SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

From the SelectedWorks of Professor Vibhuti Patel

Spring April 1, 2013

WomenPowerConnect Newsletter

Professor Vibhuti Patel

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/professor_vibhutipatel/50/
Quarterly
April-June 2013
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**From the Chairperson**
Dear Friends,

Greetings from WomenPowerConnect!

I am happy to share with you the WPC newsletter for the period April-June '13. WPC being an Advocacy Body continues to partner and work with many organizations to create structures that are inclusive, just and democratic, restructurig gender relations from home to the State, in order to achieve equality and equity and promote lives of dignity, autonomy and peace. This quarter WPC has focused on the EMPHASIS project (CARE India); Women’s Land Rights (Oxfam India) and Addressing Child Marriage (Ford Foundation).

We at WPC will continue working towards the issues of violence against women, decline in child sex ratio and the pending Women Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha.

The issues related to women and girl children in India has been subject to many great changes over the last few months starting with the brutal gang rape of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012. The recently released NCRB report states that 30,942 cases of crime against women were reported in 2012. The highest in the country, West Bengal accounted for 12.67 per cent of the total crime committed against women in the country while Kolkata ranked the third most unsafe metropolis for women, behind Delhi and Bangalore. We hope to see some positive changes and curb in incidents of crime against women with the passage of new legislations such as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2013 and The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act,2013. The government and other relevant stakeholders including the CSOs now should focus on better implementation of the legislations and convergence of different departments to address the issue in a holistic manner.

We hope that with the support of all our partners and concerned stakeholders, we will successfully realize our goals, which is to fight for the concerns of women at the policy level and be a part of the process of strengthening and empowering women’s rights throughout our country.

We thank each one of you for your continued support and encouragement!

Ranjana Kumari
Chairperson
Marked feature of neo liberal policy is enlightened self- interest activated through market forces in the era of economic Globalisation (G). G rides on the back of cheap labour of migrant women and children. Landscape of urban informal sector in dozens of South Asian (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal) and South East Asian (Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia) countries, Indochina (Laos, Kampuchea and Vietnam) and China is flooded with sweatshops, ghetto labour markets and stigmatised migrant workers. ASEAN countries have recently discussed establishment of Special Economic Zones that would ensure flexibilisation of the labour force to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

During the 1980s employment of adult women decreased and employment of adolescent girls and child labour increased. Women were and are given less skilled and underpaid jobs. Budgetary cuts for balwadis and crèches enhanced the burden of poor working women. Free Trade Zones (FTZs), Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) thrive on young women’s super-exploitation. The employers overlook occupational health hazards.

**Displacement in the Name of Development**: Quantum leap in infrastructure development and mega projects of highways, railways, flyovers, shopping malls, car parking, and construction projects has evacuated millions of poor people in the urban and rural areas. The most disturbing aspect is the very space to live and work is withdrawn from the poor in favour of parking spaces and flyovers. They have no other alternative but to migrate to some other place in search of livelihoods. Rise of women’s work-participation in the service sector is as a result of massive induction of migrant women as domestic workers-cooks, baby minders, cleaners, carers of the elderly.

Throughout the 20th century, the urban poor women have been employed in food, beverage, tobacco, textiles, and wood / bamboo / cane and ceramics industries. Here too, they have been targets for retrenchment and forced to join the unorganised sector. Women are squeezed out of the marketing, vending spaces because global traders have made local labour and skill obsolete.

Sizeable section of the informal sector goods and services are produced, frequently by means of contracting and subcontracting, which are paid for on piecework rather than a time-rate basis. Migrant workers are the cheapest source of labour that ensures super profit to their employers. Much of the economic activity in the informal sector is founded on capital from the formal sector and given the low cost of labour and taxed minimally or not at all, return to where it came from with tidy profit. Primitive accumulation in its classical form included plunder, slavery and colonialism, while primitive accumulation in the contemporary period includes sweat- shops, labour concentration camps and criminalization and stigmatization of the working class. The
world economy had 1.2 billion poor i.e. population with an income of less than 1 dollar per capita per day.

As a result of Structural Adjustment Programme, sacked/retrenched formal sector workers and employees are forced to work in the informal sector. Victims of Voluntary Retirement Scheme have downward economic mobility. Rationalisation, mechanisation and automation have had labour reducing implications. Massive urban unemployment and rural underemployment and disguised unemployment have resulted into social tensions in terms of ethnic and religious chauvinism in several Asian countries. Women pay the heaviest price due to communal and ethnic conflicts. Incidents of economic crimes have risen drastically.

**Labour Standards** as set by the ILO under the impact of Economic Globalisation have been violated resulting into erosion of workers’ rights and collective bargaining process due to informalisation, casualisation and marginalisation of the working class as a result of economic liberalisation policies adopted by the nation states in the region. Trade union workers from all Asian countries expressed their anxiety about countries competing with each other to cut costs by compromising labour standards. In the name of labour flexibility, exploitation of the workers is enhanced and feminisation of poverty has taken place. The social action groups must demand of uniform labour standards for all countries that are part of World Trade Organisation so that the nation-states stop competing for cutting the cost by violating workers rights.

