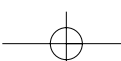
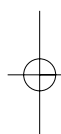
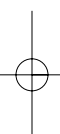
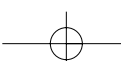
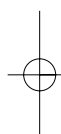
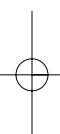
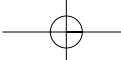


# **Governing for Equity**

Gender, Citizenship and Governance





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## Gender, Citizenship and Governance

**Edited by Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay**

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## 1. SETTING THE SCENE

### **Why a Programme on Gender, Citizenship and Governance?**

MAITRAYEE MUKHOPADHYAY,  
ROYAL TROPICAL INSTITUTE

The conference 'Governing for Equity' was the outcome of a process in which many individuals and institutions have been involved over a period of three years beginning in 1999. In that year KIT Gender, at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam, initiated a three-year programme entitled 'Gender, Citizenship and Governance'.

The Gender, Citizenship and Good Governance programme is an initiative to bring a gender perspective to global debates on and approaches to international development. In the 1990s, the issue of good governance assumed enormous significance in the debates on global development. The concern with governance arose from the growing realisation that conventional development efforts had failed to achieve desired ends – to eliminate poverty and inequality and to promote respect for human rights. The attention thus began to shift away from traditional development interventions towards a greater consideration for the way in which power was exercised in the management of economic and social resources for development.

The priorities of the good governance agenda differed according to the priorities and mandates of the different actors involved in the debate. Despite differences in the priorities, the good governance agenda, by and large, envisaged building accountability of public administration institutions to the public they are supposed to serve. Typically, this involved resourcing a wide variety of projects to improve the institutional capacity of various types of organisations and institutions, especially of governmental bodies. While some donors stressed democratic reforms, this mainly concentrated on the institutional design of the state involving reform of electoral systems, decentralisation and devolution of government, reform of administrative and legal systems.

Our concern was that the debates about and approaches to improving governance structures to obtain better development outcomes did not automatically address the question of gender inequality. If the desired outcome of good governance is distributional equity, then gender equality should

stand high on the agenda of this project. As for example, enhancing governmental capability to design, formulate and discharge its functions especially with regard to economic management does not necessarily entail recognising the central contribution of unpaid labour (mostly performed by women) thereby excluding from public accountability a significant area of priorities and exacerbating the gender divide. Establishing the rule of law does not automatically translate into the legal recognition of violence against women as a crime. Expanding the scope of citizen participation in governance through decentralisation of government does not by itself ensure that women and men will be represented on an equal basis. In all of these areas special efforts are necessary to integrate gender equality concerns, which in turn necessitates changes in institutional rules and practices.

With the above understanding in mind, the Gender, Citizenship and Governance Programme aimed to develop a range of good practices to bring about institutional change – changes in institutional rules and practices that would promote gender equality and enhance citizen participation, changes that build the accountability of public administration institutions to the gender differentiated public they are supposed to serve.

A related concern was that approaches to improving governance did not adequately recognise and resource civil society institutions in creating the demand for democratic, accountable and just governance. Thus in order to build good practice on institutional change from a gender perspective the approach adopted was to resource civil society institutions.

Partnerships were developed with sixteen organisations in two regions, namely, Southern Africa and South Asia. In the southern Africa region the participating organisations were from South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. In South Asia organisations from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh participated in the programme.

The GCG programme had three strategic objectives: (1) training and consultative processes to build capability and common understanding among practitioners as well as of theoretical frameworks on gender and governance issues; (2) to create a range of good practices, draw insights from, and implement action research and other initiatives by selected

partner organisations in the South; (3) sharing information, theoretical insights and building networks of gender practitioners at national, regional and international levels, to enable collective action on issues relating to gender, citizenship and good governance.

The cornerstone of the programme was the action research projects undertaken by each participating organisation on a theme of particular national and regional importance for gender equality. While the action research projects developed were on a range of issues, the initiatives undertaken can be categorized as follows: (1) enhancing and sustaining women's representation and political participation; (2) engendering governance institutions; (3) claiming citizenship and staking a claim to equal rights.

The conference 'Governing for Equity', convened in Kochi on 15, 16, and 17 October 2002, was organised to provide a forum for different institutional actors in development – civil society organisations, international development institutions, national governments and elected representatives from South Asia and Southern Africa – to dialogue on ways of working towards gender equitable governance, to share the findings and good practices of the action research projects and to contribute to a shared vision of the future.

The three-day conference was jointly organised by SAKHI, the women's resource and documentation centre in Kerala, India and a partner in the Gender, Citizenship and Good Governance programme, and the Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam.

The first day of the conference was devoted to a global discussion on gender and governance issues. This included presentations by representatives of international institutions and national organisations on institutional change for gender equality; testimonies from women elected representatives about their experiences; key-note speeches on women, power and politics; and a presentation and discussion of the innovative democratic decentralisation process in Kerala state entitled the 'People's Plan Campaign'. The second day was organised in four workshops on the main thematic areas of the action research projects undertaken by participating organisations in the Gender, Citizenship and Good Governance programme. These thematic areas were: Claiming Citizenship, Engendering Governance Institutions, Taking office and



Governing Peace. On the third and final day of the conference a synthesis of the previous two day's discussions was presented followed by a public hearing on ways forward and a shared vision of the future, culminating in the adoption of the conference declaration.

This report provides a synthesis of the presentations, debates and discussions, and conclusions.

## Welcome Adresses

ALEYAMMA VIJAYAN, SAKHI

I am very proud and privileged to welcome you to this international conference. On behalf of Sakhi I would like to extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you. I would like to especially mention our friends from Pakistan who could make it to Kochi despite the tensions between the governments although the people of both countries long for peace. I am delighted that we can welcome friends from Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa to this conference, to Kochi and to India. We are happy that we can reciprocate the hospitality that we experienced in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka during our previous regional consultation meetings and we welcome our friends from both these countries. To our participants from India, a very warm welcome to Kochi. We also extend a warm welcome to representatives of international institutions present here – the Dutch government, World Bank, UN institutions, Ford Foundation, and various universities and other institutions. This conference is about governance and women's representation in governance structures. Therefore, I want to especially mention those of you among us who have been part of formal governance institutions and were elected to represent the people – I welcome Mam Lydia, Pregs Govender and Ambika Kumari and Salma Bashir. My friends and colleagues from Kerala present at this conference will join me in extending our welcome to all of you.

Our special welcome to Dr. Jan Donner, the President of Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, without whose partnership this programme would not have been possible. Dr. Donner, we are very privileged that despite your busy schedule you agreed to co-host the conference along with us and be present for all three days.

This conference is on gender, citizenship and governance. In the present context of globalisation, good governance has assumed enormous significance as we struggle to sustain our livelihoods and crave for security and peace. Women have been excluded from the structures of governance and we are witnessing the consequences.

The international context today poses special challenges for human development and well-being. Macro-economic governance today is imposing policies whereby government spending on social sectors has been squeezed with disastrous consequences for the poor, especially for women. Poor women have to work long hours, look for less expensive food, spend more resources on basic needs and face insecurity. There is a crisis of governance as governments fail to deliver on economic and social security, giving rise to sub-nationalisms, ethnic rivalries and religious fundamentalisms. As in every conflict situation, women's bodies become the sites of power struggles between contending forces.

In this entire rather gloomy scenario there is much hope to be derived from the rise of women's movements and other movements of marginalized peoples. The reason that women must be given a voice in governance is because the history of the women's movements shows that it is vibrant, gives space for the articulation of diverse interests, which are the hallmarks of democracy. The inclusiveness of the women's movements means that every issue is a gender issue whether it be to eradicate poverty, live in security, promote human well-being and allow for multiple voices to be heard.

We are really privileged that this international conference has chosen Kerala as the venue. The reason partly is that Kerala presents a real development dilemma for the rest of India and also for the developing world. We have high human development indices and especially as these relate to women's position – high literacy rates, low maternal and infant mortality, low fertility and other demographic achievements. We have a well functioning public distribution system and social security measures. And all of this has been achieved despite the fact that Kerala has a low rate of economic growth. This is a puzzle for neo-liberal economists. The fact that this model was becoming unsustainable had dawned on the government. In order to meet the challenge of economic stagnation, Kerala introduced a unique

experiment of decentralisation of governance with the devolution of power and finances to the smallest local government institutions.

Another part of the Kerala puzzle is that women, while being ahead of the rest of India and many other developing countries in terms of literacy rates and social indices, nevertheless are under-represented in the public sphere, especially in politics and decision-making bodies. Women are kept out of power. They also face increasing violence in the home and in the public and work place. This and lots of other issues will be discussed and debated in the coming three days.

Let me use this opportunity once again, to extend a warm welcome to each and everyone of you. We will do everything in our capacity to make your stay comfortable and enjoyable in Kerala.

JAN DONNER, ROYAL TROPICAL INSTITUTE

It is a privilege to welcome you to this conference. The Royal Tropical Institute of the Netherlands is proud to co-host this workshop, which concludes a multi-country and multi-cultural study. We look forward to hearing some of the results of this study, to analyse these results and then to discuss them. We are extremely grateful that an expert audience has convened to do so and admittedly the state of Kerala and the city of Kochi make an interesting and fitting venue and background for this conference.

At international conferences it has become fashionable these days to make some reference to the “global village”. And yes, it is true that we have been shuttling all over the planet to get to this marvellous city to attend this conference. Increasingly, we become aware that shuttling back and forth is damaging to the sustainable development of our planet and that we ought to pay taxes for the CO<sub>2</sub> exhaust from the airplanes that got us here. While on the one hand each and every corner of the global village has become more or less accessible, we all of a sudden find that our flight schedules are being affected by squabbles that used to be far-away wars, which did not affect our lives previously. Now all of a sudden we find that:

- we are being drawn into global wars, while we are unsure if we really want to be part of them;
- religious strife amongst groups that used to be

far-away has come to our neighbourhoods;

- diseases which we imagined had been eradicated have come to our doorstep and that natural disasters are becoming a daily occurrence on everybody's shores.

Living in a “global village” thus has made us increasingly aware of existing inequalities within that village. Although many societies have started to address the inequalities within social development, literacy, gender issues, it would be untruthful to suggest that all inequalities within our societies have been eradicated. Rather, new inequalities have replaced the old ones. While there is growing recognition of the importance of gender equality in some societies, can the same be said for our immigrants and minorities? Those are the – what I would call – “dynamics of inequality”. The concepts of global governance, of human rights and of good governance suggest that on a global level, humanity shares a number of common values and norms, which we all wish to see, applied in every corner of our planet.

The Royal Tropical Institute aims to create an understanding between different cultures as well as an appreciation of why cultures and societies within the ever-smaller global village could possibly be as diverse as they actually are. To this end our museums show the Dutch – adults as well as children – the beauty of different lifestyles. We use our theatre to stage productions from all over the globe and we hope to unite audiences from both The Netherlands and as well as from abroad in viewing the productions. Our vast library is at the disposal of all to study the observations of others and to do anthropology and other research. Our own publishing house takes over 100 titles to market each year, providing insights from unexpected angles. Our staff travels the world to support governments, agencies and institutions to advance agreed causes in their own familiar environments.

The guiding principle of this study on Gender, Citizenship and Good Governance has been to develop strategies to ensure the incorporation of gender equality concerns into governance structures. There has been study and comparison between situations in South Asian nations to what is happening in Southern African nations. I feel that we can say that this study has been done very professionally. Your presence today – and in far larger numbers than we would have expected at the outset – seem

to justify this very tentative conclusion. As a relative outsider I find that the outcomes of this study have wetted my appetite to know more, while on the other hand satisfying my managerial responsibility to maintain the standards of the Royal Tropical Institute and its partner organisation Sakhi.

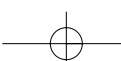
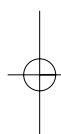
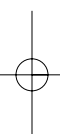
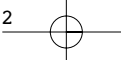
While I find myself satisfied on the one hand that we have met an important part of the mission of our Institute, I have to ask myself about the other side of the coin. How can we align our respect for diversity, for the preservation of different cultures and the heritage of individual societies with the promotion of universal values and human rights? Can we even be sure that such universal values and human rights are compatible with cultural and religious diversity? To some extent we can, because such values and rights have been accepted by the world community and by each individual country. Each of those countries has balanced and continues to balance its proper cultural and religious values alongside the formulation of universal declarations by the world community. These universal values incorporate the concept of governance, the system by which a society shall be directed and controlled. The governance structure should address issues such as the equitable distribution of rights and responsibilities amongst the different participants and stakeholders of that society.

As a lawyer by training I have to accept that the global governance that we are seeing being introduced into our global village will not in the short term succeed in enforcing the global values of good governance and equity. The world community through the collectivity of national governments will not manage to implement a top-down approach to the implementation of equity, good governance and many other values that many individual members of that same world community crave. And that is exactly why studies like the one before us and meetings like the one we are starting today are a valuable addition to the efforts of the world community to make accepted rights and responsibilities enforceable.

If the top-down approach does not work, we, the people – civil society – need to lend a hand through a bottom-up approach. We are seeing and possibly are part of global social movements to support the implementation of values, rights and responsibilities through other means than pure law enforcement. By sharing stories and experiences, looking at the success of others in different, yet comparable

societies and cultures we advance the causes that have been underwritten by the world community but that have only partially been implemented.

We are here these days to discuss complex issues. We do so on the basis of elaborate studies that have been brought before us. We do so in an appropriate environment and with an expert audience. I can assure you that the Royal Tropical Institute as one of the sponsors of this event is looking forward to lively discussions and tangible results. We will feel much encouraged if by the end of this meeting you will be able to say that it has contributed to your perspective on “Governing for Equity”.



## 2. GLOBAL DEBATES ON GENDER, CITIZENSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The demand for equal representation of women and men in political and public office has been the cornerstone of the good governance agenda from a gender perspective. While the demand for equal representation is a collective one, it is individual women elected to political office who have to bear the responsibility of negotiating their public role. Testimonies, being personalised accounts, help us to link the personal struggles involved in taking on a public role to the political struggles that underrepresented groups like women have to undertake to achieve equal representation.

### TESTIMONIES

#### **On being a woman Member of Parliament in South Africa**

MAM LYDIA NGWENYA

*Mam Lydia is an ANC Member of Parliament in South Africa. She was an active campaigner against Apartheid and has campaigned for rights of workers and women. While working in an electrical factory, Mam Lydia was elected as a shop steward of MAWU (Metal & Allied Workers' Union) - at a time, when Black South African workers were prohibited from joining unions and faced violent confrontations with the State. She became a member of the National Executive Committee of the MAWU and later branch secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union. She fought against Apartheid, the employers, and also engaged in battles against sexist attitudes of male trade unionists. In 1992, Mam Lydia formed the Rural Women's Movement. During the Constitution-building process, the Rural Women's Movement played a vital role in ensuring that the Constitution was gender sensitive and gender equal. Mam Lydia is currently serving her second term as an ANC MP.*

I am honoured to be here to share experiences with you women as a woman. Let me explain the things I did to be where I am. I was born and brought up in rural South Africa – daughter of a peasant. There were seven of us, of which 5 brothers are dead.

I always think that I am 15 because most of the things that happened to me were when I was very young. I was born in a Lutheran Mission and we had enough land. My father grew and sold sweet potatoes, and although we were cash poor, with exchanging crops

for other things, we didn't know hunger and starvation like we see today. The exchanging of sweet potatoes for cattle – that actually helped us survive and to go to school!

In late 40s ('49/'50) a 'betterment scheme' (initiated by the apartheid government) led us to lose our land in the Lutheran Mission, and our Church actually didn't fight enough against this grabbing of land by the government! We could see that we were becoming poorer and poorer with the cattle, donkeys and pigs going. We had no option – my mother had to go to Johannesburg to get work as a domestic servant; my father was too old to go to work in the mines – the only job for men who were not educated like my father. We were left with our father and life became disorganized without the warmth of a woman at home. My father became disillusioned – started drinking and not returning home – I remember that I would ride a bike and go and fetch him, drunk, back home.

In such circumstance, I left school in '54 having finished Standard-8 and went to work in a small town – my mother settled in Alexandra (Johannesburg) with my brothers. My father tried to join them, but he missed his home and had to go back. In 1963 my father died.

I worked in the hospital as a nurse-aide and met my husband and got married in 1958 – in 1956 I had my first child. My husband was also poor, he could not work as we did not have the right to live in Johannesburg as we were from the rural areas. That kind of life caused a lot of misunderstandings. If you do not have enough food – and I as an ordinary housewife depended on my husband – a jealous husband who did not want me to even join with other women! He left us twice. When my youngest child was seven, he left me for the second time and I felt enough was enough.

I went back to Johannesburg but as I did not have documentation to live in the city I took my children to my sister. Someone I met in Johannesburg told me to get a coloured identity document – this meant that one could work anywhere, had less restrictions and permission to stay in the coloured areas – and I thought 'maybe this was the answer'. She took me and we went for a coloured ID, (practicing to speak Afrikaans) I made all these lies, changed my name from Komape to Kompe and I

got my ID! I then took my Dom pass and shoved it under my bed – since having a forged ID was a serious offence with a long jail sentence. I used that ID and I survived!

In 1973 I worked at Heineman Factory and we had a big strike because we wanted the Union to be recognised and we were dismissed. I went to work for the trade unions and was the only woman among six men. I started now finding it difficult to make tea and washing dishes! I then started to challenge this – saying that I was not taking this any more! I made a roster for the union men, and like this, we survived! In 1979 we formed FOSATU (the Federation of South African Trade Unions), which from 1985 is the COSATU today. I felt that now my dreams have come true: that women had built this huge union, and I need to explore more, and my roots that I have left behind.

In 1986, I went to work for the Transvaal Rural Action Committee, which was concentrating on forced removals. Within the movement we had a Rural Women's Movement that I initiated. The reason was that I wanted women to know their rights. I said let's meet women and decide plans on how we could resist and we came with the rural women's movement. That rural women movement moved me to Parliament where I am today. I did not fight for the Struggle to become something – it didn't come to my mind. I only needed to be liberated, to be a free person, to be a South African because all this time, *I wasn't a South African!*

Being in parliament has not differed much from my previous life where I was a migrant worker leaving my home and children in the rural areas to live in Joburg. On being elected an MP I left my home, my grandchildren for Cape Town. I was expected to open a constituency office in my home village and move every fortnight between parliament in Cape Town and home where my constituency office is. It was a continuation of my life as a migrant worker. Only now I was doing this for the sake of the people who put me there. It is unlike before when I was forced by circumstances to leave my children.

My role on the Parliamentary Standing Committee for the Improvement of Quality of Life and the Status of Women is to put forward women's concerns. The committee monitors all the portfolio committees to ensure that women's issues and women's representation are addressed and taken seriously in

all committees and all bills. We are involved in taking up issues in the provinces and we meet with implementers. For example on women and violence we met with police and magistrates to see how they are implementing the new laws. On customary law matters we met with the traditional leaders. It has not been easy to push women's concerns in parliament. That is why we have the monitoring committee, Committee for the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women – so that all other committees know there is a watchdog committee that has the power to call a minister or a director general to explain, and we can make recommendations. But sometimes we get very unpopular. Yet we struggle on.

We have made good progress with violence against women, and customary law. We have managed to ensure that women married by customary law do not forfeit benefits. This came from Rural Women's Movement proposals with assistance from CALS who carried out interviews which was the base of drafting the legislation. The presence of the Rural Women's Movement on the ground made all the difference in this struggle. Women also now have the right to access land, a right they did not have before and this made rural women homeless and vulnerable in the past. At present, although rural women are legally entitled to access land, chiefs often stand in the way. It is important that NGOs continue to support women in claiming these rights. Government cannot filter down to the people. NGOs can assist in educating women to know their rights and how to claim them.

The ANC Women's League and women in various structures within the ANC are pushing women very strongly. This is high on the agenda of women in the ANC. And we are struggling. We still talk about one third, but we are trying to push for 50% representation. But it is very difficult. We come from a patriarchal system all over Africa, and South Africa is no exception. We have the problem of forcing male comrades to accept our constitutional right as women to be equal. Within the ANC it is said that a committee with only men is not desirable but the thing is it is not *unconstitutional*. We need to change the ANC constitution to make an all male committee unconstitutional.

I am left with 18 months in parliament before I leave. I don't think much will change in that time. After I complete my term I will be at home. I will continue, if I have the strength, to work with the women in the projects we have started, to ensure they are empowered. These are the things I am looking forward to see.

My party should make sure that whoever is elected into power should know what they are there for, be accountable to the people, have a heart for the people, be available when people want their assistance. They need to report to people on what government is able to do and what not. We need to go to the people who elected us and say what it is we can do – to tell people the truth. People love our government. They see the difference between the past and now. They want to know where we are now. They need openness, transparency. MPs on the ground need to make this happen. It makes me very angry when I see that there is often only talk and little practice of transparency from MPs.

### **On being President of Vattiyurkava Panchayat, Trivandrum District, Kerala, India**

AMBIKA KUMARI

*Ambika Kumari is a member of the Vattiyurkavu Panchayat<sup>1</sup> in Trivandrum District of Kerala and the first woman president to be elected in the history of this panchayat. Born in a traditional Nair family, she did not have a political background. Her life was sheltered in her parental home without any exposure to politics. She completed her post-graduation studies and was married in 1978. Her husband had a strong left political background and he encouraged her to participate in political campaigns. She was accepted for group membership in the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] on the basis of her work in the community and for the Party. The Party put her up as a candidate when the Panchayat elections were announced. She won the elections. In her panchayat, there are 17 wards – and it took her a while to get used to her position and her responsibilities. In the beginning, she had many difficulties and men in her committee took scant notice of her decisions because she was a woman. There were difficulties at home too, as a woman travelling at*

<sup>1</sup> Panchayat – is the Indian term for the first tier of the three-tier decentralised government system. The panchayat is the local government body at the village level.

*night was frowned upon and she had to do a lot of late evening travel as part of her work. In spite of all these difficulties, she has achieved a lot. In her area, more and more women began to come forward with their problems and she has tried her best to highlight and these problems and seek solutions. She formed the "Jagrita Samiti" a vigilance committee for preventing violence against women. She organized "Kudumbashree" or women's self-help groups that organise women's projects and manage micro-credit schemes. During the course of her work, she has learnt that women have many constraints, of which poverty is one. However, the major constraint that women have is the attitude of men, who do not see women as capable of making decisions and involving themselves in social and political activities to improve their own and their families' situation.*

I am happy to participate in this conference on Gender, Citizenship and Governance. I am the present president of Vattiyurkavu Panchayat and am the first woman president of this Panchayat. I would like to speak a little first about myself and then about the experiences that I have had after I became the President. I was born in a traditional Nair family, my father was a landowner and a government employee and my mother was from a poor family.

I have four brothers and two sisters. I graduated from Kerala University, and my siblings were also studying. At this time, the family was affected by financial misfortune that affected our futures. We had to shift home to Vattiyurkavu village.

I tried to get a government job, failed, got a job in a beauty parlour in Trivandrum where I worked for one and a half years. It was then that I got married. My husband did not demand a dowry nor was he interested in matching horoscopes, practises important for Hindu marriages. We have three children. My married life was different from my natal family where no one was interested in politics or social activities. My husband was a strong member of the Communist Party and gradually I took interest in the Women's Wing of the Party. Although I was dynamic in women's activities, I had no interest in politics. My political activities were limited to election campaigns. In the 2000 elections of the panchayat, the Communist Party nominated me as a candidate for a seat that was reserved for women. I did not expect to win as the sitting candidate was from the Congress Party (the opposition party). However, the Party's support, my family relations and social contacts, along with my better educational qualifications, and my opponent's poor social relations helped me win the

elections. My dedication to the Party helped me to get the Presidentship of the Panchayat.

At the outset, I was not confident whether I could manage official and family life and also my public duties. With the support of the Party, I studied the methodologies for governing a panchayat. However, I had to face several constraints. One of the earliest was when a group of people surrounded me, refusing to vacate my office, demanding an immediate solution for their drinking water supply problem. Although I became nervous, I somehow managed the situation and that gave mental strength to meet subsequent problems, and now I do not have stage frights anymore! Becoming the president of the panchayat changed my family too especially related to the needs of my children. In the beginning, they did not want to get used to my public life, but gradually that changed too, mainly due to boundless support of my husband. He helped me in my housework, and my children became self-sufficient too – this I consider to be an asset in my family life. I got freedom for my social and political activities from my husband and am always conscious not to misuse this.

As I am a woman president, I get ample opportunities to work with other women in the Panchayat, and many approach me to solve their problems. The People's Planning Campaign began with the aim to help each and every person to participate in the development process. Through this campaign, women began to get more involved in the development process. As a part of this process the village meetings and neighbourhood group meetings were held in each ward of the Panchayat. The neighbourhood groups were gradually converted into self-help groups. One hundred and twenty-five such self-help groups exist in Vattiyurkavu Panchayat. Each group consists of twenty members, and that means two thousand five hundred women are gathering in different parts of the Panchayat every week. They run savings schemes and moreover discuss their problems and attempt to solve them. I enjoy attending these meetings, and get acquainted with women's problems. I can also help them with several self-employment schemes through the Women's Component Plan.



In our panchayat, out of 17 members, only 6 are women, and the involvement of these women members in the work of the panchayat is very limited. This is because four of them are Anganwadi<sup>2</sup> teachers and they can give very little time for Panchayat work. In spite of this, they try to get involved in women's problems. We try to keep a women-friendly environment in the Panchayat with cooperation from both men and women members. We have succeeded in creating this atmosphere to a certain extent and in this we receive strong support from SAKHI Women's Resource Centre. Even then, some men members think that women are not capable of taking such responsibilities. We have taken this as a challenge and are working harder.

From my experiences, I have realised that if women enter politics, they can prevent criminalisation and corruption too. Meanwhile, I am also active in Party work like attending meetings and participating in agitations, etc. The higher committees (in the Party) give timely suggestions that are beneficial and give me courage to face obstacles in my work. The bureaucracy of local government has created many problems for me. The reason is that I am a woman. It is true that some men are reluctant to accept 'an ordinary woman' in a higher position. I think I am changing their attitude towards women in political office by showing understanding, dealing with them affectionately and above all by learning to be courageous. Our Panchayat showed excellent achievements during the year 2000-2001 and we were hailed as the second-best panchayat of Trivandrum district. We wish to place the name of my Panchayat at the top, and for this we need support from organizations like "SAKHI".

Local women could achieve this status because of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments of the Indian Constitution that ensured that one third of the seats in local bodies would be reserved for women. If the Women's Representation (Reservation) Bill is to be passed in the Indian Parliament, women could get proper representation at all levels of government in the country.

All political parties need to support the Women's Representation (Reservation) Bill in the parliament. Organisations like SAKHI should act as pressure groups in the process. Thank you all, and Namaste!

### Concluding remarks

AYESHA KHANAM

It was an excellent idea to begin the sessions with the voices from the grassroots. This focuses the conference activities from the beginning. Conferences usually have voices of the grassroots in their concluding sessions.

These testimonies are from two women from vastly different countries, with different life-situations (one a daughter of a poor peasant in a country with severe poverty and political complexities, and the other the daughter of a landlord in a situation where women are not thought important enough to contribute to changing their lives) and different social, economic and political cultures. However, both these testimonies share common experiences as women: a reminder that there is a shared global experience of women.

Mam Lydia's testimony shows how women have been struggling to empower themselves in the South African situation. How women faced poverty, political complexities of apartheid and family troubles that include desertion, destitution and loneliness in the long road to attain political power. Her experience shows the universality of how a woman struggled and will have to struggle to surpass the immeasurable odds placed before her – of how as a woman, she changed herself and how she continues to change herself and, in the process, transforms her society. Specifically also, it is a story of beginning a rural women's organisation – an issue to be discussed during the conference.

Ambika Kumari's testimony, on the other hand shows that even where there is support from the

<sup>2</sup> Anganwadi Teachers (or workers) are women volunteers, selected from the local villages, who work at the Integrated Mother & Child Development Services Scheme (previously known as ICDS) projects. The IMCDS targets pregnant and lactating mothers, adolescent girls and children from birth to six years of age. The services include antenatal advice, contraceptive advice, immunisation for pregnant women and children and health-awareness activities. Besides this, the IMCDS provides non-formal education through games, song and dance to the target children. There is also a nutritional program with the AWW (Anganwadi Workers) assessing nutritional status of, and providing calorie supplementation to children in the target group.

family and society, women are not allowed to function beyond a certain 'border'. When women 'transgress' these 'borders', the existing political order, political culture and political thinking, create problems in the process of making women politically empowered. This experience is not limited to grassroots level, but is also a problem in parliamentary politics of many nations. In the important political decision making bodies women have to follow certain unwritten, 'hidden bindings' and therefore in important posts or decision-making bodies, women are just showpieces. The empowerment of women, not only as a political being, but also as total human being is a very difficult struggle.

What we learn from the two testimonies is that although the situation of women varies vastly from place to place and country to country, there are some constraints and problems women share that seem almost 'universal or global'.

- Women are not taken as equal partners even in protest movements – and are usually relegated to the roles perceived by men as 'womanly'. (Mam Lydia's experience in her Union, where she was the one initially delegated to making tea, shopping and washing dishes).
- As a corollary, women's role in deciding for themselves, even about problems unique to them are not taken seriously by men. (Ambika Kumari's decisions not being taken seriously by male members of her Panchayat, initially).
- As women are the traditional 'homemakers' in any given society, family pressures often put undue burden on women and prevent them from achieving their true economic, political and social potential.

## INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE GENDER AND EQUITY AGENDA

This panel brought together representatives from key institutional actors in global and national governance to discuss and debate their experiences in making gender equality a core concern of good governance. The speakers on this panel were requested to address the following key issues:

- The ways in which the institution has attempted to improve and influence governance with the objective of achieving gender equity and equality.
- The real problems of making gender equity a key concern.
- The prospects for the future and the ways forward.

### World Bank

KAREN MASON

Although the World Bank is primarily an *economic* institution that has to maintain *political neutrality*, the issue that "good governance is essential for development" is gaining currency within it.

Studies by the World Bank have demonstrated that (i) Globally women are under-represented in parliaments: the 'best performing' region has less than 20% while the 'worst performing' region has less than 5% women representatives in their parliaments; (ii) Where women and men have more equal rights and more equal participation, governments are less corrupt. Although this finding is very controversial as regards causality, it is nevertheless a very provocative finding.

The Bank has developed a set of principles on engendering development. Gender issues need to be *country-led* and *country-specific*. A *gender-diagnosis* is

critical for understanding the extent to which gender inequality is inhibiting economic growth and poverty reduction. Finally, the Bank's role should be supportive but also pro-active.

The Bank's strategy entails conducting a *country gender assessment (CGA)* that is based on inclusive consultations in the client countries; to use that assessment in identifying the priority of gender-responsive policies and interventions; to ensure that projects are gender responsive; and to monitor progress. Examples of gender-responsive governance work are as follows:

- i. "Engendered" Public Expenditure Reviews (PERs) in Cambodia and Morocco.
- ii. Judicial reform projects with services for poor women in Ecuador – there was dramatic reduction in the time taken to resolve child-support cases.
- iii. Countering corruption through community-driven development (CDD) – Nepal Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund, Kecamatan Development Project in Indonesia, and Malawi Social Action Fund.

Some of the main challenges to engendering governance within the Bank are (i) Resistance and ignorance among economists and finance ministers (both in the Bank and in various nations); (ii) Lack of accountability – as the World Bank is hierarchical and also because all World Bank projects are country-driven; (iii) Development overload: gender equity has to compete with a load of other 'development priorities'.

### **Centre for Applied Legal Studies [CALs], University of Witwatersrand, South Africa**

KATHY ALBERTYN

CALS was formed within the University of Witwatersrand in 1978 as a centre of legal activity against apartheid – it had an activist strand woven into its being from the beginning and was involved in anti-apartheid activity for the first twelve years of its existence. CALS was always an applied research organisation committed to democracy. After the ANC was unbanned in 1990, CALS took on many other diverse issues like gender research, HIV/AIDS and land rights, and these became the newer sectors of research and advocacy.

During the constitution-writing process in South Africa, CALS was deeply involved – researching

constitutional law and advising groups. Post 1994, CALS was engaged in law reform, policy development activities and the gender project. The last mentioned being involved in a whole range of processes – using research to link with women's organisations to push for reforms through government and through Parliament.

#### **Challenges faced by CALS:**

CALS is currently facing a situation where although quite a few laws are in place, not all are, and the organisation is thinking of new and innovative strategies of advocacy and litigation to implement and enforce rights.

CALS is within a university set-up and therefore sometimes occupies contradictory positions. CALS has authoritative research that it uses to engage with the 'outside' and that builds the profile of the University in the community – where sometimes it has been criticised as a 'white liberal, ivory tower institution'. However, within the University, CALS occupies a 'love-hate' relationship in that the University challenges 'cause-driven' research and 'research for social change' that CALS advocates. CALS has to do constant acts of 'balancing' in order to sustain personal careers and the University on the one hand, and the more 'activist' oriented research that it does.

#### **Lessons learnt:**

Being University-based emphasises the importance of research and information. No real advocacy process or enforcement process or implementation process can happen without information (in the gender sector) about women's lives. Research at CALS has been about women's experience of the law, human rights violation and this has also been disseminated and shared with other universities and organisations. In other words, the university-base has placed CALS in a very good position vis-à-vis information gathering, research, dissemination and in establishing links.

Although CALS engages in activism, it cannot do it on its own – CALS does not have the legitimacy to do so. Therefore it is vital for CALS to enter into varied relationships with other women and women's organisations – both with women in civil society and women in state institutions, to push particular issues. It has really been the combination of CALS and partner organisations that has been able to hold the government accountable.

University-based organisations like CALS have an inside-outside role vis-à-vis the women's movement inasmuch they are both part of the movement and also research it in an effort to understand it better.

In context of gender relations and HIV/AIDS in South Africa, an important lesson has been to see how gender inequality drives HIV/AIDS and to look at how failure to deal with HIV/AIDS will worsen women's human rights. In South Africa, it is the biggest threat to the advances made till now.

#### ***Ways forward:***

Till now the work has been sector-wise, e.g. reproductive rights, violence, etc., but with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the challenge is to develop new ways of working across sectors. There is growing acknowledgement of the need for the AIDS movement to work with the women's movement and to devise new strategies to do so. The way forward is to transform the role of the CALS gender project that only does women's issue-based work to one of a group that does work on a whole range of issues and is able to interact with other organisations in order to promote change.

Until now, institutions in South Africa have primarily engaged with the state to bring about changes to the exclusion of civil society. Not much has been done to engage with values and attitudes in general – and one of the problems of enforcement or implementation is this problem of values and attitudes. In this context, the University has a greater role to play because at a university, peoples' values are challenged and changed. The challenge is how to work among the students through teaching and discussions to ensure that people who are going to be in positions of power in the future have begun to think about gender, HIV/AIDS, violence, poverty and issues that are important to society before they begin their careers.

### **The Royal Netherlands Embassy, Bangladesh**

MARGRET VERWIJK

Awareness of the value and necessity of gender equality increased significantly between 1975 and 2001. As the world changed, gender policy changed with it. In the Netherlands, it was a dynamic process, which initially centred on external policy implementation and later, of necessity, on internal

organization. I will focus on equipping the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (that is in The Hague and the Embassies) to incorporate gender equality into all aspects of foreign policy. Gender equality is achieved by incorporating it into organisation and policy.

Following the first UN conference on Women in 1975, more attention was devoted worldwide to the status of women. Dutch development policy aimed to ensure more aid benefited women, and the first Dutch policy memorandum on women and development appeared five years after the conference, in 1980. It set our gender policy, identifying the following goals: (a) to increase the influence and participation of women in the preparation and implementation of development policy; (b) to promote greater economic independence for women; (c) to strengthen women's organizations in developing countries.

After Nairobi, the Forward Looking Strategies were introduced into Dutch development policy, which consisted of 53 points relating to policy and organization. They ranged from guidelines for improving the participation of women in the various aid sectors to courses for the Ministry's own employees and the appointment of specialists at embassies. Although gender was gaining more substance, more action was needed to make what was still a fragmented policy fully operational. It needed, for instance, to be given a higher priority and incorporated more deeply into general development policy.

In 1990, gender policy gained a higher priority when Women, Poverty and the Environment became the main themes of Dutch development policy. The focus was on increasing the autonomy of women in developing countries in order to strengthen their economic independence, on political and social participation; social and cultural position, and control over their own bodies.

After Beijing, in 1995, it was observed that the difference between men and women was still very significant in many areas of life and that the status of women had even worsened in many developing countries. At that moment, recommendations appeared on the ways of organising the integration of gender equality. We received warnings against the excessive production of policy, arguing that more attention should be devoted to putting it into action,

consolidating agreements made at international conferences, and to evaluating implementation. Governments, including the Government of the Netherlands, needed to be made accountable for their policies on women, also to their own parliaments. That warning is still valid.

In terms of implementation, the following changes took place since then: (1) delegation of responsibilities to embassies; (2) concentration of bilateral support on a limited number of countries; (3) ownership by the recipient government; (4) support sectors as a whole instead of project-based assistance.

What about integrating gender equality into the Ministry's internal organizational structure?

The Council of Europe's definition of gender mainstreaming in this context is useful in the sense that it places responsibility with the people that make and determine policy. It is defined as "the (re)-organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making".

