REPORT

Advocating for Women's Effective Political Participation

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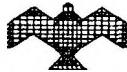# Advocating for Women's Effective Political Participation

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Introduction

The workshop on **Advocacy for effective political participation of women**[1] was held at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, NIAS, Bangalore, India between the 19th and 21st of August 1998. It was organized by the NIAS in collaboration with the Bangalore Consultancy Office, BCO, and was financially supported by the Global Women in Politics, G-WIP, Washington.

This workshop was a follow-up activity of the Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop that was conducted in Subic, Philippines, by the Global Women in Politics for a select group of trainers drawn from Asia and the Pacific. Unlike most workshops, the TOT workshop was conceived with long term objectives. To begin with, it aimed at creating a pool of Master trainers in Advocacy, who, in turn, would be able to apply the knowledge, concepts and skills gained in the workshop to activities that they were directly engaged in

their countries. It hoped to form a pool of trainers within the South Asian and the Pacific region. As a pro-active step, G-WIP created an action fund, to which any of the participants of the TOT could apply to as an initial step to start the process of the follow-up.

The NIAS was represented by the Women's Policy Research and Advocacy Unit (WOPRA) in the workshop, and the provision of the action fund helped to concretize the advocacy plan of the WOPRA unit.

The Context: Study on the Status of Rural Women in Karnataka

The Women's Policy Research and Advocacy project at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, was initiated in 1994. It was set up with the goal of studying the impact of public policies and programmes aimed at gender justice, particularly with rights guaranteed through the Indian Constitution. It also aimed at advocating changes in policy and implementation by generating and disseminating data relating to the position of women. The WOPRA unit attempts to achieve these broad objectives through two interlinked strategies: Research and Advocacy. To make advocacy meaningful and effective it must be based on a solid foundation of facts. The unit, therefore, undertakes both primary and secondary research on the status of women, in order to determine the extent to which women, particularly from poor and socio-economically disadvantaged groups, are able to assert their rights. However, in view of the complexity of the

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problem in the country as a whole, it was decided to initially focus on poor women in rural Karnataka.

The unit believes that research findings, i.e.,insights generated from the field need to actively influence policy and enable implementation. A participatory approach to research was, thus, envisaged to ensure accountability and to benefit the community. Following this, a detailed primary research study was undertaken on the status of rural women in Karnataka between 1994 and 1997.

A preliminary analysis of the study reveals the following:

- Women have less control over private assets such as land, housing and household assets.
- More women work as either unpaid family labour or in home based productive activities.
- A majority of the earning women hand over their income to another household member, primarily the husband.
- Women have lower access to public resources such as health, education, credit and survival needs.
- Women's control over decision-making in relation to labour, mobility, fertility and bodily integrity is low - the underlying reasons being cultural and strong internalized belief systems.
- The family is identified as a key institution in constructing women's reality and mediating her rights, and it is this very institution that is perceived by most women as appropriate for seeking justice
- Women's access to political spaces is limited to voter participation in formal political bodies. And, their

membership and participation is largely limited to exclusively women's groups.

These findings clearly indicate women's lower status in both the public and private spheres. The study also reveals that a lower status in one sphere reinforces the same in the other. To be more specific, lack of 'space' in the public sphere is a manifestation of her notion of womanhood, which is negotiated and constructed through a number of institutions. Being a woman, therefore, entails a subsumed identity wherein one has lower access and control over resources and power. In this context, assertion of one's rights to access power will necessarily entail a better understanding of the close nexus that exist between the private and public spheres of women's lives. It presumes that assertion of rights - access and control over power in the public sphere will percolate down and influence her private sphere. It is against this background that the WOPRA team hopes to evolve an advocacy plan for effective political participation of women.

Advocacy : Issues and Perspectives

The 'crisis of governance'[2] faced by most developing countries in their post-independence era witnessed the gradual disillusionment with development planning resulting in the widening gap between public policy and people[3]. Simultaneously, the increasing incursions of capitalist forces

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[2] Kohli,1991.
[3] Kabra, 1998.