Co-existence of high wage islands in the sea of pauperised working class has enhanced human misery and social conflict in the context of massive reduction in the welfare budgets of the nation states in South Asia and South East Asia. With rising ethnic and communal tension jeopardising economic activities, visible and invisible activities of underground extra-legal economy is displaying a tendency to expand.

Individuals with similar levels of education & skills get differential wages due to casualisation of the workforce. Introduction of contract system in public sector has institutionalised neo-liberal dual economy model.

**Labour Market Segmentation**

Immigrants face job discrimination in pre-entry phase & wage discrimination in post entry phase. They remain the first to be fired and the last to be hired. Dualistic Models in the urban India promotes differentiation based on language, caste, religion, ethnic background and exclusion from informal network for upward economic mobility. Majority of the toiling poor rot in the external sector in which real wages change at disparate rates. Institutions like extended family, caste and village nexus play an important role in providing safety nets to migrant workers.

Globalisation has also increased women’s migration within and outside the national boundaries. As a result insecurity for poor women have increased. They have been the first victims of downsizing and rationalisation. Their subjugation and exploitation have enhanced thro’ retrenchment, unemployment, increase in contract/subcontract work, home working, loss of livelihood. There is an urgent need to address globalisation of poverty, violence, expanding zones and techniques of violence (as experienced in the Gujarat Carnage), consumerism and glocal cultural industry, strengthening partnership of market and global fundamentalism.
Globalization has made civil society more inward looking. Caste, religious and kinship networks are activated to bring reforms within the community. Without ensuring women's rights, globalization can't have a human face. We should not forget that globalization has widened income gap between the resource poor and resource rich countries. Free play of market forces have made majority of Indian women more vulnerable. NGOs have provided islands of security in some pockets. In this situation, affirmative action by the democratic institutions and the nation state, in secular areas of human governance is the only answer.

Important issues for Advocacy to Empower the Urban Poor Migrant Women:

a. **Strengthening of Public Distribution System (PDS) and Right to Food and Nutrition Campaign** has been sphere-headed by united front of NGOs across the country. Social action Groups working in the urban poor community have form state level networks to stop erosion of essential items provided by PDS.

b. **Public Health issues** are highlighted thro’ a national network, People’s Health Assembly. Safe, clean and free of change public toilets for women, not only in the community but also at the railway stations, bus stations, highways, market places, schools are demanded by Right to Pee Campaign.

c. **State Support for Women’s Education has been demanded** not only at the primary school level but also at the secondary and high school level. Forum for Child Care has demanded that one room of the school should be converted into crèche so that girls who have to look after their younger siblings can also join the schools. More budgetary allocation and actual funding for girls’ education.

d. **Free Legal Aid and Lok Adalat**: Justice and Peace Commission, a network of community organisations working in Mumbai provides free legal aid to poor women to deal with marital disputes, divorce, maintenance, custody of children, alimony, property, right to stay in the parental or matrimonial homes.

e. **Housing Rights** are the most important. Women’s groups and social work institutes such as Nirmala Niketan and Tata Institute of Social Sciences have demanded that in all housing societies and state supported housing schemes, 10 % houses should be reserved for women.

f. **Sanitation and Environmental Issues**: There is an urgent need to take up the issues of urban sanitation in terms of higher budgetary provision from the state and municipal funding.

g. **Occupational Health**- Women scavengers and recycling workers under extremely hazardous circumstances. Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action has highlighted their concerns. They should be given masks, hand gloves, gum- boots and free and quality medical care.

h. **Crèches**: the state, employers and trade unions should provide more day care centers for the children of working mothers in the community and near the workplace.

i. **Implementation of Labour standards**: Erosion of labour standards as a result of G should be fought tooth and nail. Let the nation states compete to give better wages and work-conditions to the workers.

j. **Community Oriented Media**: Social action groups need to interact closely with the mainstream media, and also generate their alternate media to highlight urban poor women’s rights to dignified life.
Migration is a common factor for all the countries over the world. In the recent past, migration has become a major trend within the South Asian region where internal migration within the region and external migration abroad continues to grow. According to the World Bank, World Development Indicators 2005, “South Asia is home to 23 percent of the world’s Population and is the most densely populated region in the world, accounting for about 40 percent of the population of Asia – as well as 40 percent of the global poor.” According to the study conducted by ILO, it is stated that around 25 million Asian workers are currently employed outside their home countries. More than two million leave every year, while a similar number return. In the past the majority went to the Gulf countries, but nowadays the largest flows are within the Asia-Pacific region - with a number of countries serving as both origins and destinations1.