In holding its own policy up to the DAC criteria, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs found that it had not yet done enough internally to encourage a positive attitude, strengthen leadership, or establish where responsibility lay or who would be held accountable. A recent study (2000) into the availability of gender expertise at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that it has made a valuable contribution to the integration of gender equality into the Ministry's internal organizational structure. However, the study did recommend that a gender co-ordinator at a senior level be appointed by the Ministry for internal and external emancipation, that the Secretary-General become the holder of the gender policy portfolio and that the Ministry provide training for all its employees. As a result the gender co-ordinator has been appointed this year. Also benchmarks were identified as to raise the effectiveness of integrating emancipation into Dutch government ministries. The benchmarks address the following issues: ownership of the problem which implies locating final responsibility for integrating emancipation as high as possible in the professional hierarchy; the incorporation of the process in structure and organisation at the ministry; the availability of gender

expertise; integration of expertise and mechanisms; availability and accessibility of gender-specific data; availability of time, people and money.

This form of integration requires more than just gender-oriented perceptions and actions. It requires a sense of responsibility and commitment from all those involved. In recent years, many international and Dutch institutions have started to integrate gender equality into their policies and organizational structures. The indicator for the sustainable integration of gender equality has therefore become the extent to which an organization takes account of men and women's different needs, interests and skills, both internally and in its external policies.

Responsibility and accountability are key concepts and mutually binding, and we need to devote extra attention to enunciating clear objectives and to building an effective gender orientation. It is important that the Ministry's political leadership and senior civil servants feel responsible for the process of integrating gender equality, because integration processes require constant support and management. We are not talking of merely 'a dash of gender equality'. In practice, the link to policy making is seldom made. With the exception of gender experts in the relevant divisions and at the embassies, staff members are not occupied with gender issues on a daily basis. The support in developing countries has to have at its basis responsibility and accountability to gender equality. Donors must co-ordinate their efforts in order to have impact.

The most promising strategy is to combine general development policy and gender policy on an equal basis. It includes institutional conditions needed for sustainable integration of gender equality at both the Ministry in The Hague and the embassies, and co-operation with and in partner countries, and other donors.

For a long time the tools for integrating gender equality have been in place, but "there was no oil to lubricate the engine". We are working on that right now within our own organization. Making sure that gender equality is expressed in all policy products and other organizational elements. Making sure that the integration of gender equality is visible and verifiable.

## UNICEF

KRISTINA GONCALVES

The UN General Assembly constantly requires the UN agencies to work with gender equality and to adopt gender mainstreaming as a tool. All UN agencies are required to report to the Secretary General of the UN about the progress in terms of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

UNICEF and all other UN agencies have gender mainstreaming as a strategy since 1994 when there was a shift from 'women and development' to 'gender and development'. UN agencies and UNICEF have, since 1998, a human rights-based approach to programming, i.e. the Rights of Child and the CEDAW Convention form the basis of programming. This is a challenge as it is a window of opportunity - putting women's rights and gender equality at the centre of programming. An area that UNICEF focuses on to end gender discrimination is girls' education. Another area is that UNICEF recognises women's rights as vital to children's rights. In terms of human resources, UNICEF has affirmative action since 1980.

The tools used by UNICEF for engendering its activities include the life cycle approach, advocacy, training, specific guidelines for programmers on how to do a gender audit and gender analyses.

What are some of the real constraints that we face in UNICEF in making gender equality a key concern in our work? The first and foremost problem is at the level of knowledge and perception. Gender perception varies from gender blind to gender sensitive - the most common perception is gender-neutral. UNICEF does not speak of boys and girls but of children, except the Latin America region that has gender sensitive language. Second, while 'gender mainstreaming' has been adopted as a strategy, it is an awkward expression that is not easy to explain. It does not help us focus on what needs to be changed nor provide indicators to measure the extent to which gender equity has been achieved. Third, accountability mechanisms for staff and managers are not in place. There are no costs attached to not being gender sensitive and as there is no incentive system, it is difficult to have accountability with regard to gender issues.

Overall, there needs to be more strategic thinking with regard to ways forward in getting institutions to

make gender equality a key concern. As for example, there is a need to see boys and men as equal partners and to include them more than is happening in the work of gender equality. Organisations must realise that men (and boys) are strategic allies. Further, economic analysis of the costs of not being gender sensitive has never been attempted and therefore there is a lack of understanding of the impact of **gender inequality** on development. Finally, there is an "Evaporation Syndrome" taking place as regards gender policy in that the focus on gender issues seems to be disappearing from policy statements and plans of action. The recent example of the evaporation of gender sensitivity is the HIV/AIDS debate. The document of the UNGASS on HIV/AIDS was very strong on gender issues, and also included issues of male behaviour. However, a year later, gender had evaporated from the XIV International AIDS Conference Declaration at Barcelona!

The windows of opportunity for mainstreaming gender into UN agencies' agendas include (i) the UN Secretary General's Initiative on violence; and (ii) the HIV/AIDS pandemic because all governments are struggling to find tools and ways to combat the pandemic and work can be done to show that gender blindness can be lethal in the battle against HIV/AIDS.

Finally one must realise that bureaucrats can only intervene to a limited extent - political involvement and political will are essential for engendering policy, institutions and organisational culture supportive of women's rights and gender equality.

### Questions, responses and discussions

The presentations highlighted that while there is recognition and acceptance within institutions of the importance of gender equality in development, the *practice* of incorporating a gender perspective in all programmes and policies is beset with difficulties that cannot be overcome by present strategies. The main strategy has been to incorporate gender equality concerns in external policies, to demonstrate the importance of gender analysis as a tool for operationalising the mandate of the institution, and setting up of gender infrastructure (gender focal points/ departments) in some instances. For the most part, however, the integration of gender equality

in the work done by these institutions relies on committed gender expertise and the 'good will' of colleagues. In other words, accountability for ensuring that gender equality concerns informs policy-making and programme implementation on a sustained basis is hard to pin down. Both Margret Verwijk representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands Government, and Kristina Goncalves of UNICEF spoke about the problem of not having accountability mechanisms for staff and managers in place.

In the plenary discussions following the presentations by panel members many of the questions to the panellists and responses revolved round the question of accountability and responsibility.

#### ***Institutional mandates and accountability for gender equity commitments***

A number of questions from the participants addressed the issue of whether it was possible to enforce gender equity commitments for global institutions whose mandate was not necessarily the promotion of equal rights and human rights. As for example, the mandate of The World Bank as an international financial institution is first and foremost economic development. Issues of poverty, inequality and disadvantage are important to address within this mandate because these cause 'inefficiencies' in the economic system. However, when macro economic reforms are undermining the possibility to redistribute in favour of disadvantaged groups, advocates of gender equality within the global institutions and outside find their work much harder. From the point of view of the 'insiders' in international financial institutions the case for gender equality has to be argued on the basis of costs involved internationally of failing to reach gender equality goals. Measures to assess the impact of economic policies on gender relations, commissioning of studies to measure the costs of failing to act on gender equality are some of the ways in which 'insiders' educate the economists within The Bank and as well partner governments.

#### ***Locating and enforcing accountability***

In all the accounts and discussions the problem of locating and enforcing accountability to gender equality commitments featured prominently. A question addressed to the representative of the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands Government, raised the issue that with the present Dutch Government policy of decentralising development aid decisions to the Embassies and support to sector wide approaches, the policy to focus on women's emancipation and advancement was being undermined. The Royal Netherlands Embassy in India no longer has a specialist addressing gender issues in development. Gender issues have to be mainstreamed into the sectors that the Embassy supports. While it is assumed that everybody in the Embassy is responsible for gender equity commitments, nobody is specifically held accountable for not getting it done. The response from the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged the problems. While the Heads of Missions have greater authority and budgets in the new decentralised system of aid administration, there is no guarantee that the gender policy will be interpreted in the same way in all Embassies. The greater autonomy does provide the possibility to the Embassies to develop their own Gender and Development programme but of course this depends on the availability of gender expertise in the Embassies.

#### ***Gender Mainstreaming and accountability***

Gender Mainstreaming has been adopted as a tool for gender integration in the UN system and also by other multilateral institutions. This strategy raises two kinds of questions regarding accountability. First, gender mainstreaming as a tool does not actually convey to those using it what exactly it is that they are responsible for ensuring. According to Kristina Goncalves, UNICEF, it would be preferable to focus on women's rights, children's rights and men's rights because the rights focus actually tells one what has to be achieved through our work. Second, gender mainstreaming as a tool is supposed to ensure that everybody is answerable for gender equity commitments in their work which has generally meant that nobody is ultimately responsible for getting it done.

## WOMEN, POWER AND POLITICS

A critical question that gender and development practitioners have faced in the last decade is how to put politics back into the international gender agenda and how to ensure the continued presence of the women's movements and their concerns in redefining governance. These questions have lost neither their urgency nor their relevance today. The last few years have seen concerted efforts across the world, particularly in the South, to engage more and more women into formal political processes and institutions. Hundreds and thousands of women living at the intersection of gender, class and other forms of disadvantages and inequalities have come to take political office. These experiences are imbued with legends of triumphs and exultation but also with instances of bitter opposition and open hostility. These experiences have also made us confront myriad questions. Is it enough for an increasing number of women to be in political office? Or is it critical to have women who are capable of bringing in transformatory visions and practices into the arena of formal politics? How do we support and sustain them so that they remain in power and remain committed to a feminist agenda of equality and justice? Do women have to create a new mode of political engagement to break away from hierarchical, unequal and unjust mores of traditional mainstream politics?

Both our Keynote Speakers, Pregs Govender from South Africa and Gita Sen from India, are feminist activists and have a long history of active engagement in trade union and parliamentary politics and in feminist theory and praxis. They were requested to *challenge our vision and force us to move beyond the borders of our own thinking* on these questions.

## Feminist politics in a fundamentalist world<sup>3</sup>

GITA SEN

I begin with some trepidation as to what new or fresh insight I can give. I am going to talk about feminist politics in a fundamentalist world and I refer not just to religious but other kinds of fundamentalisms that have been tramping around globally, nationally and locally for the last two decades at least. I refer also to market fundamentalism that has dominated the global political landscape in the past decades.

### *Feminism and citizenship*

Feminist politics for over a century has primarily been about completing the grand social project of democracy and about completing the project of citizenship. 'Citizenship' here is defined not in its narrow sense as the 'right to vote' etc., but in the sense feminists have been defining and redefining it to mean *entitlements, rights, responsibilities* and *agency*. Citizenship implies a balance between all of these. This meaning of 'citizenship' of having agency as free subjects has meaning only, if we give substantive content to it. Both the Indian Supreme Court and South African Constitution speak about equality of citizens in a substantive sense. The Indian Supreme Court has ruled that if one does not have substantive equality (i.e., the means and the mechanisms by which formal equality can be realised for citizens) then one does not have equality at all. This substantive equality has been central to feminist politics and is inherent in its understanding of citizenship.

The meaning of citizenship in feminist politics operates at four dimensions: (a) the political level; (b) the economic level (substantive economic equality is implied in respect to property, labour market and unpaid work); (c) the cultural level of norms and values; and (d) the personal level of family, home and relationships. For citizenship to operate substantively, it must be present and visible at all four dimensions.

This idea of citizenship, of having to move in all these spheres, is relatively new in feminist politics. Personally, I began thinking along these lines about a decade ago. The important thing about these four dimensions is, that the absence of one dimension

<sup>3</sup> The text of this speech was written from the transcript of the tape. Gita Sen did not make a written contribution but has checked the text that was developed.



puts the other dimensions and their achievements 'at risk'. It means that the project of feminist politics is significantly more complex than we would like to believe. An example is that one can have political citizenship i.e., equal right to vote, but if one had not moved along dimensions of sexuality, then one could remain constrained in the achievements with respect to political citizenship.

The history of this century has been one of systematically moving forwards on certain dimensions and slipping back in the others. In post-colonial nations, the feminist political movement was inextricably linked with nationalist movements. In the economic dimension, only Cuba had explicitly recognised rights for women in the domestic sphere (Cuban Family Code of 1974). Therefore, in spite of all the formal socialist rhetoric about equality for women, the recognition of economics as it operates in the domestic sphere was relatively weak. So far as early Soviet politics was concerned, Alexandra Kollontai and others tried to infuse the debates on the so-called 'woman question' with the question of women's personal autonomy, issues around sexuality and reproduction. However, these issues got totally marginalized in the evolution of Soviet politics. In the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, in both North and South, the sphere of personal autonomy in relation to sexuality and child-bearing gained greater prominence than they had had in the post-War years.

The gendered systems that we work against are those that deny women's citizenship at any or at all the dimension(s) discussed above. This, in a sense, provides the answer to the debates that had come up in feminist literature on the questions about universality: "Is the subordination of women a universal phenomenon?" Even in societies where private property had not developed to its fullest extent, there is evidence of the existence of gender inequalities. Therefore, the 'universality' of gender inequality stems from that fact that any one of the dimensions of 'inequality' may exist.

### **Context**

'Context' for feminist politics is absolutely central and critical because *what* one achieves and *how* one achieves it, depends upon the context. With respect to the feminist project of citizenship, the 'context' exists at all four dimensions discussed above. The context determines the challenges faced by and the opportunities available to feminist politics at that

time to make change happen. Because the context is changing, the focus and the mechanisms of feminist politics also change. The substantive question for feminist politics today is whether the context of fundamentalism is becoming so overwhelming that it is constricting the realms of feminist politics into ever-narrower spheres. This is an important question to address: if one believes that the context is so difficult that one can barely survive, then the nature of the alliances, the nature of the trade-offs that one is willing to make may also change dramatically. To survive, political movements and organisations have to do a lot of things they would not do when they are not faced with the crisis of survival. Therefore, the fundamental question for feminist politics today is about whether fundamentalism in the forms we have today has in fact constricted the space for feminist politics, so that it is forced into alliances it would not have otherwise made, narrowing down demands in ways it would not have narrowed them? This is a key question that feminist politics has to answer today.

It is my argument that globalisation, which is closely linked to both '*market fundamentalism*' and '*political fundamentalism*' that is arising globally and in many countries, does constrict and does move feminist politics towards particular kinds of alliances and coalitions, but it also provides opportunities. Because one always focuses on constrictions, I want to point towards some of the opportunities here.

### **Social contracts**

What has the process of globalisation done?

Globalisation had broken three of the major social contracts that have existed in the world for at least fifty years. The first social contract that has broken down is that between workers and employers, framed as this relationship was in the right to collective bargaining and rights through social democracy. These have been significantly broken because of the extreme mobility of capital and the consequent loss of bargaining power of labour unions in countries of both the North and the South. This has happened in the last 2 to 3 decades, and is still continuing, and has affected even the country where it was most strongly developed, namely, Japan.

The second contract that has been broken is that of (a) the welfare state in the countries of the North where a set of entitlements and rights of citizens was matched by the responsibilities of the state and (b) the developmental state in countries of the South.

The third social contract that has been broken is the contract that brought together countries of the South and North in an understanding of living in a common world and, therefore, the mutual responsibility for the project of development. From the Marshall Plan which presaged the beginnings of development assistance to current day discussions of 'aid fatigue' and conditionality is a significant step.

While it does not require much acuity of vision to recognise the breaking of these social contracts, why might this breaking itself create windows of opportunity? The reason is that each of these contracts, overtly for the first two, and less overtly for the third, was a deeply gendered contract. The contract between employers and employees, for example was mainly between *male* workers' unions and public and private sector firms. The needs of women workers – even in nations where the social democratic contract was best developed – were not fully recognised. The welfare state of the North and the development programs of South were deeply gendered in terms of what they did not include – that is the responsibilities of the care economy – the rights of mothers, girls' education.

The re-negotiation of these contracts will have to happen since capitalism cannot function without adequate regulation. This re-negotiation, however, cannot happen without women, without recognition of women's political and economic rights as citizens. This is because of the growing feminisation of labour making women workers numerically at least a force to reckon with. Organizations and unions can no longer afford to re-negotiate the social contract without women. An example of how this is happening can be seen from a seemingly innocuous report in a financial daily in the last year. According to this report fifty thousand workers of the Culinary Workers Union in Las Vegas ('the strip') went on strike resulting in the paralysis of the 'strip'. What has to be noted is that the bulk of the workers employed in the housekeeping sections are not only women, but immigrant women, and the demand was not only for better pay but better working conditions and respect. Similarly there is a complete re-thinking on the project of development – although less clearer at this point. However, what has become clear is that, without gender analysis of budgets, without going through how money is allocated for different needs, what happens to the needs of women specifically in these contexts, the rewiring of these social contracts will not happen.

### ***Identity Politics***

Those are the opportunities. However, the other more disturbing question about fundamentalism is the constriction in another sense. This constriction arises from the question whether politics is itself becoming a constricting struggle between fundamentalisms. The openness of public debate, freedom of movement and of expression, are all increasingly getting narrower at global, national and sub-national level. The challenge here for feminists is how to deal with and address our relationship to identity politics that fractures as opposed to the politics of social construction. "Where do we stand vis-à-vis identity politics versus a politics of social construction?" This is a very difficult question, and one that feminists must address if the feminist movement has to progress in the future – because the politics of identity is showing itself up as a politics that is deeply sexual and deeply violent. Both of those put together mean that if feminists are to move beyond this realm, then feminist politics must be able to move towards a project of social construction that includes an ethos of *inclusion*, of *equity* and of *equality*. The clash of fundamentalisms is taking this ethos out of the political debate altogether.

### ***Implications***

Feminist politics must act along all four dimensions enumerated and not just one. This is crucial since there are significant gaps, even in the feminist movement, between those who work on and speak about economic rights and those who work on and speak about sexuality and reproduction. Unless the two come together, the movement is much weaker than it needs to be.

Secondly, governance has to be seen as a project of social construction that has to include the ethos of inclusion, equity and equality. Although feminist politics is the most inclusive and transformative of all politics, it has to answer some deep and serious questions in terms of the constriction of space brought about by fundamentalism.

Finally, what is the role for an autonomous women's movement here, and how do we include ourselves in other movements dominated by progressive but un-gendered men? The task is to build those absolutely necessary alliances – a task that is as difficult as mainstreaming gender in the World Bank!

## **Sharing the experience of being a feminist fighting for the rights of marginalised women in South Africa, during the struggle against apartheid and in the post-apartheid democracy**

PREGS GOVENDER

The task before me is enormously difficult – had I been asked to talk on the South African women’s budget, or changing the law, it would have been much easier! Instead you asked me to speak from my personal experience. The questions the conference organisers posed were:

Who am I? Why did I get involved politically? What has been the trajectory of my experience? What have been the contradictions I faced? What were the opportunities that I created?

Power and politics has traditionally been the domain of our fathers and grandfathers. The sari that I am wearing today belonged to my Grandmother who was widowed young with four sons and my mother. A market gardener and midwife she used the power of herbs to heal. I wear her saris today to honour her power, and the power of all our grandmothers, mothers, sisters and all of us here today, who have tried to enter the ‘traditional’ domains of power – outside the home. While remaining whole, intact in a world that has very little respect for women, especially women who are poor and working-class.

We live in a world whose wealth has, and continues to be, ruthlessly appropriated by a handful of men (and a thimble-full of women) through their multinational corporations be it arms or pharmaceuticals; through their organisations: the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank; through their G-8. Of course there are women and men outside these parameters who benefit, who collude. But the vast majority of those who are the poorest, of those worst hit by violence, by HIV/AIDS, by too many fundamentalisms, are women from the global ‘South’ that stretches across all our countries and includes many citizens made invisible in Europe and the USA.

So, who am I? Why did I do what I did and continue to do? Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge the amazing women from South Africa who are present in this room and many who are not, whose stories helped weave my story. Shamim was the key founder and leader of ‘Speak’ magazine. Mam Lydia and I worked closely in the Women’s National Coalition

and she was an icon in the trade union movement. One of the Women’s National Coalition’s legal experts, Cathy, spoke earlier today. The members of GAP present here, Pumla and Phumeza, whose organisation literally bridged the gap between women in parliament and local constituencies in the Western Cape. Celeste is from Getnet whose organisation worked with the Women’s Budget Initiative to develop training materials for trainers. Likhapa whose eloquence on Customary Law contributes significantly to changing the law – all their stories are part of my story as much as mine is part of theirs.

So who am I? I began answering your question in writing my bio – in the first person instead of in the convenient third person – our hidden hand that saves us from our fears and charges of egotism and self-aggrandisement.

My great grandparents came from India as indentured labourers. My paternal grandfather was a van driver and a member of his trade union and was retrenched and unemployed for part of his working life. His wife, my grandmother, taught me (through her example) the act of meditation – the use of silence to hear oneself – while defending my right to refuse religion. The letters in the word listen also spell silent. We listen best when we are silent, deeply silent.

My parents were teachers, and my father was politically active as a playwright and sports journalist. The Group Areas Act moved them twice, first from their family homes. The second time saw us move as a nuclear family into someone’s garage. Since then I have moved often and stayed everywhere – in basement flats to the nice house in the suburbs. I refused to learn how to cook and ran around with my older brother who did most of the household chores we were assigned as children. I remember at a very young age writing in a school creative essay that I wanted to end poverty and suffering. As an 11-year-old I joined my older brother in an anti-Republic Day Campaign.

### ***Student Activism and Women’s Politics***

At 14 years, two years before matriculation and the Soweto uprising, I was elected secretary of my school’s first representative body – the start of political activism that was to span to the present – almost 28 years. In high school I attended a meeting of the Black Women’s Federation headed by Winnie

Mandela and Fatima Meer. As a so-called Indian girl, two of my heroes were Veliamma<sup>4</sup> and Sister Poomani, a nurse whom I had the privilege of meeting and working with, a person who was imprisoned and tortured. She continued to dedicate her life to serving the people of South Africa, whilst not brooking “bullshit from her own male comrades”. Black consciousness during that period made an impact, leading me to reject the divisive or ethnically oriented labels such as “non-white”, “non-European” or “Indian” and I asserted proudly that I was “Black”.

At the University, involvement with student politics coincided with activism in communities and support to trade unions. It was a time of making posters and handbills, barricading hostels, facing the army, teargas, guns and dogs and losing my fear of the State. In one demonstration, after being attacked and dispersed, a group of us ran back towards the police after picking up some large sticks lying at a construction site on the campus. The police turned and fled. It was a moment before I realised that hundreds of others were behind us!

In trying to mobilise around women’s experiences, the men that I ran shoulder-to-shoulder with first tried to control, through their girlfriends, and then tried to crush, the first women’s committee that we formed. We organised women around rape and other forms of violence and mobilised the largest number of women of any SRC committee.

I started teaching (something I have always loved) with a baby and a husband. The response from the students was enthusiastic. Aruna will recall the meeting in Washington where the Secretary General of a large international NGO spoke of the impact that that young teacher had on his becoming a feminist. However the teaching hierarchy did not share their enthusiasm and I was regularly transferred, which with two young children, was extremely difficult. Shamim reminded me a few years back that the founding meeting for Speak took place in my flat with babies running around playing.

I was also beginning to be critical of the political organisation I was working with, the Natal Indian Congress, which organised the working-class in the

so-called Indian townships. The organisation was racially exclusive, hierarchical and centralised in its decision-making and control of resources. Very few women were included in its middle-class dominated decision-making structures, and those of us who were, never worked together as women for women within that structure: we worked outside it.

Women’s organisations offered possibilities for non-racial, more democratic organising and I made a conscious choice to focus my energy and attention here, after campaigning against the anti-tri-cameral elections of 1984. In organising work for the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), I forged friendships and comradeship that remain strong till today. It was the time of rising state-sponsored vigilantism. A few days before Victoria Mxenge, our chairperson, was assassinated outside her home, we met in her office as the NOW Working Committee and we stood in the street outside as she regaled us with her humour and loud laughter.

It was a time of attempts by women to unite across the country against apartheid, and a time when male comrades attempted control through women, causing several failed attempts to re-launch the FEDSAW, which had existed in the 50s. I will never forget the tears of old comrades, the shock of the guest speaker, Helen Joseph, the prayers of a young Thoko Didiza after travelling across the country to be told that we were not going to re-launch. Of course there was the laughter – Florence Mkhize saying to me late at night, after driving our delegation back from Johannesburg to Durban: “You drive so well, Pregs – just like a man.” The security police, armed with massive guns ordering us to the floor outside the NOW offices. Phozo and myself were taken into the office and she was asked whether she was Nozizwe, whom they detained shortly afterwards. Of course, Phozo’s answer was NO. I was asked if I was Pregs and of course I also said NO!

### ***The Trade Unions***

In 1987, I left my University job to join the trade unions, specifically, GAWU, now SACTWU (South African Clothing and Textile Workers’ Union) – the union with the largest number of women members. At the founding Congress of GAWU, I was elected

<sup>4</sup> Veliamma was a sixteen-year old girl to whom Mahatma Gandhi attributed the success of the 1913 Passive Resistance Campaign in South Africa and who died a few days after her release from prison.

National Education Officer and my brief was to develop and run an education programme to ensure that workers would give the union (in transition from being a sweetheart union) a mandate to merge and join COSATU (the non-racial trade union federation).

At the end of the two-year programme approximately 100,000 workers gave the union a unanimous mandate to merge and join COSATU. The experience of a shop steward appointed by management to report on these workshops best illustrates the key to the campaign's success. At the end of the first day he told us that the workshop made him recall his passionate opposition to the injustice of apartheid and he was now angry at the bosses' attempt to co-opt him as their puppet. Instead he went back, told the workers the truth and asked if they would elect him to serve them. His factory became one of the strongest in the union.

During the WSSD, I wrote an article on what has happened to one of the finest of the union's women leaders, Rita Bantjies, the Chairperson of the Natal Region, of the impact on her life of a global economy based on profit and greed as well as that of a national government that lost precious days, months, years, lives... in a tragic debate about whether HIV causes Aids. She is today unemployed, one of the hundred of thousands who have been directly impacted on by government's implementation of GATT and has lost all three of her daughters, two of them to Aids.

I moved to Cape Town with my two children, leaving behind as bad memory the underground unit that I had been drawn into and my ex-husband. In the union in Cape Town I proposed doing a feasibility study on establishing a workers college to develop worker leadership in the trade union movement. I went on to establish and was mandated to head the Workers' College. Most of those who emerged from the courses are now in leadership in government, NGOs and in the union movement itself. I would like to quote from the Workers College Booklet what the College meant for the students in their own words: Rachel Visser: *"I learnt to love myself and accept myself as I am. In the COSATU Education Conference I stood up and gave an input. Everyone thought that I was an official and could not believe that this was worker leadership"*. Joe Sineke: *"The "Big Man" attitude I have dropped and committed to developing leadership amongst the new shopstewards"*. Neville Alcock:

*"The Workers College changed my perception of building power and how to use power. We must build power for the collective good, encourage individuals to develop and take responsibility for the running of our organisation – even if it means that those in power are sowing the seeds for others to take their place. We must not fear this."*

Towards the end of 1992, I was approached by the Women's National Coalition's (WNC) recently elected Convenor, Frene Ginwala, and other members of the ANC to "direct, co-ordinate and plan all aspects of the WNC campaign, from media, education and research to the organisational development of the WNC". I met and worked with women of depth and wisdom from cities and rural areas across South Africa in the course of this campaign. I had been told to conceptualise this campaign at a desk on the 36<sup>th</sup> floor of the Carlton Centre in Johannesburg. Going to the regions and organising a National Workshop to do this met with threats that I would be fired. I went ahead and the campaign was shaped on the basis of women's proposals from all parts of our country. By the end of this campaign the Women's National Coalition is estimated to have involved approximately two million women. One of the lessons of this period for me was that patriarchy all too often has a face that looks exactly like ours and can fit all too comfortably within our selves.

I spent a month before the elections working in the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP) National Office and this was how I came to see the final version of the RDP book. I noticed that all the work that women had done had been excluded from the final version. I offered to do a gender edit, and was told that I had only one night to do it in. This was a document that would come to be regarded as South Africa's key progressive programme. I systematically tried to include most of the 'Women and the RDP' workshop proceedings into it – a flawed and utterly imperfect exercise as the man in charge removed most of it before it finally went to print. With the RDP booklet, I did the same, but then went to the printer's myself to see what could be put back into it!

After the elections I moved to Cape Town with my children and the man in my life. It was a difficult time as my ex-husband, from whom I was separated, contested the divorce and threatened split custody. That represented, probably, the most painful challenge of my entire life. I could not bear the thought of

split custody, as though children were like property that could be divided. I fought for and obtained joint custody as opposed to sole custody as I believe it is important for children to enjoy both their parents.

The skills that I learnt in all those years of activism, skills learnt from women of my country and all of your countries too, equipped me to do the work I did while I was in the South African Parliament. Those skills equipped me with the power to know that we *can* do it differently. So that we can hear the voices of women, that we can make sure that those voices are heard in the so-called 'corridors of power'.

The bio reads very nicely about the achievements. The fact that we ensured that 80% of the priorities the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women (JMCIQLSW) have been enacted into law. Pioneering the idea in the 1994 budget debate and politically driving the process to ensure substantial government commitment to engendering the budget (the Women's Budget Initiative). Working on the abortion legislation through the Health Committee and getting a unanimous standing ovation including from those in the gallery who had come from their march against abortion etc. That does not convey the reality that on every single law, on every single budget issue, on every single policy issue, on every single issue of institutional transformation there was a struggle. There was a need to mobilise, to organise. For success you had to, every step of the way, be creative and even subversive. Structures of power are essentially patriarchal in nature. There is no way that one can deny that, and therefore it is vital to trust one's voice and the voices of the women who put you there. As the chair of the JMCIQLSW, I was able to have significant influence to ensure that the Committee's brief to "monitor the implementation of CEDAW and the BPFA" focused on South Africa's poorest. This was critical in the choice of hearings on poverty, the budget and macroeconomic policy, violence against women, HIV/Aids, Employment and the Jobs Summit, Customary law and women's access to land. The work of the Committee was not confined to the precincts of Parliament as we attempted to hold hearings in the provinces within the constraints of our own budget.

If we sat back and went along with what existed, then we were not going to change anything for anyone. The night before the launch of GEAR<sup>5</sup> in Parliament, I was told that I had been selected to speak in the GEAR debate the next morning and I was given a copy of the document for the first time. I spent the night reading that and I tried to understand and to interrogate what this was. I concluded by early next morning that this was not good news for the women that I was there to represent. The next morning in Parliament I asked to be removed from the list, as I had not confirmed that I would speak. I was asked to speak to the Minister in charge – who happens to be the Minister in charge of the status of women in South Africa. He first flattered me by saying that the government has chosen me as the key woman to speak on this issue. When I continued to refuse he charged me with being politically irresponsible. I did not change my mind.

At the end of May this year, I resigned from the South African Parliament. There were two critical issues that preceded my resignation. The one is linked to the fact that I had spent years in Parliament working on developing the Women's Budget which represented re-prioritising the transformation of the apartheid state in the interests of those who had been most marginalised – women who were poor and from rural or peri-urban areas. It is not a technocratic tool... a little bit of tinkering, but about interrogating the macro-economic context that determines the 'size of the pie' down to the choices within programmes across departments from national to local level. It is not about fighting for little bits between the groups that are all marginalized, the disabled, the youth, the children and the women: it is NOT about that! The logic was that if your budget, your economics was geared towards those who were at the very bottom, instead of the privileged minority, all those above the very bottom would positively benefit. The truth is that of those who are disabled, those who are the children, the youth and the elderly, it is the girls and women who generally shoulder the heaviest and most oppressive burdens.

One of the key things in governance is the way you choose to use your money. Our country took a decision to spend over fifty billion on buying arms

<sup>5</sup> "GEAR" in South African context is the acronym for a package of controversial neo-liberal reforms being pursued by the South African Government.

from multi-national companies. I waited anxiously to hear the voices of women MPs in our Parliament and in yours challenging those decisions. Saying: "You cannot do that! This is a country that has come out of war." Last year when the budget came to vote, I registered my opposition to the arms deal and was reported in that weekend's paper (The Sunday Independent) as being the only MP to do so.

The second issue was that of women and HIV/AIDS. It was an extremely painful issue. Our committee held hearings and I was mandated to write the report. It starkly illustrates the connections that exist between sexuality, violence, power and gender inequality. Its recommendations drew extensively on the Brazilian experience that shows that we can as a country actually deal successfully with this. The report was tabled on the first day Parliament reconvened in 2002. I was commended by the Speaker for the brilliance of the Report. Yet to date Parliament has neither debated it nor adopted its recommendations.

Since I left Parliament, I have been grappling with the question of being able to recognise the power of my words in my own activism and trying to prioritise that. HIV/AIDS is one of the issues that I feel passionate about and prioritise through a whole range of different ways. Amongst the organisations I serve is the Aids Advisory Board of Nelson Mandela's Foundation and on its behalf I served on the Expert Review Committee of the NMF/HSRC study of HIV/AIDS in SA. Two of the first meetings I addressed after my resignation were the Treatment Congress that was convened by COSATU and the Treatment Action Campaign. The second was a Women's Day Meeting in Kwa-Zulu Natal, my hometown, where so many of the women that I had worked with in the '80s and the '90s were present, too many of whom had experienced personal tragedy caused by HIV/AIDS.

I have not left power, nor have I left politics. Politics is beyond institutions. Power is not defined, and we should not allow it to be defined by those who think that they alone have it. It is critical for each one of us to recognise, to value and to respect our own agency, our own power and each other's power; to re-define power: not as the power of fear and hate, but as the power of love and courage. To believe that we can actually silence the patriarch in our own minds so we can hear ourselves think and be.

## Questions, responses and discussions

### *The politics of identity: differences in terminology or ideology*

In her keynote address Gita Sen characterised the politics of identity as being divisive, violent and gendered. The question was raised as to whether this assertion stemmed from differences in meaning of the term identity politics or whether it was an ideological difference. The example given to explain the background to this question was of Black women in the United States whose involvement in feminist politics is closely connected to the consciousness of one's race identity (and by implication race politics).

Gita's response was that the differences were both ideological and of terminology. The forms of identity politics prevalent today tend not to be politics of social construction – to the extent that *it tends to be fracturing*. Therefore, she was opposed to identity politics that did not have a larger social project. From the perspective of women, one of the issues in identity politics has been what to do with men? If it is not possible to be a feminist man, then feminists do not have a project of social construction. Therefore a way out has to be developed to construct a project of social change that will allow for an exposure of injustice and inequality but which will still allow for transformation and social construction. That is one of the biggest challenges that feminist politics faces today.

### *Human rights versus cultural identity*

Referring to the situation in West Asia where the movements for women's rights and social change are in conflict with the forces of religious fundamentalism, feminist movements are caught in the dilemma of having to oppose both these forces and global forces of domination that seek to annihilate the distinctive cultural identity, norms and values using women's position as their excuse. The question was how the struggle for equal rights should be continued under these circumstances.

Gita Sen responded that the challenge, especially for the women's movements in the South, is not to give up on women's rights and the universality of human rights while not falling into the cultural hegemony of the North generally but

increasingly of the dominant superpower. Like all politics it becomes in many cases a question of tactics rather than that of strategic position. If one is dealing with those who would essentially use culture as a cloak or a fig leaf for patriarchal dominance then one asserts the universality of women's rights as human rights. However, if one is faced with a moment of extreme cultural hegemony and domination, then one may have to assert 'cultural identity'! In practical politics what wins is the presence of a movement that asserts its voice. One must remember that women's rights are part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and assertion of those rights was not only for 'Western' nations emerging out of post-Hitler Europe, but also for all the nations including those that were emerging out of colonialism.

***On the donor rhetoric of corruption, good governance and development***

While it is widely acknowledged that corruption and bad governance affect development, the question was asked as to why Gita Sen in her keynote address termed the issues of corruption and poor governance as part of the new donor rhetoric. In responding Gita Sen explained that while no one would argue in favour of corruption and bad governance, it is necessary to bear in mind that these and other issues have emerged out of a particular politics. It is not accidental that these issues emerged at a time when there were major arguments regarding the need to downsize nation states. Therefore, every argument was how bad the 'State' was. Corruption was one of the major arguments that were used in that context. Unfortunately, the 'good governance anti-corruption' arguments of the agencies came out of that. The results were, as in India, that corruption in post-liberalisation era as compared to the pre-liberalisation era in fact became larger! Therefore the arguments had nothing to do with governance or corruption. In fact, if corruption and good governance were the fundamental issues, then privatisation is the first thing that needs to be re-looked at. Because privatisation has been the biggest source of corruption in every country of the South where it has occurred!

***Going against the party: what are the consequences?***

Pregs Govender resigned from Parliament and opposed her own party on an issue which she

felt strongly about. It is the experience of most women politicians that once they go against the wishes of their party, their political careers are over. How does Pregs relate to her party since she left Parliament? In her response Pregs explained that there is always a danger of being labelled, threatened or ostracised when one stands up for or against an issue. There is also a struggle for the heart and soul of a political party on every single one of these issues. Her approach to her work within the party has been a critical part of her interventions. By and large the responses that she had received from members of her political party have been of respect and admiration for her courage and actions. What each country faces is the global system of domination – individual countries cannot be isolated from that global context. Decisions have to be made on every issue whether or not to collude with that global system or whether to follow that course of action that is beneficial for the people in the country. Elected members and those in politics have that power and that choice. The power of members of parliaments is to exert that control and challenge their political parties.

**People's Plan Campaign, Kerala, India**

THOMAS ISAAC

Decentralisation of government has been hailed as the model for promoting citizen participation in governance, making decision-making more transparent, and making resource allocation and mobilisation more efficient. By bringing government closer to people's lives, decentralisation processes open up the possibility for the representation of different interests at the local level and the setting up of development priorities according to people's needs. While Constitutional Amendments in India in 1993 paved the way for the setting up of elected self-government bodies and a 33% quota for women's representation in these bodies, the process of democratic decentralisation has taken different forms in different states of India. The state of Kerala pioneered a model of democratic decentralisation that devolved both power and resources to the self-government bodies and attempted to create a culture of participation and democracy at the grass root level. As the architect of this model entitled the People's Plan Campaign, Dr. Issac was asked to discuss the Kerala experience and highlight specifically in what way this model contributed to



enhancing women's participation and met gender strategic interests.

