Oxfam India, members of Girls Not Brides and member of Women Power Connect) are having state level programming on the issue of child marriage. The collaborative initiative of Girls Not Brides, Oxfam India and Women Power Connect aimed at bringing together these CSOs and to facilitate the process of working in solidarity in ending child marriage in their states thereby contributing to national level advocacy. The consultation also envisaged the objective of sharing and learning from the good practise models from the states.

A key goal of the consultation was to address three broad themes on which advocacy initiatives would be based – law and policies, social norms, and essential services (education and health). Three groups were formed to deliberate on each, and share one-year, three-year and five-year action plans. Section four of this report summarizes the key action points of each group.

The group on essential services suggested three main things:

1) Improving education delivery mechanisms, and a more comprehensive approach to skill development among children and adolescents.
2) Improving tracking mechanisms of children in areas where they are vulnerable to trafficking and child labour.
3) Including SRHR and mental health and counseling in programmes in a way that reduces the stigmatization of adolescents’ sexuality; Creating child friendly Panchayats1.

The recommendations of the group on laws and policies centred on:

1) Training those responsible for implementing the laws and looking for possibilities of convergence in laws.
2) Carry out a gender budgeting of schemes.
3) Develop monitoring tools to assess how child marriage cases are handled after being filed.

The group working on social norms felt that it was important to address the centrality of marriage and its importance in social life. Steps to achieve this would include:

1) Incorporating a gender-curriculum at every stage till graduation.
2) Re-positioning the messaging of cash transfer schemes that incentivise delaying marriage till 18.
3) Including messaging about agency of young people to shift the goalpost of 18 as the minimum age at marriage.

1The first tier (village level) of the formalised local-self governance system in India called Panchayati Raj.
Following the national consultation, WPC collated all the top three suggestions provided by the participants for working collectively and as organizations towards ending child marriages. The recommendations included training programmes for all stakeholders involved in ending child marriages, convergence meetings with stakeholders, a compilation of all laws relating to child marriages, advocacy to extend the right to education up to 18 years, and advocacy on amending the law in order to make child marriages void ab initio (rather than voidable as per the PCMA). A google group of all participants who attended the national consultation has been formed. Girls Not Brides, Oxfam India and WPC plan to act upon the recommendations received at the National Consultation in collaboration with NGOs working on ending child marriages in India.

II. An Assessment of Services Available for Trafficking Survivors in India and Nepal: Focus on Improving Rehabilitation and Repatriation Efforts between India and Nepal

WPC with the support of The Asia Foundation conducted a study on “An Assessment of Services Available for Trafficking Survivors in India and Nepal: Focus on Improving Rehabilitation and Repatriation Efforts between India and Nepal”.

This study provides a mapping of services available for victims of human trafficking in Nepal and India with a focus on rehabilitation and repatriation. Both repatriation and rehabilitation are closely linked to each other. In the absence of proper rehabilitation services for the victim, (which includes effective vocational training, skill development, shelter, victim compensation, witness protection and legal aid) victims who are repatriated are likely to be re-trafficked and return to a situation of exploitation. In order to make repatriation a meaningful exercise it is important that adequate rehabilitation services be offered by both governments concerned.

This study is based on desk-based research, Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) held with NGOs (both in India and Nepal), Child Welfare Committee (CWC) Member, Delhi Commission for Women, Delhi State Legal Services Authority, and Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) officers. A need was expressed by all stakeholders dealing with anti-trafficking for the creation of updated Resource Directories, with updated and verified addresses of AHTUs, CWCs, legal aid, and NGOs working on anti-trafficking. WPC (with support from The Asia Foundation) has created Resource Directories for the States of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and West Bengal. With this study, WPC updated the Resource Directory for Delhi, and created new lists for the cities of Mumbai, Kolkata, and Delhi, and also mapped a list of support services for Nepal.

The findings from this study have highlighted the following lacunae in existing services for repatriation and rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking in Nepal and in India. Specifically, these include:

**Absence of victim centric legislation:** Efforts have been made by both countries to end human trafficking by enacting legislation. However, the existing laws in both India and Nepal are
protectionist, criminal centric and focus on penalizing the trafficker(s). India recently enacted a victim centric Bill in 2018, namely, the Trafficking (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, which is a step forward towards enacting a victim centric law. Some loopholes have been pointed out by NGOs / CSOs that exist in the Bill.

**Poor quality State run rehabilitation facilities in Nepal:** There is an absence of good quality shelter homes, legal aid, or vocational training offered by the State in Nepal. Most of such services are provided by NGOs / INGOs.

**Lack of funding for shelter homes in India:** Shelter homes are unable to meet the demands of women due to shortage of funds.

