

# **Delhi Consultation on Women and Resource Rights**

March 2, 2009 Indian Social Institute 9.30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

*Supported by IGSSS in partnership with SAFF, UNIFEM, D PWN, Savera, Now, JWP India, Chetanalaya and Nirmana,*

A consultation was organized on the issue of women's access to resource rights in Delhi to understand the situation on the ground as well as the mechanisms created by the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi to facilitate such access.

The Consultation opened with a welcome address by the IGSS Executive Director Dr. Joseph Sebastian who informed the participants of the nation-wide campaign by IGSS to support work on the issue of women's rights to land and resources.

## **Women's Resource Zone**

Ms Jyotsna Chatterjee of Joint Women's Programme chaired the opening session.

Ms Shivani Bhardwaj of Sathi All for Partnerships made an introductory presentation on issues of women and resource rights including rights to housing and land. She stressed that Urban Planning should be more participatory and particularly include women and their needs, concerns and perspectives. She spoke of the need to facilitate the creation of spaces managed, owned and monitored by women collectively, individually or jointly. She introduced the concept of Women's Resource Zones as safe women owned and managed spaces that could include housing as well as community spaces for a range of activities including education, childcare, healthcare, income generation activities and leisure activities. She said that since most women do not inherit property and have practically no rights to matrimonial property the State should promote their access to property and resources.

## **Mission Convergence**

Mr. Vinod Nair of the Delhi Government's Mission Convergence presented the scheme and the various benefits it could provide to women from nine government ministries through a single window at the Gender Resource Centres that have been established in every part of the city. He provided details of the social welfare schemes available including pensions for widows and the aged, health insurance etc that could be accessed through the GRCs. He explained that the Mission is in its initial phase of surveys to build a database on people and their needs. Later, it would introduce biometric smart cards and enable every beneficiary to open a bank account to receive grants etc.

## **CBO Experiences**

Ms. Ameeta Agarwal of Savera and Ms. Seema of Now Reach spoke of their experiences of managing CBOs in Delhi and their work to set up SHGs. Ms Ameeta

said that she is managing a GRC in East Delhi. She said that while considerable effort goes into setting up SHGs and women are able to save money and even get small loans the biggest hurdle for 'basti' women is finding space for their work. Their small houses do not have enough space for small enterprises. Rents are unaffordable. Women want to try running a crèche or tuition centre or a 'silai' centre or even make papad. But the lack of space is a deterrent and when nothing moves forward the groups start breaking up. She said basti women have 'hunar' (capability) and work hard but lack opportunities. She said she had tried to get a Basti Vikas Centre allotted but it had proved impossible.

Seema narrated similar experiences and said SHGs have to be linked to government credit and other schemes as their own financial resources are small. She said that for months at a stretch she had tried to get the use of a Basti Vikas Kendra but without success, even though she knew of two that were lying closed and unused. Discussion on this issue led to a decision that post-elections the demand would be taken up with the government at a policy level.

Mr. Nair also said that Mission Convergence was exploring with the Slum Wing the possibility of using Basti Vikas Kendras to save the rent now spent on space for GRC offices.

### **Excluded Women Speak Up**

Five groups of excluded women (Positive women, Muslim women, Tribal women, Unorganised sector women and Home based women) participated in the discussion that followed, speaking up on the issues that directly affected their lives. They also made specific demands of the government.

Aman of Jamia Nagar described the awful state of roads in her area and demanded a community hall and space for women to start a training centre. Currently, she holds women's meetings in her own home. A neighbour runs a free stitching class in her home. Kamlesh from Vinod Nagar said the neighbourhood park has become a dump yard. She would like the space to start a nursery; it would keep the area clean and also yield income.

Saroj from Chilla Gaon said she is from Jharkhand but has lived in Delhi for 15 years. She and her neighbours have been trying for years to get a voter identity card but with no success. They have also been refused bank accounts. Women from the Positive Women's Network spoke of open discrimination including doctors' refusals to even deliver a pregnant woman. Renu of Bawana said there were not enough schools so children stay at home when they are refused admission or go to NGO learning centres.

Sister Sushila of Chetanalya spoke of the large number of SHGs being run by her organization in several areas of the city

Ms. Aditi Seth of ISEC offered volunteers to work with the community groups and NGOs on drafting proposals to meet the women's needs for collective spaces.