The presentation by Professor Isaac was divided in three parts: (1) Introduction to Kerala – the 'Kerala Model' – its crisis and why decentralisation right up to grassroots had become necessary. (2) The People's Planning Campaign. (3) How the PPC is being carried forward in a particular constituency in Kerala state. The first two parts of the presentation are summarised below.

### ***The Kerala Model***

Kerala is a state in India<sup>6</sup> that has a high Human Development Index. In terms of literacy, life expectancy and infant mortality rates, Kerala is closer to developed countries of the North. However, per capita income is similar to, or even lower, than in other states of India. This is what is known as the Kerala Model or the Kerala phenomenon. In Kerala, the 'trickle down' model of development that was followed in the rest of India was turned upside down. Some of the reasons why this was so can be attributed to (a) the history of social reform movements from the pre-independence period followed later by radical grassroots movements that generated a demand from below; (b) the State played a very positive role in the redistribution of wealth and land as a result of these powerful grassroots movements and demands from the social sector; and (c) public policies provisioned the social sectors of health and education.

### ***Crisis of the model***

The crisis of this development model has been discernible in the last decade. The main causes of this crisis are as follows: (a) stagnation in material production; (b) deterioration in the quality of services – with the state increasingly becoming unable to foot the bill for social services; (c) marginalized groups, particularly indigenous populations, were not adequately reached by the model; (d) invisibility of women and their subordinate status – only 14% women's participation in labour; (e) ecological degeneration; (f) inability of the government to finance its expenditures and degeneration of the state; (g) political backlash – threat to and a setback for the radical democratic heritage of the state.

### ***New Strategy***

The new strategy adopted by the previous left coalition government of the state to confront and tide over the crisis was based on two main elements. First, for the large-scale production sectors a greater private sector role was envisaged, with the state to provide only infrastructure support. Second, for the small-scale sector (agricultural sector and service sector), the state would begin a process of decentralisation. The aims of decentralisation were to enhance citizen participation in planning and to promote efficient administration of grass root development with better choice for the people, an integrated approach, additional resources at the grass roots and transparency in implementation and monitoring.

The challenges posed by this new development policy were two-fold. First, the role of mass (people's) organisations would have to change from intervention only in the sphere of distribution to getting involved in the production processes. Second, the new development politics required a reorientation to democratisation in the production process with the intervention by mass organisations.

### ***The change in the structure of government in India***

Till the 1990s elected structures did not exist from district level downwards. Below the district level government splits into urban and rural bodies. For urban areas there are town councils, municipalities or corporations based on population. For rural areas, the sub-district level had community development blocks with block panchayats, village panchayats and gram sabhas (village assemblies). The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments (in 1993) mandated direct elected democracy at the local level and gave rights to local bodies to participate in the planning processes. The flaws in the amendments were that (i) the functions at different levels were not demarcated specifically; (ii) planning units were arbitrary geographic units; (iii) these were compartmentalised into 'urban' and 'rural' areas and thus integrated governance was not possible.

Despite these shortcomings, the Constitutional Amendments allowing for decentralised government were a window of opportunity for democratic

<sup>6</sup> The Indian union is divided for political and administrative purposes into states each with their own elected assemblies. Kerala is one such state in the Indian union.

reorganisation. However, most states in the Indian Union missed the opportunity for democratic reorganisation because of vested interests at power centres, lack of capacity at local levels, and the compromising attitude adopted towards change, pacing change according to capacity. This compromise ultimately became an excuse for not devolving power and resources to the local bodies.

### ***Kerala State and the People's Plan Campaign – the strategy***

In 1996, when the Left Coalition came to power in Kerala, a new strategy was adopted.

The state government decided to allocate 30% to 40% of its planned budget from the 9<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan to local bodies<sup>7</sup>. This was actually 'asking for trouble'!

To implement the new decision, the government decided to organise a 'mass movement' under elected representatives, based on volunteers and retired professionals through a 'Kerala wants you' campaign. Ten thousand people were recruited to ensure that the resources allocated at the grassroots and local bodies were effectively and efficiently spent. The volunteer experts and professionals were expected to spend at least a day each week in their allotted local bodies and panchayats. It was expected that they would generate different sets of values and attitudes and call for a change of style on the part of the bureaucracy and village governance bodies. Once the attitudinal changes took root, these were to be institutionalised into new laws and even new institutions. The strategy envisaged that the process was as important as the expected outcomes.

### ***Implementation of the PPC***

The implementation process of the People's Plan Campaign envisaged: (a) procedures for decentralised planning with norms of participation and transparency; (b) objective analyses of resources available and needs assessments; (c) development reports for each local self-government body; (d) gender impact statements; (e) plans were integrated and approved; (f) trainings were developed and seven rounds of trainings were conducted for the elected representatives and the bureaucracy.

The distinctive features of the People's Plan Campaign were: (i) Scope and scale of the campaign – autonomy, bottom-up approach and transparency, participatory with integration of plans; (ii) planning was seen as an instrument of social mobilisation; (iii) power was devolved to local bodies; (iv) changing social processes: the challenge of democratic decentralisation lay in creating a new civic culture. In implementing the programme two important steps were taken. First, village assemblies selected the beneficiaries. Second, the selection, sanctioning and auditing of the plans and projects were done by the elected committees and not by the bureaucracy.

The main outcomes were: re-ordering of priorities (basic needs, small-scale, labour intensive); leakages of money and resources were reduced; greater participation by people and greater transparency in decision-making; innovative programmes were planned and implemented; and, better physical achievements (e.g., number of roads and houses built) were recorded.

The shortcomings and limitations of the model are also apparent. A major question is how to sustain participation of the people in the PPC and how to preserve the spirit of the 'movement' in order to ensure that it does not deteriorate into another bureaucratic exercise. A second limitation is that despite built-in checks and balances, corruption persists. Third, there is inadequate integration of plans since decentralisation processes and integration are not necessarily complementary. Fourth, the model was less effective in boosting the production sector and therefore resource mobilisation was inadequate. And finally, there remain major problems in enhancing the involvement of women and of indigenous peoples in the process.

The suggested measures to overcome the above problems and limitations include the formation of neighbourhood groups to enhance participation; nurturance of gendered groups (e.g. women's neighbourhood groups) to address specific issues; development of citizen's charter to ensure greater transparency and finally, coordination of plans at the district level for better integration.

<sup>7</sup> *The Indian 5-Year Plans have two main expense heads: the 'Planned expenditure' component is earmarked for new developmental activities. The 'Non-plan' expenditure mainly finances the government's salary bills and continuing expenses of older projects already on stream, and is therefore closely guarded by the respective ministries and departments.*

## Questions, responses and discussions

The questions raised by the audience can be divided into three categories. The first set of questions sought to clarify the reasons for the economic crisis and the consequent non-viability of the Kerala model and the background of the demands for social sector spending by the state. The second group of questions focussed on whether and how the decentralised planning model had addressed social inequalities and specifically gender inequality. The third set of questions, closely related to the second, were about the extent of participation of poor women in development planning and the impact on their lives.

### *The background of the crisis*

The crisis in the Kerala Model was a legacy of under-development and the post-independence regional disparity of development. In post-Independence India, the inter-regional transfer of resources was not always equitable. The Government of Kerala raises one-third resources; the rest is from the Government of India, of which 40% are plan allocations, i.e., expenditures according to laid down conditions. Of this, 30% allocation is earmarked to fill gaps based on national norms. As 70% of Kerala's products are export oriented, they cannot be regionally taxed and therefore, taxing the state's produce to raise resources is out of question. Also, the state loses out from the government allocations because of its higher life expectancy and other positive social indicators. People live much longer in Kerala and that leads to astronomical pension bills for the State. The post-liberalisation phase wrought further havoc on the state's economy, which is largely agrarian in nature, as a large part of the agricultural products are cash crops and depend on national and international markets. Therefore, it was not simply inefficiency that caused the crisis in Kerala – as Kerala is also a part of the national and global economy. The then ruling left coalition government knew that the process of decentralisation will not be the anodyne for all the ills, but decided to move towards grassroots decentralisation as that could open up new possibilities.

### *The history of investment in the social sectors*

The background of the growing demand for social sector spending is as follows. The Kerala

economy opened up in colonial times. This led to the rise of middle castes that led the social reform movements demanding education, health, and investment in the social sector. These demands gave rise to severe conflicts – one result of which was that education was seen as the ladder to move up the social scale. Kerala has witnessed riots for education and strikes by agrarian workers, not for land, but for the right to school entry. Another result was the growth of radical politics in the state that kept up the pressure for development

### *Decentralisation and addressing social inequalities*

Decentralisation has helped in re-ordering the priorities for development at the grassroot level. However, whether or not hitherto marginalized groups can benefit from this opportunity depends to a large extent on the quality of citizenship and the realisation of the rights of citizens to intervene in the process of decision-making. In order to ensure greater participation by marginalized groups in decision-making, training programmes were organised for members of such groups all over the state. The People's Plan Campaign has addressed inequalities to the extent that sixty per cent of the resources available to local self-government bodies were spent on programmes for the poor. Self-help groups were directly linked to poverty alleviation programmes. The role of decentralisation is to create spaces for democratic processes. However, the immediate outcome of decentralisation may not be the removal of social inequalities.

### *Women's participation and the impact on poor women*

The People's Plan Campaign put special emphasis on the participation of women in the planning process and reserved 10% of the budget (overall and for each local government body) for women's development. This was known as the Women's Component Plan. Thus ten percent of the direct beneficiaries were women. However, the first plans were mechanical and not well thought through. Added to this was the problem that poor women were not very articulate about their needs. Interventions included the organisation of training programmes for women to help them get involved in the planning process. Subsequently it was decided that more effort would be given to training and equipping the

elected women and this has had a desirable impact in that the plans are better. The generation of women's status reports for each local government body was also designed as an intervention to focus on gender issues, provide analysis of the problems women face and what needs to be done. The Women's Component Plan helped to provide a separate space for discussion of gender issues in development in the village assemblies. But in order to generate discussion interest groups needed to be organised. Local activists were hired to mobilise women and to organise women's self-help groups. These groups were linked to poverty reduction programmes.

Decentralisation of planning will not, however, solve gender problems but it can contribute towards redressing inequalities and enhance women's participation in decision-making.

### 3. TAKING OFFICE<sup>8</sup>

#### Introduction

The international women's movement over the past decade has articulated the demand for the equal representation of women and men in political and public office. The United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) resolved that equal representation was one of the critical areas of concern and called on member states to make this a reality. Civil society organisations representing women's interests have continued to lobby and campaign to this end. The demand for equal representation is the cornerstone of the good governance agenda from a gender perspective. The demand arises from the understanding that women and men each constitute fifty per cent of the population and that women, as well as men, should be represented in bodies that make decisions in order for differing interests to be represented. Thus the demand acknowledges the differing interests of women as compared to men and the unequal positioning of the genders in relation to power.

In three countries of South Asia, namely, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, the state has put in place mechanisms to ensure the representation of women in local government. Affirmative action in the form of quotas for elections has made it possible for thousands of ordinary women, both rural and urban, to be elected to political office for the first time. The organisations participating in the GCG programme from India and Bangladesh have taken advantage of the window of opportunity provided by the quotas to enhance the participation of women in local government bodies albeit following different and also related strategies. For participating organisations from Namibia and Sri Lanka, the project has been to campaign for popular and political support for mechanisms that will facilitate women taking office. Using the opportunity provided by the last general elections, the participant organisation from Zambia mounted a campaign to get more women elected to Parliament while also ensuring that more women voters were able to cast their vote.

Participant organisations presented their findings of the action research projects in a workshop. **The objective of the workshop was to go beyond the**

<sup>8</sup> The title *Taking Office* is borrowed from the film by the same title by Deepa Dhanraj in which the film maker investigates the experiences of women elected to local government institutions (*Panchayati Raj*) in India.

sharing of experiences and to interrogate the experiences to reach an understanding of what is involved in enabling an under-represented group like women to take office.

### **Lobbying for a quota of reserved seats for women in Sri Lanka**

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES (ICES)

#### ***About the Organisation***

ICES is a research organization which works to advance human rights, national cohesion, peace and equitable development processes in Sri Lanka.

#### ***Background to the issue***

Sri Lanka is the only South Asian country without quotas for women in local government. The current level of women's participation is 4% in national parliament and averages 2.5% in local government. This is so despite the fact that individual women have occupied positions of cabinet minister, Prime Minister and President in Sri Lanka. This is also despite positive development indicators such as 86% literacy for women, which is very different from other South Asian countries.

In a context of ongoing civil war, and a political culture marked by violence and deteriorating democratic values, women have been increasingly marginalized from political processes. In the past, women's organisations mobilised on election violence and lobbied political parties to address women's concerns and to nominate more women. Formal politics has continued however to be resistant to women and their interests. A matter of concern is that half the number of women stood as candidates in the 2001 election as compared with the previous election. In this context and particularly since electoral reform was under consideration, ICES saw the need to mobilise women on the issue of increasing women's participation in formal politics.

#### ***Goals of the Research***

The goal of the research was to initiate a process of advocacy and mobilization through which the issue of quotas for women's representation becomes part of public debate, and consensus is built for quotas for women.

#### ***Strategies and Activities***

The key strategies were mobilisation of women in the provinces and in Colombo, and the politicisation of the issue of women's representation in local government.

Activities involved four provincial consultations with grassroots women activists; consultations with activists, academics and policy makers in Colombo; a national consultation bringing together activists from the provinces and Colombo; and an advocacy campaign directed at government departments, key policy makers, and political parties.

#### ***Findings***

The consultations and the lobbying activities served as vehicles for mobilising women around the issue of women's political participation, and for deepening understandings on the issue. In the process the issue was politicised. In addition, ICES succeeded in linking grassroots women from the provinces with city activists – something that had not happened previously in women's activism in Sri Lanka.

#### **Deepening understandings of barriers to women's political participation and why more women in politics is necessary**

There was agreement that it was unjust and undemocratic that women are not in politics, and that this is reason enough to have more women in politics. In addition it was agreed that more women in politics would improve the quality of representation, bring in a consensus seeking style, reduce aggression, and represent women's interests.

Barriers to women's participation in politics include a violent political system within a violent society where women experience violence as a continuum from home to the public. The ongoing war in the north and two youth insurrections in the south militarise the electoral and political process, fuelling gender-specific violence and heighten women's vulnerability.

Added to this are barriers resulting from racial and ethnic hostilities, entry to politics being mediated through patronage as well as family connections, and obstacles from families, society and political parties who do not see women as having a place in formal politics.

Political parties are deeply resistant to women in formal politics and cannot be trusted

The five leading political parties were invited to the national consultation and to a national meeting prior to the consultation. Only one party, the UNP (part of the ruling coalition which holds 46% of seats in parliament), responded. The UNP made clear its stereotypical biases to women in formal politics, stating that there are no suitable women candidates and that women need training.

This despite the fact that in the 2001 election the UNP launched a women's manifesto promising mechanisms for including women in nomination lists at local government level within five years. The large numbers of votes received by UNP were seen as stemming from women's votes. However, once in power, the party did not include women in governance and legislative processes. During the February 2002 elections the Ministry of Women's Affairs requested all political parties to include at least 25% women on their lists of candidates. All parties ignored this. These experiences give weight to the view expressed in consultations that political parties cannot be trusted.

System of proportional representation in Sri Lanka does not enhance women's political participation

The consultations noted that the proportional representation system in Sri Lanka has not benefited women. A modified form of proportional representation by districts introduced in 1977 was intended to advance minority interests. Women had hoped this would enable greater numbers of women to enter politics. However, the shift to districts meant candidates needed greater financial resources and encouraged monolithic party structures. Political parties already reluctant to field women candidates were reluctant to use the national lists to benefit women.

The provincial consultations noted that other factors need to be in place in order for proportional representation to benefit women, factors such as a strong women's movement, commitment of political parties to advancing women's participation, conducive cultural and social conditions.

The need for a quota was clear but what form this should take was not so clear

It was felt that merely giving women a chance to participate in politics would be insufficient given the cultural, social, and political factors that influence

elections. At best this would result in a few elite women being elected.

It was agreed that a quota of reserved seats was required and that advocacy on reserved seats for women was needed. It was agreed that political parties could not be trusted to implement quotas, and that this was a matter best dealt with through legislation.

Discussion on the intricacies of implementing quotas in different electoral systems was new to the women engaged in the consultations. The debate was raised to a new level and a need was identified for a study on how quotas work in different electoral systems. However there were also concerns that politicians would use reservations for their own ends through getting female relatives as proxies in reserved seats. It was noted that youth quotas which call for all political parties to have 40% youth between the ages of 18 and 35 on nomination lists in Sri Lanka have been abused by powerful politicians who reinforce their power by getting young male relatives into these youth seats. Women felt they should learn from the experience with the youth quota and not make the same mistakes.

To counter politicians making use of reserved seats for their own ends, it was suggested that activist groups identify and train women and then compel parties to include these women. It was noted also that not all women would be sensitive to women's needs.

Importance of a strong women's movement in civil society

It was agreed that there was need for the women's movement to think of long-term strategies for equal representation of women and to engage with government on this. A strong women's movement should highlight women's political activism at local level and lobby politicians nationally to include competent women as candidates on party lists. Within such a movement the role of women community activists was seen as significant. The movement would need to go beyond quotas in order to address the deep-rooted barriers to women's political participation.

The consultations and lobbying activities made a start in developing such a movement, and activists are continuing to take up some of the ideas raised during the project – such as the idea of setting up a trust fund so as to train women for effective political participation.

Differences between provincial and city activists

The consultations threw up significant differences between activists from the provinces and Colombo – differences which future strategies on advancing women's political participation and strengthening the women's movement will need to consider.

Many of the grassroots women activists at the provincial consultations were actively engaged in local politics through party affiliations or politicised community based work. Many were interested in entering formal politics, and some had attempted to contest elections but had met with problems. These women noted that lack of participation in provinces deeply affected their every day lives, and their ability to take up women's concerns effectively. They had greater day to day dependence on politicians and bureaucrats than did city women.

The Colombo-based leaders of women's organisations, academics and policy makers who were involved in the consultations were not involved in party politics themselves, and they were not interested in standing as candidates. It seemed likely that this was so because they had access to politicians, ministries and government departments through social and family links.

In addition, it might be that the competitive nature of the PR system, which entails contesting in the larger electoral districts in Colombo, may be a barrier to women activists there.

Lobbying points agreed on and lobbying activities undertaken

Agreement was reached on the broad demand that electoral laws should be changed to provide for 30% reserved seats at local and provincial levels. Women from the provinces and Colombo presented this recommendation to the Minister of Women's Affairs in the presence of the General Secretary of UNP, representatives from two other political parties, and the secretary to the Minister of Women's Affairs at the national consultation meeting.

A petition carrying this demand was launched at a public rally on the 8 March 2002.

Two national women's groups are following up on a signature campaign and on creating a fund for women activists wanting to enter politics.

The demand does not include specific mechanisms for the incorporation of the quota, and two activists

were charged with the task of preparing amendments necessary to existing laws in order to get a quota in place.

Impact on ICES

The project signified a shift in ICES from an organisation with a research base and a focus on international, regional and national organisations to working with grassroots rural organisations and activists in the provinces. It highlighted the advantages for ICES of networking and alliance building.

### **Building political legitimacy for Muslim, Dalit and Backward Caste women elected to Municipal Councils and Corporations**

CONFEDERATION OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS (COVA)

**Organisational Profile**

COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) with its headquarters in Hyderabad city in India is a network of 750 organisations working for communal harmony through literacy, recreation and vocational training programmes. An important aspect of COVA's policy and advocacy work is to develop women's awareness of their rights, and to sensitise elected representatives to the concerns of women and children. COVA operates in five states in India.

**Background to the issue**

Large numbers of women entered local government following the 1993 amendment to India's Constitution that introduced a 33% reservation of seats for women. However, the opportunity this presented for women to become political agents and address their concerns has not been realised, with women from Muslim, Dalit and other marginalised groups experiencing additional constraints.

**Goal**

The goal of the action research was to enhance the capacity of fourteen elected women representatives from Muslim, Dalit and other marginalised groups, across political parties, and from five districts of Andhra Pradesh, to function effectively as political representatives.

**Strategies and Activities**

The core strategy was to engage the elected women representatives in four workshops, held at six-month



intervals and aimed at building their capabilities as political leaders.

Alongside these workshops, COVA monitored the performance of each participant through eliciting feedback from voters, government officials, the media and political parties.

Fourteen members of Community Development Societies (CDS) – women’s structures – were also included in the workshops so as to improve relations and minimise the conflict resulting from the handing over to CDS’s of powers formerly held by political representatives.

### **Findings**

A major task was to establish the legitimacy of the women representatives as political actors in a context where individual politicians and political parties have captured women’s quotas to serve their own political ends, and were using women representatives as proxies. This task became the focus of the project.

The way in which women’s quotas are incorporated into the local government system serves as a hindrance to traditional political interests – male politicians and political parties. Each council is made up of nine wards and in each election a different three wards are declared women’s constituencies. A male political aspirant thus suddenly finds he cannot stand for election because his ward is declared a woman’s seat. To overcome this obstacle the male politician, with party backing, puts up a female relative, usually his wife, as candidate, pays for ‘her’ election campaign, and once she is elected he operates as de facto representative, visiting constituencies, interacting with government officials and attending party meetings. Prevailing gender power relations within the home and community, and entrenched ideas that women’s place is not in politics, allow him to do this.

Hence establishing women’s legitimacy as political actors challenges this neat arrangement, within which women are not expected to be political actors. It challenges also the prevailing political set up within the home, the community, the party and local government structures.

COVA responded to these challenges by devising a training strategy to support the women representatives to take over the performance of their basic duties such as visiting constituents, addressing the media, speaking out more in council meetings and engaging with the administration. Through more active

engagement women’s legitimacy as political actors grew, both in terms of their self perceptions and in terms of how others viewed them. Resistance from male relatives also grew and COVA addressed this as part of their support to the women.

COVA’s strategy of eliciting feedback from voters, government officials, the media and political parties reinforced the idea among these groupings that women were to be taken seriously as leaders.

Much of the training focused on changing perceptions of women as political agents and did not deal with progressive gender agendas in development programmes. The following sets out progress made in getting women to view themselves and be viewed as legitimate political actors, and it highlights the deepened understandings uncovered by the research of the many difficulties in women’s way.

### Difficulties getting women to attend the training as a result of women’s lack of autonomy

Women’s lack of personal autonomy was evident from the difficulties COVA encountered in selecting women representatives to participate in the training. In addition to families not expecting the women representatives to be active in politics, prevailing gender power relations and ideas about women’s roles prohibited women’s travel outside of their towns. Attending a workshop for three days away from home in Hyderabad was therefore not to be allowed and particularly not for Muslim women.

COVA had to work at convincing the families of women representatives that they should attend the workshops. Together with public figures from its networks, representatives of COVA met with the women representatives and their families. Some husbands refused to allow their wives to participate in the training. One such husband acted as de facto corporator, and even though his wife (the corporator) was keen to take active office, she was afraid of the adverse effects of her insistence to do so.

### Women allowed to attend the training were relatively more autonomous than others

The women finally involved in the project were therefore those *allowed* to do so by husbands and families. They thus represent a grouping with relatively greater autonomy. It is fair to assume that constraints faced by those who were not “allowed” to attend might in many ways be more extreme. At the same

time the families of many of the participants were ambivalent of their participation in the workshops and some husbands and brothers accompanied women to the first workshop, but allowed them to go unaccompanied to subsequent workshops.

Of the fourteen women representatives participating in the training eleven had a male relative in politics, and one had been groomed by her party. All were married with children. Four were Muslim, 2 Dalit, 6 Backward Castes, and 1 Christian. Half of the participants were university graduates.

Training linked skills development with practical application in the field, and feed back worked well to shift perceptions so that women began to be seen as legitimate political actors

The strategy of linking skills development with practical application and engagement with key role players worked well to challenge notions that women are not political actors. Through the programme women developed leadership capabilities and gained confidence to act independently from male relatives. Once they began to do so, their self perceptions and other's perceptions of them shifted.

Workshops focused on a better understanding of rules and procedures and developed skills such as public speaking, interaction with the media, handling government officials. A handbook provided information on the programmes of various government departments. Participants discussed the problem of women proxy candidates. For most, training of this kind was a first.

At the end of each workshop participants resolved to undertake specific actions: visiting constituents, meeting officials, speaking at meetings, interacting with media, gathering information on development schemes, being active in political parties. That their effectiveness between workshops was to be assessed and discussed in feedback sessions served as additional incentive to engage in such visits.

For the first time some visited constituents unaccompanied by a male relative, began to engage more directly with officials, address council meetings, and the media. This gained them respect as leaders among members of the public, officials and fellow councilors and this in turn improved the confidence and self esteem of the women representatives. At the end of the first training workshop participants

addressed a press conference. Many have since addressed the media in their districts, and have received coverage for activities.

By the fourth workshop many were keen to continue in politics signifying a shift in their own attitudes, as at the second workshop most representatives had not evinced interested in continuing in politics.

Political parties are still resistant

The negative perceptions by political parties that women representatives are political liabilities and in public life simply because of reservations did not shift during the course of the research despite women's relatively greater activity in the party.

Women representatives effected changes in some councils and in some communities

Women were able to make changes to facilitate their effective functioning in some councils. These include more appropriate meeting times, a special time slot for women to speak at meetings, women seated in a bloc so as to caucus with and support each other, and a separate room for women. One woman representative successfully challenged a co-opted member who bypassed elected representatives in decisions concerning programmes, and won the admiration of all representatives, including males, since this was a general problem. A number of participants demanded that the times of the water supply be changed to suit women and have asked for the construction of public toilets.

Increased family tensions as a result of women's increased political profile

On the negative side women representatives have had to deal with increased resistance from families. While some husbands encouraged their wives, most were resentful of their greater activity, and a few tried to prevent their wives visiting their constituencies. In some cases mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law were obstructive. Many families saw women as being negligent of household responsibilities, did not help the women with household chores, and were of the view that 'politics was a bad and dirty business' and not for 'good' people.

After the second workshop women expressed the need for family counselling and training for male relatives. COVA counselled a husband and wife in one case where serious marital discord resulted from a wife's increased visits to constituents and public appearances. COVA held one training of male relatives, attended

by men already supportive of their female relative, and whose support was reinforced. Unsupportive men refused to attend.

#### Resolving differences with CDS representatives and interesting them in politics

Combining political and CDS representatives in the training had two positive impacts. Firstly, some differences were resolved and both sides saw the importance of working together to develop their constituencies. Secondly, some CDS representatives became interested in entering politics. Since CDS members tend to be leaders in their own right, not influenced by male relatives, their recruitment into politics is likely to have positive outcomes that is if they are able to enter local government.

#### Independent women are barred from political participation

The action research highlights that women's entry into politics continues to be through a male relative, and that the entry of women with independent political aspirations is barred. This was illustrated in the May 2002 elections to the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad, which took place in the final phase of this research. In the run up to these elections COVA identified and trained 30 women to contest the election. However male political aspirants got political parties to nominate their female relatives to the reserved seats for women, and only 6 of the 30 women trained by COVA were put forward by political parties, and these to seats which the parties had no possibility of winning. Active and interested women are thus barred from entering political positions. COVA believes that pressure from large numbers of women within political parties is one way to ensure that women are independent political agents.

### **Enhancing and sustaining the role of elected women members of local governments**

BANGLADESH MAHILA PARISHAD (BMP)

#### ***Organisational Profile***

Established in 1970, BMP is an activist advocacy and lobby organization with a mass membership of more than 94 000 women in local units all over Bangladesh. BMP aims to contribute to building a society based on gender equality, democracy, and peace. Committee members work on a voluntary basis for the organization.

#### ***Background to the issue***

Over the past few years BMP has played a key role in promoting women's participation in formal political structures in Bangladesh. BMP has campaigned for direct election to reserved seats for women in parliament and at local government level; and they have worked on enhancing the effectiveness of women elected into local government.

Since 1997 women have entered local government in Bangladesh in large numbers through elections to reserved seats in urban municipalities or Pouroshabha and rural Union Parishads. NGOs and women's organizations have worked with these women representatives to strengthen their skills and capacities. From their involvement in such training it was clear to BMP, that in addition to a lack of skills and experience broader issues of power and representation were at stake and that interventions were needed beyond training.

#### ***Goal of the Action Research***

The goal of the action research was to enhance women's representation in local governance structures; create an environment that would enable women representatives to exercise their power and work on agendas for achieving gender equality and equity.

#### ***Strategy and activities***

The key strategy was to create an enabling environment for three elected women representatives, one from an urban Pouroshabha and two from rural Union Parishads, through the development of support groups for each woman representative, and by creating a support network of influential members of public, the administration and the BMP network.

#### Activities involved

- Creating support groups for individual elected members in one Pouroshabha and two Union Parishads drawing from women in each member's constituency and equipping support group members with capacity to engage with issues from a gender perspective;
- Creating through the support groups a political constituency for the elected women members to ensure that these women remain accountable to an agenda of gender equality and equity;
- Creating a broader support network by building alliances with influential members of the public and the administration and also with the entire BMP network;

- Training representatives and support group members in practical skills, broader conceptual clarity and strategic planning.

### **Findings**

BMP's engagement with women representatives, their husbands, the support groups, the networks of influential members of the public deepened understandings of constraints faced by women representatives and of ways in which a support network comprised of women constituents could both support the women representatives and hold them accountable.

It was clear that getting elected is a first step, and that building capacity of individual women is not enough in the face of impregnable institutional rules and structures, a hostile male political culture, and constraints emanating from women's positioning in their families and community.

The project highlighted that the ability of a woman representative to act as a political agent rests on her attaining a level of autonomy from her husband/male relative; a demand for political action for gender outcomes from a constituency; and support from a network or group.

### Constraints within the local government structures

#### *Structural constraint*

A major structural constraint for women members lies in the electoral system, and the way in which quotas for women have been incorporated into the system of local governance.

Each Union Parishad has a chairman who is elected directly; 9 general elected members who tend to be male, even though women can stand for these general seats; and 3 elected women members. Each woman member is elected by and responsible for three wards while each general member is elected by and responsible for one ward. Women members are given the same budgetary and other resources as a general member despite having to attend to the needs of a population and area three times that of a general member. Women also have to canvass their election from an area three times the size of a general member. There are no formal guidelines indicating women's responsibilities. Each woman representative finds herself in a situation where she is competing with three men – the general representatives of the three wards she is responsible for – each of whom is trying to make his mark in his ward.

#### *Symbolic devaluation*

Since women have responsibility for three wards, and general members for just one, women's position in the hierarchy and in terms of symbolic value is higher than the general members. Women's representatives names as listed at the Union Parishad and Pouroshava offices should therefore appear directly after that of the Chairperson and before those, of general members. However, women representatives names appear at the bottom of the list appearing as an additive, rather than as an integral part of the structure. This translates into the way women representatives are treated by local government and other elected officials.

#### *Exclusionary practice*

Male officials and general representatives who deliberately withhold critical information hinder women's participation in committees and their servicing of their three wards. A meeting is quorate without the elected women representatives' presence and it is therefore general practice not to inform women representatives about committee meetings. It is also the practice that the chair and general members ask women representatives to sign blank pieces of paper in order to secure their consent to resolutions the content of which are unknown to the women representatives. When women representatives query this practice they are victimised.

#### *Attitudes of male chairs, male representatives, and males in the administration*

Women's marginalisation is reinforced by paternalistic and discriminatory attitudes of male representatives and male chairmen, and their beliefs that women should not get involved in local politics, and that while men get into office on merit, women get in through government favours in the form of quotas. Women representatives were often intimidated into silence by male representatives at committee meetings, and male officials in the municipality office did not take them seriously.

### Constraints related to family and community values, notions of women's place in society, and the gender division of labour

#### *Constraints to womens' mobility*

The mobility of women representatives is constrained as women are not expected to go out of the home after dark. As one husband said, "This is a Muslim country, she is a woman so she should not go out in the evening". He saw his wife's responsibility as caring for the children. He 'helped' her by attending

to her official duties. In addition, women as part of the electorate were constrained in one of the three project areas since fundamentalist leaders had declared that women should not vote in elections.

#### *Women representatives lack personal autonomy*

Husbands of the women representatives saw their (the husbands) positions in society and politics as the factor that led to their wives election into office. Husbands, brothers and brothers in law had put up the money for their wives election campaigns ranging from 60 thousand Takka to 300 thousand Takka. Husbands therefore adopted a proprietorial attitude to their wives' elected positions and undertook their official duties. In one case a husband wanted his wife to work in only one of the three wards she was responsible for, as he intended to contest a general seat in the next election. He did not want his wife to stand for office in the next election. She was keen to stand but was totally dependent on her husband's financial support.

#### The significance of autonomy for a woman representative

One of the three representatives – the one with the greatest measure of freedom from her husband's involvement in her official role – made the greatest strides in getting development projects sanctioned, in obtaining resources for a development project, and in intervening in individual cases on rape, women's right to property, and maintenance. This woman was able to take initiatives in working with the support group and with BMP. This points to the significance of personal autonomy from the political aspirations and control of a husband.

#### The effectiveness of a support group for the women representatives

BMP's strategy of drawing women from the constituency of an elected representative, and equipping them to support the women representatives worked to end the isolation of the women representatives, made them and the hostile environment in which they operate more visible to constituents, and set in place means to hold these women representatives accountable.

In addition, BMP and the support group created a broader network of support of influential members of the public and the administration. Members of the constituency became aware of the constraints under which the women representatives work,

women representatives became more aware of what their constituents expect of them, and from this understanding they began to work on plans to ensure that each of them was able to perform her duties with greater effectiveness.

#### Autonomous Cells to hold women representatives accountable

The support groups also took on an independent role in safeguarding women's rights through forming "Women against oppression and violence" cells which exclude the elected representative and which will act as a pressure group to hold all elected representatives accountable, and to make this a concern that local government acts upon.

#### The significant factor of BMP's mass base and profile

BMP's mass base and profile is significant in two ways. Firstly, an important enabling factor in this project was BMP's mass base and profile. The support groups and the elected women representatives could draw on their link with BMP as an important resource in negotiating for influence and development resources. Secondly, its mass based profile and presence throughout Bangladesh enables the BMP to incorporate lessons learnt from this exercise in others of its efforts at the local level, in building a campaign to change the local government structure that is loaded against women, and in its long-term campaign for the reservation of seats for women in national parliament. This campaign will now also include building a political constituency as an integral part of the campaign.

### **Promoting women's participation in law reform**

SISTER NAMIBIA

#### ***Organisational Profile***

Sister Namibia is a women's NGO formed in 1989 on the eve of Namibia's independence to ensure women's voice in the post-colonial society, and to challenge sexism, racism and homophobia. Over the past 13 years, Sister Magazine was the main vehicle for achieving these aims and raised awareness of the ways in which the political, social, cultural, legal and economic systems of power oppress women. Since 1999, Sister Namibia is more directly involved in organising women and in advocacy work.

**Background to the issue**

In 1999, Sister Namibia called together NGOs, political parties, and elected women representatives based in the capital city Windhoek, to discuss the findings of research Sister had conducted on women's participation in politics and decision-making in Namibia. A decision was made at this workshop to lobby for 50% women candidates on party lists, and to draw up a Namibian Women's Manifesto. The workshop participants formed themselves into the nucleus of the Namibian Women's Manifesto Network (NWMN) which was to be led by Sister.

Over the following months, Sister successfully drew in a larger number of NGOs into the NWMN, launched the Namibian Women's Manifesto, and began a campaign to raise awareness on the need to increase women's political participation.

The country context is that of a new democracy, where there is a strong state and relatively weak but growing civil society. The ruling party, SWAPO, was the former liberation movement which led Namibians in the struggle against apartheid. It holds 76% of parliamentary seats and thus has no opposition to speak of. Outside parliament, civil society organisations are reluctant to challenge the party. Sister however challenged the ruling party prior to this project, on the question of lesbian rights, resulting in the ruling party's wrath directed at Sister.

**Goal of the action research**

The goal of the action research was to engage women across Namibia in developing and lobbying for a bill that would provide for 50% representation of women in local, provincial and national government, and in the process to build women's organisational capacity and their consciousness as citizens and political actors.

**Strategies and activities**

Key strategies were to

- strengthen women's organization and their networking and lobbying capabilities through strengthening the NWMN and extending it beyond Windhoek to rural towns and villages;
- raise awareness within the Namibian public and among state actors of the importance of women's sustained increased participation in formal political structures.

Activities included

- commissioning research so as to inform a draft bill;
- developing a 50/50 bill as a lay person's draft of necessary amendments to the electoral acts;
- mobilizing women in Windhoek and in rural towns and villages to be part of the Namibian Women's Manifesto Campaign and take leadership in their communities;
- two national workshops to consult with women facilitators from towns and villages on the proposed bill and to train them to carry out local consultations and campaign activities;
- arranging for network facilitators to visit parliament;
- engaging women in towns and villages and in the capital city Windhoek in lobbying parliamentary committees, legislators and political parties;
- an extensive media campaign.