India though a developing country, has been at the receiving end of migrants from its relatively less developed neighborhoods, especially Nepal and Bangladesh. According to the Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011, the bilateral estimate of migrant stocks in 2010 in India from Nepal was 564905 and a population of 3299268 from Bangladesh. As per the 2001 Indian census, Nepali migrants in India represents 11.6% of the total immigrants received by India. India and Nepal signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which is a bilateral treaty between Nepal and India establishing a close strategic relationship between the two South Asian neighbours. The treaty was signed at Kathmandu on 31 July 1950 by the Prime Minister of Nepal Mohan Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana and Indian ambassador to Nepal, Chadreshwar Narayan Singh and came into force the same day as per Article 9 of the Treaty. The treaty allows free movement of people and goods between the two nations and a close relationship and collaboration on matters of defense and foreign affairs.

The issues of migrants have been portrayed under the banner of the CARE EMPHASIS project, a project that began its implementation in the year 2010. The project has worked to ensure the safety and dignity of migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh into India in the various aspects of health, banking services, remittance, education, and safety and dignity while crossing borders. WomenPowerConnect (WPC) came into partnership with CARE India as “Strategic Advocacy Partner (SAP)” in the year 2012. As SAP to CARE India, WPC supports the project by providing evidence based advocacy with key stakeholders (within the policy and legal framework of India), developing methods for assessment of advocacy & alliance building efforts at source and

1 http://www.pstalker.com/ilo/h-flows.html
destinations, policy briefings, networking, collaborations, communication resources and direct interventions to address the health and HIV & AIDS related human rights and access of cross border mobile population at source and destinations towards HIV/AIDS, Violence Against Women and other vulnerabilities within the legal frame work and the International commitment of the countries concerned.WPC has met with various stakeholders and also visited the project areas, interacted with partners and with migrant community members in order to understand a number of issues that encompasses migration.

WPC being an organization that works for the issues and concerns of women, under this project, it also looks at migration from a gendered perspective whereby WPC looks at women as vulnerable during the migration process facing various forms of harassment and violence either at the source, transit and destination areas. It acknowledges that women are vulnerable by the fact that they are firstly women, then poor and then a migrant woman. Women migrant workers account for more than half of the 50 million migrant workers in Asia alone (APWLD 2012). WPC’s SAARC experience so far as CARE EMPHASIS Advocacy partner on migration also shows that migrant women workers either within their own households or at workplace be it at source, transit or destination areas have a low status in their societies.

Though there are many areas and issues that need much attention and concern, WPC SAP has identified six issues that it can work towards as an advocacy agenda with the various stakeholders at different levels.

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During the project period of April 2013-June 2013, WPC organized meetings and workshops and was also a part of various activities.

WPC team met with Dr.P.M. Nair, Director General, National Disaster Response Force & Civil Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India to share information and also get suggestions on how to work around the issue of migration. WPC also organized an “Advocacy workshop on issues relating to Migrant Workers living with HIV”, in Kolkata, West Bengal.
WPC also participated in CARE’s various events such as the CARE EMPHASIS “Knowledge Fair”, held in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand; “Workshop on Vulnerabilities of Cross Border Migrants and HIV/AIDS”, Mumbai; “Regional Consultation on PLHIV”, Kathmandu, Nepal, which was organized by CARE Secretariat in Kathmandu, Nepal. The purpose of WPC attending this consultation was for the purpose of meeting with the three country teams and getting an in-depth understanding of the issues that needs to be advocated for under this project. The consultation had representatives from various organizations such as UNAIDS, World Health Organization (WHO), CARE India, CARE Nepal, CARE Bangladesh, National Centre for AIDS and STI Control (NCASC) Nepal, National AIDS and STD Program (NASP) Bangladesh, Asia Pacific Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (APN+), and Delhi Network for Positive People (DNP+).

From these various events, WPC got valid information regarding services for migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh. They are:

**ART Services:** India, Nepal and Bangladesh have revised their ART guidelines according to the revision of WHO 2010 ART Guidelines. All the three countries are in agreement that services at ART centres will be open to all HIV patients. Thus the policy does not discriminate against any person who asks for services therefore having a valid nationality is not a criteria for availing services, albeit the attitudes and behavior of personnel within the centres and the drop in patients may reduce service delivery. Access and Availability of ART is also applicable for migrants and is free of cost in India, Nepal and Bangladesh. There is also a standardized referral form for transfer of ART centres: A Nepali Migrant who is about to migrate to India or any other country should inform their ART centers in Nepal at least one month in advance so that he or she will be migrating. If this is done, the ART center in Nepal can prepare the necessary referral form and send it to the ART Center at the destination country which is India².

**Remittance:** There are two private money transfer agencies in Nepal “Prabhu Money Transfer” and “International Money Express (IME)” that functions in order to provide Indo-Nepal remittance services. These two money transfer agencies have more than 300 outlets all across Nepal and it is very easy to access and also takes little time for the money to reach the family of the migrants. These two money transfer agencies are also approved by the Central Bank of India and Central Bank of Nepal.