**Delegation of responsibilities to NGOs for repatriation:** It is primarily NGOs / INGOs in India and Nepal, and not the State departments, who coordinate the process of repatriation. This is a negative trend as NGOs do not have any mandatory requirement to keep state departments informed about each case.

**Inadequate vocational training / skill development offered:** Vocational training and skill development offered by State run centres and NGO centres / homes in India and Nepal are usually inadequate to meet the economic aspirations of the rescued women.

**Inadequate allocation of State funds for compensation of victims in India:** With the exception of Delhi, State Legal Aid Authorities across India lack sufficient funds to provide victim compensation in cases of human trafficking.

**Lack of convergence between State departments in India:** Meetings held by WPC with the Delhi Commission for Women, Delhi State Legal Services Authority and the Anti Human Trafficking Unit in Maharashtra, showed there is lack of convergence in between stakeholders. It is important for different departments to work together to arrest cases of human trafficking. For example, the Delhi Commission for Women needs to keep the legal aid authorities updated following their rescue work so that compensation can be awarded to victims. The police need to register FIRs quickly in order for the CWC to pass an order. The legal aid authorities, women commissions, Child Welfare Committees, police / AHTUs and shelter homes lack information about each other and tend to play a blame game with each other.

**Procedural difficulties in the process of rehabilitation and repatriation:** Identification of the victim, tracing of families, frequent transfers of the Investigating Officer (IO), and age verification of the victim cause difficulties in the process of rehabilitation and repatriation.

Based on the above mentioned drawbacks, recommendations made in this study include, convergence meetings and regular trainings for all stakeholders in order to make their roles and responsibilities clear, vocational training and skill development that meets the individual needs of each victim, clarifications to be made in the Trafficking Bill 2018 on the maximum and minimum amount of compensation that can be awarded in cases of human trafficking, increase in government funding for shelter homes, directions from the Magistrate for mandatory recording of the IO’s statement, and awareness generation for civil society and vulnerable groups.
We also recommend the drafting and regular updating of a “Resource Directory” – essentially a listing of stakeholders, their verified contact details and the services they offer. WPC has created such a Resource Directory for Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Nepal as part of this study. Such directories should be made available to all stakeholders dealing with human trafficking.

Finally, we reached no consensus on the issue of whether an SOP should be signed between India and Nepal for the purpose of improving rehabilitation and repatriation efforts. While one view is that India must enter into bilateral agreements with all countries whose population are vulnerable to trafficking to India, another view is that in the absence of a binding law, such SOPs will not be helpful. However, it is clear that a system, under the overall responsibility of the governments of both countries, needs to be put in place for effective repatriation and rehabilitation of victims. The roles and responsibilities of both governments need to be clear in order to prevent a blame game at the later stage. Monitoring the process of repatriation and overall responsibility for each case must vest in the state to ensure accountability and not in NGOs.

III. Consultation on “Legal Advocacy on Ending Child Marriage”

A one day expert’s consultation on, “Legal Advocacy on Ending Child Marriage” was organized by Girls Not Brides and Women Power Connect (WPC) on 8th September 2018 in New Delhi. This consultation grew out organically from the discussions that took place during the National Consultation to end child marriages which were held earlier in April 2018 at a National Consultation on Ending Child Marriages organized by Women Power Connect, Girls Not Brides and Oxfam India.

The April consultation deliberated upon social norms, law and governance and essential services as three focal areas to target in ending child marriages. The focus of this consultation was on
developing a deeper understanding of the laws governing child marriages in India and how do these laws pan out on the ground. Participants from NGOs / CSOs and lawyers working on the issue of child marriage and survivors of child marriage were invited for the consultation.

The issue of whether child marriages should remain voidable in India or a move made by NGOs / CSOs to push for an amendment to make all child marriages void ab initio was the central concern of the consultation. Participants at the consultation spoke both in favour of making child marriages void, but also cautioned against taking steps towards advocacy in this regard in a hurry. While child marriages are in violation of the rights of the child and in particular, the girl child; equally, the PCMA is being used largely by parents to annul self arranged marriages between consenting young adults. In the course of the consultation, a child marriage survivor from Rajasthan also shared her experience in fighting against the practice of child marriage, highlighting the challenges and difficulties in approaching the courts and using the laws for fighting for justice.