**Findings**

Sister successfully engaged a broad range of Namibians in discussions on women's right to political participation, making this a political issue. Sister strengthened women's organization in Namibia, and raised women's awareness of their rights as citizens, including awareness of the right to a right. Sister was not as successful in lobbying government. While government representatives at local level and within specific departments were sympathetic to the campaign, at national level government discredited it through two different labels – a front for lesbians and a front for the opposition party.

**Clarifying the issues and what was needed in order to advance the demand**

In clarifying the key issues concerning women's current representation in politics in Namibia, Sister noted that a high proportion of women at local government had been attained – 41% as at 1998 – as a result of a party list system with quotas for women. However, this gain was under threat since electoral changes under way involved a shift from a party list system with quotas, to a constituency based system without quotas. This was likely to lead to low proportions of women in local government, since women's representation at regional level, where there were no quotas, was at 4%. At national level, women made up 26% of parliamentary representatives. Whether women's proportion at this level would increase or not was entirely in the hands of political parties, since there was no law in place requiring quotas at this level.

Sister was of the view that a law was needed to ensure that women made up 50% of representatives at all three levels, and linked with the global 50/50 campaign launched by WEDO to develop a broad-based campaign in Windhoek and the small towns and villages of Namibia.

Women's organisation was strengthened and extended beyond Windhoek, and women's leadership and lobbying capacity was developed through active participation in the campaign

Sister Namibia recruited potential women leaders (facilitators) from towns and villages and involved them together with Windhoek-based women in two national consultations. The current problems relating to women's political participation and mechanisms to achieve this, including the proposed bill, were discussed. The national consultations also trained the facilitator in conducting local consultations in lobbying, and introduced them to the Namibian Women's Manifesto and the NWMN.

This strategy of recruiting and training facilitators was successful in taking the campaign beyond Windhoek. In order to build the local women's movement, facilitators started committees and women's organisations in their towns and villages, using the skills gained in workshops. They developed campaigns to contribute to local-level organization of women and carried out local consultations in their villages. In total, 105 local workshops were held in 55 towns and villages, involving 3 500 people.

As part of their local level lobbying work, local women's groups took the campaign message to 70 schools, 88 churches, 9 traditional leaders, 17 Regional Councillors and 32 Local Councillors. They held meetings with NGOs and leaders of all major political parties, soliciting support of government leaders. They distributed thousands of pamphlets, collected hundreds of signatures and held marches to local authorities to hand over the signatures and the 50/50 bill. A Windhoek march handed signatures and the bill to the head of the parliamentary petitions committee.

Many of the local groups joined the NWMN as they see the need for a strong women's movement to advance women's concerns. Local workshops discussed the Namibian Women's Manifesto and affirmed this as a valid gender agenda. One woman said: *"The Manifesto booklet has helped me to*

*understand the many forms of gender inequality in my life and that I have human rights as a woman"*.

Developing local women leaders was an important outcome of the research. Among new skills gained, the facilitators list new understanding of politics, a sense of political agency, the realisation of their own leadership capabilities, recognition as leaders, and the desire to stand for political office.

Broad-based consultation and some measure of legal literacy was achieved in the drafting of the bill

Never before had legal rights been taken up in Namibia through mass mobilization based on a critical analysis of women's situation in Namibia. And never before had poor women from rural areas and small towns been involved in national discussions. The process involved organizing and mobilizing women while at the same time developing legal literacy. The assumption was that legal literacy was not necessarily alienating for poor women, and that all laws can be explained in a language people can understand.

Awareness was developed of civic and women's rights within the new democracy, and women's participation was framed as a political issue

In a context where civil liberties for the majority black population are relatively new, since black Namibians were denied such rights under colonial and apartheid rule, the campaign created a new awareness of rights as women citizens. For many women attending local workshops this was the first time they had engaged in such discussion. In the words of one facilitator: *"Women heard what women's rights are and what election laws we have. [...] They became aware of their role in politics and that they have to participate"*. Another said: *"Women in our town first thought participation in politics was only for men. Now that they have seen that they can participate in any political activity, they believe that they can become councillors and governors. They cannot only be there to produce children, to cook mielipap, to be battered or only become teachers or nurses"*.

Women came together across their diversities

The campaign brought together women across their diversities – such as language, ethnicity, education, class, political affiliation, ability, sexual orientation. Women worked together in the face of government/ruling party attacks on the Network on two grounds – being lesbian and a support base for

opposition parties. Facilitators successfully dealt with such charges in local workshops. As one facilitator said: *“One question was why the lesbians are involved in the Manifesto issue. I said that gay and lesbian people also have rights, they are our children, they are people of Namibia and cannot be chased out from the country. We studied the Manifesto booklet on this point and they liked it very much”*. The way was paved for the Network to be an inclusive movement open to all women. Another woman said: *“Once you are dealing with human rights, you cannot cut out the issue of lesbian rights. Either we say lesbians are not women and they do not have human rights or we keep on arguing our case!”*.

#### The challenge of lobbying national government

The campaign won the support of most regional and local government officials, among them SWAPO leaders. It also had the qualified support of some national departments – for example the Deputy Minister of Women Affairs addressed the launch of the Bill. However, with SWAPO nationally there was another dynamic. In Sister’s view SWAPO sees itself as the only authentic voice able to bring anything good to Namibia. In a context where the party has 76% seats in parliament, where there is no effective opposition, and where the only autonomous women’s organisation was forced by SWAPO to disband on the eve of independence, Sister has faced enormous challenges in engaging government as an autonomous organisation. Added to this, two key Sister members were the butt of SWAPOs’ wrath when they made legal representation that one be granted Namibian citizenship on the basis of their lesbian relationship. This saw increased homophobic verbal attacks by government ministers and spokespersons and an attack on the Women’s Manifesto and 50/50 campaign as lesbian fronts.

At the same time, SWAPO is not anti-women and the formal policy framework is conducive to advancing women’s political participation. The 1997 National Gender Policy provides for mechanisms to attain a gender balance in decision-making structures. The Department of Women Affairs set up in 1990 became a fully-fledged ministry in 2000, and is charged with promoting substantive gender equity through mainstreaming gender issues in all government departments and policies. Government has signed CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, thereby reinforcing a commitment to increasing women’s participation in politics and decision-

making. The challenge for Sister and the NWMN remains how to use the opportunities at national government level to advance the demand.

#### Sister’s identity as an activist organisation has been reinforced

The campaign reinforced Sisters’ identity as an activist organisation. Sister over-stretched its human and financial resources in the undertaking to lead the NWMN and the 50/50 campaign, in a context where most other NGOs are battling to survive and hence are not able to do more than pledge symbolic support to the campaign. Sister has started a movement and their challenge now is how to build on the gains achieved thus far in order to sustain and further strengthen women’s organisation.

### **Increasing women’s participation in political decision-making as candidates and voters**

ZAMBIA NATIONAL WOMEN’S LOBBY GROUP (ZNWLG)

#### ***Organisational Profile***

The Zambia National Women’s Lobby Group (ZNWLG) is a non-governmental organisation formed in 1991, at the end of 18 years of one-party rule in Zambia. The ZNWLG works to promote women’s equal representation and participation on all levels of decision-making.

#### ***Background to the issue***

Women comprised 12.6% of parliamentarians in 2001 and 6% of local government councillors in 1998. ZNWLG argues that since women constitute 52% of the population, they need to be equals in decision making.

The action research was conducted in the run up to the 2001 elections in Zambia in a context where the President had not been allowed to run for a third term as a result of popular pressure and where there was an overwhelming desire in the country for a change of government.

#### ***Goal of the Action Research***

The goal of the action research was to achieve an increased number of women participants in the 2001 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections as candidates and voters.



### ***Strategies and activities***

The strategies employed by the ZNWLG were

- to influence political parties to increase the number of women candidates and the number of women in party governance structures;
- to facilitate the coming together of a critical mass of female political leaders in the Women in Politics Forum so as to influence processes within and outside political parties;
- to link women in political office with women in civil society;
- to develop a Zambia Women's Manifesto to serve as an election manifesto and to hold political representatives accountable;
- to engender the voter education and election monitoring processes so as to ensure more women participated as voters.

### ***Findings***

The ZNWLG succeeded in organising women in politics, in bringing them together with women in civil society, and in getting political parties to increase the numbers of women in party structures and the number of women candidates. The ZNWLG through its activities highlighted that women are political actors and that politics as usual which does not include women is unfair and unacceptable.

At the same time, the action research deepened understandings of difficulties faced by women attempting to contest elections. The main difficulties noted, given the focus of the action research, were with political parties and the electoral system.

#### Influencing political parties to increase numbers of women in party structures

In discussions with the leadership of six political parties, including the ruling party, the ZNWLG advanced the idea that at least 30% of party executive committee members should be women. Since the ZNWLG has a long standing relationship with parties, a good track record, is seen as non-partisan, and has established its legitimacy, party leadership were open to their approach and invited the ZNWLG to monitor party elections and to give support to women contesting party elections. ZNWLG attended party conventions, where they campaigned for women candidates –through posters, flyers, and songs with the message “vote for women”.

The outcome was that more women stood in party elections and more women were elected than in

previous elections across all parties. Four of the six parties canvassed achieved 30% representation of women on their National Executive Committees.

#### Influencing parties to field more women candidates

In discussions ZNWLG also advanced the ideas that parties should field more women candidates. More women were adopted by parties as candidates for the 2001 elections than in the past – 153 women candidates in the national election as compared with 59 women candidates in the previous election – with three parties adopting at least 30% women candidates. However, of these 153 candidates 114 actually stood for election, the drop-out being the result of lack of financial resources. In some cases, parties dropped women candidates just before the election as they thought the women would lose the seat. Some women dropped by parties stood as independents and lost.

#### Need to create environment conducive to women's participation in elections

It was clear that more needs to be done beyond convincing parties to adopt women candidates. Women candidates were at a disadvantage as compared with male candidates, and parties did little to give women additional support. The ZNWLG will continue working with political parties to ensure women candidates are adopted and that parties create environments conducive to levelling the playing field so that women may participate fairly in elections.

ZNWLG finds that it needs to encourage political parties to adopt women to seats in regions where the party is more popular. There was a tendency to adopt women in wards where the party stood no chance at winning. Further, it was clear that women stood no chance when standing as independent candidates, as all women who stood as independents lost. This underscores the need to work with political parties.

#### Bringing women in politics together on the basis of an election manifesto

In order to facilitate the coming together of a critical mass of female political leaders who could influence processes within and across political parties, the ZNWLG met with women from political parties and worked towards the establishment of a 'Women in Politics Forum' (WPF). The WPF was set up in a major conference which brought together women across all political parties to debate the socio-economic

and political environment and their impact on women's participation in national affairs. Barriers to women's participation and strategies to address these were discussed, and a draft women's manifesto was developed – intended to serve as a common women's agenda for the 2001 elections.

Linking women in politics with women in civil society as a means of support and to hold women in politics accountable

A second conference brought together aspirant women candidates and women from civil society to adopt the Zambia Women's Manifesto that had been developed by the WPF. Women from NGOs, churches, the private sector, and traditional leadership came to this conference to support women in political parties.

These discussions strengthened the resolve of women party members to work within their parties and across party affiliation in order to ensure a greater involvement of women in politics and to work towards a women-centred development agenda – set out in the Zambia Women's Manifesto.

A Manifesto to raise civic awareness and hold political representatives accountable

The Manifesto – a non-partisan document, upholding gender equality within a development agenda – was launched, published and distributed widely. It was intended to raise awareness among women voters and candidates so that women participated in the elections; and it was intended to serve as a means to hold political parties and government accountable, persuading them to prioritise the interests of women, children, youth, and people with disabilities. Women candidates used the Manifesto in their campaigns, and voters were urged to use the content of the Manifesto as criteria for assessing candidates.

Voter education and the use of media

As part of their contribution within the National Voter Education Committee (NVEC), ZNWLG conducted voter education in specific provinces. In keeping with the Zambia Women's Manifesto, messages were tailored to reach women – that voting for women will result in better health services, more food, better schools, access to clean water, clean environment; that a government without women was incomplete, undemocratic, and unaccountable.

Methods used were drama, songs, posters, flyers, and door-to-door campaigns. ZNWLG designed radio and TV adverts and paid for air-time for women candidates to promote their campaigns. ZNWLG produced a video documentary – “Do not talk on our behalf”, and put up billboards throughout the country, including one electronic bill-board.

Monitoring the Electoral Process from a gender perspective

ZNWLG monitored the adoption of candidates, the campaigns and the election-day events from a gender perspective in order to ensure women were not left out of the electoral process. To do this ZNWLG developed a gender checklist drawing on TGNP (Tanzania Gender Network Project) and SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) support; trained 432 ZNWLG members to monitor elections on the basis of this check list; and deployed 8 monitors in each of 54 constituencies where women were standing.

On election day, ZNWLG noted a massive turnout, much of this could however be attributed to the overwhelming desire among Zambians for change in government.

With regard to campaigns, ZNWLG noted irregularities including bribes, violence and intimidation. A woman councillor was shot in the stomach; women bore the brunt of character assassinations – being called prostitutes, husband grabber (but still getting voted in). Media manipulation by ruling party was evident. Overall, male candidates tended to have more resources than women candidates, and ruling party candidates had more resources than other parties.

Need to review the electoral system

A major hindrance to women's participation as candidates was the electoral system itself. In view of this the ZNWLG is continuing a national dialogue aimed at influencing a review of the current electoral system. This will include looking into mechanisms to facilitate women's electoral success

Awareness of women as political actors and of the notion of fair elections needs to include gender considerations

The aggressive media campaign, developed by the ZNWLG, together with door-to-door campaigns and community meetings, created awareness of

women as political actors in the national and local elections, resulting in greater numbers of women candidates and voters.

Through the strategy of developing a gender checklist, training its members and deploying them into constituencies for purposes of monitoring the elections, the ZNWLG has begun to challenge the criteria by which elections are judged to be free and fair.

ZNWLG is aware that ongoing work needs to continue to create an environment conducive to women's participation in politics. This must include electoral reform and ongoing work with political parties.

Overall, the ZNWLG has been able, through the above-mentioned strategies and activities, to challenge the notion that politics as usual that does not include women is unfair and unacceptable.

### Comments, analysis and discussions

#### *Establishing a legal basis for affirmative action*

The need for establishing a legal basis for affirmative action to enable more women to enter the political process was seen as being paramount, as political parties could not be trusted to nominate women as candidates for elections. This was evident from the projects undertaken by ICES, Sri Lanka, Sister Namibia and, to some extent, the National Women's Lobby Group in Zambia. In Sri Lanka, for example, the broad-based consultations with rural and urban women activists arrived at the conclusion that a quota of reserved seats was required and that advocacy on reserved seats for women was needed. It was agreed that political parties could not be trusted to implement quotas, and that this was a matter best dealt with **through legislation**. In Namibia, the project was undertaken at the political moment when quotas for women in local government were under threat, since electoral changes under way would involve a shift from a party list system with quotas to a constituency based system without quotas. Whereas at the national level, women made up 26% of parliamentary representatives, whether women's proportion at this level would increase or not was entirely in the hands of political parties since there was *no law in place* requiring quotas at this level.

Therefore, the project sought to build a broad-based alliance to draft a bill that would provide the **legal basis for quotas** at all levels of the political system. In Zambia, the active campaign mounted by ZNWLG to increase the number of women candidates did yield results in terms of increasing the numbers of women standing for elections, but relying on parties to nominate women candidates and support them did not achieve the results envisaged. Therefore, they concluded that electoral reform was necessary within which there should be affirmative action measures to secure women's representation in politics.

#### *Turning legal legitimacy into political legitimacy*

The existence of a legal basis for affirmative action does ensure that more women come into politics but it does not ensure that elected women will be seen as legitimate political actors. Experiences of BMP in Bangladesh and COVA in India indicate that there is systematic exclusion of women elected to political office through the quota system, both by the local government bodies and by the aspiring male relatives of women. The latter (male relatives) see in this systems a way to extend their hold on political power by getting their wives/sisters nominated by political parties and elected. They then act as the de facto elected representatives reducing the role of the women to proxy candidates. That this is not just the experience of women is apparent from the experiences with youth quotas in Sri Lanka. The youth candidates became a proxy for powerful, elite men to keep their hold on power.

Thus, turning legal legitimacy into political legitimacy for women candidates is the main challenge faced by those civil society groups that aim to enhance women's role in politics. In the different situations represented in the action research projects, the organisations have evolved creative strategies to make this transition possible and establish women as political actors. COVA responded to these challenges by devising a training and accompaniment strategy to support the women representatives to take over the performance of their basic duties such as visiting constituents, addressing the media, speaking out more in council meetings and engaging with the administration. Through more active engagement

women's legitimacy as political actors grew, both in terms of their self-perceptions and in terms of how others viewed them. BMP's strategy of drawing women from the constituency of an elected representative and equipping them to support the women representatives worked to end the isolation of the women representatives, and made them and the hostile environment in which they operate more visible to constituents.

The work to establish women's legitimacy as political actors has to be undertaken alongside campaigns to demand legal recognition for affirmative action. In Sri Lanka, the consultations and the lobbying activities served as vehicles for mobilising women around the issue of women's political participation, and for deepening understandings on the issue. In the process the issue was politicised. In addition, ICES succeeded in linking grassroots women from the provinces with city activists – something that had not happened previously in women's activism in Sri Lanka. Sister successfully engaged a broad range of Namibians in discussions on women's right to political participation, making this a political issue. Sister strengthened women's organization in Namibia and raised women's awareness of their rights as citizens, including awareness of the right to a right.

#### ***Good Governance from a gender perspective***

The issue of equal representation of women and men in political office is the cornerstone of an agenda for good governance from a gender perspective. That many people come into political office through the patronage of more powerful people is not a phenomenon that is limited to women. The gender issue lies in the male and female subjectivities reproduced in the process: that women are 'illegitimate' occupants of public office, whereas men are groomed into public life by patrons. In order to **enhance and sustain** women in political office we learn from the action research projects how these subjectivities change and what are the indicators to measure these changes. The projects shed light on the changes in institutional practices that come about as a result of the presence of women in political office: (1) decision-making in governance structures becomes more transparent as a result of the newcomers (elected women in the BMP project demanding to know about the

disposal of projects); (2) new agendas are introduced (e.g. measures to curb violence against women in Bangladesh or measures to secure livelihoods for poor women); (3) new political alliances are built which in the long-term will undermine the patronage system (the rural and urban activist networking in Sri Lanka; connections between diverse groups of women established in Namibia; cross party women's caucus in Zambia).

## 4. ENGENDERING GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS

In the decade of the nineties there was growing attention to the way in which power is exercised in the management of economic and social resources for development. This has led to efforts to get public institutions 'right' by which is generally meant creating more accountability of these institutions to the public they are supposed to serve, and greater transparency in the way decisions are made. However, redirecting the use of power to redistributive ends entails much more than managerial and technical interventions. It is a political project calling to question the core values of institutions and their practices; the creation of a 'public' that will demand accountability; and participation in decisions relating to resource allocation.

The international gender equality agenda, as articulated through the various international conferences (from Nairobi 1985 to Beijing 1995 and beyond), has consistently highlighted the need for institutional change. The agenda itself calls for equal distribution of power and resources, more accountability to gender equitable outcomes, and increased participation by women in decisions affecting their lives and that of their families and communities. Towards this end gender and development activists have sought to create more visibility about women's condition and position, developed tools and mechanisms to 'mainstream' women's interests in institutions, and helped to create capacity of people to work with gender equality issues.

The action research projects undertaken by partner organisations in the GCG programme represent civil society initiatives to engender governance institutions. In Pakistan, the military government issued a statute in 2000 creating the National Commission on women without consultation with stakeholders and in a non-transparent manner. The action research project represents efforts by civil society organisations to reclaim the mission and mandate of the National Commission; to open it up to greater public scrutiny; and to involve both state and civil society actors in securing an institution that protects women's strategic interests. In Kerala, India, the partner organisation SAKHI has worked with local government institutions to engender the planning process. In Bangladesh, PRIP Trust has also worked with local government institutions to involve elected women officials in development planning. Nari Pokkho in Bangladesh has sought to build accountability of local health

authorities to women's health needs by working with the health authorities and women's organisations, and by re-activating hitherto inactive multi-stakeholder committees, set up by government, to oversee public health provision. GAP in South Africa has worked to create a bridge between women elected to Parliament and poor women in communities, who are the electorate in order to secure more accountability and enhance participation. Nirantar in India has sought to bring back policy attention to the need for adult women's education and literacy both at the level of the state and non-governmental organisations.

This workshop provided the opportunity to share experiences and lessons learnt in engendering governance institutions. The objective was to go beyond the sharing of experiences to interrogate what is involved in engendering institutions. The role of civil society organisations, the meaning of participation, the strategy of working in tandem with public institutions and through alliances, and the importance of working both at the level of material practice and symbolic representation are issues that need to be examined more closely.

### **Strengthening the National Commission On the Status of Women – a consultative process**

AURAT FOUNDATION & SHIRKAT GAH

#### **Organisational Profile**

Aurat ('Woman') Publication and Information Service Foundation, a national organisation established in 1986, is a civil society organisation committed to women's empowerment in society. Aurat Foundation's overall goal is to develop an enabling environment for women's empowerment at all levels through participatory democracy and good governance in Pakistan, through enabling women to acquire greater control over knowledge, resources and institutions, and through developing and strengthening networks of civil society organisations. Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre was established in 1975 and is today working in all four provinces of Pakistan. It has a vision of 'fully empowered women in a just, vibrant, democratic, tolerant and environmentally sound society, where equity and opportunity are ensured for all, resources sustainably used, where peace prevails and where the state is responsive.' Shirkat Gah combines advocacy and capacity-building based on research, networking and publications.

#### **Background to the Issue**

A key demand of women's organisations in Pakistan has been to establish a permanent commission on the status of women, to address the inequality of women's status and rights in Pakistan. The demand was made in 1976 and has been periodically reiterated as a recommendation in civil society and government documents until 1998. The demand gained momentum in the build-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. Aurat Foundation and Shirkat Gah were actually planning a consultative process towards advocacy on the issue. However, the military government of General Musharraf abruptly set up the Pakistan National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) in July 2000 without any transparent process or consultation. Critical lacunae remained relating to structure, mandate and powers of the NCSW. Civil society organisations were apprehensive that it might be unable to make any significant contribution towards changing the situation of women, since the NCSW did not appear to have a truly independent status, enforcing authority or clear mandate.

At this point Aurat Foundation and Shirkat Gah made the strategic decision to nonetheless initiate a post-facto consultative process involving all stakeholders, government, commission members, civil society and experts. This was not only to develop a common understanding on the kind of structure, mandate and powers necessary for an effective commission, but also to reinforce the idea that critical decisions of this nature should involve all stakeholders. However, the major challenge was that government as a whole was not favourable to having a strong and independent commission, which would perform a watchdog role regarding government's own performance. Moreover, commission members saw the criticism of the selection process as a personal attack, and were not keen on dialogue with rights organisations.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of the project were to

- Work towards enabling circumstances within civil society and the government for the ownership, legitimacy and enhancement of the role of the NCSW so as to make it more accountable and effective in the context of women's empowerment
- Undertake an informed consultative process between different actors and translate the

outcome into concrete recommendations towards strengthening the NCSW

- Enhance understanding among policy makers and women's rights activists about the structure, role, powers and functioning of such state machinery as the NCSW.

### **Findings**

The strategies used by the two women's organisations included experience-sharing with representatives of similar commissions in other countries, consultative processes at provincial and national levels and lobbying for law reform. The experiences of Shirkat Gah and Aurat Foundation demonstrate the challenges of engendering a national machinery that is itself set up for the implementation of the equality agenda. They also highlight the nuances of the process of setting up a machinery responsive to community women (for whose welfare it has been set up), draws strength from the women's movement and yet has sufficient political authority to hold the entire government accountable for advancing gender equality. At the same time, the achievements of their post-facto intervention demonstrate the significance of civil society engagement with the government system despite its obvious flaws.

The process started with the International Conference on National Commissions on Women in July 2001, in Islamabad, attended by representatives of the national commissions for women from four carefully chosen countries - India, South Africa, Philippines and the UK - as well as the members of the Pakistan National Commission on the Status of Women. The consultation focused on six major areas of concern: independence of the commission, criteria and selection process of members, ensuring state responsiveness (departmental cooperation, parliamentary action, policy advisory role), mandate and rules of business, interaction with civil society and funding.

This was followed by four Provincial Consultations held in North-West Frontier Province, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan, which were attended by state officials, elected local councillors, NCSW, and civil society representatives. The discussion focussed on the following areas of concern: role for the NCSW *vis à vis* the existing Ministry of Women's Development and the Women Development departments, membership criteria, interaction with civil society, ensuring state responsiveness and finally mandate (including complaint cell).

The next step was a National Consultation on the NCSW, attended by existing NCSW members, participants of the earlier consultations and government department officials. The discussions focussed on finalising consensus recommendations regarding the NCSW, its independence, mandate and functions, its funding, systems for ensuring government responsiveness, its powers, the criteria for selecting its members, and its own accountability.

The rich debate from these consultations surfaced some of the complexities surrounding the structure of a body that draws its strength and part of its mandate from women and civil society organisations, yet must be strongly embedded in the political realm to perform oversight functions for the state. The consultations also served to explore the myriad functions (redressal/ referral, oversight, policy advisory, planning and monitoring) that a national machinery like the NCSW could perform, but which have to be specified for optimum effectiveness. The discussions also served to highlight the two different roles that are played by national machineries: one, when they are the only state body committed to women's agenda, and the other, when they are independent watchdog bodies. A clear analysis of the Pakistan NCSW emerged using this framework.

The process created a direct interaction between the NCSW and their primary constituency women from civil society under unique circumstances compared to the earlier meetings called by the NCSW. Here, the expectations of civil society became clear to the members of the NCSW. It provided women's organisations with a first opportunity to reflect upon the role and composition of government machineries to mainstream women's interests. It was an opportunity to provide direct feedback to the NCSW members themselves. The addition of international experiences led to a deeper understanding of the entire concept of a national machinery for mainstreaming gender issues among all participants. As such, this process provided the space for discussion and consultation that had been missing in the actual creation of the NCSW.

The unique impact of this strategy of engagement, dialogue and collective capacity building was that the NCSW members took ownership of the process and its outcomes in a number of ways. They had a separate meeting with the members of the foreign commissions to strengthen their own understanding.

They mentioned the International Conference and the Regional Consultations in their own Annual Report as “ a consultative process that provided (them) with considerable insight and opportunities for interaction and dialogue, ... as well as valuable information”. In the Annual Report, they mentioned that they were trying to streamline procedures, and gave a list of recommendations for amending the Ordinance that created the NCSW. Their recommendations are almost identical to those developed during the consultative process. It was also clear that the Members were now in favour of consultative processes and wished to build up support from outside the NCSW as well. While the NCSW began to open up spaces for civil society to provide inputs, they also became more responsive to issues raised by civil society. They began taking up prominent cases of injustice and violence against women and issuing statements, as well as sensitive issues of religious ordinances.

As such, despite being a post-facto process, the consultations served to generate concern, ownership and renewed debate on the creation of the NCSW. It demonstrated that ‘it is never too late to start a dialogue’.

## Gender and decentralised planning

SAKHI

### *Organisational profile*

SAKHI<sup>9</sup> is a feminist resource centre for women in Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala State in South India. It was started in 1996 and has been providing information services, gender training and support to networks to enable advocacy and campaigns. It has been training and mobilising women in Panchayats (rural local government institutions) as well as doing advocacy on women’s issues. It is focussed on gender equity, reproductive and sexual health and rights for women as well as leadership building. It has been active in forming the state-level network of women’s groups, *Streevedi*.

### *Background to the issue*

Kerala is one of the smaller states in India with the highest density of population. Despite a low per capita income, it has the best Human Development

Index<sup>10</sup> in India at 0.446. Kerala is also the only state in India with a favourable sex ratio (1040 women to 1000 men). It has a high Gender Development Index as well, but women’s participation in the state legislative assembly never crossed 10%. The 73rd Indian Constitutional Amendment of 1993 for local governance bodies (Panchayats) in rural areas enabled women to have 1/3 reserved seats in all three levels of elected bodies as well as in the levels of leadership. The Left Democratic Government, which came into power in Kerala in 1996 implemented this through a resource sharing experiment wherein 35-40% of the state budget was handed over to local governance bodies for decentralised and participatory development planning. The State Planning Board drew up detailed guidelines to make the planning process truly decentralised, participatory, equitable, accurately reflecting local realities and feasible. It also asked for 10% of funds to be earmarked exclusively for women’s projects, which were closely checked to see if they were really benefiting women, and gender impact assessments were made mandatory in the cost-benefit analysis of all projects.

### *Goal and objectives*

SAKHI’s goal was to intervene in the decentralised planning process in Kerala so as to make gender concerns central to decision-making on the allocation of resources, and to secure women’s practical and strategic interests through planning. The project was planned in *two* phases.

- In Phase I (prior to the October 2000 local government elections), the objective was to undertake a detailed analysis of whether gender issues were a concern or criteria in the general projects undertaken in 2 Gram Panchayats; study and document how the local bodies handled the mandatory provision of 10% for women’s projects; identify the key institutional actors and strategies that facilitated the design and implementation of programmes with a gender perspective.
- In Phase II of the project, one objective was to intervene and work on gender sensitive decentralised planning proces in two selected Panchayats with a view to influencing budgetary allocations for generating livelihoods for women, focus on women’s health issues and programmes to resist violence against women. A second

<sup>9</sup> *Woman friend*

<sup>10</sup> *On the lines of UNDP*



objective was to engage in state level consultation to develop tools and indicators for gender based planning and also advocate for gender planning through membership in state level networks.

Within the **first phase**, SAKHI conducted a study based on secondary sources of the various projects planned and implemented in two women-headed local bodies - Panchayats A and B - with similar geo-physical and socio-economic situations. During the **second phase**, SAKHI worked closely with two new Panchayats C and D to observe and intervene in the decentralised development planning process, especially to influence the Women's Component Plan (WCP) so as to include issues of health, livelihoods and violence against women in the budget allocations. Apart from this, SAKHI also conducted studies and built capacities on these and worked with the elected representatives on gender sensitivity.

### **Findings**

What emerged from these interventions was that:

- The needs assessment and resource identification exercises, compiled as the Development Reports, in their chapters on Women lacked data and were based on traditional notions regarding appropriate behaviour and spaces for women, referring to them as goddesses and mothers. There was no recognition of women's productive or reproductive roles, and their problems were seen as stemming from the lack of gainful employment. There was no attempt at gender analysis. The lack of analysis and priority setting was a major handicap in engendering the planning process.
- While larger numbers of women participated in the general assembly meetings (Gramsabha), they did so primarily as the beneficiaries and not as decision-makers.
- The Women's Component Projects focussed on women's practical gender needs, with emphasis on particular activities, which were not adequately planned to actually increase income. No systematic analysis had been undertaken on how to address the need for sustainable livelihoods. Training women in skills of accounting, management and marketing was not addressed. The institutional mechanisms to organize and run the programmes were also not clear.

- Aggressive, patronising and sometimes outright condemnatory attitudes of men in Panchayats made it difficult for women leaders or elected members to speak out or take part in the decision-making process. Men tended to run down women's suggestions. Violence and confrontational party politics vitiated the discussions during meetings.
- Women's entry into the Panchayats had been mediated through their male family members. In contrast to the men, who had been in political activity from their school days, for all the women, it was a first. Additionally, women had mobility restrictions in the evening as well as for work-related travel unaccompanied by male family members.

SAKHI concluded that despite existing state procedures to promote democratic decision-making, this in itself does not guarantee democracy where gender relations are concerned. The procedures were gender neutral in that they assumed that women and men have equal power and status to exercise authority. Further, they were gender blind because the procedures in themselves do not uphold a model or vision of society and development that is gender fair and are not about the transformation of gender relations. Neither were women themselves able to articulate their strategic interests at the Panchayats, having neither the analysis, nor the organisation. Better articulation of women's needs can only take place if there is a growing demand from women themselves regarding a strategic gender agenda.

As interventions towards this, SAKHI started gender sensitisation workshops facilitated by men with a non-threatening and non-evasive approach. These led to some changes in behaviour. Women members reported that they were asked for their opinion and were actually heard by their male colleagues. SAKHI also provided psychological support to the women and provided plan suggestions when the Panchayat could not come up with any ideas for the women's sector. SAKHI conducted the Status of Women study on health and violence for the Panchayat on request and organised trainings and other capacity building events for the elected representatives. SAKHI effectively advocated for the setting up of Vigilance Committees to check Violence Against Women at the level of Panchayats, which led to action by the state.

SAKHI's experience brings out useful elements of good practice, and highlights some of the theoretical issues of engendering development planning. It is undeniable that there was considerable political will in enforcing the process of engendered local development planning. However, the absence of systematic gender analysis by the planners and women's groups, as well as women's lack of experience in articulating their development priorities prevented effective change. Women as an unorganised constituency were constrained from becoming active agents in prioritising and making decisions on their own development needs.

### **Enabling elected women members to participate in Development Committees**

PRIP TRUST

#### ***Organisational Profile***

PRIP Trust is a national NGO that provides technical support for institutional capacity building to the NGO community in Bangladesh, and particularly to smaller women's organisations and NGO networks. PRIP Trust has been advocating the decentralisation of development programme management, and the participation of the newly elected women members at Union Parishad or lowest administrative level in development planning. PRIP Trust has worked closely with a large number of elected women representatives in nearly 350 Union Parishads and conducted two studies<sup>11</sup>.

#### ***Background to the Issue***

In October 1997, perhaps as a concession to the persistent demand of the women's movement, the Bangladesh parliament passed the Local Government (Union Parishads) 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Act, which made provision for direct election of women in local governance bodies (Union Parishads or UP) in three reserved seats. The UP has on the average a population of 20,000. The governance body of each has nine general elected members, three women from reserved seats and one Chairperson. Each seat reserved for women was composed of three ordinary Wards (one Ward is the constituency of one ordinary elected

member) and so was three times the size of what an ordinary member had to contest from. Elections held in December 1997 saw 13,402 women elected from reserved seats. Additionally, 110 women were elected from general seats, and 23 came into the posts of UP Chairperson. The UP were supposed to set up 12 Standing Committees, and 13 Sub-Committees, one third of which have to be headed by a woman member. All these committees were to ensure smooth functioning of development programmes. In addition, in November 1998, the Ministry for Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) declared that "Social Development Committees (SDS)" had to be set up by the Chairperson, each headed by the elected woman member of that Ward. Although there is no explicit mention of funded activity, the SDC can access funds from the concerned ministry or the UP. The resources for the other activities of the UP come largely from the Annual Development Plan of the government, which is administered at the level of the Upazila<sup>12</sup> Parishad.

#### ***Goal and Objectives***

The project of the PRIP Trust was conducted in the district of Faridpur, 150 Km from Dhaka, in 11 Union Parishads in collaboration with a local NGO Racine. PRIP planned to work with the 34 women who were elected members of the 11 Union Parishads (one had contested from a general seat). The objectives were:

- To build capacity of elected women representatives of eleven Union Parishads in planning local development programmes from a gender perspective.
- To enable them to activate and direct the functioning of the women-headed Committees (not just the SDC) in the Union Parishads.
- To enable the women representatives to mobilise resources to implement the plans.
- To create a gender sensitive environment within the administrative structures and the general community, which would be supportive of planning and implementing gender development programmes.

<sup>11</sup> *Daspurkayastha, Nibedita: Problems and prospects of female councillors and Khan, Zarina Rahman (1999), Roles and perception of elected women members and linkages with the civil society.*

<sup>12</sup> *Upazilla is an administrative unit of government in Bangladesh and roughly translates to sub district.*

### **Strategies and Activities**

PRIP Trust's strategies included studying the situation of the women representatives, resource identification exercises, review and planning workshops in Union Parishads, community sharing, and dissemination of outcomes in the Upazila. They worked with the elected women representatives, male members and the Chairpersons of the 11 Union Parishads, the UNO, the project implementation officer, the LGRD engineer, the Deputy Commissioner, and of course their local partner, the NGO Racine.

### **Findings**

What emerged from these interventions was that:

- Women are heads of committees, which relate to community welfare such as vulnerable group development, benefits for widows and older people, or prevention of oppression of women and children. They would also be on committees that do not have much to do with disbursement of resources but are related to practical gender needs. Men, however, head committees clearly related to resource allocation like finance, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, infrastructure, law and order, and the Food for Work programme.
- Their Chairpersons did not provide women with complete information about the composition<sup>13</sup> and function of the Committees. Chairpersons in nine out of eleven Union Parishads, despite the government order, had not formed the women-headed Social Development Committees. Women's inclusion in any committee depended on the whim of the Chairpersons. If women did get included on committees, decisions would be taken without consulting or even informing them. Those who did try to exercise their roles encountered problems. Elected women members disclosed that the Chairpersons often do not bother to send out the circulars to the women members, so they are inadequately informed about processes. Moreover, Chairpersons sometimes get women to do work without giving them membership in the concerned committee, so there is no evidence later that they actually did the work.
- Elected women members also complained that the Chairperson always headed the most resource-intensive Committee, and handed out all the

work to his favourites. Women were paid lower wages than men for the same amount of work, and signatures of women "members"<sup>14</sup> of Project Implementation Committees were forged or forcibly collected by the Chairperson on muster rolls. Moreover, it also appeared that the Chairpersons can put pressure on the UNO to bend the government rules for their own interests, under threat of getting them harassed or even transferred<sup>15</sup>. PRIP Trust observed that the Chairpersons owe allegiance to the local MPs rather than to their own electoral constituency.