It was stated that “International Money Express (IME), with an aim to offer remittance service to Nepalis working in India, has teamed with United Bank of India (UBI) in partnership with Global Bank Limited, Nepal. The agreement was exchanged between chairman of Global Bank Chandra Prasad Dhakal and Chairman and MD of UBI Bhaskar Sen in the presence of consulate General of Nepal Chandra Ghimire and CEO of Global Bank Ratna Raj Bajracharya on 22nd March 2012³.

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² Information from Dr. Supriya Wurusawithana, Representative of WHO Nepal and Sri Lanka, during the National Consultation on PLHIV in Kathmandu, Nepal on the 1st-4th April 2013.

WPC strives to continue working at various levels and with different Stakeholders in order to bring to light the need to focus attention on migrant population living and settling within the country. There is a need to focus on migrants since with migration comes the issues of HIV/AIDS, violence and harassment of migrants especially women, and trafficking which effects one’s country, mostly in a way that is negative and problematic. In order to avoid problems, WPC needs to work out ways to advocate for positive migration experience in the country.

**Women Property and Land Rights**

*Building People’s movement for pro-women farmer policy and programmatic efforts*

In India, the contribution that women make to the country’s economy remains largely unrecognized, underpaid and unpaid. It is because of the persistence of discriminatory laws, policies, patriarchal customs, traditions and attitudes that block women from enjoying their rights.

According to Dr. Vibhuti Patel, President of WPC, and Professor and Head of Department of Economics SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai, “Women’s rights to land have been a major concern of the women’s movement in India for over two decades”. She further states that “In most societies, women have historically managed the unpaid care and fulfilled the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, family care, collection of fuel, fodder, water, kitchen gardening, poultry and animal husbandry and provided food and nutritional security. As women’s contribution to the economy and society at large remains unrecognized, largely underpaid and mostly unpaid, the need for women to be able to secure land and property has become even more critical”.

Though women farmers are the ones who grow the food that we eat, bare the brunt’s of the weather, they remain invisible. 70 % to 80 % work in agriculture is carried out by women yet only 9 % of the women own the land they work on and the women earn less than half of what the men farmers earn. Not only do women farmers have no access to land and property but they also struggle to get benefits like essential training in agricultural practices, getting loans, crop insurance, fertilizers and other benefits that male farmers usually get. Since till today, laws and policies related to land and property rights still explicitly discriminate against women. Understanding and acknowledging the loophole in our country’s land rights and property rights policies for women, WPC and Oxfam India came into partnership since 2011, with the focus of working towards ensuring property and land rights for Indian women farmers.

This new project year April 2013-March 2014 will focus on working towards identifying and projecting research policies at State levels in effective implementation of women friendly legislations related to land rights and will also include a secondary analysis of the status of women farmers in India under the new project banner “Building people’s movement for pro-
women farmer policy and programmatic efforts”. The project will continue to be at the pan-India level.

Taking forward the issue of land rights for women and from the experience from the last two years, the focus for this year will be on; **Mobilization of Youth:** Youths from various colleges/Universities will be targeted for youth development. Three ways in which youth development can contribute to social change were identified: *self-development* (behavior and action in relation to others); *Group interaction* (mobilizing community support for creating an environment for open discussions and passions among young people to an issue); and *social action* (campaigns for the demand for entitlements for oneself as well as others as well as transparency of public service programs). The activities will centre around working with existing youth networks on property rights issue; and Sensitizing youth on property rights issues using different mass communication techniques such as talk shows, play/ theatre, video, and engaging discussions; **Research and Advocacy:** A qualitative research document on the judgments on Hindu Succession Amendment Act 2005 and Research document on the status of various policies at state levels along with a fact sheet will be produced on different land laws/ progressive programmes by state government for women land rights and state wise status of women land rights and other related issues; **Consultations and Meetings:** One National Level Consultation on women and land, focusing on women livelihood issues in India. This will aim at involving the various stakeholders such as Government Departments, Academicians, Research institutions, Youth groups and Civil Society Organizations to create a platform and build a consensus over Women Farmer Entitlement Bill and also acknowledge the commendable efforts by women farmers at different levels in our agrarian society. For this purpose, Oxfam and WPC will get in touch with leaders from the media fraternity who can join the campaign as jury members, performers, spokespersons and collaborators. Other collaborators can be news agencies, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Rural Development, and Ministry of Agriculture etc.

There have been various activities that have already been undertaken. They are: Listing of various youth groups in the country and major institutions for youth mobilization on property rights of women; developing a framework for case study on Hindu Succession 2005; and Planning for meetings with major NGO’s working on women’s land rights and property rights.