Some of the other issues that emerged related to what the age of marriage should be, personal laws, self arranged marriages, procedural difficulties in using the PCMA to make a child marriage void, rights of adolescents, and the international human rights context of which India is a part. Areas on which there is a broad consensus amongst the NGOs / CSOs who came for the conference include trainings on reproductive and sexual health for adolescents, extending provisions of the RTE Act to 14-18 year olds, trainings for stakeholders dealing with child marriage, and making the age of marriage 18 for both boys and girls.
At the end of the consultation, the participants were asked to submit any three action plans/ideas as a way forward on legal advocacy on ending child marriages. The action points submitted to WPC and GNB were as follows:

- There is consensus amongst the CSOs that age of marriage should not be linked to the age of consent. The age of marriage for girls and the age of consent is presently 18 years of age. The age of consent may be lowered to 16 years of age in order to give validity to young adults who chose to enter into consensual sexual relations with those who are in the same age group.
- The implementation of the PCMA is poor. The Child Marriage Prohibition Officers appointed under the Act are unaware of their roles and responsibilities and function on double charge in most States of India. Budgetary allocation for implementation of the PCMA needs to increase.
- Minimum age of marriage for all genders should be 18 years of age. The differentiation made between men, women (and possibly other genders in the future) for age of marriage is based on false gender norms.

- Registration of marriages should be made compulsory in all States and efforts made to simplify the process of registration and spread awareness on the need for registration.
- A model SOP can be drafted for implementation of the PCMA. All NGOs working on child marriages can contribute to the SOP and its implementation sought by filing a PIL in Court.
• Awareness needs to be spread that PCMA overrides all personal laws. An amendment in the PCMA stating as much is urgently required.
• The Child Welfare Committees should be involved in future consultations. Data on the lacunae in the laws needs to be gathered through research studies before advocacy initiatives are undertaken.

IV. Conference on “Engaging with youth on political feminism”

On 12th September 2018, WPC in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung held a conference on “Engaging with youth on political feminism” with students and teachers from several colleges in Delhi in order to understand what the youth wants in relation to gender and feminism.

In the opening session, Dr. Krishna Menon, Professor at AUD, discussed the relationship between feminism and politics and how feminism is a political issue. She historically traced the concept of politics and in that context discussed the feminist interventions in politics and how feminists understand politics.
In her presentation, Dr. Bijayalakshmi Nanda, Vice Principal, Miranda House College, discussed the challenges and opportunities of creating a culture of feminism in universities. With regard to the question of a culture of feminism, she raised the question – is there something like a feminist university or department, with the exception of women’s studies centres? Do institutional structures have the potential to be imbued with feminist culture? She argued that there is a distinction between women leaders and feminist leaders that students should think about.

Ms. Vandana Madan detailed the extensive work undertaken in JDM College related to violence against women. She explained that the necessity to undertake these various practical programmes emerged from the demand of students to go beyond theoretical discussions to do some practical. In classrooms, students constantly ask about how they can create change and demand action. Are gender issues about only intellectualisation or can they be understood through lived experiences? Experience has to be given importance to live up to the “personal is political”.

Ms. Archana Jha, the National Programme Coordinator of the programme for political empowerment of women at the Centre for Social Research, was invited to speak on the Campaign for the Women’s Reservation Bill (WRB). Discussing the history of the WRB, she stated that while under the 73rd and 74th Amendments women’s reservations in Panchayati Raj was passed, the Draft bill to grant women’s reservation in the Parliament and State Legislatures has been pending for the past 22 years. It is the longest pending bill in independent India. She argued that the reason for this impasse has been deep rooted economic interests of ruling parties that work against sharing political power with women.

The panel was followed by an open house discussion, wherein a range of interesting responses and questions emerged in the subsequent discussion.

The open house discussion was followed by the students’ presentation, moderated by Dr. Vibhuti Patel on the issues of prevalence and prevention of sexual violence on campus spaces and women leadership in academia. Students from Ambedkar University Delhi, Janki Devi Memorial College and Jamia Millia Islamia presented at the conference.

V. Genderlogue on Gender Sensitization of the Youth on Beauty Ideal(s) and Body Image(s)

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung collaborates with their partners to organize Genderlogues, with an objective to provide an alternative platform to facilitate a dialogue on issues that are relevant for fostering peace, freedom, solidarity and social justice. This platform attempts to provide a safe space for encouraging a critical and solution oriented dialogue in an open constructed manner.

On 12th September 2018, WPC in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung held a conference on “Engaging with youth on political feminism” with students and teachers from several colleges in Delhi in order to understand what the youth wants in relation to gender and feminism. At the conference, students and faculty shared that they would like to have a Genderlogue on several issues including the issue of body image and beauty ideals.
Taking from the students’ feedback, WPC and FES with the support of Janki Devi Memorial College (JDMC) organized a Genderlogue, Gender Sensitization of the Youth on Beauty Ideal(s) and Body Image(s) on 2nd November 2018 at JDMC in New Delhi.