- Of thirty women profiled by PRIP, all were married and six were barely literate. Less than half had completed ten years of schooling, 21 were housewives by occupation. Women who had come into elected positions were usually new to political life and had to negotiate their position *vis à vis* their home life. Even though their male family members would have asked them to contest the elections, their growing public life led to domestic disapproval and strong opposition to contesting the next round of elections.

A Resource Mapping Workshop followed a survey, conducted through the elected women representatives in each of 11 Union Parishads. Earlier, there had been no such systematic effort in development planning. It gave the UP members the confidence that resource-mobilisation problems can be solved. It was also a first-time opportunity for the elected women members to work together with the LGRD Engineer, Officer in Charge of Project Implementation and the UNO, and women were able to interact with the Chairperson with some amount of confidence.

The structural limitation of the electoral system started women off with a disadvantage for resource allocation in their constituency. This was compounded by the gender-power relations within which elected women were either functioning or not able to function at all. Moreover the lack of adequate checks and balances or horizontal accountability systems permitted abuse of development resources by the Chairpersons of the local bodies, and marginalisation of women from the development decision-making

<sup>13</sup> Especially the possibility for women's participation.

<sup>14</sup> Who have no information about their membership on the committee.

<sup>15</sup> It is not clear whether this is done through linkages with the political party in power.

process. It emerges that “good governance” is imperative for enabling women to become active agents in taking political decisions to address their gender needs.

While demonstrating the interventions needed to optimise conditions for participation of an excluded group, the project explores just how much can be realistically achieved by a civil society organisation trying to engender the process of functioning of local bodies. The case studies of the elected women members show that women did try to exert more agency in exercising their right to political participation in terms of struggling and negotiating to get what they wanted, now that they knew it was their right. This effort to change the socially constructed rules about how far women could participate in an institution of local governance is the expansion and reconstruction of “invited space” by a civil society organisation. Moreover, collectively analysing the gendered nature of development committees and the barriers to women’s participation in the workshop was an effort to break the silence and isolation of women’s gendered experience in politics. The sharing of their experiences with the Chairpersons of the UPs has the possibility of enabling women to expose and challenge the corruption and hegemony of these men.

## **Women Accessing Power**

GENDER ADVOCACY PROGRAMME (GAP)

### ***Organisation Profile and Mission***

The Gender Advocacy Project (GAP) is a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to empower poor black women to hold elected parliamentary representatives accountable.

GAP was formed in 1993 on the eve of South Africa’s first democratic elections. Women’s organisations, active in the period running up to the elections, lobbied to ensure that at least one third of the candidates on party lists should be women. An outcome of this activism was that the 1994 elections resulted in an increased percentage of women in the national parliament from 3%, under the apartheid government to 27%. Aware that an increased representation of women would not automatically translate into improved living conditions for poor black women, a group of activists formed the organisation GAP. Their mission was to empower

poor black women to hold elected parliamentary representatives accountable.

GAP is based in Cape Town, where the national parliament is located. One of GAP’s projects involved taking women from working class communities to parliament to meet women parliamentarians and be exposed to parliamentary processes. Over three years – 1999 to 2001 four hundred and fifty African and Coloured working class women were involved in these visits to parliament.

### ***Objectives***

The main objective of the action research was to explore what kind of activities would ensure that elected political representatives give working class women’s concerns priority, and what kind of activities would make an impact on parliamentary processes.

### ***Strategies and Activities***

*Phase One* assessed previous visits to parliament and asked the following questions:

- To what extent does taking poor women to parliament empower them to access parliamentarians and to ensure that women MPs are responsive to poor women’s interests?
- What changes in strategy are required? What other strategies will ensure poor women’s interests are addressed through the parliamentary process?

In order to address these questions, GAP undertook a documentation study and conducted interviews with community women, women MPs and GAP staff. In these discussions, GAP assessed the visits conducted up to 2001, explored the interests and concerns of community women, and explored strategies for addressing these concerns. GAP then compiled and discussed the findings with community women and with GAP staff, and on the basis of the findings developed a new modus operandi for future visits to parliament.

*Phase Two* involved reformulating the project, and organising a visit to parliament by women from two communities centering on an agenda defined by these women. Together with the women from these two communities, GAP then assessed the new form of visit to parliament, and attempted to provide ongoing support to women.

## **Findings**

### Phase One

#### *Potential for such visits to empower poor women to hold parliamentarians accountable*

In discussions with women from marginalised communities GAP learnt that these women felt alienated from their elected political representatives, that they saw women parliamentarians as an elite group and as not acting on behalf of poor women. Women from poor communities felt disempowered in accessing parliament, the provincial legislature and local councils. GAP decided to address this by bringing marginalised women to parliament, exposing them to parliamentary processes and providing them the opportunity to meet women parliamentarians. Individual women were recruited from communities least likely to access parliament and with whom GAP had previous contact. In assessing the visits to parliament, GAP found that that visits

- de-mystify parliament for community women,
- made community women aware of parliamentarians as ordinary human beings,
- gained greater respect for the community women in their communities and their homes,
- encouraged more women in the communities concerned to join local organisations involved in the visits.

However, the visits in themselves were not sufficient to empower women to access parliament and to ensure that parliament was responsive to women. In most cases, women who went on the visits did not initiate further contact with parliamentarians, nor did GAP have a strategy for ongoing contact with the community women, their organisations or communities.

#### *Changes required to ensure poor women's interests are addressed through parliamentary processes*

GAP realized that the previous visits had been one-off events with no follow up. Discussions with parliamentarians were usually of short duration – around 15 minutes, did not focus on a specific issue, and therefore did not allow for meaningful dialogue. In order to meet the goal of empowering poor women to access parliamentarians, and to ensure that their concerns were addressed, a shift to a community-based approach was agreed upon, which would build a more sustained basis for holding political representatives accountable in the future.

Community women selected for the visits tended to be individual women who did not belong to organisations, and this limited their ability to build on the experience. There was no specific selection criteria for women MPs involved in the visits – such as MPs covering the constituencies the community women came from, or MPs holding specific portfolios. Instead, a general invitation was sent to all women MPs with attempts made to ensure that MPs came from across all political parties.

Community women felt GAP should contribute to building the women's movement by developing the skills of grassroots activists involved in organisations in their communities. This required that the project should shift its focus from individual women to organised groupings of community women; that the group should bring a specific issue to the meetings with parliamentarians; and that GAP should provide additional support and follow-up to the visits to parliament.

In exploring their interests with women involved in previous visits from six communities, GAP found key issues were unemployment, problems arising from changes in the state child support grant, AIDs and domestic violence. In these discussions, GAP got a deeper sense of community dynamics and community concerns and explored possible strategies with the women. It was evident in these discussions that parliament was not the most appropriate avenue for dealing with all the concerns raised by the community women. It was also clear, that GAP and the women needed a clearer understanding of the issues different spheres of government were responsible for in order to target the appropriate authority.

### Phase Two

It was agreed that GAP would create a space for more meaningful dialogue in future visits. These would involve community based women's groups, be issue based, and MPs would be invited on the basis of their involvement in the particular issue and/or constituency. GAP would help community groups define more clearly the issue they wanted parliamentary women to respond to, and would help to identify the other relevant authority or sphere of government that needed to be addressed. In addition, GAP would provide support to community groups after the visits to parliament. A visit to parliament was organised along these lines with two women's groups – one from the community of Manenberg, and one from Mfuleni.

*Articulating demands depends on the state of organisation and resources available to the community group*

In assessing the visit to parliament of women from these two communities, GAP found that both community groups felt they had gained from the training. They were encouraged to think through how they could hold politicians accountable. However, the Manenberg group had distinct advantages, which resulted in their making greater gains from the visit relative to the Mfuleni group.

The group from the better serviced and more settled coloured community of Manenberg had prior experience in lobbying and advocacy, had higher levels of formal education, spoke English and Afrikaans (languages in which GAP's trainer is conversant), had some knowledge about the issue of concern to them - the Maintenance Act.

The group from Mfuleni, a less developed African community, where most residents are migrants - their "real" homes being in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape - had no prior lobbying experience, had lower levels of education, spoke Xhosa and needed translation in the training (something that had not been catered for by GAP). In addition, their issue of unemployment was too broad for GAP and the MPs to address easily. At the meeting in parliament both groups had equal time, but since the Mfuleni group needed translation, less time was actually spent on their concerns.

*Impact of the reformulated community approach*

While this was an improvement on past visits, the women were not able to get parliamentarians to commit themselves to specific actions. After the visit, the two community groups assessed their visit and made follow-up plans with GAP. A steering committee was elected from each community to meet, discuss next steps, and decide on what further assistance they needed from GAP.

The Manenberg women asked GAP for assistance in holding a community workshop on the Maintenance Act.

The Mfuleni group asked GAP to assist in developing a more specific demand on the issue of unemployment. They also planned to meet an NGO providing training in business and production skills for job creation.

Both groups had difficulties undertaking their planned follow-up activities and needed ongoing support

from GAP. Their relatively more intense involvement with the community groups gave GAP a better sense of these communities, and this enabled GAP to tailor assistance to communities more adequately. It was clear that merely providing exposure to elected representatives does not sufficiently empower women from disadvantaged communities.

**Lessons learnt and conclusions**

The following recommendations arose from the action research project:

- GAP should follow-up future visits to parliament, invite the same politicians to a session with the same community groups so that the politicians may feedback their actions to community women, who in turn can act as a check on the parliamentarians
- GAP should deepen its work by focusing on a few targeted communities through all its programmes
- GAP should link its work with local communities with others of its programmes, for example GAP's local government and social policy programmes can both contribute to solutions regarding the issue of unemployment

The overall conclusion is that bridging the gap between women elected to government and working class women at community level involves working intensively with women's organisations at community level, as well as being able to engage at all levels of government across a range of policy areas.

## **Ensuring accountability of local health authorities and health service providers**

### **NARIPOKKHO**

**Organisational Profile**

Naripokkho (roughly translated as 'for women') was founded in 1983 in Bangladesh, and is working for the advancement of women's rights and entitlements as a women's activist organisation whose activities include advocacy campaigns, protest activities, research and lobbying on issues related to gender justice. Naripokkho has a well-established reputation as an advocacy group for women's health and rights with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Naripokkho was included in various government committees for the follow-up of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the development of the government health and

population programme. As part of this effort, Naripokkho had earlier worked with a local NGO, Sankalpa, in Pathorghata, to advocate for better delivery of health services to women.

### **Background to the issue**

Around 1979, primary health care in Bangladesh was organised around the sub-district level, where 400 Upazila Health centres were built to a standard. This Upazila Health Complex is the comprehensive primary health service provider institution, and is administered by the Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer, who convenes the Upazila Health Advisory Committee<sup>17</sup> (UHAC), which is to be chaired by the local Member of Parliament. The Committee is supposed to meet every month with the objective of improving health and medical services at the hospital and solving any problems that might arise at the local level.

Bangladesh has a very high maternal mortality ratio at 450 per 100,000 live births, largely due to preventable causes, presenting the failure of the public health system to effectively provide services for women. Trained and skilled staff are unwilling to work in rural areas, leading to inequitable distribution in access to health services. Moreover, doctors earn low salaries in state service and prefer to keep the quality of state services relatively low so that they can attract private clients. Public service is not understood as an accountable duty.

### **Objectives**

Pathorghata is a remote and poor Upazila in the southern coastal part of Bangladesh, where people depend on one crop a year, fishing and some trading. The UHAC of Pathorghata was defunct, no meetings having been convened for five years due to the lack of time of the local MP who is to chair these meetings. Doctors took fees from patients at the Upazila Health Complex (UHC) for services they were supposed to provide free, and sometimes resorted to extortion. Working from a rights-based framework, where state agencies can be held accountable for adequate and accessible service provision to all its citizens, Naripokkho tried to explore how the mechanism of the UHAC could be made into a sustainable forum for enforcing this accountability. The objectives of the project were:

- To make the local health authorities and service providers accountable to people, particularly women
- To make the health authorities and service providers more gender sensitive.

### Strategies and activities

Naripokkho's principal strategy was to re-activate the Upazila Health Advisory Committee (UHAC), a formally constituted oversight body which had providers, citizens and people's representatives on it, and make it play a regulatory role ensuring accountability of the local government health services. Towards this, Naripokkho and its partner NGO Sankalpa conducted a study of women's health problems, monitored the health services at the hospital and provided technical support to the members of the UHAC to plan for improving the health services. Through workshops, they motivated different segments of the stakeholders to take a keen interest in the right to access health services from the state. Strategically, Naripokkho also maintained linkages with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Departments within it.

### **Findings**

#### Working on both demand and supply

Naripokkho had to make a series of strategic choices about the most effective ways for starting a discourse on women's right to health through the forum of the UHAC. This included ensuring that all members had faith in using it as a problem-solving forum, as well as ensuring respect for its decisions, especially compliance of the providers. At the other end, the service users, or women who were disadvantaged both by gender and class *vis à vis* the providers, were not represented or participating in the process of monitoring the service provision. Naripokkho took several steps to strengthen both 'demand' and 'response', in order to arrive at a situation where all the concerned actors were motivated to play an active role in improving the health status of women.

#### Reviving the UHAC as a multi-stakeholder problem-solving forum

At the outset, they chose to engage first with the concerned local official, rather than coming in through top-down directives from the Ministry. Along with this, they started a dialogue with different stakeholders about their responsibilities in ensuring accountability for a functioning healthcare system. Since this was an

<sup>17</sup> Earlier the Upazila Health Improvement Committee.

effort to strengthen “citizen voice” as well as “state response”, it was important to involve diverse actors such as community women, NGOs, elected representatives, doctors of the UHC, journalists, other health practitioners and the administration. Following this, Naripokkho facilitated the revival of the existing but defunct oversight body, the UHC (later the UHAC). Stakeholders were encouraged to see the UHAC as a body that could address and solve some of the problems being raised, and as an ‘invited space’ for citizen participation in decision-making regarding the Health Complex. Naripokkho built up among the stakeholders an asserting environment, where the revived UHAC could actually start functioning, and they would support each other in problem solving.

Naripokkho also enabled the local NGO Sankalpa, which was already a member of the oversight body, to exercise their role in the UHA committee. This was done by daily monitoring of the service provision in the hospital, studying the health status of women and gaps in women’s access to healthcare, and using their findings in the UHAC discussions. Sankalpa played a pro-active role in engaging with other UHAC members, the media and the hospital patients in monitoring compliance to the decisions taken at the UHAC. Apart from this, Naripokkho engaged with the local elected representatives, since they were already motivated about improving women’s health and rights, and were also members of the instituted accountability mechanism of the UHAC. Their monitoring of compliance to the decisions of the UHAC was very effective, as it was based on the power of ‘public mandate’ that elected representatives bring with them to take decisions on behalf of their constituencies. Further, the increased role of journalists in activating the new norms that were set up by the UHAC created a public discourse about the need for health providers to be accountable to users, no matter how poor. This was demonstrated in the immediate media coverage of lapses, which enforced compliance to the norms set up in the UHAC, simply by using exposure and public embarrassment to the violators.

#### Giving service providers a voice

In the absence of a culture of accountability of the service provider to the client or user of services, Naripokkho had the additional challenge of opening up the power relations between them so that the providers could become more responsive. They managed this by giving the providers ample

opportunity to air their own problems, and some of the genuine grievances were immediately addressed, so that the doctors’ faith in the UHAC was built up. At the same time, they enabled the doctors to acknowledge the social barriers faced by poor women in safeguarding their health whereby they were faced with their moral responsibility to facilitate women’s access to health services, admitting the barriers which were caused by their own neglect. Given the failure of the existing horizontal systems of oversight and monitoring, Naripokkho had to introduce an element of “moral accountability” through highlighting poor women’s disillusionment with the failure of the health system to address their poor health status. An additional ‘moral’ pressure was built up by the MP in the UHAC who commented “doctors are holding the patients hostage for money like extortionists. All this should be published in the newspapers”.

#### Providing research and information for decision-making

Naripokkho also came up with data on women’s health status, health-seeking behaviour, perceptions of the quality of services available and barriers to accessing health services. This initiated discussion in workshops with different stakeholders about problems in the health system and led to planning on a list of priorities on which workshop participants could themselves take action, especially for increasing accountability of the health providers. Some significant impacts include enhanced and proactive participation of UHAC members in committee meetings, monitoring of the hospital by journalists and councillors, improved professional behaviour of doctors, better service provision (less bribes, regular health education classes), and women being able to negotiate lower fees for seeing doctors.

The rights framework pre-supposes that the state will be obliged to provide an explanation of its actions to the people or their representatives, and will have an institutional capacity to respond to ‘citizen voice’ and be held to account for not addressing adequately the needs of disadvantaged groups. Given the existence of the accountability mechanism, Naripokkho was able to get all stakeholders to invest in it to make it really work, and strengthen the ‘voice’ of the community to bring in the gender agenda. As such the state body (the hospital) has to become responsible for implementing the gender agenda and is obliged to be held accountable for this to the citizens.



## Educational opportunities for women

NIRANTAR

### *Organisational Profile*

Nirantar is a resource centre based in Delhi, India, and was set up in 1993 with a gender and rights perspective on education. It defines education broadly as learning that enables people to take control over their lives. Education can be a medium through which women – who are otherwise marginalised – can access information, critically examine their situation, express themselves, communicate effectively, and participate in decision-making at various levels. The opportunity to acquire literacy skills is a right, and women's literacy also holds tremendous potential as a tool for empowerment.

### *Background to the issue*

In India, women's literacy continues to be extremely low, especially in comparison to men's literacy. There is an attitude of derision towards those who are illiterate, their illiterate status being equated with ignorance and backwardness. For women from marginalized sections of society, illiteracy becomes yet another facet of their disempowerment. Although Education policy in India is considered very progressive with regard to its focus on gender, a wide gap exists between stated policy and actual implementation. The lack of commitment to women's education is reflected in grossly inadequate programmes, meagre budgetary allocations and under utilisation of the available resources. Even Mahila Samakhya, the government's only programme dedicated to women's education, has not paid attention to women's literacy notwithstanding its other successes. The Total Literacy Campaign in the 80's and early 90's made no special efforts to target women. As such, a striking feature of the Total Literacy Campaigns in India has been that the vast majority of adult participants were women. This belies the myth that women do not value literacy. But little attention has been paid to enable women to sustain and build upon the confidence and skills acquired through the campaigns.

Within NGOs, there has been a lack of interest in literacy as compared to other development interventions. Furthermore, the failure of most NGOs to seriously work on women's literacy results in a lack of effective pressure on the State to be accountable on this front. For the women's movement too, women's education, and in particular literacy, are not priority areas compared to issues of health,

violence and legal rights. The linkages between education and women's empowerment are not part of the current discourse within the movement.

### *Objectives*

It is in this context that Nirantar initiated an action research study that would analyze women's perceptions related to education and empowerment. The ultimate goal of the study was to establish women's education, with a focus on literacy, as an area of concern not only on the part of the State but also of civil society organizations. Its objectives were:

- To analyze and understand educational opportunities for women from socio-economically marginalised sections of society in context of the agendas of the State, NGOs and women's organizations.
- To examine and highlight the linkages between education and women's empowerment, and the role that education plays in enabling women to play a more effective role in decision-making in various forums such as Panchayati Raj Institutions and Self-Help Groups.
- To advocate for an expansion of empowering, quality educational opportunities for women with the government as well as NGOs and women's organizations.

### *Strategies and activities*

Nirantar employed a dual strategy of research and policy advocacy. On the one hand Nirantar engaged in a collaborative study with a group of partners across the country to analyse various initiatives in the realm of women's education. The case studies examined policy and institutional frameworks, content of education programmes, and incorporation of gender training and curricula for programme staff and volunteers. They also sought the women recipients' perceptions regarding the quality and relevance of educational interventions directed at them. Virtually all the partner organizations of the study were facilitating women's participation in the Panchayats and community-based institutions.

On the other hand, Nirantar analysed perspectives of policy makers and bureaucrats towards women's education, and examined the donor agenda and international funding priorities, perspectives and approaches adopted for women's education. Further, Nirantar analysed provisions and priorities in education in the context of provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination

Against Women (CEDAW) and the Education for All (EFA) commitments made by India as key areas for a gender audit strategy for the education sector. This was accompanied by policy advocacy through the process of organising, conducting and following up a National Consultation on Gender and Education Policy which focussed on impacting the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan of the Government of India.

### **Findings**

#### Mismatch between poor women's expectations and that of NGOs and the state

The study highlighted a difference in the way women perceive literacy and its importance, and the perspectives and approaches of providers like NGOs, government and donors. Even women who had not been part of literacy interventions spoke about the role of literacy in enhancing self-esteem. Literacy meant for them an increase in mobility - moving independently to greater distances, as well as socio-economic mobility to enter new spheres of work and new roles in public arenas. Women who participated in literacy programmes stated having acquired reading and writing skills, irrespective of whether they actually acquired these skills, indicating a confidence that stems from the perceived value of literacy. Virtually all the women said that literacy prevented them from being duped and gave them a reduced sense of dependency. The importance of literacy is manifested in women's willingness to take on heavy odds to participate in literacy programmes such as opposition from the family as well as the community. It was useful to evoke and highlight the perceptions of the group whose interest had been marginalized and to posit that against the perceptions/stated objectives of the institutions of governance.

The providers appeared to regard literacy as part of the welfare framework, not as a right. As such, there were uneven commitments in terms of resources and priority allocation. The marginalization of women's literacy was so acute that the main advocacy required appeared to be with the partner organizations themselves. A major stumbling block was the integration of literacy skills into the lived realities of learners. For example, even the NGOs had not considered offering literacy opportunities for women who have been elected into Panchayats. Donors had withdrawn funding support for literacy programmes just because their own priorities had shifted. The 'empowerment' of learners had led to closure of a literacy programme by the district administration

who were annoyed by questions and complaints being articulated. In terms of materials, the government's information and communication material for women elected into local self-governance bodies seems designed to exclude those who do not have sufficiently high levels of education.

#### Re-inserting a 'marginalised' issue in the national policy agenda

Nirantar's engagement with the realm of policy advocacy was part of their organisational shift into lobbying and advocacy. Nirantar offered to co-ordinate a national convention that would bring together concerns relating to recent government policies on education, a high profile national event which gave visibility and energy to an issue that had for too long been marginalized. By opting to influence the national 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan process to put the message across regarding gender and education, Nirantar was seizing the moment - a moment which was very critical, since gender issues in education were being 'mainstreamed' in policy, which in turn would secure the resources necessary for gender issues in education. It required a deliberate choice of resource persons and people from government to be invited - people who could influence the process in the long run. It meant that even after the Consultation, participants would in their individual capacity continue to lobby with government to include the recommendations. Whether or not the recommendations were carried into the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan as they were devised, the process did result in a coalition of concerned persons and organisations coming together in a forum. Participants of the Consultation remained involved even after the event, lobbying to get the process further, making sure that at least key elements in the recommendations got included in the Five Year Plan. A major programme for women's empowerment through education, namely the Mahila Samakhya programme, was retained and expanded in the Five Year Plan as a result of this advocacy effort.

#### Highlighting the link between literacy, gender and citizenship

Nirantar's project highlights the crucial linkages between gender and citizenship. Women have been deprived of opportunities for formal education because of their gender and class. Their illiteracy as adults brands them as foolish or ignorant, vulnerable to fraud and low self-esteem. This substantially marginalises women's roles as citizens and decision

makers, in realms of public engagement, more so in an era when the premium is on information, obtained through the written word. Women also remain uninformed about their entitlements as citizens, since the knowledge exists only in the formal sphere of the written word. The exercise of citizenship is constructed within the notion of the citizen as a highly literate (male) person, since governance structures will only respond to the interest articulated through the written word. Literacy is required not only to represent interests but also to monitor and hold accountable the institutions of governance. As such, governance cannot be truly gendered until women are literate enough to access their entitlements as citizens.

#### Linking poor women's aspirations to policy forums

At another level, the project demonstrates the process of strengthening political 'voice' around an issue. Nirantar, a women's NGO, took up a hitherto marginalised cause as it uncovered women's own feelings about acquiring literacy, and determined to represent this priority in the policy arena. In the process, it provided 'voice' to women themselves, and also managed to mobilise other organisations around the issue through the process of the Consultation. Nirantar established the presence of the neglected issue of women's education even among other civil society groups working on education, ensuring that a broader coalition would now lobby for the collective recommendations to be accepted by the government.

### **Comments, analysis and discussions**

#### *Improving supply*

Engendering governance institutions involves bringing about changes in institutional rules and practices that promote gender equality and enhance citizen participation – changes that build the accountability of public administration institutions to the gender differentiated public they are supposed to serve. Therefore, a major task is to improve the supply side of the relationship between those who govern and the governed. The lessons learnt from the action research projects are as follows

- *Insisting on civil society participation*  
The Government of Pakistan set up the National Commission on women without consultation with civil society groups, whereas

civil society groups had first articulated the need for such a Commission. Critical lacunae remained relating to structure, mandate and powers of the NCSW, since it did not appear to have a truly independent status, enforcing authority or clear mandate. Civil society organisations were apprehensive that it might be impossible to make any significant contribution towards changing the situation of women. At this point, Aurat Foundation and Shirkat Gah made the strategic decision to nonetheless initiate a post-facto consultative process involving all stakeholders, government, commission members, civil society and experts. This was not only to develop a common understanding on the kind of structure, mandate and powers necessary for an effective commission, but also to reinforce the idea that critical decisions of this nature should involve all stakeholders. This insistence on civil society participation in setting up governance institutions is discernible in all the projects.

- *Developing transparency*

The projects demonstrate that once civil society organisations have insinuated their way into the functioning of governance institutions, a major task is to make transparent how the institution functions, how decisions are made and resources allocated. PRIP Trust did this by involving elected representatives of local government bodies in a resource mapping exercise, undertaking a situational analysis of how these function, presenting the results to the stakeholders, and organising workshops and meetings to build the capacity of elected members. In the process, undemocratic practices were unearthed, the marginalisation of elected women representatives visibilised, and information regarding resources available to local government was more widely shared.

- *Building accountability*

Accountability to a constituency, especially women, is very difficult to pin down. However, the lack of accountability of service providers is clearly discernible in the outcomes. Bangladesh has a very high maternal mortality ratio at 450 per 100,000 live births, which are largely due to preventable causes. As such, it presents the failure of the public health system to effectively provide services

for women. Public service, however, is not understood as an accountable duty. The project undertaken by Nari Pokkho sought to develop the accountability of local health service providers to women. They did this through a gamut of strategies which included giving the service providers a voice to articulate their problems, reviving a defunct health accountability body and making it function as a multi-stakeholder, problem solving body, and providing information about women's health needs, so that the service providers were aware of what they had to address.

### ***Creating demand***

Changes in institutional rules and practices to promote gender equality and enhance citizen participation requires that women emerge as a constituency, are aware of their entitlements, and are able to articulate this in an organised fashion. Therefore, a major task is to build constituencies that can demand gender-fair practices. The lessons learnt from the action research projects are as follows:

- *Building constituencies*

The experience of Sakhi in the decentralised planning process in the state of Kerala in India shows that despite the existence of regulations favouring women's participation in the planning process and budgetary allocations to meet women's priorities, women could not take advantage of these favourable conditions to further their strategic interests. They did not have the organisation nor the articulation of interests to intervene as agents in the planning process. Sakhi set about remedying this situation by helping women to organise, providing information and training so that women themselves could undertake a needs analysis, and by training and supporting the elected women representatives.

- *Articulating demand*

GAP in South Africa initiated a programme to put poor women in touch with parliamentarians by organising visits to Parliament. While these visits served to involve poor women in the new democracy, put them in touch with parliamentarians, and enhance their self-respect, it did not result in holding parliamentarians accountable to

the problems that women were facing in the townships. Therefore, the next task was to build organised groups of women and help them to articulate their most pressing problems. Similarly, Nirantar in India organised a national consultation on educational opportunities for women in the run-up to the drafting of the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan in India, so that the recommendations got included in the Five Year Plan.

- *Building awareness, building respect for women*

Sakhi found that the aggressive, patronising and sometimes outright condemnatory attitudes of men in Panchayats made it difficult for women leaders or elected members even to speak out or take part in the decision-making process. PRIP discovered that women's inclusion in any committee of the local government body depended on the whim of the Chairpersons. If women did get included on committees, decisions would be taken without consulting or even informing them. Nirantar's action research study that analyzed women's perceptions related to education and empowerment showed that contrary to women's perceptions of the value of literacy in enhancing their self-esteem, the service providers both governmental and non-governmental regarded literacy as welfare and charity work and not as a right. These experiences all speak about the appalling situation of gender relations, the denigration of women, and their consequent exclusion. Each of the projects had to deal with this lack of awareness and disrespect for women by men and sometimes by women themselves. They dealt with this through various strategies, ranging from gender training for men to linking women's aspirations with policy forums, providing information, undertaking research, writing Status of Women reports, and in general by supporting women to be assertive.

## 5. CLAIMING CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship is generally seen as a 'given' set of entitlements (rights) by virtue of living within or belonging to a territory, a nation. This notion that 'citizenship' is a given set of entitlements obscures the inequalities and differences between people arising from their positioning in gender, class, race, ethnicity, caste and other groupings, and their unequal ability to make their needs and interests the basis of rights. It also hides the fact that the standard entitlements, which should apply to all, are themselves fashioned on the needs and interests of powerful and dominant groups in society, which in most societies generally means those of men from elite classes. While equal citizenship is today a universally accepted notion, the reality remains that it is built on the exclusion of certain categories of people and this has evolved through history. Citizenship has been and remains a contested terrain in which excluded groups struggle to make visible their needs and priorities in defining entitlements.

The relationship between citizenship and gender is a fraught one, because citizenship – as we understand it – is gendered. As for example, in many societies men and women's rights within marriage, to guardianship of their children, to inheritance remain unequal. This is because these differential rights are based on an understanding of gender relations in the private sphere, which give to men the status of heads of households – the superordinates in relation to subordinates. In the international sphere, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) sought to make state parties accountable to equal treatment of women. In the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), equal rights has been stated as a critical area of concern. Thus, better governance would imply growing accountability of public institutions to gendered claims for equality.

The action research projects undertaken by GCG partner organisations in South Africa, India, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe represent initiatives by women to stake a claim to citizenship by making visible their needs and priorities in defining entitlements. The project undertaken by the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs) analyses their engagement in the law reform process in South Africa. Involving women living under customary law who articulated their needs and priorities reformed the customary law of marriage. A similar strategy was instituted in monitoring the impact of this reform to find out

whether the reformed law had made a difference in the lives of the same women.

In Zimbabwe, the Women's Charter drawn up by the National Coalition for Women in the run up to the Constitutional Review process aimed at making sure that the specific needs and interests of women entered the political debate on constitutional rights. The Women's Charter did enter the political debate, and in some ways contributed to the government's defeat in the referendum on constitutional reform. However, the struggle to keep the Women's Charter alive in the shrinking democratic space and general disarray of oppositional groups, including women's coalitions, provides insights into the relationship between wider democratic politics and the possibility of forwarding women's agendas.

Durbar, the largest sex workers' organisation in India, has staked a claim to re-defining the issues involved in trafficking into the sex trade on the grounds that being the population most affected, they have a right to participate in articulating a programme and mechanisms to control trafficking.

In Bangladesh, where the father is regarded by the law as the natural guardian of children, Naripokkho has taken up the issue of women's right to guardianship of their children, and built public awareness of the issue prior to staking a claim for legal reform.

This workshop provided the opportunity to share experiences and lessons learnt in claiming citizenship. The objective was to interrogate from these and other related experiences the kind of entitlements being carved out and how these relate to gender equality. Does legal reform or the demand for legal reform aimed at the 'private' sphere of family relations, for example, result in definitions of women's and men's roles and responsibilities, without changing the basis of these relations? We also need to learn more about strategies to claim rights: in what circumstances do we need to work in tandem with public authorities, and when is it important to articulate an autonomous position. What is the role of civil society in claiming new rights, supporting implementation, and monitoring outcomes?

## Law reform process around the Customary Law in South Africa

CENTRE FOR APPLIED LEGAL STUDIES

### *Organisation profile and mission*

The Gender Research Project (GRP) at CALS was formed in 1992 with the broad objectives of promoting gender equality, human rights and social justice for women and men, with a particular focus on women who are disadvantaged by race, class, geographic location and other factors. The GRP specializes in legal and socio-legal research that is used for informing the public policy debate and law reform processes; to ensure that policy and legislative processes are informed by the needs and interests of disadvantaged groups of women; and to enhance the participation of women in the policy and legislative processes.

### *Background to the issue*

From its inception in 1992, the GRP at CALS became involved in the constitutional negotiations, providing technical assistance to the Women's National Coalition and to ANC (African National Congress) women. It also played a role in one of the key disputes during these negotiations, which was the place of customary law in the Constitution. It made expert submissions on the position of customary law in the new Constitution and advocated (orally and in writing) for customary law to be subject to the Bill of Rights, including the equality right. During the course of this process, CALS was invited to address the Rural Women's Movement (RWM), a regional organisation of rural women committed to the advancement of the rights of rural women. It established a working relationship with this organisation through providing information on the constitutional negotiations and obtaining the views of the RWM on the issue of customary law and equality.

After the advent of democratic government in 1994, CALS became involved in a range of policy and law reform issues, including customary law. In 1995, the RWM identified reform to customary marriage as a key priority and asked CALS to conduct research and advocacy with them on this. This was the beginning of a more formal partnership with the RWM. CALS began a research project to find out more about how black South Africans marry, and about their understanding of marriage. This research, which sought to identify the practices, needs and interests of women in relation to marriage, and the

CALS/ RWM partnership were to be key factors in CALS' subsequent ability to influence the process of customary law reform that took place between 1996 and 1998.

### **Research goals and objectives**

The research analyses the role of CALS in the reform of the customary law of marriage under the new constitutional dispensation in South Africa (in line with gender equality and cultural values); in seeking to ensure the effective implementation of the law (so that it would actually improve the quality of life of women). It seeks to assess how effective CALS' method and contribution was to both of these processes, and to draw out lessons applicable to similar situations in other countries.

A number of assumptions underpin these goals and objectives. Firstly, CALS assumed that the new constitutional framework in South Africa provided a set of norms and values regarding gender that set achievable standards for gender equitable law reform. It is also assumed that the various actors would be guided by these in their activities relating to law reform and implementation. In particular, it was assumed that the context of democracy would mean that the state (SALC, Parliament, government departments, judicial officers) would be open to participation and influence by civil society.

The second set of assumptions relate to possibilities of the law. The Act was expected to introduce new principles, rules and enforcement mechanisms into the system of customary law. For example, it introduces equality between spouses in a situation that was previously unequal. This equality extends to women's status and decision-making power in the family and society at large, as well as to rights over children (guardianship and custody) and property. The Act also brings the civil courts into a system that was previously regulated by customary court, traditional leaders and families. It does this through requiring divorce in a civil court, and significantly, by introducing civil courts into the system of polygyny. It is assumed that these were workable provisions and that an Act, that in theory reflected the needs of women, could do so in practice. In other words, it is assumed that the gains made in the letter of the law are **sustainable** in the practice of the law. For our purposes, the law is sustainable, if fully implemented brings about the desired outcome, namely the improvement of quality of life of parties

to customary marriages, especially women. This involves firstly, assessing whether there is provision of adequate financial resources and effective state capacity in implementing the law, and secondly, measuring whether the law changes women's quality of life especially with regard to their ability to access and own property during and after marriage.

The third set of assumptions relates to the nature of culture and custom. The Act tries to protect customary practices that are compatible with the Constitution. It is assumed that these practices still resonate within communities. It is also assumed that the Act is capable of accommodating both the variety of customary practices, as well as changes in these practices. If it is not, then further reform of the Act will be necessary.

### **Strategies and activities**

- Ensure a positive constitutional framework;
- Gather evidence of women's experience of the law and women's needs by conducting research on the customary law of marriage to establish how Black South Africans marry and what their understanding of is marriage;
- Engage the Ministry of Justice to reform the law, especially women's minority status, through memoranda and meetings;
- Engage the South African Law Commission and Parliament to ensure that the voices of women most affected by the issue of customary marriage were heard in the law reform process by
  - sharing research findings with organisations working with rural women;
  - using research findings to inform reform proposals and make written and verbal submissions to the SALC and Parliament;
  - making a written submission on behalf of the Rural Women's Movement to the SALC and Parliament.
- Raise awareness on the issue and build support for CALS position through dissemination of information, meetings, workshops and lobbying activities.
- Change Strategy to ensure sustainability of law: CALS decided that it needed to continue with the project on the customary law of marriage to advocate for the promulgation of the law, and then monitor the implementation of the Act;
- Pre-empt problems of interpretation and application by the Courts by influencing training of magistrates; writing a Bench Book on the

implementation of the Act; and (in the future) engaging in test case litigation to clarify interpretation of the Act;

- Research problems of implementation;
- Develop an advocacy strategy for addressing problems of implementation by informing relevant stake holders about CALS' work, building channels of communication and sharing findings with state departments and officials responsible for implementation.

### *Findings*

#### Engaging the state in law reform

Law reform requires a positive context. Early attempts by CALS to engage the state proved to be fruitless. Part of the reason for this was timing, another was the capacity of the state to go through the procedures of law reform. At CALS, we also thought that targeting the Minister alone was the correct route, and that a simple amendment to part of the law was viable. In retrospect, we should have engaged the functionaries in the Department to understand the nature of the process of law reform within the state. We should also have realised that the complexity of customary law would need both time and resources.