The first quarter of the project will focus on preparation of communication materials for youths on women’s property rights; advocating with policy makers on women farmers land policies and building consensus of civil society groups on women’s property rights.
The customs of Child marriage are fairly widespread in parts of Africa, Asia, Oceania and South America. There are many instances where only one marriage-partner is a child, usually the female, because of the importance that is placed upon her virginity, the perceived inability for her to work for money and since women’s reproductive life is considered to be shorter than that of men’s. However with an increase in the advocacy of human rights, whether as women’s rights or as a child’s rights, has caused traditions and customs of child marriage to decrease in many areas. Though child marriage is a common practice in many countries around the world, however it is especially prevalent in India, where more than one third of all child brides live. According to UNICEF, 47% of girls are married by 18 years of age, and 18% are married by 15 years of age⁴. These marriages are often performed without the consent of the girls involved in the marriage. Though Indian law has made child marriage illegal, the practice is still widespread across the country. The highest rates of child marriage are seen in the rural areas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh⁵ and Jharkhand. Though the practice of child marriage affects both boys and girls, statistics show that girls are far more likely to be forced into a child marriage than boys.

WPC through its 2013 project “Empowering Girls by Addressing Child Marriage”, funded by Ford Foundation aims to advocate for the amendments in the Prohibition against Child Marriage Act (PCMA) and ensure its effective implementation; to increase in allocation of funds by government for awareness generation; for appointment of functionaries stipulated under the law for its implementation; for providing orientation to law enforcement authorities and systems created for a supportive administrative structure for addressing early marriage and to build capacity of networks/alliances and the local watch dog groups, task force groups and NGOs for preventing early marriage.

During the reporting period WPC and its partners in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar undertook various activities. WPC’s team has undertaken various Advocacy work such as developing a document titled ‘Ending Child Marriage: An Indicator to Measure Progress on the Needs and Rights of Adolescent Girls’ for inclusion of child marriage as an indicator in post 2015 Agenda to UN Women and NMEW. This document has been developed in partnership with Girls Not Brides; Questions on child marriage were also sent to parliamentarians for them to be raised in the Parliament session (April-May 2013); WPC also drafted top three key ‘asks’ for the education community on child marriage that can be raised to Indian delegation at a global meet of education and finance ministers from 16-18 April in Washington D.C. to meet UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim; WPC also wrote to Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Ministry of State for Human Resource Development to ensure that ministry ensures that education for girls is given importance in its agenda so that it becomes a catalyst to prevent child marriage.

As part of Community Mobilization, WPC and its partners (Badlao Foundation, Chetna Vikas and Mahila Chetna Manch) organized a Capacity Building of taskforce members at the district

level in Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh. Through these capacity building workshops, the participants shared their learnings and understanding of the issue of child marriage (legal age of marriage, reasons why children should not be married at a young age and importance of education and nutritional needs of a girl). WPC team made some observations from the workshops. These observations will enable the team to work better for future workshops. The observations are as follows:

- While planning activities whereby the participants are required to spend two complete days forgoing their own work and time, the organizations (especially WPC) have to ensure that the members are free and are not at a loss in their lives due to their presence in such activities.
- Adolescents take time in opening up and sharing their thoughts but by the end of the day the facilitators could see the changes in the body language of the members.
- Both girls and boys have interest in learning and working. Further facilitation by the organizations will enable them to be the change agents in the community. Regular hand holding and guidance is required from the organization.
- To bring in changes it will take time, resources and a lot more efforts. Capacity Building needs to be constant along with facilitation of member’s efforts at each stage in this process of making them the change agents of the community.

WPC’s partners also held meetings of women’s groups, school teacher and children, women representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions. During the meetings the effect of the early child marriages were discussed and the focus was also on how the life of the girl child was ruined because of early marriages.

Under Alliance Building/Networking component of the Project, meeting with District Heads of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Education Department and Women Empowerment department was held on March 30th 2013. A list of drop out girls between the age group of 6 to 14 years was given to the District Officer of SSA in Sehore District and a request was made for the enrolment of these girls under Right To Education (RTE) as per their eligibility.
Other WPC Activities

Study Tour of Afghan delegates to India

*Counterpart International* in Kabul organized a study tour of eighteen delegates from Afghanistan to India in June 2013. The group consisted of women activists, civil society members and a few government officials. The agenda of this tour was to enable, engage and exchange experiences through dialogues with civil society representatives and groups, government representatives and NGOs from other countries on topics of mutual interest, including peace building. WPC facilitated the entire study tour activities from June 23 2013 to July 02 2013.

The visit was primarily focused on:

- Knowledge sharing and practical exchange of information, practices and advice related to women’s right advocacy.
- To identify Indian agencies’ strategies to involve grassroots organizations and local communities in their advocacy programs, while targeting the government.
- Learning about the benefits of coordination and collaboration amongst women’s right group for more effective campaigning and advocacy work.
- To network and interact with Indian women activists, sharing achievements, challenges, and problems.
- The Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society II (I-PACS II) Gender team will utilize the government representatives engaged in the study tour as entry points to other government officials and networking opportunities for Civil Society Organizations and Government collaboration.