Ms. Rashmi Singh, a resource person, shared with the audience that family, peers, fashion icons, and media plays a critical role in influencing our understanding of what beauty is. Peers often compliment and comment each other based on the external appearances. There is a need not only to accept the self but also to look ourselves and others beyond the physical appearances.

She further stated that beauty ideals are socially and culturally influenced and vary from one to another. There is a need to critically question as to who is deciding what it means to be beautiful, good looking, fit and so on. Dominant images and ideals of the beauty are that of upper-caste and upper class.

Often we rely on society’s definitions of what beauty is. It is crucial to define beauty for ourselves. We need to create spaces where we can initiate and keep having such dialogues on beauty images and body ideals and share our personal journeys.

Ms. Rashmi also screened a video on Dove Real Beauty Sketches with the students. The video is about a social experiment, wherein, women were asked to describe themselves to an artist for making their portrait. Strangers who had just met these women were also asked to describe those women to the same artist. Then the two portraits were showed together to the women who volunteered to get their portraits done. Rashmi noted that women in the video shared that how one thinks about oneself has a huge impact on their lives, their jobs, and friends they make.

It was an interactive session, wherein, students and teachers shared their opinions, concerns, experiences and personal stories of body shaming.
VI. Seminar on Design Thinking for Social Justice

WPC programme team attended the concluding seminar on Design Thinking organized by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, India Office on November 16 – 18, 2018 at Samode Hotels, Rajasthan. With the objective of enabling a fresh and creative approach towards working on the gender related issues, FES India facilitated a series of Design Thinking workshops for its gender unit partners from 2017-2018.

In these workshops, participants were introduced to concepts of design thinking and empathy, and several tools such as empathy research approach, Dan Ariely’s concept of design for behavioral change, Edward de Bono’s Six Thinking Hats for constructive critic, and visual story telling. Participants also got an opportunity to design their interventions based on the design thinking
principles and present it to the larger group. All the workshops were highly interactive and participants were involved in both individual and group work.

VII. Developing an Online Resource Directory

Women Power Connect has brought out a number of “Resource Directories”, which essentially provide information about an issue that is useful from the point of view of a victim / survivor and stakeholders set up to help her. Our Resource Directories on human trafficking provide updated and verified information about the law relating to human trafficking in India and Nepal, schemes that are available for survivors of trafficking, and contact details of stakeholders she can reach out to.

The Resource Directories providing information about human trafficking have been brought out with the support of The Asia Foundation. The Asia Foundation has also supported the development of the online Resource Directory.

The information provided in the online version has been collected from various sources, including websites, telephonic interviews, face to face meetings and internet searches. We have compiled all the information available in our Resource Directories dealing with human trafficking for this online version and will soon be available at WPC website, www.womenpowerconnect.org.
VIII. Developing and Publishing of WPC's Blog

WPC has brought out a blog which aims to spark off a discussion on how networks and alliances working on women's rights are functioning in India, what are the challenges they face and what have they succeeded in achieving.

It also features WPC members and work done by them. WPC invites its organizational members to share about the organization, their work, and ongoing and upcoming campaigns. This is posted in ‘About Our Members’ segment of WPC blog for other members and non-members. The idea is to introduce and showcase the WPC network through its members. You may check the page on https://womenpowerconnect.wixsite.com/blog/monthly-blogs.

The blog is available here: https://womenpowerconnect.wixsite.com/blog.
DOCUMENTS PREPARED

- Report on National Civil Society Consultation on “Working together to End Child Marriage” held on 24th-25th April 2018 in New Delhi (English and Hindi)
- Report of Experts Consultation on “Legal Advocacy on Ending Child Marriage” held on 8th September 2018 in New Delhi (English and Hindi)
- An Assessment Study of Services Available for Trafficking Survivors in India and Nepal (English)
- The “Womanifesto” released on 6th March 2019 by National Alliance for the Women’s Reservation Bill. WPC is an active member of the National Alliance and contributed to the process of drafting the Womanifesto, which contains 11 points that all women’s groups have agreed need to be delivered to women by the State. This Womanifesto has been circulated to all political parties.
Executive Body 2018-2020 Office Bearers

Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Chairperson  
Dr. N. Hamsa, President  
Ms. Hasina Kharbhih, Vice President  
Ms. Gouri Choudhry, Treasurer

Governing Body 2018-2020 Office Bearers

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Ms. Sara Pilot, Delhi  
Ms. Tara Sharma, Delhi  
Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Mumbai

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Mr. Sonu Kumar, Office Assistant.