It was only when the state was open to reform that CALS was able to make an impact. This occurred when the state itself demonstrated a willingness and a capacity to engage in the issues in detail, beyond a rhetorical commitment to gender equality. In other words, while the state was committed to gender equality, it was only able to act on this commitment in relation to customary law, when it had the means and capacity to do so. Here, the South African Law Commission (SALC) provided those resources.

Once the process started in the SALC, CALS' participation was made possible by the openness of the SALC, and then of Parliament, to public participation. At the same time, CALS had (through its research) become a very useful resource for the state institutions to use and engage with. We showed the state that 'it needed us'. This meant that our strategy of engaging in research was a highly successful one: it gave us the tools and the authority to engage the state in the law reform process.

#### Giving rural women a voice in law reform

We assumed that knowledge of women's lives is critical to influencing law reform that will ultimately benefit women. In the law reform process, this

knowledge was important to our ability to formulate positions, engage in advocacy and serve our constituency of rural women (by giving them a voice). However, we cannot tell from the law reform process itself that our assumption is true. It is only through the ongoing monitoring process that we will know that the law will benefit women.

#### Law making involves making strategic choices

We learnt that law making is an imperfect process and that strategic choices and compromises have to be made along the way. We think that these should nevertheless have women's experience and needs as their reference point. We certainly tried to do this, for example, in relation to polygyny.

We also learnt that achieving a reputation in the area (again based on our research) creates opportunities. For example, this reputation led to our being invited to address the Parliamentary Committee at an early stage.

#### Monitoring the Law

In our monitoring research, the idea of action research became particularly relevant. By its very nature, the process of monitoring implementation and identifying problems meant that we had to engage the state constantly. We had to develop relations with key officials and open the channels of communication so that we were able to influence the way in which implementation unfolds. Here, of course, we have been helped by a climate of openness in the state and the willingness of some officials to listen to us.

We have also begun to learn that while many of the problems lie in the state, attitudes within society constitute a barrier of unknown magnitude. The women's movement has traditionally engaged the state in South Africa over the past decade. It seems as if we have to continue to do this at the same time as we expand our activities to engage civil society in attitudes about women. Our research highlights the critical need for women's movements to work more in this area.

The exercise of having to review our activities on customary law over the past eight years has made us even more convinced that we have to continue to monitor the implementation of the Act, if we are to be true to our commitment of improving women's lives through changing the law.



**Lessons**

We have extracted ten key lessons that we believe can be used as examples of 'best practice':

- Democracy with a commitment to gender equality and to open and participatory governance is the most conducive political climate for engendered law reform.
- Law reform should reflect women's realities and concerns to make 'good laws' and to enhance democratic participation.
- Participatory research can provide a way of bridging the gap between experts/academics and community-based women.
- Advocates for change need to understand the nature of law reform processes in the state and the need for a conducive environment.
- Advocacy for law reform is more effective when an organisation works in partnership/alliance with others.
- An effective partnership/alliance means that one must create legitimacy, establish a mandate and include political and technical strengths.
- It is important to influence all phases of the process, including implementation. Following through not only ensures that the best intentions are realised in practice, but also allows an opportunity to fix up previous failures/omissions.
- Strategic choices must be made, mindful of their possible impact on one's constituency.
- Law reform is a lengthy and complex set of processes requiring human and financial resources. Success can only be measured in the long term.
- Engaging attitudes in civil society is crucial – both amongst allies (NGO sector) and within society as a whole.

### **Reframing the global debate on trafficking from a sex workers' perspective**

DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAY COMMITTEE

#### ***Organisational Profile and Mission***

Durbar represents an affiliation of autonomous sex workers' organisations, with a membership of about sixty thousand sex workers based in West Bengal, working for the rights of sex workers. The promotion of sexual health and HIV prevention was the original context within which the Durbar affiliates had emerged. However, right from the start the sex workers and other workers of the HIV prevention

intervention (the Sonagachi Project) had understood that even to realise the very basic aim of improving sexual health, it was crucial to fight the social exclusion of sex workers. This they had set out to do by mobilising sex workers across West Bengal and construct a political community of sex workers through creating a positive self-identity as sex workers. They defined and articulated explicit political objectives for the promotion and protection of the rights of the sex workers as a community. They demanded the recognition of sex work as 'legitimate work', akin to that of others who hire out their physical labour, or sell specialised services in the market. Sex workers also sought the same status as any other self-employed professional group with their own institutional mechanisms, such as the self-regulatory board, for the internal regulation of the sex trade. They argued that sex workers should come under the purview of general civil, criminal and labour laws of the land, and should not be criminalized by being confined to the jurisdiction of special laws for prostitution, which have historically acted against the interests of sex workers rather than in controlling those who exploit them.

#### ***Background of the issue***

In the last decade, the issue of trafficking has become a major concern worldwide. The overriding assumptions on which the general understanding about trafficking and the anti-trafficking practices are premised, elide trafficking with trafficking of women and children for sex work. Further, discussion and action on trafficking is too often based on perceptions of the authorities or the experts from outside, rather than on the views, needs and interests of the people who have been trafficked. As a result, the solutions that are offered at such mainstream forums ignore the possibility, in fact the absolute necessity, of involving sex workers as active agents to combat trafficking, thereby further exacerbating the problem rather than exploring effective and sustainable preventive measures. The action research project undertaken by Durbar for the Gender, Citizenship and Governance Programme examines the strategies that a sex workers' organisation can apply to claim a space within the anti-trafficking praxis as the central institutional agent, redefining the concept of trafficking from their own perspective which privileges their role as agents and citizens, rather than relegating them to the margins as mere victims.

**Overall goal, objectives and strategies**

The overall goal of the proposed project was to enable sex workers to table their own perspectives and rights agenda on to the global discourse and action on prevention of trafficking into sex trade. By working towards this goal, the proposed project aimed to ensure that: (1) Sex workers exercise their right to self-determination by taking charge of eradicating the exploitative practices within the sex trade that violate the rights of sex workers; (2) Sex workers establish their identity as legitimate, responsible citizens and development agents, challenging their image as aberrant criminals or hapless victims waiting to be policed, rescued or reformed by the elite; (3) Sex workers are in a position to influence major policy debates and public discourses on trafficking and sex workers' rights.

The objectives of the project were: to contribute to the understanding of international as well as intra-national trafficking for sex work; develop and widely replicate a model for preventing trafficking and underage prostitution through direct intervention of sex workers' organisations; build institutional alliances across civil society and state institutions; bring about policy changes at all levels, supporting the rights of trafficked persons.

The main strategies of the project were: (a) Research to investigate the root causes for trafficking into sex work and explore sex workers' understanding on how to prevent it; (b) Develop and popularise an effective intervention model designed by sex workers; (c) Advocate and network to influence policy discourses; and (d) Build the capacity of sex workers to analyse factors determining vulnerability to being trafficked and also to run self-regulatory boards effectively.

**Activities and findings**

A qualitative study was undertaken with 92 in-depth interviews and 14 focus group discussions with sex workers working in Calcutta, who have come to the city from other parts of West Bengal, other states of India, and from Bangladesh and Nepal.

Why women migrate

This study found that most sex workers interviewed had migrated from their places of origin in search of new lives, better livelihoods, or simply to seek adventure. With globalisation, the radical changes in the labour market and realignment of social and

cultural relations, more and more women, who traditionally had to hold back on exploring alternatives because of rigid gender norms and lack of opportunities, are now able to look for more viable livelihood options or a preferred way of life.

From migration to being trafficked

Increasingly stringent anti-immigration national laws in most countries make such migration hazardous, particularly for poor or marginalised aspiring migrants who become vulnerable to trafficking while being smuggled illegally into countries they seek to enter. Lack of access to education and information increases the risk of potential migrants being deceived by traffickers. The main outcome of trafficking is losing all control over the circumstances under which the trafficked person has to work and live. The main reason for trafficking is that there is a demand for trafficked labour in all labour markets, including the sex industry, as trafficked labour are considered to be easier to control and exploit than free labour.

Most respondents who had been trafficked managed to get out of the situation of total lack of control by dint of their human agency. In situations where sex workers organisations existed, they proved to be a major force facilitating the trafficked persons transition from bondage to autonomy, either through direct intervention, or more indirectly with the person gaining courage to act from the notional belongingness to an organised group of peers.

Developing and popularising the intervention model

Durbar intensified its anti-trafficking intervention in red light areas and documented and regularly published the results to demonstrate the effectiveness of its strategies in this field. The idea of the self-regulatory board was disseminated to other sex workers' organisations through the National Network of Sex Workers – of which Durbar is a leading founder organisation. However, self-regulatory boards could not be formed in any other state of India, as this period witnessed a significant increase in violence against sex workers, both from the police and members of the civil society, in many parts of India.

Before the start of the GCG project, Durbar had initiated self-regulatory boards in three red light areas of Calcutta. During the project period, concerted efforts were made to start such self-

regulatory boards in all red light areas where Durbar has branches. Although Durbar managed to form another 13 self-regulatory boards in red light areas of Calcutta and other districts of West Bengal, this effort was met with stiff resistance from: (a) Local powerbrokers who control and profit from the sex industry, namely, local petty criminals and racketeers as well as local political party offices which started to perceive Durbar as a threat to their territorial control; (b) The existing legal framework that disallows sex workers the right to intercept trafficking or rescue the trafficked person. Although Durbar succeeded in creating a support base within local police institutions, without which they could not have carried out their anti-trafficking activities at the field level, the contradiction with the law and judicial system remains. This poses a constant threat to Durbar's intervention in this area, as its extra-constitutional role can be used against them, and (c) The prevalent positions and practices of NGOs, both local and international, also pose a challenge to sex workers' intervention into trafficking. Because Durbar's intervention model (through the formation and functioning of self-regulatory boards) stresses that more sex workers' organisations gain the capacity and the confidence to implement intervention activities themselves, the mediating role of NGOs, working on behalf of the poor and within the constraints of the existing discourses and practices of rescue and rehabilitation, becomes questionable and indeed part of the problem.

#### Advocacy and networking for influencing policy discourses

In March 2001 and 2002, Durbar organised 'melas' – large fairs where sex workers from all parts of India and other countries in South and South East Asia came together and held face-to-face dialogue with representatives of the state, media, trade unions, women's movement, NGOs and other civil society organisations as well as members of the general public on issues concerning sex workers' rights, including trafficking. These large gatherings proved to be an extremely effective strategy for refining arguments on part of sex workers and for influencing public discourse on sex workers' rights and trafficking.

At the first *mela*, an advocacy network of sex workers' organisations in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific was set up. Durbar participated in the First National Conference of Sex Workers in Bangladesh in 2002 to further advocate on the issue in the region. As an

on-going process, Durbar continues to hold open forums with intellectuals, academicians, media personnel, women's groups, human rights groups and trade-unionists as well as senior police personnel and bureaucrats to influence their understanding of trafficking and to build alliances. In Calcutta, Durbar's help is increasingly being solicited by senior police personnel and the Social Welfare Department for repatriation of trafficked sex workers who seek to return home.

Durbar has been able to make some shifts in the discourse around sex work and sex workers' rights by bringing the issue into the public arena through its dramatic strategies such as holding the *melas*. The Media has proved to be an effective ally, recognising the newsworthiness of the issue and such events. A significant sign of this impact is that in all forms of media in India – both print and electronic, the term 'sex workers' has now been widely used, tacitly accepting Durbar's demand for recognition of sex work as work. In addition, the fact that sex workers are legitimate actors in the development arena has also been established. This is borne out by the fact that the National Commission for Women insisted on inclusion of sex workers' organisations and not just NGOs who work for sex workers to all its consultations of the trafficking act. This can be seen as the first step towards establishing sex workers' demand to be heard and their right to participate in and determine all policy decisions regarding their lives and profession.

However, it also became evident that more successful sex workers' organisations are emerging as a force to reckon with, more resistance would they face from the broader political nexus. This extends beyond the red light districts but profits from the exploitations of sex workers within the sex industry, including trafficking. This backlash cannot be met with the strategies of negotiation and networking, which had earlier yielded results in gaining entry into the red light areas.

### **Establishing Women's Right to Guardianship**

NARIPOKKHO

#### ***Organisational profile and mission***

Naripokkho is a membership-based women's activist organisation founded in 1983, working for the

advancement of women's rights and building resistance against violence, discrimination and injustice. Naripokkho's activities include advocacy campaigns, research, discussions, cultural events, and lobbying on issues of gender justice. The following themes constitute their main foci: violence against women and human rights; reproductive rights and women's health; gender issues in environment and development; representation of women in media and cultural politics.

### ***Background of the issue***

Through its advocacy and research activities in the past, Naripokkho had identified that the constitutional framework of Bangladesh guarantees women equal rights only in all spheres of the state and public life, leaving the private domain of the family to the arbitration of ascribed gender relationships and interpretation of religious laws. Naripokkho regards the ambiguities that exist around the notion of guardianship as one of the most telling examples of this dichotomy.

While mothers bear the primary responsibility for rearing children, and 'motherhood' is ideologically privileged as women's core identity, it is men who are considered the natural guardians of their children, both in law and dominant practice. Women's rights to guardianship of their children are restricted and conditional. Women suffer from substantial discrimination and disadvantage in terms of rights and power over their children, with laws regarding marriage, divorce, guardianship, and inheritance in all religion-based personal laws upholding and reinforcing this discrimination.

Naripokkho felt that guardianship is one of the key issues, which has to be addressed in order to bring about a re-questioning of social norms and values, and a change in women's position. It decided to undertake this action research to identify strategies that would draw attention to the political significance of the issue within the women's movement of Bangladesh and bring about a change in popular perceptions about it, which would pave the way for a constitutional reform guaranteeing women's equal right in this arena.

### ***Goal of the action research project***

To raise awareness about women's limited rights of guardianship, and to work towards establishing women's equal rights regarding guardianship of their children.

### ***Objectives of the action research project***

- Creating public awareness of the contradictions between the ideology of motherhood and actual rights and practices limiting women's right to guardianship.
- Mobilisation of women's organisations (both local and national) on the agenda of guardianship rights.
- Persuade the state to review and reform existing laws and procedures regarding guardianship.

When the project was first designed, one of the objectives was conceived as pressurising the government to review and revise the existing laws on guardianship. However, once the project was initiated, Naripokkho realised that it would be unrealistic to attempt to achieve this objective within the scope of this project. Therefore, it was decided that this objective would be modified.

Naripokkho implemented the project at the district and national level. The strategies included consultations/meetings and seminars with different stakeholders, training to non-governmental organisations and to the national network of women's organisations, media review, review of court cases, and development and dissemination of communications materials. At the district level, this was done in collaboration with a local women's group in Jamalpur in Bangladesh. At the national level, the project was implemented with active participation of Doorbar which is a network of small women's organisations spread throughout Bangladesh.

### ***Activities***

#### Creating public awareness at the local level

##### *Engaging children and guardians*

As a first step to engaging children and their guardians on the issue of women's rights to guardianship, a survey of schools in Jamalpur was conducted to identify forums where consultation with mothers and children could be held regarding the issue. A series of meetings with mothers and children in the Jamalpur schools was held between September 2001 and February 2002. 119 mothers were consulted in parent-teacher forums. These consultations created an opportunity for understanding ordinary women's own perception about the issue; helped to introduce the issue to them within a right-based framework and explored the possible strategies and arguments for securing equal guardianship rights for women.

Consultations were held with 150 school going children (from classes 6 to 10) of two schools, a boys' and a girls', in Jamalpur. This was undertaken to introduce the issue both to the children and teachers while eliciting the childrens' views regarding women's right to guardianship. A follow-up survey among children who participated showed that the majority of them had taken up the issue at home. In some cases, children, particularly girls, had stood up for their mothers when the latter faced discrimination at home. However, most children accepted the notion of women's claim to guardianship not within a rights framework, but because they saw women as 'natural' carers of their children.

#### *Engaging elected representatives of local government bodies*

Meetings were held in Jamalpur with Municipal commissioners (urban local government representatives) and Union Parishad (rural local government body) members. This was aimed at sensitising elected members so that they play a more active role in the *shalish* (local courts) committees in their localities to promote women's guardianship rights. Follow-up individual interviews with the participants to assess the impact of the discussions showed that a few elected members had tried to privilege women's right to guardianship. For example, a Municipal Commissioner awarded custody of a child to her mother, while adjudicating a marital dispute in a local *shalish*. He attributed his judgement to the exposure he had had regarding equal right to guardianship. Most members said that such discussions have to be an on-going process to have any sustained impact. They said outside pressure groups, such as Naripokkho, would have to continue playing an important role. Some recommended similar discussions be held in rural areas with local opinion makers.

#### *Engaging non-governmental organisations*

A series of consultation meetings were held with 5 non-governmental organisations that provide support to 234 local women's committees (Mahila Samity), and with ten women's organisations with the objective of introducing the issue to them, acquainting them with the existing law and its discriminatory nature and encouraging them to make the issue of women's equal right to guardianship a part of their work. It was found that most participants were introduced to the issue of women's equal right to guardianship for the first time. It was clear that more needed to be done in order to attain a degree of conceptual clarity regarding the issue, and to persuade the NGO

leaders to prioritise the issue in their activities.

#### Creating public awareness at the national level

##### *Raising the issue with the Doorbar network*

In the second National Conference of Women's Organisations, held in January 2002, Doorbar members discussed the issue of women's guardianship rights along with other rights where women are deprived. The network represents 400 women's organisations. As women's organisations attending the conference came from different parts of the country, this facilitated the task of spreading concerns about women's guardianship rights throughout the country.

##### *Training workshops*

Training workshops were organised for Naripokkho researchers and Doorbar members to develop a clear idea about the existing guardianship laws, ways of raising awareness about the issue at the field level, and how to advocate and lobby for a more equitable law.

##### *Raising the issue at the International*

##### *Women's Day*

Naripokkho took women's guardianship rights as the theme for the International Women's Day celebrations in 2002. Naripokkho celebrates this day through a Committee of which 48 other organisations are members. The leaflet was reprinted and distributed throughout the country.

##### *Distribution of leaflets and posters*

Naripokkho published a leaflet, entitled 'Both parents (father and mother) are the children's guardians', which was distributed nationally. Naripokkho reprinted a poster designed by a Calcutta-based women's organisation on the issue and distributed it through similar channels. Both publications received wide media coverage.

##### *Auditing court cases on custody and guardianship*

Most cases over custody and guardianship were closely linked to inheritance or property disputes. Fathers' unconditional right to guardianship, enshrined in law, was more often than not used to refuse a woman's claim on their children, and also to the property her children had inherited.

**Findings**

Working with schools proved to be an effective strategy for initiating public engagement with an issue, which is being introduced for the first time within a political framework of citizenship rights. Naripokkho was able to introduce the issue to constituencies who had not been aware of its importance previously, and to create allies in putting it forward.

Since the issue of women's right to equal guardianship is relatively new in public discourse, the engagement with it has to be enriched with analytical insights into the issue. There is a danger that women's 'right' to guardianship may well be argued for within the existing parameters of women's perceived 'natural' role as carers of children. This way of arguing for women's right to guardianship was evident in the consultations at the local level with school children, teachers, mothers and local government officials. Establishing equal right to guardianship of children has to be argued from the point of view that both parents – mother and father – have equal rights and responsibility for their children. Arguing the case for women's right to guardianship from the point of view that women as mothers are better suited to be guardians absolves men of any responsibility in rearing children, while retaining the right to the children on the ground that they are better able to provide for them.

The preliminary auditing of the court cases on custody and guardianship showed that linking guardianship with the issue of women's right to property and inheritance may be one possible way of de-linking guardianship rights issues from a biological interpretation, and to focus on the institutional rules and norms that frame women's limited rights over guardianship.

Engagement with elected representatives to enable them to adjudicate in local *shalish* on custody and guardianship issues in a more gender just way, proved to be another strategy of establishing women's right to guardianship, which can be further explored. This strategy can both bring about changes in the rules and activities of local legal and governance institutions and also create a public opinion on the issue.

Working through the network of women's organisations (Doorbar) and in alliance with national women's organisations proved to be an effective

strategy for increasing political engagement with the issue of guardianship and ensuring its inclusion and prioritisation in the agenda of the women's movement in Bangladesh. What we also learned is that when a new set of rights are being introduced in public discussion it is necessary to: i) create an alternative discourse regarding the issue representing its complexities and outlining within a political framework of citizenship rights; ii) identify and work with new constituencies to introduce the arguments; iii) work in alliance with the women's movement.

## **Experiences in using the Women's Charter as a lobby and advocacy tool**

ZIMBABWE WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

### ***Organisational Profile, Mission and Background of the Issue***

The Constitutional Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe was set up in June 1999 by women activists in order to redress the marginalisation of women and their concerns from both the government-led Constitutional Commission and the civil society-led National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). The Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Coalition (ZWLA) acts as its secretariat.

The Coalition was formed in a context, where civil society organisations were challenging the government in an unprecedented way since independence. Among these organisations was the NCA, established in 1997 by civil society organisations, calling for a new democratic constitution for Zimbabwe. The NCA sought to build a broad alliance around constitutional reform, but soon came into conflict with a government-initiated, non transparent process of constitution making. The NCA and civil society rejected government's constitution in a show of popular strength in a No vote in a referendum, held in February 2000. Government responded to the challenge presented by civil society and an opposition party, that was gaining considerable support by increasing repression.

Although individual women and women's organisations were members of the NCA from its inception, they found that they were marginalised within the NCA. To ensure that women's concerns were considered by the NCA and that women were involved in NCA leadership structures, women members of the NCA set up the **Constitutional**

**Women's Coalition.** Women's organisations were therefore part of the challenge to Mugabe at the same time as they challenged the civil society movement to take greater cognisance of gender concerns. The Coalition is a network of around 66 women activists, researchers, academics, and representatives of 29 women's human rights organisations. Its membership is drawn from trade unions, women's wings of political parties, and women's organisations.

A key instrument for advancing women's interests within the constitutional reform process was a Charter of women's rights, drawn up by the Coalition through a participatory process involving women across the country. Launched at a national conference of 1500 women in August 2000, the Charter included the range of issues women wanted addressed within a new country constitution.

#### **Goal and objectives**

The action research focused on the Charter. The goal of the research was to investigate the use of the Charter as a strategy through which the Coalition would reinforce its role as a political actor and place women's interests on the agenda within the constitutional reform process and the 2002 presidential elections.

The objectives were to (1) evaluate and document the Coalition's experiences in using the charter as a tool in the constitutional reform process to date; (2) analyse and interrogate the Coalition's socio-cultural, political, economic and legal context; (3) identify ways in which the Coalition and its membership will use the charter to create links between grass roots women and policy making forums in order to sustain the debate on constitutional reform and to engender the national political and governance agenda.

The research assessed past and ongoing practice in using the charter to influence government in favour of women. In assessing past practice, the following question was asked: What were the experiences of the Coalition in developing the Charter during the constitutional reform process, and in using it as a lobbying tool when engaging with government and political parties? In order to take up this question, a document review and interviews with Coalition members were conducted.

In relation to ongoing practice the questions posed were:

- How effective is the charter as a strategy to influence government and political structures in favour of women?
- make links between grass roots women and policy makers?
- sustain the debate on constitutional reform? and
- engender the governance agenda in the period prior to the 2002 elections?

#### **Activities and Main Findings**

In order to take up these questions, the Coalition planned to conduct and assess the following activities: (a) Disseminate the charter to grassroots women, NGOs, MPs and key government personnel; (b) Involve member organisations in using the charter in their daily work with political parties, government and other civil society organisations; (c) Involve NCA field workers in engendering their work on resuming the constitutional reform process through using the charter, and (d) Promote the charter as an agenda that MPs, political parties, women's wings and government personnel should respond to.

#### Training of field officers in engaging to use the charter

A training workshop was conducted in April 2002 with a group of 25 women field officers of member organisations of the coalition. This was followed by an assessment in June 2002 with some, but not all, of the field officers. The assessment indicated that it was easy for the fieldworkers to use the charter in their respective areas of work, because it is an all-embracing document covering many issues. Field workers gave the charter to local leaders in order to influence the political and governance process. Through the training, some women who were part of the process of formulating the charter, took the process a step further to use it within their communities, especially with their local leaders. The Coalition found that it was vital to maintain a grassroots-base in order to make the charter a living document.

#### Dissemination of charter to key government personnel, NGOs and MPs

Through disseminating the charter to government personnel, NGOs and MPs, the Coalition was able to popularise women's demands and increase its own public profile, so that it could influence a range of institutions.

The Coalition disseminated the Charter to the director and the policy department of the Ministry of Justice, strategic points for influencing the content of government policies. As a result, officers of the Department of Justice considered the charter when reviewing the marriage laws of Zimbabwe, and called on ZWLA to facilitate the analysis of marriage laws from a gendered perspective.

The Coalition disseminated the Charter to women parliamentarians and made them aware of the broad range of demands in the charter. As a result, the women's Parliamentary Caucus has called on women's organisations to help identify how they can influence change in specific areas of the law.

Various NGOs, including non-Coalition members, were given the Charter. These included the National Constitutional Assembly and the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), both of which adopted the charter as the policy document to guide them on women's issues.

Engaging with these bodies displayed the potential of the charter to influence different institutions. What made this possible was the legitimacy of the charter because of the consultative and inclusive way in which it was drawn up. These institutions accepted it as an authentic embodiment of women's demands.

#### Dialogue with political parties

The Coalition dialogued with three political parties - the MDC, the ZUD and the United Party - on the need for gender balance in top party positions and gender sensitive manifestos. The Coalition conducted a gender critique of party manifestos against the Charter. The critique noted that no party had a clearly articulated gender policy. This was publicised, and the MDC responded by drawing up a gender policy. The ruling party ZANU (PF), however, refused to meet representatives of the Coalition.

#### Engendering the NCA-led constitution reform process

The Coalition's strategy was to continue to influence the NCA process through members taking positions on the various committees and the NCA task force. The chairperson and other members of the NCA task force were members of the Coalition who tirelessly drove the process to engender it. When the NCA renewed its drive for a new constitution at the beginning of 2001, it called for a national conference. At this conference, attended by over 1000 people,

ZWLA made a presentation on behalf of the Coalition. ZWLA made clear that women's participation in the process was crucial and that the women's charter was the document that should guide the NCA on what women wanted to be addressed in a new constitution.

Following that conference, the NCA decided that the charter be given out to its entire membership and be incorporated into the suggestions for reform. ZWLA facilitated the supply of the copies of the charter. It is important to note that ZWLA and other members of the Coalition attended the NCA meetings, and in discussions drew on the charter to ensure that women's issues were not sidelined. In addition, the chairperson of the NCA, a woman who was also a member of the Coalition, worked to convince NCA members on the importance of adequately incorporating women's issues into the constitution.

The Coalition challenged the male domination of the NCA and was able to influence a decision that at least 30% of the members of the National Task Team of the NCA should be women. However, there was no quota at regional level, and only one of ten regional leaders is a woman. A woman has served as NCA chair for a term. However, from 2001 tension between the NCA and Coalition members increased, resulting in a decision by the Coalition to use the Charter outside the constitution process, while remaining NCA members as individual women and individual organisations.

Although the NCA draft constitution did not contain all the demands from the women, it was a great improvement as compared with the provisions of the current constitution. In its assessment of the draft document, the Coalition used the charter as its yardstick. The charter proved to be an invaluable tool to the Coalition in this renewed process. Negotiations were easier to handle from the standpoint of a document that came out of wide consultations. The overall outcome of the negotiation indicated that it pays off to engender a process from within. While the Coalition was not able to engender the entire reform process, strides were made in this direction.

While the Coalition ceased participating in the NCA in order to register its protest on the insensitivity of some members of the task force, it is now working on its re-engagement plan and on how to improve its work in the constitution reform process.



### National Gender policy

The government-led process of drafting the National Gender Policy was concluded quickly due to the political call, which required the process to be expedited. The policy, however, fell far short from being a document that the government or any other person can use to effectively address the needs of women in the country. The Coalition undertook to analyse this document against the charter and sought to influence its amendment. At a workshop, hosted by the Ministry of Gender, a ZWLA member made contributions from this analysis to show the shortcomings of the Gender Policy. It is one of the tasks of the women's movement to continue to lobby for a better policy.

### Workshop of the Women's Coalition

At the beginning of the KIT action research project, a workshop was held by the Coalition to come up with ways of ensuring that the principles and spirit of the charter remained integrated in the work of member organisations. From this workshop, member organisations indicated that aspects of the charter were relevant to their ongoing work, and that integration did not demand any extra work or effort on their part. By virtue of having been the authors of the document, organisations took it upon themselves to keep the document alive. The charter became a tool through which member organisations presented women's demands to players, including the state.

### Mass production of the charter

ZWLA, on behalf of the Coalition, managed to raise little funding from Oxfam America, which enabled editing, translation of the charter into Shona and Ndebele, and the production of 3000 copies for mass distribution to members and other stakeholders. The process of editing and translation took place in 2001.

### **Conclusions**

It has been difficult for the Coalition to sustain itself in the present political climate. The Coalition was formed in a context, where democratic forces were on the rise, and in a period, where – for the first time ever – the Mugabe government was confronted with a strong opposition party the MDC. Mugabe's government responded with increasing repression. Government pronounced that constitutional reform was not a priority issue, and that land reform was the most pressing issue.

The volatile environment threatened to throw civic groups into disarray by dividing them by party lines. Like other civil society organisations, polarised party political views have had to be negotiated within the Coalition. However, in a situation of intense political division, the charter served as a rallying point for women. It did so because of the broad range of women, transcending party and other divides, who engaged in a participatory process and who saw the Charter as being relevant to their lives.

The Coalition was able to use the Charter and the influence of Coalition members, such as the chairperson of the NCA, in its attempts to shift the NCA to a more gender sensitive position. While these were successful strategies that shifted some ground in the battle to engender the NCA, this is an ongoing battle, requiring a range of strategies.

Like other civil society organisations, the Coalition has experienced a loss of members, as individuals leave the country as a result of political and economic turmoil.

## **Comments, analysis and discussions**

### ***Creating 'Voice'***

The projects helped to articulate women's voice by foregrounding the real experiences of exclusion from entitlements and rights faced by women. As for example, in the reform of customary law on marriage in South Africa, CALS established the need to have women's experience and needs as their reference point. For this reason, they de-emphasised the issue of polygyny, because for the women living under customary law this was not the most important problem. Far more important for the women was to establish the right to marital property, custody of children, and not to be seen as legal minors.

These articulations have relied on and helped release women's agency. By involving sex workers as active agents to combat trafficking, Durbar released women's agency to take charge of their own lives, and seek effective and sustainable preventive measures.

However, giving voice does not always lead to better outcomes for women. The gains have to be secured through painstaking task of influencing

institutional rules and norms, and changing public perceptions about women and their entitlements. CALS had to develop relationship with key officials and to open the channels of communication so as to influence the ways in which implementation of customary law unfolds. Further, they had to expand activities to engage civil society role players in attitudes about women.

### *Creating space*

The projects also demonstrated the importance of carving out spaces for the articulation of entitlements. CALS used the opportunity provided by the new democracy in South Africa to intervene in the law reform process. The knowledge that CALS had (through its research) made it a very useful resource for state institutions to use and engage with. They showed the state that 'it needed CALS'. In Zimbabwe, the Women's Coalition drew up a Charter of women's rights through a participatory process involving women across the country, and used the constitutional reform process as the space for advancing women's interests. After the defeat of the government's referendum on constitutional reform and in an environment of growing repression, the Coalition revived the charter and used it to argue in different forums for its adoption. By setting up self-regulatory boards and organising the 'melas', Durbar constructed the spaces for the articulation of sex worker's perspectives on preventing trafficking.

### *From absolute positions to pragmatic decisions*

Apparent in the initiatives undertaken by the projects is also a change in feminist debates. These refer both to the content of feminist demands and ways of working. As for example, there is a move away from fundamentalisms – that one set of demands for equality are equally applicable to all kinds of women. This finding was best highlighted by the CALS project in reforming customary law of marriage in South Africa. While feminists have always held monogamy to be the cornerstone of feminist demands for equality between men and women in marriage, the CALS project and their consultations with women living under customary law demonstrated that this was not necessarily the most important right that the concerned women wanted to secure. That this was not a position (i.e. the position to not make

monogamy an issue in reform of customary law on marriage) which was welcomed or acceptable to all, was evident in the debates that took place at the workshop. While many participants insisted that the future reform should insist on monogamy in marriage, CALS argued that to legally outlaw polygyny would not necessarily have the desired effect in practice. A much more pragmatic approach, and one that was adopted in the reform, was to insist on those provisions that make polygyny even more expensive than it is now, ensuring thereby its demise.

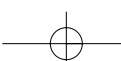
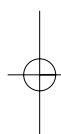
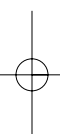
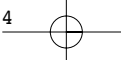
Similarly, there is an apparent change in approaches as was evident in the strategies adopted to change the discourse of rights. Most of the projects worked in tandem with state institutions, sometimes aligning with the state, at other times agitating for changes. The Women's Coalition did not cease to work with state institutions, even though they had opposed the government's constitution in the referendum. Durbar as a sex workers' organisation and opposed to the heavy-handedness of the police have, nevertheless, built alliances with officials in the police in their work to prevent trafficking and make the self-regulatory boards function.

### *A new discourse of rights*

Evident in all the projects is the endeavour to establish the right of marginalized groups to participation. Durbar stakes a claim to participation in the national and international debates on trafficking by actively involving sex workers in defining the problem and seeking solutions. In so doing, they turn the discourse on trafficking on its head by showing that trafficking cannot be elided with trafficking for sex work only, but that trafficking is about losing control over the circumstances under which a person has to work and live.

In establishing the right of equal guardianship of both parents to their children, Naripokkho worked with the group most affected by legal decisions on guardianship, that is children. Thus, Naripokkho was able to introduce the issue to constituencies who had not been aware of its importance previously, and to create allies in putting it forward. However, the right to participate has to be nurtured in ways that enable those groups in society who are left out

to change the existing notions of entitlements. As for example, the issue of women's right to equal guardianship is relatively new in public discourse, and therefore, there is a danger that women's 'right' to guardianship may well be argued for within the existing parameters of women's perceived 'natural' role as carers of children. This way of arguing for women's right to guardianship was evident in the consultations at the local level with school children, teachers, mothers and local government officials. Establishing equal right to guardianship of children has to be argued from the point of view that both parents – mother and father – have equal rights and responsibility for their children.



## 6. GOVERNING PEACE

The outbreak of violent conflict represents the failure of governance. While the death, destruction and trauma experienced in times of conflict are well publicised when these occur, far less information and understanding is available about the legacy of conflict and the constraints that this imposes on re-building individual lives, communities and the social structure. There is a growing body of literature on the gendered dimensions of conflict. This literature moves away from the simple definition of women as 'naturally' peaceful and men as violent to looking at the differential impacts on women and men and the constructions of femininity and masculinity that are constitutive of and the result of conflict. There is also a growing demand and movements for women to be represented in peace negotiations as it is widely acknowledged that given their social roles, women and men have differing interests to represent.

This panel discussion brought together experiences of individuals and organisations that have worked in the aftermath of conflict. The aim was to discuss what is involved in helping women to make the journey from private trauma to political struggle, to end conflict and build a just peace. The context of this discussion was to be the presentation of the findings of the action research project 'Engendering the Peace Process' undertaken by North East Network, a partner in the GCG programme in Manipur state in India; presentation of activities of two partner organisations, Nirantar and COVA, in helping women to build organisations to rebuild their lives and communities in the aftermath of the riots in Gujarat state in India in 2002; the strategies of The Khulumani Support Group from South Africa which is a victim and survivor support group, established in 1995 in response to the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); and experiences from Sri Lanka's two decades long civil strife, its impact on women, and the emergence of women as a political constituency across ethnic divides in demanding peace.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Last minute cancellations by the Khulumani Support Group from South Africa and the women's peace groups from Sri Lanka meant that only groups from India were represented. Thus participants from South Africa, Afghanistan and the Middle-East attending the conference were requested to share their experiences and join in the discussion. The presentations, discussions and key learning points are summarised.

## Engendering the peace process

NORTH EAST NETWORK

### *Organisational profile*

The North East Network, (NEN) is a women's organization with its headquarters in Assam state in India. It works in the seven states of the North-East of India on gender and development, and on peace building and conflict resolution. These seven states of India share a common predicament. They are geographically and economically isolated from the rest of India. There has been an ongoing struggle of peoples in the region trying to establish their right to autonomy that has led to political instability, ethnic conflict and outright violence. The conflicts are both between the Indian Government and insurgent movements, and between the insurgent movements representing different ethnic groups.

### *Goal and objectives*

The Engendering the Peace Process action research project was undertaken by NEN in Manipur state, which is one of the North-Eastern states. The **goal** was to contribute towards **solutions to conflict in the North-East region** of India by strengthening women's networks for peace building in one state, namely, Manipur. The **objectives** of the project in Manipur were as follows: (1) To strengthen women's advocacy skills in peace building, and the processes of mediation and negotiation; (2) To sensitise law enforcement agencies on issues of gender in the context of conflict/trauma, that are experienced by the majority of women and communities; (3) Restoring capacities of men and women living in vulnerable conflict areas through the creation of participatory development initiatives.

The activities planned included: (a) Networking and an advocacy programme with 20 women's organizations in Manipur. A special focus would be on trauma counselling, with an aim to set up such centres in the near future. Workshops for skill building in negotiations and conflict resolution will be organised for the women's organisations; (b) Keeping in view the frequency of house searches, checks and custodial interrogations in situations of conflict, NEN will evolve and implement gender sensitive training for law enforcement bodies and develop guidelines; (c) Involve women in development activities and acquaint them with public delivery mechanisms as a means of investing in village well-being and livelihood sustenance.