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have dampened people's capacity for collective action. To deal with this conflicting reality, the 1970s saw the emergence of advocacy as an important mechanism to impact public policies in favour of the disadvantaged. While advocacy efforts can be traced to struggles and movements which attempted to change the socio-economic-political scenario in the pre-independent period[4], the terminology has been appropriated since the 1980s by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in their effort to work out an alternate development paradigm, through people's rights and collective action. Also lately, with the large scale proliferation of NGOs in the past two decades, there has been a gradual movement towards the use of social marketing tools and techniques[5]. The rationale for such a shift has been the realization that advocacy is a complex process which requires certain specialized skills. Advocacy experiences in the recent years have pointed out the limited impact that these specialized techniques have, independent of the active participation of the people, both as an individual and as a collective in asserting their rights[6].

Thus, the meaning of the term advocacy has evolved to include both 'impacting public policies' and 'active people's participation' for the reason that if these two processes / activities are independent of each other, there is a distinct

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[4] In the preindependent period, the campaigning to organise festivals like the Ganesh Chaturathi inWestern India can be seen as an advocacy effort for independence.

[5] There is an argument that advocacy in its rudimentary form draws extensively on the tools and techniques of social marketing (Thomas, 1997a)

[6] VeneKlasen, 1997

possibility that the marginalised group will enter into a 'hierarchical-dependency' relationship with the group / set of individuals advocating on their behalf. Integrating these two processes is the challenge that lies ahead of advocacy practitioners today. In other words, though it is important to advocate 'on behalf of' and 'argue in favour of' the disadvantaged groups, it is equally important that these groups of citizens do so on their own behalf. Therefore, the definition of advocacy has now widened to include enabling citizens to participate in a more complete manner, especially with respect to decisions affecting them.

The practitioners of advocacy claim that advocacy strengthens civil society. Civil society is understood as the public sphere where all citizens participate and engage in decision- making processes. And as a corollary, democratic civil society is a precondition for political democracy - it is the domain of the rights bearing individual. A democratic civil society cannot exist unless every individual is allowed to act in the public sphere as a concerned citizen irrespective of the social, economic, cultural and gender distinctions. However, civil society exists as a limited arena for large sections of the population. The capitalist state hegemonises civil society as both the precondition for democracy and as inhibiting the democratic project. This gives legitimacy to advocacy as a process to strengthen it by making spaces for the excluded groups. Certain sections of the population are excluded from participating in the civil society based on socially constructed

identities[7]. **Amongst all other identities, i.e., caste, class, race, ethnicity, gender, it is women as a category which pervades through all categories and yet forms the single largest group of culturally marginalised, ideologically edged out and politically deprived.** Any invocation of civil society is, thus, a call for the occupation of the political space by women and for the control of the political agenda by them. Therefore, it is imperative for any advocacy effort to take up the inclusion of women in the public space of civil society as their main agenda.

In India, advocacy has largely been the forte of grass roots groups and movements. The main criticism of NGO advocacy in India has been on two counts - some see it as a borrowed western notion of people's assertion for democratic rights[8]. They also believe that as a process it is present in various forms much earlier than the term gained currency in its present form.

In addition, advocacy efforts of NGOs, by and large, tend to be reactive rather than pro-active. Their efforts are often a response to policy changes, whether effected or imminent, rather than initiating policy changes. This becomes very clear in the arena of women's issues. NGOs have been unable to take up or initiate any prolonged effort to address women's issues as the larger women's movement has also been plagued by this reactive tendency. For instance, the momentum built up by the Indian women's movement around individual 'crisis,' such as the Mathura

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[7] For a detailed discussion, see, Chandhote, N. (1995).

[8] This is clear from the vast literature on advocacy which draws from the Latin American experiences. See VeneKlasen, 1997.

rape case, Shah Bano's divorce, Deorala Sati case has not fed into the larger question of women's oppression/discrimination. Though, there have been some efforts to link these cases and sustain a campaign for women's rights, the lack of a common agenda/platform from which they can negotiate has resulted in them being sporadic. In other words, advocacy for women's issues has been used to handle particular cases to seek short term solutions, without evolving into a long term sustaining mechanism which will prevent the occurrences of such cases in future.