As part of the process the delegates visited various organizations like Jagori, Centre for Social Research (CSR), UN Women, Garib Nawaz Mahila Evam Bal Kalyan Samiti (GNS) and CECODECON and few important Govt. Offices like National Commission for Women (NCW) and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK). The delegates had interactive sessions with NMEW, Breakthrough, Lawyers Collective, Communication India, CREA and a presentation by Ms. Shagufta (from Ministry of Women and Child Development) was made on Gender Resource Centres.

The Delegation was highly impressed to know the convergence of various Government schemes with NGO’s and they expressed their willingness to adopt our strategies in their countries.
Feature of Partner’s Work

Living Heritage Foundation (LHF), Assam

The Assam State Chapter of WPC in partnership with Living Heritage Foundation (LHF) has been active in gender-related and other issues since inception until date. During this period, LHF has had many conferences and workshops relating to Gender-Budgeting, Domestic Violence Act, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, the Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) (PCPNDT) Act, as well as Regional Meets in Gauhati, Assam. LHF was established in 2005 and WPC Assam Chapter in 2007.

On 30th October 2010, an Interactive Meeting on Domestic Violence Act (DVA) and PCPNDT Act was held at Demow, Sivsagar in Assam. It was a huge success and the meeting was attended by approximately 600 participants. The Deputy Commissioner, the Additional Deputy Commissioner, and the Project Director, District Rural Development Agency of Sivsagar District attended the meeting.

In 2011, a Regional Meet on Tourism was held in Gauhati, Assam. Several north-eastern states participated. The Commissioner and Secretary of Tourism, Director of Tourism and the Director of Social Welfare attended the meet. Ms. Agatha Sangma, Minister of State for Panchayat and Rural Development, Govt. of India, also attended the meet. Living Heritage Foundation raised some moot points relating to tourism and concerns of women.

On 14 February 2012, a Regional Conference on “Effective Implementation of Women-Friendly Laws” was held in Gauhati, Assam, which was attended by Dr. Ranjana Kumari. Participants from all north-eastern states attended as well as Chairpersons of several Women Commissions. LHF raised some important points relating to Domestic Violence and other issues and also provided a resource person who dealt with several legal issues of DVA. LHF pointed out how the top brass of the police are unresponsive to DVA cases as well as other cases of violence against women.

In June 2012, Ms. Rumi Nath, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Assam, was assaulted by her constituents in a hotel room at night. Video footage of this incident was telecast on all local channels and also made it to the national channels. There was widespread condemnation of this sensational incident. We at WPC Assam Chapter took up this issue and submitted memoranda to the Hon'ble Speaker and Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam as well as to the Chairperson, Assam State Commission for Women (ASCW). In the memoranda, we protested against the incident and demanded action against the guilty and also greater safety and protection of women, among other things.

The National Consultation on “Strategizing Advocacy for Effective Implementation of Women-Friendly Laws” was held in Delhi on 12 July 2012. A member also represented the Chairperson of the Assam State Commission for Women (ASCW). On behalf of the Assam State Chapter, Ms. Nandita Konwar raised concerns of women from the state of Assam and apprised the House about the status of implementation of DVA and other acts on the ground. Several of our findings and suggestions were noted by the House. Some participants including Chairpersons of some
State commissions also noted the findings and suggestions put forward by Living Heritage Foundation (LHF).

Around that time, the infamous G.S. Road incident took place in Guwahati. A girl was manhandled on G.S. Road outside a lounge bar in full view of the cameras by a group of men. The video footage was played again and again on national television and led to widespread outrage. NDTV Hindi News invited Ms. Nandita Konwar to a panel discussion on the incident since she happened to be in Delhi on 13 July 2012. She raised several points pertaining to safety of women and suggestions were given on how to make our cities safer for women after dark.

Besides all these activities mentioned above, Living Heritage Foundation (LHF) has been involved in awareness campaigns since 2005 and has also acted as resource persons for DVA and SHW. The Secretary of LHF, Mr. Sanjeeb Bhattacharya, has been the prime mover and the focal point responsible for the successes of LHF and WPC. Without him, none of these events/activities would have been possible.
**Important News this Quarter**

**Women and Domestic Violence**

Violence in India against women does not necessarily have to be inflicted by others but the emotional pain a woman is pressured by such, as forces to pay a dowry have led to suicides. Dowry has been a practice for many years and is still very much evident in India. It is however very much surprising to know that though subtle, the causes of domestic violence and burn injuries and suicides in Indian Societies are caused by the pressures from men/husbands and in-laws seeking for dowry.

According to the Daily Mail dated June 24, 2013, it has been recorded by the Police Control Room (PCR) that calls related to domestic violence against women raised from 95 in December 2012 to 222 calls in January 2013 and to a soaring 1858 calls in May. And off these many calls recorded, 10-15 cases have been transferred to the Crime Against Women (CAW) every day.  