### *Background of the conflicts in Manipur and the role of women's organisations*

Manipur, situated in the North-Eastern region of India, is inhabited by a diverse number of tribes and sub-tribes. It is divided into two distinct parts, the valley and the hills. The Meitei, Pangal, Loi, Yaithibi and Nepali communities dominate the valley. The Meitei community is the dominant ethnic group, and their identity and distinctive form of Hinduism practiced defines what outsiders know about Manipur. The hill areas have two distinct sections, one inhabited by the Naga groups, and the other by the Kuki-Chin groups; in addition, there are numerous other tribes inhabiting the area. A majority of tribes are Christians, while others practice their traditional religions. The history of Manipur, therefore, has two distinct features: one, the history of the valley, and the other, the history of the hills.

Since the accession of Manipur to the Indian Union in 1949, Meitei groups have been in conflict with the Indian state, demanding autonomy and, in some cases, secession and independence. Similarly, the other groups in Manipur feel disaffected and have their own movements for autonomy. These movements are armed ones, and the clash between them and the Indian armed forces has resulted in this state becoming a battleground. Besides the stand off between armed insurgent groups and the Indian state, people's lives have been torn apart by the battles between armed groups.

Manipur is known for women's activism. From the beginning of the twentieth century, there are records of large women's movements mobilising against state authorities on behalf of citizens and helping to reverse laws and regulations that were seen as anti-people. Commentators attribute this to the fact that in Manipur, women have historically controlled agricultural production and the markets and were therefore expected to safeguard these interests against arbitrary state power.

While women from almost all communities have been organised and have been part of various movements, the most well known movement is the Meira Paibis. The Meira Paibis - or the torch-bearing women - first emerged in the mid twentieth century, patrolling the street at night and punishing alcoholics and drug abusers. In recent years, Meira Paibis have been involved in humanitarian activities in Manipur, especially working on issues relating to

atrocities by the state and the armed forces. They are the only section of people who have access and, to some extent, moral authority over insurgents. In the 1990's, when the extension of *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* transformed Manipur into a garrisoned state, women were in the forefront of the struggle against human rights violations by the security forces.

However, despite this tradition of activism, there has been no effort either on the side of the state nor the non-state actors to involve women in the actual peace negotiations. Rather, women's movements have come to be defined as the socially acceptable players in Manipur's peace process, to be the go-between, to play the role of the 'healer' or the 'pacifier'.

### ***Project activities and lessons learnt***

#### Building the network

In January 2001, and with the initiation of the project, contacts were formalised with women's organisations in Manipur. At the initial consultation held with representatives of key women's organisations in the state in January 2001, the project was welcomed, and it was decided to hold a larger consultation with more organisations to initiate the network and plan the activities.

#### Consultation meeting with potential partners

In March 2001, the first formal consultation of six women's organisations took place over a period of two days. The organisations were representing different ethnic groups but shared a common problem, which was conflict and the violence generated by this conflict. The consultation gave participants the opportunity to meet with others in a similar predicament. Since most of the groups are very local, that is they work in their immediate vicinity and community, and rarely get the opportunity to meet others in similar situations but from different ethnic backgrounds (who are often opposed to each other in the complex mosaic of inter-ethnic strife in the state).

#### Survey and other activities

In order to further the work of networking among organisations, the NEN project team met with them in their own areas throughout April and May. A survey to document the history, objectives and activities of the organisations and their needs for capacity building was undertaken. The compilation of this data showed that small and localised women's initiative have grown up in response to the most pressing problems

faced by these communities. These are, on the one hand, the problems of growing alcoholism and drug addiction, and on the other hand the need to take care of people in the aftermath of violence and conflict.

#### Negotiations with the district administration

The district and the state administration were contacted in order to propose gender training for the district law enforcement bodies. It was agreed that a one-day sensitisation programme would be organised as a beginning.

#### ***Conflict and breakdown***

Wider events, however, radically disrupted planned activities to build a network of women's organisations working on peace, and to sensitise the district administration officials and law enforcement bodies about the problems faced by women. On June 14<sup>th</sup> 2001, the civil and political order in Manipur broke down. The immediate provocation was the peace agreement between the government of India and one of the ethnic groups, namely the Nagas, resulting in misunderstanding and tension among other ethnic groups, specifically the Meitei. Violence erupted and people were killed. This put paid to the project activities, since the main strategy was to build a network of women's organisations across ethnic divides.

#### ***Back to the future***

It took six months for the situation in Manipur to calm down, and NEN began the painstaking task of rebuilding the fragile network of women's organisations, of bringing women leaders together from different ethnic groups.

#### Trauma Counselling

NEN decided that as originally planned, trauma-counselling training would be provided to women's organisations as a way to build their capacity and to initiate a process of inter-ethnic dialogue. In the following six months, three rounds of trauma counselling training were organised for representatives from twelve women's organisations. The trauma counselling training had the following outcomes: (a) It provided a broader framework for looking at conflict and issues relating to conflict; (b) Drawing parallels with other situations of conflict in India helped participants to learn from experiences of other women facing conflict; (c) It provided a safe environment and the space for the women to discuss

their feelings and issues affecting their lives; (d) It resulted in developing a core group, whose members network among themselves, build on their strengths, and finally disseminate their learnings; (e) It brought about a qualitative change in how one views oneself and how one relates to others.

#### Exposure Programmes

In pursuance of the strategy to build capacity of organisations, women's groups in Manipur were invited to take part in two regional workshops held in the neighbouring state of Meghalaya. The first workshop discussed the *Tenth Five Year Plan Approach Paper*, acquainting participants with the national development plan and implications of the plan. The second workshop which Manipur organisations attended was on *Health, Vulnerabilities and Rights: Gender and HIV/AIDS*.

NEN also initiated a workshop on *Gender and Peace*, in April 28-29, 2002, which was attended by 18 women's organisations from Manipur. The workshop was successful in bringing together leaders of women's organisations from Manipur, and in developing a rights based framework on gender and development that cuts across ethnic divides. The exposure of women's groups to discussions and debates on the above issues has also greatly contributed to their wider understanding of issues of concern, and ultimately in the rebuilding the women's network.

#### **Impact**

- NEN has succeeded in creating a forum in Manipur where women from different organisations can come together and share issues that affect their lives.
- The trauma-counselling training has proven to be a process of self-discovery for the participants. As a result, women who participated could overcome ethnic barriers, and built strong relationships between each other.
- The activities done together across ethnic divides have helped in initiating dialogue across ethnic lines and between women's organisations for holistic development for the North-East.

#### **Questions and responses**

The questions can be grouped as follows: (a) clarification regarding the parties in the conflict in Manipur; (b) new directions and issues that women are demanding; (c) strategies to break the silence about rape and sexual violence in the context of

conflict; (d) women's role in peace. Grace Shatsang, NEN activist and also an activist for the Naga Women's Union of Manipur, was requested to respond and share her own experiences of organising women for peace.

The parties in the conflict include both the insurgent groups organised on ethnic lines versus the Indian armed forces, and rival factions of insurgency groups fighting each other. There is a growing realisation among women who were part of the NEN programme, that despite their differences, they can work together. They also want to start their own counselling programmes for their communities and organisations. They are demanding that the Church carry the message of peace, and that Church leaders be trained and interact with civil society organisations in 'mainstream' India on peace building.

Strategies for breaking the silence about rape and sexual violence in the context of conflict have included stigma management; collaboration of women and men in stigma management and counselling; high profile court cases against perpetrators (mainly Indian armed forces personnel); the use of theatre and poster campaigns; protest actions and media campaigns when incidents have occurred.

Unlike in other situations, in Manipur and among all ethnic groups, there is a culture of women organising, and traditionally, women have been active in stopping conflict. Citing the role of the Naga women's organisations of which she is a member, Grace Shatsang also claimed that this tradition has carried over to the present whereby women have been involved in negotiations between insurgents and the Indian government. *However, the new role that organised women are claiming is that of negotiator between rival insurgency movements.* In 2001, Grace led a group of Naga women on a peace mission to talk to rival factions. *'We walked eleven and a half hours through wooded and mountainous terrain to meet other factions of Nagas – to say that if there is mutual killing, who will savour the 'independence' that we talk about? We met them and they were glad to see us. We went because we felt that women's participation in peace is very essential. The impact was that we had a ceasefire for six months between the two warring factions of Nagas after our visit. And I thought that was a great achievement, although conflict continues in other places'.*



## Citizen's Initiative Fact Finding Mission in the aftermath of communal violence in Gujarat state, India

MALINI GHOSH, NIRANTAR, INDIA

### Background

Nirantar is a women's organisation based in New Delhi, India, active in the women's movement in India and working on the right to education. The following presentation was not a KIT action research project. The presentation is based on Nirantar's involvement in the Citizen Initiative set up to investigate the causes and consequences of the riots that occurred in the western Indian state of Gujarat in February and March 2002. Malini Ghosh, a member of Nirantar, was part of the all-woman fact-finding team that visited Gujarat in the aftermath of the violence. The Citizen's Initiative is a coalition of 20 CBOs (community based organisations), NGOs and civil rights groups in Gujarat. The brief of the fact-finding mission was to find out the impact of the violence on women. Additionally, the brief was to look at the role of the state, the police and right-wing fundamentalist organisations in the violence.

### Context of the conflict

Between 28 February and 3 March 2002, there was widespread violence against the Muslim community in Gujarat (a state in Western India). The official figures of the violence states that 150,000 persons were rendered homeless and 900 persons were killed, of whom a large number were women. The violence was state-sponsored in that the political party in power in the state of Gujarat actively abetted the violence and failed to provide the Muslim communities protection. The violence erupted allegedly due to the burning of a train carrying Hindu "Kar Sevaks"<sup>20</sup> by Muslim fundamentalists.

### Findings of the Fact Finding Mission

The report highlighted the following: (1) The violence was not a spontaneous outburst. The Hindu right-wing party (the Bharatiya Janata Party or the BJP) that was in power in the state, however, stated

officially that it was a spontaneous Hindu reaction to the 'burning' of the train. (2) There was large-scale sexual violence on women. (3) There is strong evidence of the complicity of the State and the police in perpetuating these crimes (including crimes against women). This has not ended and is continuing. (4) The impact of violence was physical, emotional and economic, and directed against the Muslim community. (5) Relief operations that are the State's responsibility were appalling. The physical conditions of the relief camps were inhuman (e.g. Shah Alam Camp had 8000 displaced persons living, but only eight toilets). (6) This was the first time that communal violence was widespread in the rural communities as well. Previous history of communal riots in Gujarat shows that the violence has been restricted to urban areas.

The immediate outcome of the violence perpetrated by one community on another is the growing ghettoisation of people along community lines. The trust between communities has been breached, and those evicted (mainly Muslims) are afraid to and - in many cases - unable to go back to their original homes. In addition, for many Muslims there has been complete destruction of livelihoods. The growing physical separation of communities is evident in rural areas too, where such demarcations did not exist before.

### Sexual violence as part of overall strategy of violence

Women's bodies were used as battlegrounds and part of the overall strategy of violence included sexual assault and rape. The fact-finding mission highlights the following revelations about sexual violence:

- Mothers bore testimony to the fact that their daughters were raped and then killed.
- A lot of sexual violence was committed in public spaces.
- The scale of the sexual violence was something that had not been experienced in India (with a long history of communal violence) ever since the Partition of India in 1947.
- The main thrust was to dishonour the target

<sup>20</sup> "Kar Sevak" literally "volunteer workers". In the Indian context taken exclusively to mean Hindu right-wing militants affiliated to various Hindu organisations that 'donate' labour in realising the objective of building a temple dedicated to Ram (hero of the epic Ramayana, and attributed demigod status) at Ayodha that is deemed as his birthplace. The issue boiled over on 6 December 1992, when hordes of trained Hindu militants tore down the Babri Masjid, a mosque that is supposedly on the very site where Ram was born. The destruction of the mosque, felt very keenly by the Muslim community in India, led to widespread violence and rioting. The issue known as the "Ram Janmabhoomi (birthplace) - Babri Masjid" issue in the Indian media, is yet to be satisfactorily resolved.

community and make it impossible for them to renegotiate living side by side once more. This, again, is a departure from histories of communal violence elsewhere in India, where people of both communities have continued to live in areas where they had experienced violence – having renegotiated living spaces with the ‘other’ community.

- A whole thesis of ‘revenge’ was developed in relation to sexual violence. In this, the local media played a major role with false stories of Hindu girls being sexually assaulted and disfigured after the train was burnt. Although the paper in question (“Sandesh”) retracted their story, saying it was a falsehood, two days after consecutively running it, the ‘story’ had travelled to the remotest corners of Gujarat. Subsequent sexual violence on Muslim women was justified on the grounds of ‘revenge’.
- At the core of this violence was the issue of sexuality: the press reported widespread feeling of ‘emasculatation’ felt by Hindu men.
- The English-language press and the national press did not report the stories of sexual violence against Muslim women on the plea of self-censorship, saying that if they did so, that could lead to more violence. In fact, the fact-finding report provided space for a lot of reporters to report on sexual violence.
- “Normalisation” of rape by responsible persons, e.g., the Defence Minister of India commented in Parliament that it was *not unusual* for rape to happen in circumstances of communal frenzy.
- “Denial” of rape. As time goes by, women who suffered sexual violence are refusing to speak about it. The state is using this to deny that rape and sexual violence happened, saying that all this propaganda is ‘anti-Indian’ and ‘anti-Gujarat’ and aims at showing Gujarat (and India) in a ‘bad light’.

#### Role of the state in perpetrating the violence

Testimonies of victims speak of the police leading violent mobs. The police and security forces were seen as aiding and abetting in the violence. In many instances, the police remained as spectators on the plea that they ‘had orders from above’ to not do anything to contain the violence. The best-case scenario was when the police escorted Muslim families to Muslim-majority neighbourhoods and left them there. There was no effort by the police to contain the violence where it was happening and when it was happening. In many instances, the

police refused to accept First Information Reports from the affected persons initially; that made any legal case weak. The police were also involved in some cases in the combing operations – and a lot of Muslims have been taken into ‘preventive custody’.

Electoral rolls were taken from municipal corporation offices to identify Muslim households. Elected members of the state legislative assembly were seen leading mobs in many areas and participating in the violence. At panchayat (village) level, wherever the elected headman (sarpanch) allowed or sanctioned the mobs to enter the village, violence occurred.

#### ***Impact of the Report of the Fact-Finding team***

The report was published when the debates were going on in the Parliament and, as a result, it was used extensively in the debates. It was also used to lobby the Women’s Empowerment Committee that is made up of women representatives of all parties. The report was strongly opposed by the BJP women MPs, who are also members of the committee. The report provided a tool for people of Gujarat, who used it, to bring out their own reports and enabled them to speak about the sexual violence. The report was also sent to various international bodies.

#### ***The situation after six months***

The issue now is the economic targeting and economic boycott of Muslims across the state. The refugee camps were shut down on 30 June 2002. With no other option, people had to return to their villages/homes. There, they are not being allowed to pursue their livelihoods. There seems to be a blanket diktat, often from the elected representatives, that the Muslims cannot continue their businesses and work their land.

In many villages, the Hindu majority did not want the Muslims to return. Therefore, the district level authorities negotiated with the village headmen and attempted to set up negotiations with both communities. However, in most such negotiations, the perpetrators themselves were negotiators and said they did not want the Muslims to return.

#### ***Challenges that Gujarat poses for the future of democracy***

Civil society actually participated in the violence and was not just bystanders! Women from the majority community participated in the violence by helping their men with materials (e.g., passing burning tyres to the mob), shutting doors on faces of

neighbours seeking protection. This is a challenge for the Women's Movement, a challenge that has not yet been addressed. We learn that there is no 'essential' woman, who is naturally 'peace loving', but that women are part of the communities to which they belong and whose political interests they share.

The role of bodies like the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) has been questioned. By maintaining a false neutrality in their reporting, these bodies actually sided with the government in power in Gujarat state. The NCW report spoke about women generally saying, "women have been affected, they have been rendered homeless" and "we heard about some cases of sexual assault". The issue in Gujarat was not that 'women' were targeted, but rather women of one particular community were targeted for sexual assault. The larger issue here is of governance, as the NCW is the apex body for women's issues in India and is supposed to be autonomous. Where would women's groups go now for redressal, now that the NCW is taken over by the government in power?

Alternative mechanisms of justice must be initiated. The evidence-based justice procedure will not work for victims of sexual violence in Gujarat.

In Gujarat, the communal divide had been nurtured at many levels over the last decade. For example, textbooks have been re-written with the Hindu right-wing agenda: e.g., the Standard IX textbook portrays Hitler as a hero! Non-governmental organisations in Gujarat have not realised the extent to which this perpetuation of hatred has happened and, therefore, had no strategies to counter it.

The positive development in this otherwise dark chapter of Indian democracy is the emergence of local women's groups. Women were pushed into roles of organising in the relief camps, and out of this women's groups have emerged. These groups are determined that such violence is never going to recur and they have the support of their communities. They want help in getting organised. A space is opening up for women's activism.

### ***Questions, responses and discussions***

The questions and comments on the presentation can be grouped as follows: (1) the need for an effective redressal system for sexual violence; (2) the

growth of women's activism; (3) the manner in which sexual violence was rationalised; and (4) the impact of the violence across social classes.

### Need for an effective redressal system

In the situation of widespread sexual violence suffered by Muslim women in Gujarat, the existing redressal mechanisms were both ineffective and inoperative. This was for a number of reasons. First and foremost is the fact that the police in many cases did not properly file the First Information reports. This then prejudiced the follow-up legal action. Second, the tardiness of the legal process itself has denied justice to the victims and the delays make the justice system ineffective. Third, many women withdrew the cases they had filed, especially if they had named the perpetrator, as part of their strategy to return home. The need for a fast track justice system has been recommended by most organisations that have filed reports on the violence in Gujarat. This includes the National Human Rights Commission report that took a stand against sexual crimes committed. However, the government did not act on these recommendations.

### Growth of women's organisations

The fledgling organisations of women have grown around women's initiatives to mobilise against violence and to help themselves and their communities. It is the outcome of their experiences in the refugee camps. At present, they are working on livelihood options for women. These groups are too young and too inexperienced to represent themselves in peace negotiations.

### The rationalisation of violence

The perpetrators of the violence were *organised* groups espousing a militant Hindu fundamentalist ideology. They were dressed in khaki coloured shorts and saffron shirts that are the symbolic markers of militant Hinduism. They were motivated by the 'cause', the 'cause' of righting wrongs historically done to the Hindu communities by so-called Muslim aggressors. This 'cause' and this version of history has been constructed and nurtured by the Hindu right organisations since almost the beginning of the twentieth century. In the 1990's, as the political wing of Hindu fundamentalist organisations gained space in the electoral politics in India, this version of history - and the cause emanating from it - gained wider currency in some states in India, of which Gujarat is one. Violence, therefore, was justified on the basis of this history and ideology.

The events in Gujarat call to question the notion of citizenship. Who is an Indian citizen, and who is a citizen of Gujarat? In his statement in Parliament in the aftermath of the carnage in Gujarat, the Indian Prime Minister did not say that the Indian constitution had been violated. Rather, he said that Raj Dharma (the religion of governance) had been violated.

#### The impact of violence across social classes

The impact of the violence in Gujarat was felt across social classes. Even within the educated middle class, Hindu women did not contact or protect their Muslim friends and associates. Many Muslim women who were educated and had jobs, have begun migrating out of the state of Gujarat.

### **The role of COVA in post-violence reconstruction in Gujarat, India**

NOOR JAHAN, COVA

COVA has been attempting to help NGOs in Gujarat in the aftermath of the conflict. COVA found that the NGOs were not working in coordination in Gujarat, and therefore sought to coordinate their efforts. They effectively used the experience of COVA in Hyderabad city in mobilising Muslim women in the work with NGOs in Gujarat. COVA took a group of women volunteers to COVA (Hyderabad) to inform them on how to work for peace. COVA found that some women from the camps have emerged as leaders, but there is a misgiving that as time passes by, community leaders will gradually prevent these women from coming out and continuing to work. COVA is therefore trying to utilise this 'window of opportunity' (6 to 8 months) to train the women leaders, so that they become strong enough to resist their own community's pressures and continue working for peace and harmony. The strategies used by COVA to strengthen women's organisations in Gujarat have included training women, taking them to meet grassroots women in Hyderabad, establishing the importance of mobilising from below, and helping them to build a constituency at the grass roots level.

### **Resistance and reconciliation in South Africa**

PUMLA MNCAYI, GAP

The transition from apartheid rule to multi-racial democracy in South Africa meant coming to terms with many decades of long conflict and violence, and finding a way towards a just peace. Pumla Mncayi outlined some of the main initiatives that were undertaken and those which are ongoing in South Africa, to build the basis for a just peace.

The Peace Process was initiated by Nelson Mandela. "Whenever we talk peace, we talk Mandela". He came from a position of *tolerance*. His message was that we are all South Africans, both Black and White, and we all have some or other contribution to make and we have to tolerate each other. Out of this idea was constituted the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" that is enshrined in Chapter IX of the South African Constitution. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provides various opportunities:

- to talk about the experience of living under Apartheid and all the violence that people suffered under the system and the police,
- to make suitable reparations,
- to admit atrocities committed under Apartheid and seek amnesty.

While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has provided the main framework for reconciliation, a number of initiatives within civil society have helped people in South Africa to resolve conflict, seek justice and reparations, and to overcome trauma. The Black Sash movement operates 'advice offices', where they are helping victims as well as the general public to claim their human rights. The Trauma Centre is responsible for counselling victims of violence. The Kulumani Support Group is a victim and survivor support group, established in 1995 in response to the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It encourages people to speak out about the political atrocities that have happened to them and their loved ones in the past, provides **ongoing support** for members, and fosters **real reconciliation** by participating in victim-offender mediation. The "Ubuntu" (Ubuntu means 'helping each other') centre in Capetown provides help to victims. The campaign begun by white liberals, saying that they needed to say "Sorry", although they were against Apartheid. Women come together

on Women's Day in a process to change their tears of pain to tears of joy. These are some of the ways we are getting on with reconciliation and tolerance for one another.

## Key learning from the debates and discussions

### *Afghanistan*

Marie Akrami, representing an Afghan women's organisation, highlighted the problems that women face today in the post conflict situation. She stressed the need for support from the international community, and especially women's organisations in the neighbouring countries, in organising women both in Afghanistan and those living as refugees in Pakistan, for building a new society and for the reconstruction work underway. She especially mentioned that the fate of Afghan refugee women and children in Pakistan was particularly difficult, as the host country was withdrawing support to the refugee camps. This has meant the closing down of schools and other facilities in the camps.

### *West Asia*

Fatima Almena, representing the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, spoke about the constraints faced by women in taking an active role in resolving the many conflicts that persist in this region. These constraints arise from two interrelated factors. First, women and men are not equally represented in public life, and there is no public discourse to change this situation. This situation differs from, for example, South Africa, which is both a post-conflict society and one that has struggled at a political level to give both women and men a voice and representation in public life. Second, there is an overall lack of democratic freedom and participation of the people in governance. Most of the regimes in these countries keep a tight control on their people. This is all the more difficult in oil-rich nations, where control over oil interests is the main objective of political regimes. The Economic and Social Commission for West Asia has commissioned studies on governance and civil society in a few countries of the region as a way of opening up a public discussion of women's right to participate in governance. Further, this year, a meeting to launch a peace initiative was organised by women's organisations in the region. A collective position is being developed, and it is hoped that in coming together and acting

together in 2003, there will be increased space for participation of women in peace negotiations and conflict resolution.

### *Specific experiences of women in violent situations*

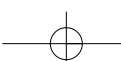
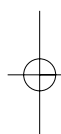
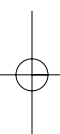
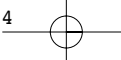
A number of speakers referred to the fact that the specific experience of women in violent situations tends not to be addressed in peace negotiations and commissions. Citing the experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa, Pregs Govender highlighted that this was one of the weaknesses of this process. An alternative forum, the World Court of Women, organised a special session in Cape Town, where many women were able to bear testimony to the sexual violence and trauma they had suffered.

K.Lalitha pointed out that the violence in Gujarat clearly showed that there is no 'one' women's experience of violence and conflict, since ethnicity, religious community, caste and class, too, divide women. Hindu women were perpetrators of violence against Muslim women. In order to build a just peace and to work to resolve conflict, organisations have to take sides and name which 'women' they are working for.

In the same vein Margret Verwijk said that, while women can be pacemakers just like men, they could also be the aggressor. She cited her experience in Sudan in facilitating the role of women in peace building and conflict resolution. Building a just peace that is gender fair is a painstaking task requiring an awareness of one's own agenda, knowledge about the other stakeholders' agendas, and the points of disagreement. Once the disagreements are clear, it becomes possible to negotiate the differences.

### *From personal trauma to political struggle*

Talking about conflict raises emotive issues that need to be acknowledged. This workshop was no exception to this. Trauma needs acknowledgment before the journey can be made towards a political struggle that will end conflict and seek a just peace.



## 7. SYNTHESIS OF KEY CONCEPTS AND CONCLUSIONS

### GOOD GOVERNANCE

#### **What is 'good governance' and what does it mean for women?**

The concern with good governance in international development arose out of a particular politics at a time when there were major arguments regarding the need to downsize the state. Throughout the conference, references were made to the current approaches to improving governance that reduce the act of governing to an apolitical and technical exercise. A key issue, which comes back in each session throughout the conference, however, is that governance is about power and politics. As Pregs Govender reminded us in her keynote speech referring to the achievements of the South African parliament in putting in place laws to promote gender equality: 'This does not convey the fact and reality that on every single law, on every single budget issue, on every single policy issue, on every single issue on institutional transformation there was a struggle'. A recommendation stemming from the conference was that in order to have meaning for ordinary women and men, governance has to be seen as a project of social construction, which includes issues of inclusion, equity and equality.

#### **The role of civil society demanding good governance**

Another feature of current approaches to improving governance is that they fail to recognise the role of non-state actors. In a globalised world, though, where politics is characterised by 'governance without government', the state is not the only actor. A broad range of actors including international financial institutions, corporate bodies, social movements and civil society organisation, influences the process of governing. The civil society organisations within the framework of the Gender, Citizenship and Governance Programme have shown the crucial role of citizens' actions demanding gender-just governance working in tandem with the state institutions.

#### **Globalisation: challenges and opportunities**

The current processes of globalisation pose challenges in pursuing an inclusive politics. A key challenge identified was the context of fundamentalism (religious as well as market), which restricts the democratic

space to conduct inclusive politics. In order for the women's movement to operate in this difficult context, alliances with other political movements and organisations have to be built. The ongoing globalisation processes also offer opportunities for women's movements. Globalisation had broken three of the major social contracts that have existed in the world for at least fifty years: between workers and employers, the welfare state in countries of the North and the developmental state in countries of the South, and the joint responsibility of the North and South for the project of development. Each of these contracts, overtly for the first two, and less overtly for the third, was a deeply gendered contract. The re-negotiation of these contracts will have to happen, since capitalism cannot function without adequate regulation. The window of opportunity lies in the fact that this re-negotiation can no longer happen without women, and without recognition of women's political and economic rights as citizens.

## CITIZENSHIP

### Defining citizenship

In her keynote speech, Gita Sen addressed the concept of substantive citizenship, arguing that it needs to include entitlements, rights and responsibility, and agency. Citizenship operates at different dimensions being the political, economic, cultural and personal. These dimensions are equally important. If, for example, progress has been achieved within the political dimension (e.g. equal right to vote), but not within the personal dimension, substantive citizenship is not achieved.

### On women's voice and agency

The key learnings from the action research projects in the Gender, Citizenship and Governance programme are that, first, the projects have helped to articulate women's voice by foregrounding the real experiences of exclusion from entitlements and rights that women face. Second, these articulations have relied on and helped release women's agency. Third, the action research projects have aimed at changing the discourse about women's rights and entitlements, linking different sets of rights.

While the projects have demonstrated the importance and the possibility of releasing women's voice, it was

cautioned that this does not always lead to better outcomes for women. However, the importance of according centrality to foregrounding women's experiences and giving voice is paramount to the construction of political space, new demands and striving for democracy and participation.

### Linking citizenship rights to women's realities

Apparent in the initiatives undertaken by the projects is also a change in feminist debates. These refer both to the content of feminist demands and ways of working. As for example, there is a move away from fundamentalisms – that one set of demands for equality is equally applicable to all kinds of women. This finding was best highlighted by the CALS project in reforming customary law of marriage in South Africa. While feminists have always held monogamy to be the cornerstone of feminist demands for equality between men and women in marriage, the CALS project and their consultations with women living under customary law demonstrated that this was not necessarily the most important right that the concerned women wanted to secure. By listening to what the women living under customary law considered to be their problem, the CALS advocacy for law reform de-emphasised monogamy but focussed on other rights within marriage that women were demanding.

## WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

The action research projects reached out to and engaged poor rural and urban women never before consulted in political processes. A key finding is that these women have a tremendous desire to be part of the political processes, however corrupt and undemocratic it may be. In fact, these women saw it as their right to participate, precisely because they thought they could democratise political structures, systems and practice.

### Quotas for women

Quotas and other positive affirmation mechanisms to enable more women to be elected to political office are increasingly being accepted, and they have been



implemented around the world. Although quotas are desirable, they are not the panacea for women's equal political participation and representation. The action research projects showed that quotas are mapped onto specific systems of political patronage and culture that may inhibit elected representatives from working in the interests of women. It was therefore concluded that simply accessing political systems is not enough, but we need to engage in debate, discourse and dialogue on 'real politics'.

### **Women's global experiences**

There are shared global experiences of women in office. From the testimonies we learned that independent of context, social background and even way of entering politics, women face certain obstacles because of their gender. This is true even under the most favourable circumstances. Despite receiving support both from society (e.g. through quotas) and family (e.g. supportive husbands) women only seem to function to a certain 'border'. Indeed, women in decision-making bodies have to follow certain unwritten rules, and when they break these rules, they challenge the existing political order.

### **Perceptions of women political representatives**

Does affirmative action induce women to think and act politically? Although women elected through quotas did not always see themselves as political representatives, both the testimony and the action research projects showed the possibility to change the subjectivity of female elected representatives. Becoming political – and perceiving oneself as political – is something that the elected women learned from the training programmes and simply from practicing politics.

### **Building a political constituency of women**

The increase in the number of women in politics is no guarantee for more gender equitable politics. The projects showed the importance of establishing a relationship between the elected women and the constituency they are supposed to serve. In fact, in each case, institutionalising women's participation in decision-making has meant building a political constituency supporting the women or connecting them with the mass base. A key strategy has been to

build constituencies through consultative processes – involving women themselves in defining political representation.

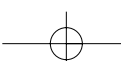
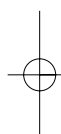
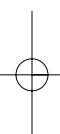
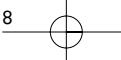
## **ENGENDERING GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS**

### **Accountability at local and national levels**

In order for women to make an impact on policies and programmes, mechanisms of accountability need to incorporate women's concerns. However, analysing the public and civic institutions at both national and local levels from a point of view of gender shows the systematic failure across institutions of accountability. The findings from the projects thus challenge beliefs that decentralisation processes increase accountability, and that NGOs (as in the case of Nirantar in India) always safeguard the needs and interests of women. The projects provided creative strategies how to either create new or reactivate existing mechanisms of accountability. Projects in Pakistan and Bangladesh showed, for instance, how to reactivate and strengthen mechanisms set up by the state itself.

### **Internal accountability in international organisations**

Although progress has been made in terms of making gender a key concern, all international organisations in the global panel faced a common problem: the lack of internal accountability for achieving gender equity and equality. While gender experts work on these issues, there is lack of commitment and engagement from the rest of the staff. How can we actually ensure that gender issues are integrated in the daily work and practices? Since mechanisms for accountability of staff members are not in place, it was suggested to include institutional conditions for sustainable integration of gender equality or to implement a reward-punishment system.



## 8. PUBLIC HEARING

The aim of the public hearing was to provide the opportunity for participants to articulate concerns that confront social movements like the women's movements in their endeavour to secure social transformation, and to discuss ways forward based on a shared vision of the future.

What emerged from the debates and discussions were key principles that should guide the actions of those groups in society that seek to bring about social and political transformation.

- ▶ A powerful vision of what transformation means was evoked. The need for transformation arises from a concern for the majority of people in this world, people who are living under conditions of poverty, under all sorts of deprivation – economic, social, political, and at all levels, people experiencing deprivation in terms of basic services, rights, entitlements, even in terms of how they see themselves. Values of inclusion, equality and justice are central to the politics of transformation.
- ▶ The dilemma of activists having to compromise when operating within institutions and bureaucracies that do not share their vision of a just society and transformatory politics was discussed.
- ▶ The language of gender mainstreaming, equity, good governance adopted by development institutions were identified for what they are – techniques and mechanisms bereft of politics that do not aim to transform unequal power relations. The need to use this language, these mechanisms and tools, while not being subsumed by it, was seen as a major challenge activists face.
- ▶ That transformation in unequal power relations cannot be brought about solely by working within institutions, but that it requires pressure from below demanding change was underlined.
- ▶ The world needs change, and women's claim to equal representation is based on the assumption that women can make a difference to politics and be change agents. But it is important not to essentialise 'women'.
- ▶ While identifying with the vision of transformation that accords centrality to inclusion of the majority, justice and equality, activists warned against using one measure/ principle/value to address the needs and interests of women facing different realities.
- ▶ Respecting the differences between women was acknowledged as an important principle in order to truly reflect different realities, but with two important reservations. First, reflecting differing realities does not mean dividing women into interest groups each having different rights but seeing the connection between the lack of rights of one group and the consequent curtailment of rights of another. Second, acknowledging differences and inequalities between women does not mean creating hierarchies of oppression.
- ▶ While advocating for women's representation at all levels of government was seen as an important task, activists bear the responsibility of ensuring that the women they promote and nurture in politics and decision-making will never support a pogrom, never a position that perpetuates the loss of life.
- ▶ Activists need a new and more critical engagement with states that stresses accountability to human well-being.

The key issues emerging from the public debate have been grouped together in the words of some of the participants themselves.

**Transformation requires politics – politics that concerns itself with changing the conditions of the majority of people in this world living under poverty, under economic, social, political deprivations, and at all levels. Without this shared vision of transformation our efforts are reduced to techniques and mechanisms bereft of politics that cannot transform unequal power relations.**

For me what constitutes feminist politics, as distinct from any other kind of politics, are the values we espouse. It's about values that we knew very clearly in an earlier context in most of our histories, for example where I come from, when we were waging struggles for national liberation against an Apartheid state, it was very clear what the values were that we stood for. The core values that social movements try to advance are about a concern for the majority of people in this world, people who are living under conditions of poverty, under all sorts of deprivation – economic, social, political, and at all levels, people experiencing deprivation in terms of basic services, rights, entitlements, even in terms of how they see themselves. As we go into professionalization and 'NGOisation' of women's organisations, we adopt the language and terminology of governance, equity, mainstreaming as tools and terms to advance values that we believe are core values for us, terms that are used in different ways, by various institutions and organisations that do not have the same core values. We use these terms, which in a sense we have to, to engage with states and spaces that are constructed in ways that entrench rather than advance the prevailing values of exclusion of the majority of people in this world. We use these spaces, which are constructed to actually perpetuate exclusion, and at the same time we want to change these. How do we advance these values of inclusion, equality and justice while using these spaces that are actually set up to defeat what we are trying to advance?

Politics and power cannot be reduced to techniques and methods. There is a huge danger in that. Politics is about who we are, how we actually are, not just in the meeting, on the platform, not just in the organisation, but also in every interaction. What do the mass organisations and the self-help groups stand for? We have heard at this conference about the dangers of the mass women's organisations that can be mobilised so easily for fundamentalist religious purposes, for example. When we advocate for getting women into local government positions, when we campaign for 50/50 representation at all levels of government, then it is our absolute responsibility to actually make sure that when they get there those women will never ever, ever support a pogrom, support a position that in relation to HIV/Aids, for example, perpetuates the loss of life. Never, ever, ever.

“Listening to the incredible presentations that have been given over the last two days and also thinking about what I do my question is: can there really be change through evolutionary processes of influence, or does change only really happen when there is a revolution, with a mass movement behind it? Because what I see repeatedly being described is if you don't have a mass force behind you threatening the existing power structure and you are trying to influence from within, you are constantly forced to compromise. You have to use the language that those in charge have invented and it's fraught with meanings that are not the values that you're espousing as in the words governance, gender mainstreaming, etc. And I feel very acutely that is exactly what I did to write a strategy that economists would not simply pick up and throw in the trash can and others would accept. But it means that I gave up on talking about patriarchy, about power. I talked the language of economic development and why gender is important for that as an instrumentality. I guess my own sense of women's movements in Europe and North America –the ones I'm most familiar with– is that nothing happened until masses of women became angry and organised. And I think that I've heard some of that today, talking about constituencies, and so on.”

**Claiming that women are agents of change means not essentialising women and paying attention to the political context of change**

My first question is: why women? And I think that is one thing we have not been able to explain very clearly. I think women, and there we can use UNICEF's advocacy slogan 'women as agents of change'. That is something we need to reflect on, because the world at this moment needs change. And women, supposedly, can stand for another way of doing politics. And that is something I would like to bring to the agenda. And another reflection is how women easily glide into male behaviour, the male way of doing business. I see it very clearly in the UN context. The UN way of doing business is the perfect example of males doing business – the marathon meetings, the way we talk, and to an extent that the point is lost many times.