The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution provided reservation of seats for women in political bodies such as the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This can be seen as an opportunity for the NGOs to pursue a common agenda for the assertion of women's rights. As of now, women's participation in formal political bodies is not a pressing issue for either the women's movement nor for the NGOs advocacy works. Even though there are NGOs who have taken up strengthening women's political participation as their area of work, it still remains an untapped area for advocacy. These NGOs have largely concentrated on supporting women members during elections and providing them with training which will enable them to participate in various proceedings of the political bodies. This is largely due to the lack of recognition of political participation as a potential area of intervention by which they can reach out to effect changes in other spheres of woman's life. As a consequence, women's political participation has been defined and addressed narrowly even in action- oriented research works[9].

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[9] For a focused discussion on the relationship between the assertion of women's rights and political participation, see Naciri, 1998

The **workshop** was convened with the twin objectives of redefining women's political participation, to include her rights assertion *vis-à-vis* her multiple roles and to identify political participation as an area of action which has 'multiplier effect'. The implication here is to have advocacy efforts in the field of women's political participation to have substantial repercussions in other spheres.

Purpose of the Workshop

WOPRA was initially conceived to combine research and advocacy, and the first phase of research on "Status of women in Karnataka" has been completed, it is imperative to plan the advocacy aspect of the study. However, the WOPRA team feels that advocacy is a joint effort and therefore, the planning exercise itself should be a participatory process with participants who are more experienced in the field of advocacy.

The purpose of the workshop has been envisaged in the following manner : ,

Development of a two year advocacy plan of action aimed at improving women's political participation:
- by analyzing concrete experiences of advocacy undertaken by different groups and examining the role of people's participation in different advocacy efforts;

- by analyzing the manner in which women have either been included or excluded in the process of advocacy of different issues;

- by understanding the strategies used by different groups for advocacy; and

- by examining the strengths and weaknesses of using different institutions for advocacy such as the judiciary, policy makers and private institutions.

Analysis of the problems different groups have faced in initiating, developing and sustaining an advocacy effort by:
- identifying the factors which contribute to the sustainability of an advocacy effort;

- listing the various mechanisms used by different groups to handle conflict; and

- understanding the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies used by different organizations and movements.

To arrive at a consensus about the objectives, strategies and action plan for advocacy:
- by identifying groups and key players who need to be targeted in order to achieve effective change both in terms of attitudes as well as policy; and

- by studying the process of creating a larger base for political consciousness.

Thus, at the conclusion of the workshop it was hoped to develop a concrete advocacy action plan with clear objectives, methodology and time-frame, and in addition, to develop

partnerships with various advocacy groups and movements in order to initiate a dialogue amongst advocacy experts in India.

To facilitate the proceedings of the workshop, the WOPRA team invited an anchor team consisting of M.K. Bhat, Chief Consultant of NOVIB, John Samuel, Director of the National Centre for Advocacy Studies, and Sunita Dhar, an experienced political advocate and trainer to jointly steer the workshop.

Profile of the Participating Organisations

A total of 25 to 30 participants representing different NGOs in the country and mostly from South India were invited. Some of these organizations have a legacy of advocacy at the policy level while others are involved in advocacy for attitudinal changes within communities.

The purposive selection of the participants was to bring together a strong team with diverse expertise to analyze concrete experiences in advocacy and citizen participation. This was to provide a starting point and an action plan of advocacy for improving the political consciousness amongst people and specifically women as a constituency.