Ms. Jyotsna Chatterjee commented that there were not enough GRCs and more would have to be set up to service the areas that have been left out so far. She asked that a list of GRCs be circulated so that other NGOs could go to them with the demands of women of left out areas. Mr Nair promised to circulate such a list. He also made some clarifications on entitlements and possibilities through Mission Convergence once it is fully operationalised.

Ms Shikha of IGSS commented that IGSSS' experience is that SHGs alone cannot empower women and therefore it has supported the campaign for land and resources.

### **Delhi Study on Women's Land & Resource Rights**

The post-lunch session was chaired by Prof. Neelima Rizbud of the School of Planning and Architecture. She said that Delhi has had no survey of the jhuggis since 1994 and there is a lack of data. The multiplicity of authorities complicates planning in Delhi. She critiqued the eviction policy of both the government and the courts and said the need is for in situ rehabilitation of people on the same sites. There should be participatory planning by the jhuggiwale as they are the best persons to suggest how to rebuild their homes and their areas. She said people themselves have to be more responsible, pay for land and housing and electricity and not sell off land given at subsidized prices. She called for special attention for the shelter needs of single women and older women, including the building of more hostels. She said in local area plans there could be provision of multi-purpose community centres for every 5,000-10,000 population including a room for women's activities.

Ms Sujata Madhok presented the findings of a study co-authored with Ms Shivani Bharadwaj and commissioned by IGSS on women and resources in Delhi. The study, she said, highlights the complete absence of data on women owned properties in the city. Similarly there is no data on women's ownership of other resources and access to credit. She said the absence of data makes it difficult for government to plan adequately for women, including such groups as homeless women who require shelter and migrant working women who require hostels etc. She called for a land and housing policy for women, with priority in the allotments of land/housing/commercial spaces to women of the lowest income groups such as SC, ST, HIV Positive women, minority women, single and disabled women. She also provided data on income levels as well as the serious housing shortage in Delhi which forces men, women and children to live in slums and 'jhuggi jhonpris' and deprives them of piped water, toilets and sanitary facilities.

### **Sustainable Development Zone**

Ms. D. Leena presented the concept of a Sustainable Development Zone, referring to the experiment to develop such a zone in Kochi, Kerala. The Zone would provide a core pedestrians-only area of mixed high rise, high density housing and commercial spaces as well as schools interspersed with open spaces and playgrounds. The area would be small enough to walk round in. Parking would be in the periphery. There would be a designated section for economically weaker people, service areas and a

low development zone with villas, workshops, small industries etc. Feeder buses would connect various parts to the core area. She said women could demand collective spaces of their own in such planned zones.

Ms Shivani Bharadwaj commented that the combination of an SDZ and WRZ would be ideal.

### **Discussion on Resource Rights & Way Forward**

Ms Vandana Mahajan of Unifem chaired the concluding session.

Mr Subhash Bhatnagar of Nirmana said women of Banuwal Nagar resettled in Bawana want space for work such as starting a crèche or doing horticulture. He said they had also demanded allotment of a ration shop.

This suggestion led to a discussion, with Ms Gouri Chowdhury of Action India pointing out that their experience with a demand for a ration shop had showed them that these are invariably allotted only to ruling party politicians. Further, she said, the investment is heavy and the returns so poor that ration shop owners have to resort to cheating and selling in the black market in order to make a profit.

Ms Deepika Nair said women should be allowed to run a model ration shop to demonstrate how it can be done. She observed that profit would not be the sole motive as women would also get their due ration. She argued for NGOs to adopt new approaches and innovative practices, saying that markets provide new cellphones and other products each year and we should follow similar strategies.

There was also discussion on strategies of inclusion for positive women and single women. Ms Chowdhury said that such women often did not want to be separately defined but wanted to be included with other women. Ms Mahajan said her experience is that positive women do want a separate identity and work, for instance in rural areas they want separate land allotments.

Ms. Mahajan also stressed the need for collective initiatives by the groups present to approach the government. Ms. Chowdhury said the best practices of various groups should be gathered and shared so that no one tries to reinvent the wheel.

Ms Shikha of IGSS said there is a need for policy level advocacy work at the top. A group should be set up for this purpose. She suggested that proposals be drawn up for further work and that a meeting be called for finalizing an action plan in two months' time, post elections. She assured IGSSS support for such activity. #