There have also been studies that women who suffer burns injuries or those that lead to death are higher than men. In India, more than 1.5 to 2 lakh people die of burns. And off the women who die of burns, most of them are women who have been married for less than 10 years. Burns have been a common method of suicide and according to studies, female suicides are simply a result of violence against them. SNEHA which is an NGO working on women’s health interviewed with 33 women who suffered burns, 22 were accidental burns, 5 suicidal cases and 6 homicidal. However, there is a large suspicion that most of the accidental burns were not accidental but mostly suicidal attempts associated with the pressure to pay a dowry.

There are indeed many instances of such violent behavior towards women which we have witnessed through media channels. In today’s increasingly competitive and ever increasing cost of living makes it very difficult and frustrating for many families. Demands are today made after a marriage by the groom’s family resulting to husbands beating their wives for not being able to provide.

According to a sociologist Shiv Visvanathan, such violent state of affairs is mainly due to the increasing high financial aspirations of people today. The transitions in class and aims for a higher status in society is based on income and today’s new generation men seek marriage as a means to upgrade their financial life and if this does not ensue they subject to violent behavior towards their wives.

Though there is the existence of violence against women because of dowry, there have also been many measures which have been taken up by different women organizations to provide relief if not prevent the acts of such violent acts towards women in the future. Not only that but to be able to also punish those who are guilty of these violent acts towards their wives.

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6 Daily Mail June 24, 2013  
7 The Hindu, New Delhi, June 16, 2013  
8 The Hindu, New Delhi, June 16, 2013
One of the organizations that have taken such an initiative is the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Mr. Khanna proposed and authorized the formation of DDA flats which will be run by NGOs to provide accommodation and cater to women facing insecurities and danger. 8 reception-cum-care centres will be opened providing temporary accommodation for women in distress. As noted, most of the distress women experience is due to their husbands’ violent behavior towards them at home. In addition to this, the DDA has demanded to hold imperative meetings with as many as 161 police stations in Delhi to avoid such crimes. It has been a regular occurrence that women are ill-treated. Many measures have been taken by many organizations such as the creation of DDA led by Mr. Khanna.

Most women withstand the violent behavior they face at home simply because they have nowhere to go and that they feel that they are all alone in this. With the support of temporary housing, this will allow women to become stable both mentally and physically. With the help of such organizations, women are able to feel and see what other women also face and they are only stronger together. This will empirically help them get back on their feet faster.

Partners for Law in Development (PLD) is an organization that engages in many campaigns protesting against all forms of racial discrimination, human rights, communal and sexual violence. PDL has also initiated plans on making information readily available to everyone on the mentioned issues. This is a vital addition towards reducing domestic violence against women. PLD have taken actions such as re-launching their website to publicize the ideology of social justice and women’s rights to law. The website will provide updated information and developments on women’s rights, PLD’s activities, workshops, trainings etc. The website also educates on women’s movements and their impact on legal developments. With such organizations supporting women and their rights as human beings as well, is a path in creation towards a safe environment.

Women are also afraid that the current justice system reacts very slow to the problems faced by women. Unless there are planned potential developments of fast-track courts and effective communication between hospitals and the police these problems will never be solved. With further addition of possible involvement of counselors will surely help aid the requirements of and understand the problems women face at home.

Though the future certainly looks much brighter however society and dogma has had such an adverse effect on women that it undoubtedly takes time for change. Regardless of the abuse they face at home, women are still “devoted” to their husbands as do generations ago, hence do not wish to complain against their husbands and in-laws. It is also because of this that the justice system cannot work very efficiently.

The right to pee is not just a right, but a women’s network too
Zee News, June 18, 2013, By: Pooja Bhula

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9 The Indian Express, New Delhi, June 22, 2013
10 The Hindu, New Delhi, June 17, 2013
Mumbai: The Right to Pee network was launched when 35 NGOs came together on May 3, 2011 to voice women’s right to clean, safe and free public urinals in Mumbai. The idea being that in a city which has 5,74,1632 women there are no public urinals for them and even the number of toilets is far less in comparison to men. From the beginning of the campaign the network has been creating awareness about the health problems that result from lack of urinals and adequate number of toilets. Some examples they have given are saturation of urine and urinary tract infections caused by long hours of wait before relieving the bladder or by reducing water consumption so as to reduce the urge to pee.

In its strategy meeting on Saturday the group decided to ensure that the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) implements the construction of 25 public urinals for women by December 2013. This was a follow up to the campaign which began on January 24, 2013, when through an MCGM circular Rs 75 lakh were earmarked for construction of public urinals and toilets in the city’s crowded places. The allocation is for the period 2013-14. The circular asked its various departments for a plan to be submitted in 15 days mentioning places where they can be constructed and organizations that can carry out the necessary work. Even after 5 months no proposal has been submitted by the MCGM.

As a result of the campaign, on Special Duty Officer of MCGM, Subhash Dalvi, said at the meeting, “BMC is supportive of the campaign and plans to construct 25 new urinals for women.” However, the group feels that except for the announcement, nothing has been firmly decided in terms of identifying locations and implementing urinals.