The participants were either partners of the SRWK study (**Mahila Samakhya** and **GRAMA**) or belonged to organizations involved in advocacy efforts in various fields. These organizations were **PREPARE** - a "fisherfolks movement" that cuts across all the southern states and some

of the Eastern states of India; **Samaj Samudaya Parivartan** (SSP) - an organization that played an active role in environmental issues, in general and in the drafting of the Forest Bill in specific; **Young India Project** (YIP) - located in Andhra Pradesh (the neighbouring state of Karnataka) involved in the process of unionizing the agricultural labourers to enter the field of politics at the level of the Gram Panchayat - the lowest level of local self government tier; **National Alliance of Women's Organization** (NAWO)- engaged in mobilizing support at all levels in order to pass the women's Reservation Bill in the legislatures and the parliament; and, **SAHAYOG** from the state of Uttar Pradesh, actively advocating women's reproductive rights.

The first two days of the workshop were devoted to case study presentations from NAWO, MS, PREPARE, SSP, YIP and SAHAYOG, and panel discussions. The final day was kept exclusively for discussing the strategies and carving out of the action plan. The anchor team met on the 18th August evening and reviewed the tentative programme. While the overall activities of the workshop were retained, provision was made for the accommodation of the expectations of the participants and for reflections on key concepts like power and effective political participation. It was also thought important to have an exercise of visioning - 'how a society will appear if all citizens, in particular, women effectively participated in aspects that directly affect their lives?' The design of the workshop was, thus, altered to allow more participation in small groups for conceptual clarity of key concepts so as to facilitate consensus on a working definition of effective political

participation of women. At the end of the day's session, the anchor team reviewed the day's discussions and rescheduled sessions to accommodate concerns raised by the participants.

In the inaugral function, M.K. Bhat delivered the welcome address and placed the workshop in context. He drew the attention of the participants to the spread and potential of the NGOs to take up issues that can bring about social change. According to him, in India alone, there are more than 35,000 NGOs registered with the central home ministry who are eligible to get foreign funding. Out of these, 75 per cent work in the rural areas. Assuming that only 50 per cent are active, there are still about 12,000 to 13,000 NGOs working in the countryside. In other words, about 6 lakh villages are covered by them or for every 30 to 40 villages, one active NGO is present. Considering this vast spread and potential, he urged the participants to actualize this human resource potential of the people, and hoped that their voice could feed into policy.

Prof. M.N. Srinivas in his inaugural address traced the evolution of the WOPRA unit from its inception. Amongst other things, he stressed the need to actualize the potential of the numerically insignificant and or politically invisible groups such as women and a group he was personally familiar with - small artisan groups. He urged those present to bring into the ambit of discussions the small artisan groups which are just above the state special focus, while at the same time below what is justifiably required for a dignified life, as they are not numerically significant to be politically visible or noticed. On the other hand, he said, as the SRWK study reveals there are

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women who are numerically significant but politically invisible and it is this group that needs to be strengthened if there is to be an effective civil society. It is in this regard that decision-making in the domestic sphere becomes important for the discussions. He felt that for this purpose, special attention needs to be given to the use of media in advocacy and to changing attitudes in various related realms especially, education - school text books at the primary levels etc.. Following the inaugural address, B.K. Anitha, representing the WOPRA unit, introduced the participants to the background and purpose of the workshop.

As the next session was to place the issues in perspective, individual expectations from the participating organizations were noted. The tone of the workshop was set with the presentation made by V. Gayathri. She traced the practice of advocacy efforts in India in order to critically analyze them from the point of view of the strategies adopted by them. She also highlighted the need for and challenges for women's political participation. A summary of her presentation is included since it reflects the understanding, philosophy and premise of the workshop.

Text of presentation
A cursory glance at the existing literature reveals that advocacy includes a wide range of issues, institutions and movements and the term in vogue now connotes one time events such as workshops, discussion meetings, 'melas' etc., organized by certain institutions, which are action specific to well-planned long term strategies employed by organized networks. Of

late, it has gained currency as a specialized field amongst certain NGOs "... the word is used and misused to mean everything from street protests, to research reports, attending international conferences, wining and dining the influential and lobbying. The theater where advocacy shows are held vary from the tehsildar's office to the chambers of the chief minister, the corridors of parliament and the General Assembly of the United Nations"[10]. These variations result from the different perspectives from which it is viewed and therefore, it becomes imperative to come to a common perspective. To begin with, advocacy has been defined in the following ways:

"Advocacy consists of actions designed to draw a community's attention to an issue and to direct policy makers to a solution. It consists of legal and political activities that influence the shape and practice of laws. Advocacy initiatives require organization, strategic thinking, information, communication, outreach and mobilization." [11]

"Advocacy is working with other people and organizations to make a difference"[12]

"Advocacy is putting a problem on the agenda, providing a solution to a problem and building support for acting on both the problem and solution"[13]

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[10] Thomas. S. Binu 1995

[11] Schuler, 1997

[12] CEDPA, 1995

[13] Sharma, 1997

From the above definitions, it can be inferred that advocacy has three components. First, it aims at changing policies using various strategies such as reformation of existing laws, introduction of new laws, lobbying to influence policy makers and ensuring smooth implementation. In the Indian context, apart from legal reforms it is essential to target the large and omnipotent bureaucracy. Secondly, advocacy attempts to change the manner in which important decisions are made by making people aware of existing rules, laws and procedures. Such a mechanism is necessary to overcome the problems of implementation. This is possible by increasing people's access to information so that they will be able to ensure accountability.[14] Finally, advocacy constantly strives to strengthen citizen participation so that they are an active part of all decisions which concern them.

Hence, an advocacy effort can be understood as a process aimed at bringing about changes in policy, information and rights dissemination. Their activities also aim to bring changes in values and attitudes among varied social actors such as the state, media, national and international organizations, people belonging to groups / sectors other than those affected in order to bring about social change based on social justice, equity, democracy, participation and solidarity.[15] And, it involves sustained activity by : a) the oppressed people themselves; b) those with scientific knowledge; c) professionals and technicians; and d) concerned people.

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[14] This is illustrated by the right to information campaign which was initiated by the Kisan Mazdoor Sangha in Rajasthan

[15] Bombarolo *et al*, 1991

Even though advocacy efforts differ on the basis of the issue and conditions found in each region, they share a number of values which determine their actions and activities. In general, they attempt to "disseminate and delve more deeply into the ideas of democracy and participation to search for a redistribution of resources and power".[16]

As already discussed, there are two approaches to advocacy - one which draws from the value premise of people's struggles for securing their rights and involves large scale mobilization of the affected and the concerned; the other relies on the professional approach of marketing ideas involving research and the use of the instruments of democracy involving lobbying, coalition building, networking, use of media, judiciary, legislature etc. However, we believe in advocacy which is based on citizen-participation for the following reasons - it helps to build the confidence and hope of the people, the marginalised, especially women in being able to positively influence the society they are a part of, which, in turn, is essential to the continuance of any form of democratic governance. It also provides legitimacy to the process of advocacy.

Advocacy Efforts in India

It is often argued that most of the advocacy efforts have grown out of campaigns which were specific and action oriented[17]. This brings us to the most important issue - do

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[16] Bombarolo *et al*, 1997

[17] For example, see, Lattimer 1994 and Bhat *et al* 1997

advocacy efforts have to be located within a movement? There has been an increase in the number of organizations and agencies specializing in advocacy.[18] These organizations accept that people are their strength, but claim to have a right to advocate due to either their being custodians of scientific knowledge or are concerned about the condition of others or interested in people's issues. They also believe that they speak the 'necessary' language and have skills to get decision-makers to listen to them. In this context, it is necessary to examine the *locus standi* of these efforts to represent people. In the same spirit it is necessary to work out feedback mechanisms between grass roots organizations and advocacy groups. This question remains unanswered amongst the NGOs and in the academia. Nevertheless, many of the advocacy efforts in India have been successful with large-scale people's participation.