We need to very carefully understand in what kind of context we are talking about women as agents of change. Women living in poverty today don't have access to agriculture, they have lost their artisan skills, and suddenly governments and aid agencies are now bringing them into micro-enterprise. It may be possible hundred years from now, but today it's not possible. Because today they are being promoted as better managers, in my view, of poverty and not progress.

I would really like to voice a worry and it concerns an essentialist view of women. Sometimes we tend to say that women are more peace loving, that women are less corrupt, or that women stand for certain core values. Because if we use that way of talking about women having such core values, I feel that we underline the essentialist view of women, which has been used against us by certain traditionalists who wanted to keep women in their right places. At the same time I agree that women are agents of change. But I think it's really important to find out and concretise what is it that we want from women going, for instance, into office. Which kind of changes, concretely, would we like them to propose, for instance, in bureaucracies and governance? Because when we are drawn into governance institutions, I'm not quite sure that we will keep these core values. That might be because we stand on the fringes of governance that we can say that we are different. But how different are we really?

**Transformatory politics must respect the differences between women on the basis of their race, class, caste and ethnic backgrounds while not setting up hierarchies of oppression and invisibilising the connectedness of the human condition.**

The constituency of women is divided across party lines, religious lines, caste lines, community lines, etc. And it is with these women that we are interacting on a day-to-day basis. Also their concerns are so diverse: poverty, alcoholism of their husbands, HIV/Aids. We are interacting with these women, maybe about values, but our message is not coming across, because their reality is completely different. And then when we say: “you mobilise, you fight, you become the master of your situation”, that is not so easy. Because maybe we don’t have the right language to talk to them, or we have little energy, we don’t know where to focus it.

It is important that we acknowledge the differences amongst women. However, there is a danger if we start talking in terms of different interest groups, or if we start talking in terms of the rights of different sections of women. There is a danger in dividing ourselves up into smaller sections as women. As for example, in India, we are confronted increasingly by communal politics and religious fundamentalism. In the discourse of Indian politics this has meant programs against minority communities, especially the Muslims. It is very important, however, not to reduce this to a problem of the rights of minorities.

I –as a Hindu woman– panic about the situation in the country not only because I am sympathetic to or worried about Muslim minority rights. On the contrary, communalism threatens me as well because it is an ideology, a way of thinking that does not respect plurality and difference.

For me it is not even an issue of compromise per se. It’s about whose values? Are we allowing ourselves, or our values, to be waged? Are we also exposing ourselves to be divided? If we are women, and our idea is to improve the quality of life, the question for me is whose standard do we use? If I use mine, are we likely to improve the situation of the marginalized? So, for me the question is more complicated than just saying values, because whose values are we talking about? And how far do we go?

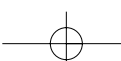
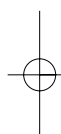
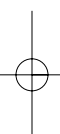
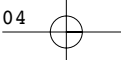
I want to say something about what happened in our group, the Women’s Manifesto Network in Namibia, whilst we were mobilizing women, and talking about the women’s equality and gender agenda. Attacks were coming from the government, particularly directed towards me, as a middle class woman, talking about issues of sexuality, me being a lesbian woman, who cannot belong in the Namibian society, who has to be eliminated from the Namibian society. I think the poor women could see maybe that they were in a much better position than me, who was rejected by our government, who was not wanted, who is a citizen who cannot be a leader of the women’s movement. I’m saying that we cannot talk about hierarchies of oppression. Maybe hierarchies of values that different people are bringing. We have to come together as different women that we are, and we have to put our issues on the agenda and say: “this is my issue of sexuality, in which my country is oppressing me.” And then poor women have to talk also about the issues of poverty, exclusion, and voiceless-ness, and we have to work together, include all the different issues that we are carrying as different people.

**A new and more critical engagement of civil society groups with the state is necessary which highlights the accountability of our elected governments to the welfare of people and to the protection of people.**

Our relationship -as feminists- with the state has always been problematic, and still is very problematic. I have huge problems with what is going on in my country - South Africa - today. The government is more and more going for neo-liberal structural adjustment type policies which are not good for poor people, not good for the marginalized, in fact it is creating more marginalisation. Yet I have to find ways of engaging with that state in different ways, to try to push the boundaries, to get something shifted. And I also see HIV/Aids and other issues we are facing as being linked to the state's refusal to shift from neo-liberal policies to a position where they consider people in the country, and human needs, women's needs included, rather than the profit motives. All of this we need to engage with, because they are the only states we have.

We see the increasing influence of money and violence in electoral politics. Following the election in October last year in Bangladesh there was a massive attack on our minority women (Hindus). Pregnant women were raped. We cannot blame and accuse only the government. But we demand remedy or protection from the government because that is the role of government. When a section of the political force organises, and consciously attacks one section of the population, then it is state violence.

Almost more than ? of our people are affected by HIV/Aids, and this brought the issue of sexuality to the front. And we are talking about prevention, treatment, and our governments are not listening to that. And I was wondering is it only an issue of resources why our governments in southern Africa are not tackling the issue of treatment and prevention? And when I think deeper about that, I think the issue of sexuality is at the core of this denial of this invisibility of this disease.





## 9. CONFERENCE DECLARATION

“We believe gender, citizenship and governance is about politics and power that recognises and respects the agency of women. We recognise the need to redefine power that respects and equitably redistributes the resources of our planet. We commit ourselves to a women’s movement that places at its centre those who are most silent and invisible. Citizenship for women is about affirming our common humanity and achieving substantive equality in all its dimensions together – economic, political, cultural and personal.

As citizens and members of communities, we demand that our governments and elected officials – male and female – represent our interests fairly. Governance institutions, be they local or national government, mass-based organisations or NGOs, international financial institutions, beware: We will hold you to account!

We envisage a world where women are present in governance structures, but that is not all. We envisage women participating fully in agenda setting and decision making to ensure that all constitutions, laws, policies, budgets, institutions and implementation programmes contribute to achieving gender equity and equality, and that is still not all. We want to see visible and verifiable improvement in the lives of women who are worst hit by poverty, violence, HIV/AIDS, etc.

We recognise that we need peace for good governance and there can be no peace without justice. Gender justice is free from discrimination based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, sexuality, etc.

We commit ourselves to challenging and transforming a political process that is patriarchal and violent. We must ensure a development process that supports life and livelihoods. We commit ourselves to empowering women within institutions of governance and to forging a range of partnerships and relationships towards achieving the above vision.

Recognising the need to constantly review our perspective and practice, we commit ourselves to moving beyond the borders of our own thinking, and sharing as we learn.

The commitment and creativity highlighted in our innovative action research initiatives in the GCG programme has provided hope and renewed our energies towards making governance institutions more accountable to gender justice. We call on all women and men to work in and with the women's movement as we create a world free from all forms of oppression and exploitation."

**Conference Participants**  
**17 October 2002**  
**Kochi, Kerala (India)**

## ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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## ANNEX 2: CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

### Day 1 Tuesday 15 October, 2002

9.00 – 9.30

#### Registration and opening ceremony

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9.30 – 10.00

#### Welcome address

*Aleyamma Vijayan, Director, SAKHI, India*  
*Jan Donner, President, The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands*

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10.00 – 11.00

#### Testimonies

Women who have been elected to political office speak about their personal struggles to enter the political process; the barriers they face and the strategies they have developed to overcome them.

#### Chair:

*Likhapha Mbatha, Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs), University of Witwatersrand, South Africa*

#### Testimonies:

*Lydia Ngwenya, Member of Parliament, South Africa*  
*Ambika Kumari, President Vattiyurkavu Panchayat, Kerala*

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11.00 – 11.30

#### Gender Equity Action Research (GEAR)

This session explains the Gender, Citizenship and Governance Programme and elaborates on the purpose and methodology of gender equity action research.

*Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, Programme Director of the Gender, Citizenship and Governance Programme, The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands*

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11.30 – 12.00

#### Tea break

12.00 – 1 3.30

#### Global panel: “Governing for equity: prospects and problems for international institutions and national governments”

Representatives from international and national development organizations discuss and debate their institutional experiences and strategies in making gender equality a core concern of good governance.

#### Chair:

*Jan Donner, President, The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands*

#### Special guest:

*Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM*

#### Panellists:

*Karen Mason, The World Bank*  
*Cathi Albertyn, Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs), University of Witwatersrand, South Africa*  
*Representative of The Royal Netherlands Embassy, India*

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13.30 – 14.30

#### Lunch

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14.30 – 16.30

#### Key note speakers: Women, Power and Politics

Keynote speeches on national and global governance issues related to women’s rights and their political agency.

Pregs Govender’s speech focuses on her experiences of fighting for the rights of marginalised women in South Africa, as a feminist and trade union activist and as a Member of Parliament.

Gita Sen’s speech focuses on what constitutes “feminist politics” in the era of fundamental global changes and the emergence of the new areas of political struggle for women.

#### Chair:

*Chandni Joshi, Regional Programme Director, UNIFEM*

#### Speakers:

*Pregs Govender, former Member of Parliament, South Africa*  
*Gita Sen, Professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore and Adjunct Lecturer of the Centre for Population and Development Studies, Harvard University*

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16.30 – 17.00

#### Tea break

17.00 – 18.30

**Decentralisation process in Kerala**

This session explains the progressive decentralisation process now underway in Kerala. It explores why the Kerala experience entitled “People’s Planning Campaign” is different from other decentralisation processes, what impacts it has on women, and, finally what are the challenges.

*Thomas Isaac, Professor in Economics, Centre for Development Studies, India and Member of Legislative Assembly, Kerala*

19.00

**Welcome drink and dinner****Day 2 Wednesday, 16 October, 2002**

9.00 – 11.00

**Parallel workshops:****Taking office: women’s political participation and representation**

Engendering governance institutions

**(1) Taking office: women’s political participation and representation**

This workshop focuses on women’s initiatives demanding equal representation and participation. The objective of the workshop is twofold. Firstly to share the experiences of the action research projects focusing on strategies to increase the number of women in office and enhance and sustain elected women in office. Secondly, it is to reach an understanding from these and other related experiences of what is involved in enabling an under-represented group like women to take office.

**(2) Engendering governance institutions**

This workshop provides the opportunity to share experiences and lessons learnt in engendering governance institutions. The objective of the workshop is two-fold. First, to learn from the action research projects undertaken. Second, to examine more closely the role of civil society organisations, the meaning of participation, the strategy of working in tandem with public institutions and through alliances, and the importance of working both at the level of material practice and symbolic representation.

**Workshop (1):****Taking office: women’s political participation and representation****Chair:**

*Jan Donner, President, The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands*

**Discussant:**

*Deepa Dhanraj, independent filmmaker, India*

**Action research projects:**

*Increasing women’s representation in local government bodies, International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Sri Lanka*

*Promoting women’s participation in law reform by collectively developing specific demands for affirmative action legislation with regard to elections at all three levels of government, Sister Namibia, Namibia*

*Capacity building for women from marginalized groups elected to city councils and corporations, Confederate of Voluntary Organizations (COVA), India*

*Mainstreaming women in electoral politics, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP), Bangladesh*

*Increasing women’s participation in political decision making as candidates and voters in Zambia, National Women’s Lobby Group (ZNWLG), Zambia*

**Workshop (2):****Engendering governance institutions****Chair:**

*Gita Sen, Professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore and Adjunct Lecturer of the Centre for Population and Development Studies, Harvard University*

**Discussant:**

*Margret Verwijk, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Bangladesh*

**Action research projects:**

*Gender and decentralised planning, SAKHI, India*

*Enabling elected women members to participate in the Development Committees at grassroots level, Prip Trust, Bangladesh*

*Strengthening the National Commission on the status of women*

*Aurat Foundation and Shirkat Gah, Pakistan*

*Women accessing power, Gender Advocacy Programme (GAP), South Africa*

*Action research and advocacy on educational opportunities for women, Nirantar, India*

*Ensuring accountability of the local health authorities and health service providers to women, Naripokkho, Bangladesh*

11.00 – 11.30

**Tea break**

11.30 – 13.30

**Workshops 1 and 2 (to be continued)**

13.30 – 14.30

**Lunch**

14.30 – 16.30

**Parallel workshops:  
Claiming citizenship****Workshop (3): Claiming citizenship**

This workshop provides the opportunity to share experiences and lessons learnt in claiming citizenship. The objective of the workshop is twofold. Firstly, it provides the opportunity to share experiences of and lessons learnt from the action research projects undertaken. Secondly, it is to interrogate from these and other related experiences which kind of entitlements are being carved out and how these relate to gender equality.

**Chair:**

*Dianne Hubbard, Legal Assistance Center, Namibia*

**Discussant:**

*Shireen Huq, Naripokkho, Bangladesh*

**Action research projects:**

*Establishing women's guardianship rights, Naripokkho, Bangladesh*

*Reframing the global debate on trafficking for women, Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee (DMSC), India*

*Law reform process around customary law in South Africa, Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs), South Africa*

*The Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe: experiences in using the women's charter as a lobby and advocacy tool, Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association (ZWLA), Zimbabwe*

**Workshop (4):****From personal trauma to political struggle:  
strategies for women to govern peace**

This panel discussion aims to bring together experiences of individuals and organisations that have worked in the aftermath of conflict. It will discuss what is involved in helping women to make the journey from private trauma to political struggle to end conflict and build a just peace.

**Chair:**

*Pregs Govender, former Member of Parliament, South Africa*

**Discussant:**

*Malini Ghosh, Nirantar, India*

**Participating organisations:**

*Women's network for peace building in conflict situations, North East Network (NEN), India*

*Ntombikayise Mosikare, Khulumani Support Group, South Africa*

*Noor Jehan, Confederation of Voluntary Organizations (COVA), India*

*Kumi Samuels, Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka (to be confirmed)*

16.30 – 17.00

**Tea break**

17.00 – 18.30

**Workshops 3 and 4 (to be continued)**

19.30

**Dinner****Day 3 Thursday 17 October, 2002**

9.00 – 11.00

**Weaving together**

Synthesis of panel discussions and workshop findings.

**Chair:**

*Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, Programme director, Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands*

**Panel:**

*Shireen Huq, Naripokkho, Bangladesh; Deepa Dhanraj, Independent filmmaker, India; Margret Verwijk, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Bangladesh; Malini Ghosh, Nirantar, India; and Shamim Meer, Lalita K, Nandinee Bandopadhyay, Marguerite Appel and Sofia Karnehed, The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands*

11.00 – 11.30

**Tea break**

11.30 – 13.30

**Public hearing**

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Discussion on how we can put what we have learnt from the conference into practice. The objectives are:

- 1) to build bridges between donors, international organisations and civil society organisations in governing for equity;
- 2) to discuss lessons learnt from the gender, citizenship and governance programme;
- 3) to discuss future plans and commitment of all the actors involved

*Debate leaders:*

*Shalha Zia, Aurat Foundation and Nandinee Bandopadhyay, The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands*

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13.30 – 15.00

**Lunch and group photo**

All participants

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15.00 – 16.00

**Conference declaration**

*Presented by:*

*Sabira Qureshi, Aurat Foundation*

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16.00 – 16.30

**Tea break**

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16.30 – 17.30

**Press conference**

Representatives from international and national development institutions and civil society organisations

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19.00

**Cultural program:**

**Kerala evening organised by SAKHI**

All participants



## ANNEX 3: PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

### SOUTH ASIA

#### Bangladesh

##### *Naripokkho*

Naripokkho (roughly translated as 'for women') is a membership-based, women's activist organisation founded in 1983 in Bangladesh, working for the advancement of women's rights and entitlements and building resistance against violence, discrimination and injustice. Naripokkho's activities include advocacy campaigns, protest activities, research, discussions, cultural events, and lobbying on issues related to gender justice.

Naripokkho's work is focused on four main areas: violence against women and human rights; gender issues in environment and development; representation of women in the media and cultural politics; and reproductive rights and women's health issues.

As an activist women's organisation that sees itself at the vanguard and as an integral part of the women's movement and recognises the similarity and affinity between itself and other local level women's groups and organisations it is particularly well placed to recognise and respond to their needs for constituency building, solidarity building and the forging of a common vision of the future.

At the same time that Naripokkho has prioritised the mobilisation of local level women's groups into an active constituency of the autonomous women's movement, Naripokkho continues to participate in collaborative activities and coalitions with other national level women's organisations on specific issues and programmes. The work of Naripokkho has also been recognised by the government. The organisation played a key role as a government delegate prior and during the International Conference on Population and Development

(ICPD). Naripokkho was also included in various government committees for the follow-up of the ICPD and the development of the government health and population programme.

##### *Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)*

Established in 1970, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) is a non-profit, activist organisation with a mass base, working for promoting a society based on gender equality, democracy and peace. The committee members of BMP work in a voluntary capacity for the organisation. At present BMP has more than 94,000 women members within a well-structured organisational formation of several local units and 59 Thana and district committees in all parts of Bangladesh.

BMP sees itself primarily as an advocacy and lobbying organisation with strong linkages with earlier progressive socio-political movements in Bangladesh. Apart from undertaking broad based campaigns on issues of gender justice and democracy, it has diverse on-going activities on lines of income generation, health and environmental interventions with women, capacity building and mobilisation of women, organising legal support to women, and running research activities and bringing out publications. In recent years BMP has started taking on 'projects' funded by the government or international donors.

##### *Prir Trust*

PRIP Trust, Bangladesh, is a national non-governmental organisation that provides technical support for institutional capacity building to the NGO community as a whole, and particularly to smaller women's organisations and NGO networks. Since the elections in 1997 to the Union Parishads (the lowest administrative division in Bangladesh), in which for the first time in Bangladesh seats were reserved for direct election of women, PRIP Trust has been advocating the need for decentralisation of management and administration of development programmes and ensuring the participation of elected representatives, particularly of the newly elected women members at Union Parishad level in development planning.

## India

### ***Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA)***

Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA) is a network of 750 organisations working for communal harmony through Participative Community Empowerment in five states of India, viz. Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir. COVA works with women, children, adolescent groups and men in programmes ranging from literacy, recreation, vocational training, thrift and credit to marketing and advocacy on policy matters.

COVA traces its beginning to an initiative of the Deccan Development Project to address the issue of inter-communal harmony in 1991-92, following widespread communal riots in Hyderabad and many other parts of India. The leading activists responsible for starting COVA soon realised that addressing the issue of communal harmony against such a context of underdevelopment and social exclusion would amount to an empty and ineffective gesture unless the social development of the community living in the old city, i.e. the urban Muslim poor, was taken up. In 1995, COVA was registered as a network of CBOs (Community Based Organisations), which were small Mahila Mandals (women's groups) in the old city slums, with a focus on community mobilisation rather than provision of services alone. At present about 100 Mahila Mandals are members of COVA.

### ***Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee (DMSC)***

Durbar represents an affiliation of autonomous sex workers' organisations, with a membership of about sixty thousand sex workers based in West Bengal, working for the rights of sex workers. The promotion of sexual health and HIV prevention was the original context within which the Durbar affiliates had emerged. However, right from the start the sex workers and other workers of the HIV prevention intervention (the Sonagachi Project) had understood that even to realise the very basic aim of improving sexual health, it was crucial to identify the environmental factors that determine the quality of sex workers' lives, locate these issues in the broader political and cultural context within which they live, and make strategic interventions to bring about radical changes in the social structures and institutional arrangements that underpin unequal distribution of power and reinforce social exclusion of sex workers.

This they had set out to do by mobilising sex workers across West Bengal and construct a political community of sex workers through creating a positive self-identity as sex workers. They defined and articulated explicit political objectives for the promotion and protection of the rights of the sex workers as a community. They demanded the recognition of sex work as 'legitimate work', akin to that of others who hire out their physical labour, or sell specialised services in the market. Sex workers also sought the same status as any other self-employed professional group with their own institutional mechanisms, such as the self-regulatory board, for the internal regulation of the sex trade. They argued that sex workers should come under the purview of general civil, criminal and labour laws of the land, and should not be criminalized, legally stigmatised and denied rights as full citizens by being confined to the jurisdiction of special laws for prostitution, which have historically acted against the interests of sex workers rather than in controlling those who exploit them.

### ***Nirantar***

Nirantar is a centre for women and education set up in 1993. Nirantar seeks to bring back a gender perspective into education in the country, along with perspectives of class and caste. Nirantar works towards making education an empowering and enabling process for women. The organisation believes that education can be a decisive intervention towards women's equality. Nirantar argues that education should not be seen as a one-time transfer of reading and writing skills, but as an on-going process informed by a vision of justice and equality. An education, which empowers, must create circumstances where women critically analyze their life situation and become active participants in the process of change by seeking alternatives, breaking stereotypes and demanding new information.

Nirantar works in close collaboration with field-based NGOs and women's collectives in the following areas:

- Plan and implement workable grassroots level strategies and methodologies in the field of Gender and Education
- Develop curricula, manuals and teaching - learning packages that are gender sensitive and relevant to the needs of poor rural women

- Produce information resources and reading material catering to the needs of adult readers with low literacy levels
- Conduct trainings with teachers in gender and pedagogy and with grassroots groups in participatory material production and curriculum development
- Undertake action-research and documentation of innovative experiences and case studies
- Network with NGOs, women's groups and other agencies on issues related to women, education and human rights

### ***North East Network (NEN)***

The North East Network was conceived in 1994 with the conviction that collective and decisive action by women can pave the way for societal progress. NEN came into being during the mobilisation process for the Beijing Conference. Women of the North-East were mobilised at the grassroots level around crucial issues of documenting and addressing women's problems in the region. NEN was registered in 1995.

NEN envisages a society where women are involved as decision-makers in all development interventions and peace processes. It hopes to usher in a shift in development perspectives in the North-East from 'needs' to 'rights'. To realise its vision, NEN's activities have been geared towards empowering women of the region around the issues of livelihood, reproductive health and environment.

NEN has attempted to provide forums to forge a feminist vision. It has endeavoured to build linkages between the North-East women's groups and the national and international women's movements. Believing strongly that the progress of society depends on peace both inside and outside the homes, NEN has worked towards local and policy initiatives to: (a) get women at the grassroots create their own space to achieve gender equity in their lives, and (b) support women in leadership roles.

NEN has been functioning against the backdrop of the armed conflict situation in the region. Its efforts have been directed towards helping women negotiate for peace from a rights perspective and from a position of strength rather than as a victim.

NEN has been an integral part of the CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination

Against Women). It is a member of the South Asian CEDAW monitoring team and a core member of the Indian CEDAW network, collaborating with all members of both the regional and the national network. In this context, a baseline study was done by NEN on women in armed conflict situations.

### ***SAKHI Women's Resource Centre***

*SAKHI*, which in most Indian languages means 'woman friend', is a women's resource centre set up in 1996 in Trivandrum in the south of India. *SAKHI* was created out of a need to cater to information needs of women's groups and empower them through training's, as well as networking them into a movement capable of demanding accountability from the Government and civil society. The groups have been helped to broaden their insights and to integrate gender perspectives into their programmes. The major aim of *SAKHI* is to mainstream 'gender' in the political discourse of Kerala. The organisation builds the skills and capabilities of women and men leaders of groups and movements on relevant issues through a process of information dissemination, leadership-training, building up networks, supporting campaigns and advocacy on key issues and enabling joint action. The key focus areas of concern are on gender equity, reproductive and sexual health and rights of women. *SAKHI* is the first resource and documentation centre of its kind in Kerala.

## **Pakistan**

### ***Aurat Foundation***

Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation, established in 1986 is a civil society organisation committed to women's empowerment in society. The Foundation sees this empowerment in the context of women's participation in governance at all levels through their greater control over knowledge, resources and institutions. The Foundations is a national organisation, with headquarters in Lahore and five regional offices in the federal and provincial headquarters. It has an outreach extending to almost all 101 districts in the four provinces. Over the last 16 years, it has emerged as a major support organisation working for social change at the community level.

Aurat Foundation's overall goal is to develop an enabling environment for women's empowerment at all levels through participatory democracy and good governance in Pakistan. It thus seeks to:

- assist women to acquire greater control over knowledge, resources and institutions;
- facilitate women's greater participation processes and governance;
- transform social attitudes and behaviour for a responsive and supportive social environment to address women's concerns and development;
- develop an enabling environment with strong civil society organisations to support women at the community and district levels;
- undertake advocacy with public servants and representatives for gender-responsive development planning, supportive legislation and increasing women's access to government programmes and services; and
- develop and strengthen networks of civil society organisations for strengthening citizens' participation in governance.

Aurat Foundation has three major programme areas: (i) information to build capacity for decision-making and action; (ii) capacity-building of civil society organisations for participation in social change and governance; and (iii) advocacy for developing an enabling environment for women's empowerment. The programmes run simultaneously at three levels: the community level; the intermediary level of civil society organisations; and the macro decision-making level of policy-makers and legislators.

### ***Shirkat Gah***

Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre was established in 1975 as a non-hierarchical collective to integrate consciousness raising with a development perspective and to initiate projects translating advocacy into action. Today it has expanded into an organisation working in all four provinces of Pakistan with three offices, and an ECOSOC status. It adopts a participatory approach in its internal functioning and all its activities.

Shirkat Gah's vision is that of 'fully empowered women in a just and vibrant, democratic and tolerant and environmentally sound society, where equity and opportunity are ensured for all, resources sustainably used, where peace prevails and where the state is responsive'. Its mission is women's empowerment for

social justice and social justice for women's empowerment. To bring this about, Shirkat Gah:

- promotes women appropriate development schemes, programmes, policies and laws;
- enhances women's autonomy, access to resources, and all levels of decision-making;
- helps catalyse a socio-cultural perspective premised on gender equality at all levels.

Shirkat Gah has an integrated approach to development and women's rights that combines advocacy and capacity-building based on research, networking and publications. It catalyses the empowerment of women through a participatory process, in which NGOs and CBOs are a primary channel for reaching women in their communities; actively lobbies at the national and international levels; and undertakes innovative research, documentation and dissemination of information.

Its ongoing focus is on: Law and Status; Sustainable Development; and Women's Economic Empowerment. Its new areas of focus include: Reproductive Rights and Health, and Globalisation. Gender awareness, popular education, analysis and training cut across all programmes and activities.

### **Sri Lanka**

#### ***International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES)***

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) is a non-profit organisation with the key objectives to advance human rights, contribute towards national cohesion, promote international peace and contribute towards a more equitable development process in Sri Lanka. The ICES has consultative status [Category II/Special status] with the ECOSOC/UN.

Through extensive interactions with policy makers and detailed research work, ICES has been able to influence policy formulation in Sri Lanka specifically in the areas of ethnicity and nationalism, comparative federalism, minority protection, collective violence, multiculturalism, violence against women, women and governance, etc.

While ICES has focused on issues relating to peace, governance and constitutional reform in recent years, one study of particular interest has been the Women and Governance study, which was conducted as part of a larger five nation study in South Asia.

The study, conducted during 1998–1999, drew on archival research and engaged in a survey/the holding of focus group discussions among women's groups across the country, to examine the nature of women's participation in governance, and their visions and experiences of the state amidst continuing violence.

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

### Namibia

#### *Sister Namibia*

Sister Namibia is a feminist non-governmental women's organisation based in Windhoek, Namibia. Sister Namibia was founded in 1989 on the eve of Namibia's independence to give women a voice in the building of a democratic post-colonial society. The organisation works to raise awareness among women, men and young people of the ways in which political, social, cultural, legal and economic systems of power control and oppress girls and women. It advocates for democratic change through promoting the full protection of women's human rights and through opposing and challenging sexism, racism, homophobia and other discourses and practices that divide people. Sister Namibia also engages in the fields of media, education, training, research, advocacy and cultural activities in order to promote women's full participation in bringing about a world free from violence, discrimination and oppression.

### South Africa

#### *Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs) at the University of the Witwatersrand*

The Gender Research Project (GRP) at CALs was formed in 1992 with the broad objectives of promoting gender equality, human rights and social justice for women and men, with a particular focus on women who are disadvantaged by race, class, geographic location and other factors. The GRP specializes in legal and socio-legal research that is used to:

- inform the public policy debate and law reform processes;
- ensure that policy and legislative processes are informed by the needs and interests of disadvantaged groups of women;

- enhance the participation of women in the policy and legislative processes;
- develop networks and alliances on issues;
- educate and raise awareness of issues with targeted groups;
- develop indigenous and gender sensitive jurisprudential frameworks which are relevant and appropriate to the advancement of gender equality within the South African context; and
- develop strategic public interest litigation.

From its inception in 1992, the GRP at CALs became involved in the constitutional negotiations, providing technical assistance to the Women's National Coalition and to ANC women. It also played a role in one of the key disputes during these negotiations: the place of customary law in the Constitution. In particular, it made expert submissions on the position of customary law in the new Constitution and advocated (orally and in writing) for customary law to be subject to the Bill of Rights, including the equality right. During the course of this process, CALs was invited to address the Rural Women's Movement, a regional organisation of rural women committed to the advancement of the rights of rural women. It established a working relationship with this organisation through providing information on the constitutional negotiations and obtaining the views of the RWM on the issue of customary law and equality.

After the advent of democratic government in 1994, CALs became involved in a range of policy and law reform issues, including customary law. In 1995 the RWM identified reform to customary marriage as a key priority and asked CALs to conduct research and advocacy with them on this. This was the beginning of a more formal partnership with the RWM. CALs began a research project to find out more about how black South Africans marry and their understanding of marriage. This research, which sought to identify the practices, needs and interests of women in relation to marriage, and the CALs/RWM partnership were to be key factors in CALs' subsequent ability to influence the process of customary law reform that took place between 1996 and 1998.

#### *Gender Advocacy Programme (GAP)*

The Gender Advocacy Project (GAP) is a non-governmental organisation whose mission is to empower poor black women to hold elected parliamentary representatives accountable.

GAP was formed in 1993 on the eve of South Africa's first democratic elections. Women's organisations, active in the period running up to the elections, lobbied to ensure that at least one third of the candidates on party lists should be women. An outcome of this activism was that the 1994 elections resulted in an increased percentage of women in the national parliament, from 3% under the apartheid government, to 27%. Aware that an increased representation of women would not automatically translate into improved living conditions for poor black women, a group of activists formed the organisation GAP.

GAP is based in Cape Town, where the national parliament is located. One of GAP's projects for empowering poor black women to hold women in parliament accountable, involved taking women from working class communities to parliament to meet women parliamentarians and be exposed to parliamentary processes. Over three years - 1999 to 2001 - 450 African and Coloured working class women were involved in these visits to parliament.

## Zambia

### ***Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (ZNWLG)***

The Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (ZNWLG) is a non-governmental organisation formed in 1991 to promote women's equal representation and participation in all levels of decision making through advocacy, lobbying and capacity building. The organisation is committed to empowering rural, peri-urban and urban women so that they can claim and occupy their equal place as decision makers in society. It emphasises the link between women's participation in decision making and development concerns, arguing that since women constitute 52% of the population they need to take part in deciding their future, in designing development programmes and in deciding how resources should be allocated.

The ZNWLG was formed in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1991 after 18 years of one party rule, when political space opened up after pressure from trade unions, business interests, professionals, intellectuals and students for the reintroduction of a multi party system of politics. The ZNWLG has over the past 11 years established its legitimacy within Zambian civil society.

## Zimbabwe

### ***Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association (ZWLA)***

ZWLA is a membership nonprofit organisation made up of women lawyers in private practice, public service, commerce and NGOs. It was formed in 1992. Members are drawn from all parts of Zimbabwe. Its mission statement is to create a society where there is equal legal and social status between men and women. ZWLA provides free legal assistance to women and children, and undertakes legal education. This is done through the establishment of a legal aid centre, the holding of workshops and media campaigns to educate women on their rights and the lobbying for law reform and policy changes on laws and practices that disadvantage women.

The main objectives of ZWLA are to promote and enhance the legal status and rights of women in Zimbabwe, to provide legal assistance to women and children, to educate women on their legal rights, to lobby for legal reform, to support and network with any organisation or institution that promotes and supports the enhancement of women's rights.

In addition to ZWLA's lobbying and advocacy activities, the organization is carrying out activities such as dissemination of information through media campaigns to enhance women's participation in the constitution reform process; making public statements on the marginalisation of women and their absence in positions of decision making; campaigning and supporting women candidates in the parliamentary elections; research on the violence that women suffered in the pre-run to the June 2000 parliamentary elections; and giving legal assistance to women victims.

## ANNEX 4: ADDRESS LIST OF PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

### SOUTH ASIA

#### Bangladesh

**Project A:** Establishing women's guardianship rights

**Project B:** Ensuring accountability of the local health authorities and health service providers to women

**Partner:** Naripokkho

170 Green Road, Dhaka 1205, Bangladesh

Phone: +880 2 811 9917

Fax: +880 2 811 6148

E-mail: [convenor@pradeshta.net](mailto:convenor@pradeshta.net)

**Project:** Mainstreaming women in electoral politics

**Partner:** Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP)

10/B/1 Shegun Bagicha, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

Phone: +880 2 966 7985

Fax: +880 2 831 3510

E-mail: [mahila@bdcom.net](mailto:mahila@bdcom.net)

**Project:** Enabling elected women members to participate in the Development Committees at grassroots level

**Partner:** Prip Trust

House Hs.# 59/A Satmasjid Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Phone: +880 2 811 9111 / 811 5953

Fax: +880 2 811 6429

E-mail: [prip@prip.org](mailto:prip@prip.org)

#### India

**Project:** Gender and decentralised planning

**Partner:** Sakhi Women's Resource Centre, TC 27/1872, Convent Road, Thiruvananthapuram 695 035, India

Phone: + 91 471 2462251

Fax: + 91 471 2574939

E-mail: [sakhi@md2.vsnl.net.in](mailto:sakhi@md2.vsnl.net.in)

**Project:** Action research and advocacy on educational opportunities for women

**Partner:** Nirantar

B-64 (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor)

Sarvodaya Enclave, New Delhi 110017, India

Phone: +91 11 696 6334

Fax: +91 11 651 7726

E-mail: [nirantar@vsnl.com](mailto:nirantar@vsnl.com)

**Project:** Reframing the global debate on trafficking from sex workers' perspective

**Partner:** Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee (DMSC)

12/5 Nilmani Mitra Street, Kolkata 700 006, India

Phone: +91 33 543 7451 / 543 7550

Fax: +91 33 400 7451

E-mail: [ship@cal.vsnl.net.in](mailto:ship@cal.vsnl.net.in)

**Project:** Capacity building for women from marginalized groups elected to city councils and corporations

**Partner:** Confederation of Voluntary Organizations (COVA)

20-4-10 Charminar, Near Bus Stand, Hyderabad 500 002

Phone: +91 40 4574527

Fax: +91 40 456 7087

E-mail: [covahyd@hd1.vsnl.net.in](mailto:covahyd@hd1.vsnl.net.in)

**Project:** Women's networks for peace building in conflict situations

**Partner:** North East Network (NEN)

J. N. Borooah Lane, Jorpukhuri, Guwahati 781001, Assam, India

267A Gulmohar Avenue, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi, India

Phone (New Delhi): + 91 11 631 2355

Fax (Assam) : + 91 361 631 582

E-mail: [mbehal@ndb.vsnl.net.in/](mailto:mbehal@ndb.vsnl.net.in/)

[assammen@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:assammen@yahoo.co.uk)

#### Pakistan

**Project:** Strengthening the National Commission on the Status of Women

**Partners:**

Aurat Foundation

House No. 16, Street 67, G-6/4 Islamabad, Pakistan

Phone: +92 51 227 7547 / 227 7512

Fax: +92 51 282 2060

E-mail: [apisf@isb.sdnpk.org](mailto:apisf@isb.sdnpk.org)

**Shrikat Gah**  
68 Tipu Block, New Garden Town, Lahore, Pakistan  
Phone: +92 42 583 8815 / 583 2448  
Fax: +92 42 586 0185  
E-mail: sgah@lhr.comsats.net.pk

### **Sri Lanka**

**Project:** Increasing women's representation in local government bodies  
**Partner:** International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES)  
2 Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka  
Phone: +94 1 685085/679745  
Fax: +94 1 698048  
E-mail: ices\_cmb@sri.lanka.net

## **SOUTHERN AFRICA**

### **Namibia**

**Project:** Promoting women's participation in law reform by collectively developing specific demands for affirmative action legislation with regard to elections at all three levels of government  
**Partner:** Sister Namibia  
P.O.Box 40092, Windhoek, Namibia  
Phone: +264 61 230618  
Fax: +264 61 236371  
E-mail: sister@iafrica.com.na

### **South Africa**

**Project:** Law reform process around customary law in South Africa  
**Partner:** Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs) at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, DJ du Plessis Centre, West Campus, Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa  
Phone: +27 11 717 8600  
Fax: +27 11 403 2341  
E-mail: AlbertynC@law.wits.ac.za

**Project:** Women accessing power  
**Partner:** Gender Advocacy Programme (GAP)  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor, Ruskin House, 2 Roeland Street, Cape Town 8001, South Africa  
Phone: +27 21 465 0197  
Fax: +27 21 465 0089  
E-mail: genap@sn.apc.org

### **Zambia**

**Project:** Increasing women's participation in political decision making as candidates and voters in Zambia  
**Partner:** Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (ZNLWG)  
P.O.Box 30342, Plot No. 1311, Lubu Road, Longacres, Lusaka, Zambia  
Phone: +260 1 255 153  
Fax: +260 1 254 450  
E-mail: nwlg@zamnet.zm

### **Zimbabwe**

**Project:** The Constitutional Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe: experiences in using the women's charter as a lobby and advocacy tool  
**Partner:** Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association (ZWLA)  
17 Fife Avenue, Harare, Zimbabwe  
Phone: +263 4 708 491  
Fax: +263 4 339 292  
E-mail: zwla@zol.co.zw



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