Dalvi added, “Permanent structures can be created in some locations, but temporary ones will be required in others. While it is possible to give contracts for maintenance of permanent ones, how will we do it for temporary ones if urinals have to be free to the public? We are still trying to find a solution for it.”

But the Right to Pee network plans to ensure that the promise of 25 new urinals and toilets is kept. Economist and professor Vibhuti Patel said, “Our team will map and propose locations for construction of these urinals and we want to ensure that all 25 are built by December 2013.”

The meeting was held at Marathi Patrakar Sangh; besides Vibhuti Patel other speakers included researcher on urban and women’s issues Sulakshana Mahajan, associate professor of KEM Dr
Kamakshi Bhat and education and social activist, Farida Lambay. They are also playing advisory roles to give the campaign strength, structure and direction.

In the coming days, the network also plans to collect information on alternative and innovative types of urinal and toilets across the world to ensure economy, eco friendliness and sustainability and practical solutions for areas in the city which need urinals and toilets but may not have enough space.

† WPC in news
Tribute to Professor Sharmila Rege
(7th Oct 1964 – 13th July 2013)

By: Dr. Vibhuti Patel

I am indeed shocked to learn about the sad and untimely death of Sharmila due to cancer of colon at the young age of 49. She was not only a good scholar but also a refined human being and ajatshatu (individual without personal enemies). Prof. Sharmila Rege was an Indian sociologist, feminist scholar and widely discussed author. She was a leader of the Kranti Jyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre (KJSPWSC) at University of Pune who fought for her ideological commitment for the excluded and brutalized sections of society.

I was amazed when Prof. Sharmila Rege, Head of Department of Sociology decided to join as Director and Reader, Centre for Women's Studies. In a hierarchical institution such as university, a scholar established in the mainstream discipline switching for 'lower' position without batting an eyelid showed her commitment towards women's studies in 2007. Under her leadership, KJSPWSC became an intellectually vibrant centre providing platform to academicians, retired scholars, free-lance researchers, social activists and feminists. I had opportunity to meet Sharmila for 10 years continuously, from 1996 to 2006 when I was invited by her centre for 4 lectures in a day on gender budgeting, globalisation, sex selection and declining sex ratio and sexual harassment at workplace for Refreshers Courses/Certificate course in Women’s studies. I was impressed by atmosphere of nurturance, voluntarism and cooperation created by Sharmila even in the midst of tremendous financial crunch experienced by the centre in that period.

Sahrmila as a social activist, feminist scholar and social analyst single-minded challenged the Brahminical patriarchy from ‘Dalit Standpoint’. In 2008, her inspiring and insightful Savitribai Phule Oration on ‘Education as Trutiya Ratna: Towards Phule-Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogical Practice’ sponsored by NCERT in a jam packed hall at SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai was mind-blowing. The audience, whether agreed with her or not, listened to her with rapt attention and many of them gave her standing ovation.

She could convincingly explain women’s predicament determined by complex interplay class, caste, religion and sexuality with the help of historical evidences, contemporary concerns of dalit-tribal-minority women and queer community. Sharmila practiced what she preached within
the academia and from the political platforms. She fought for the right of the Dalit students in her university. She legitimized crucial contribution of Babasaheb in examining Indian civilization from the point of view of the oppressed and exploited sections i.e. *shudra* and *atti-shudra*. She brought to the fore knowledge of the ‘subjugated’ and challenged the dominant Brahminical discourse.

She left a lasting impression on any one who met her. She had a huge fan following among post graduate, M. Phil. and Ph. D. students. How can anyone forget courteous, mild mannered and soft spoken Sharmila who was patient with her students, who gave quality time to her non-English speaking students, who with great perseverance brought out important works of women’s studies in Marathi in collaboration with her colleagues-Prof. Vidyut Bhagwat, Dr. Anagha Tambe, Dr. Swati Dehadroy and Dr. Sneha Gole. Their commitment and strategic thinking for KSPWSC put their centre on a national map. Every year we displayed their yellow poster announcing the MA and certificate course in women’s studies. No one would remove the poster due to Savitribai’s photograph on it. The KSPWS team played crucial role in Indian Association of Women’s Studies and edited its newsletter during the millennium years.

Her concerns were encapsulated in the quotation from Dr Ambedkar that invariably accompanied her emails:

“My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle.”

Sharmila’s book, *Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women’s Testimonies* published by Zubaan, Delhi in 2006 had a massive ripple effect among sociologists, political scientists, women’s studies and Dalit studies scholars. Sharmila received the Malcolm Adiseshiah award from Prof. Padmini Swaminathan, Director of Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai on 21-11-2006 for “sharpening the perspective on caste and gender by examining the differences and the connections of power that existed between women while also recognising what connected them as women.”


Sharmila, an extremely popular teacher and warm fellow traveler in the women’s studies movement will be there always with us through her writings on caste, gender and feminism and compassion she has shown for activists and researchers. Sharmila fighting colon cancer passed away today, within a month of it being detected. Her brutal death has given a major blow to the women's studies and dalit studies movements.