Many of the social movements such as the environmental and women's movements arose in the sixties and seventies as a result of the development crisis[19] and have eventually merged

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[18] Mid West Academy, U.S. A., was set up in 1973 to train activists about lessons learned from movements and NCAS , Pune was set up in 1992 as a resource centre for social action groups. See Bobo *et al* 1991 and Info Pak, Issue No. 2 May - August 1998 for more information on Midwest Academy and NCAS respectively

[19] French sociologist Tourraine, 1981describes new social movements as potential bearers of new social interests and Mouffe, 1984 argues that new social movements are the expression of antagonisms which have emerged as a consequence of new hegemonic formations to be consolidated after the second world war. Also see Slater, 1985 and Scott, 1990 for a detailed analysis of varied aspects related to the recent theoretical approaches to the new social movements

into the voluntary sector, as both were addressing the common agenda of 'mal-development'/'underdevelopment'. In the voluntary sector, some NGOs operate in state-centric terms while others have tried to promote feasible development alternatives. Since mid-1970s popular pressure groups formed by the NGOs began advocating on a wide range of survival issues such as housing, education, health, livelihood, etc. However, the concern of these movements was largely dealt when it fell into the realm of their agenda. Though, many NGOs have taken up women's issues at various points of time, these issues were not juxtaposed against the agenda of people's rights. As a consequence, women's issues were addressed in a 'demand-driven' manner - relating to the living conditions of women, rather than affecting the position of women. An overview of the types of advocacy efforts that have emerged in the past two-three decades viz, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), SPARC, EKLAVYA, PREPARE, Samaj Parivartan Samudaya (SPS), Young India Project (YIP), Gram Vikas, SAHAYOG, National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO), Foundation for Research and Community Health (FRCH), brings out the above mentioned shortcoming. It also provides background material for planning women's advocacy effort. However, it is important to mention at this point that the advocacy efforts discussed below are illustrative rather than exhaustive[20].

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[20] The advocacy efforts discussed here have been chosen based on the type of issues taken up by them.

Coalitions such as the NBA have emerged as movements which question the state based paradigms of development and look for alternatives which will not only address the problems of the tribals living in the area but also provide an alternative to the present type of development.

Others like SPARC and EKLAVYA work within the existing development paradigm but suggest practical alternatives to the state. SPARC, an NGO, in the course of working with slum dwellers in the city of Mumbai, realized that the category of the urban poor did not include pavement dwellers. In order to provide them with an identity and ensure rights, SPARC negotiated with the state and conducted a detailed census survey. As the survey was conducted by the people themselves, it was possible for them to then ask the government to grant them ration cards and include their names in the electoral rolls. The issue of right to housing was thus first practically dealt with. A large support base was together created by the organization and people to start a major advocacy campaign to make right to housing a fundamental right.

In a different context, EKLAVYA, an organization working in Madhya Pradesh in the field of primary education, has similarly developed alternative pedagogies and curriculum for primary schools. Initially, they began working in science education but soon realized that science cannot be taught in the existing system especially to the poor who at best send their children to government schools and at worst do not send them to school at all. In order to make a difference, they started working with the state government school teachers and the

impact of their work was felt not only by the students but also the teachers. They built up a strong people's network consisting of parents, teachers and students who lobbied with the state to design a more suitable curriculum. Today, Madhya Paradesh is the only state which has an education guarantee scheme in which the community has a right to petition the government to provide it with a school and a teacher.

Other advocacy efforts in India such as the movement against the shrimp industry initiated by PREPARE, an organization working amongst fisherfolk in Andhra Pradesh, have developed as a result of compulsion. Seeing the way in which the livelihood of indigenous fisherfolk was affected by the introduction of mechanized boats and trawlers, the organization conscientised the people to struggle against their presence. Later, with the increasing privatization and liberalization of the economy, huge multi-national companies started monopolising the waters. This strengthened the peoples resolve to fight for their livelihood which they did by networking with others living along the sea coast in similar circumstances in other states too. The enormous support that they gained for the cause ensured the passage of the Bill in the State Assembly.

The Forest Bill is a good example of not only lobbying at the state level to change policy but also bringing together scientists, environmentalists, activists and people on a common platform. Though the aim was to pass the forest bill, they were able to broaden their support base and create a strong network amongst people's organizations working with related issues such as tribal's resettlement and rehabilitation and joint forest

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management. Also, the Bill itself was drafted after a long and prolonged debate amongst different sections of people.

There have also been organizations such as Young India Project (YIP) which have tried to strengthen the existing Panchayati Raj Institutions. Initially, they unionized agricultural labourers in Andhra Pradesh and formed a strong lobby group to pass the right to employment as a fundamental right. With the passage of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, the members of the union saw an opportunity to be a part of the decision making process at the local level. In order to take pro-worker decisions they stood for elections in an organized manner and won a majority of the seats in most of the gram panchayats in three to four districts of Andhra Pradesh.

There have also been advocacy efforts that have ensured a better and efficient state delivery system. The Foundation for Research and Community Health (FRCH) in the state of Maharashtra is an example of a group which ensured the accountability of the health system at the local level. The organization trained people from the community in basic health care in order to revitalize the existing Primary Health Care Centres.

The anti-arrack struggle in Kolar is an example of a group of organizations networking to successfully change people's perception and attitude. The women in Kolar district, Karnataka, successfully ensured a ban on the sale of arrack in the district by demonstrating and sensitizing the majority of

the community about the ills of liquor. This is a clear illustration of the strength citizen participation has in bringing about change.

Though few in number, there are organizations which address women's issues as larger societal issues of discrimination. SAHAYOG, located in the Uttar Khand region, Uttar Pradesh, has been working with the community in the area of reproductive rights. Taking a taboo issue like 'right to menstruate with dignity', they have been able to positively influence the attitudes and practices of the community by involving male members.

Another initiative in taking up women's political participation at the policy level has been the National Alliance of Women's Organization (NAWO). This emerged as a post-Beijing alliance of around 1,700 women's organizations. They have been trying to organize women's groups to create pressure for the passage of reservation bill for women at the Parliament which will ensure reservation of 33 per cent of the seats in all political bodies.

The successful strategies adopted by the different groups are highlighted as follows :

- *Creating a sympathetic media* - NBA can be taken as an illustrative case for its widespread use of the media - it created a network of sympathetic individuals working in the media across districts, states, metropolises and in concerned international bodies. These individuals and organizations were regularly

supplied with scientific data which validated NBAs position. This strategy of using the media as a pressure group enabled them to broaden their popular base and influence decision making bodies.

- *Targeted lobbying of the state machinery at various levels by using popular pressure* -EKLAVYA tried to sensitize the authorities, teachers, students and the community at large on the issue of formal education. The importance and necessity of 'quality education' was framed into a rights issue which helped to influence the state.

- *Research based legal advocacy and international networking* - In addition to creating a mass base, PREPARE, used the state's legal machinery, especially the judiciary. Providing the judiciary with substantial evidence based on 'objective' research ensured that important judgments favoured the community.

- *Lobbying at the policy level and use of public figures* - SPS created a host of individuals sympathetic to its cause in various bodies such as the bureaucracy, media, legislature, public figures etc.. They used these individuals to build pressure both within the state system and in the community to make changes in the state policy. Mobilizing students to identify with the cause by regularly organizing lectures by public figures helped in creating a state wide campaign.

- *Identity building for a common cause led to demanding a fair share of power in the local decision making bodies* - In YIP, the agricultural labourers were first unionized to demand right to employment. They then used the recent Gram Panchayat elections as a footing board for their union members to get into the decision making bodies at the local level.

- *People's power* - The anti-arrack struggle spearheaded by Gram Vikas is illustrative of the way in which citizen's power has been used to affect changes in attitudes. Deeply rooted prejudices and myths were contested by using local people as role models.

- *Involving men to address what is traditionally seen as women's issues* - The myth of what is masculine was questioned 'rationally' by using skilled and qualified persons and also by involving men and women. This was done in the community by disseminating information in popular media - local language and songs.

- *Making the delivery system efficient* - To ensure accountability of health system at the local level, FRCH trained people from the community as 'bare foot doctors'. These bare foot doctors ensured that the primary health centres located in the villages functioned efficiently.

It becomes evident from the above discussion on successful

advocacy efforts in India that women's issues have fallen out of the ambit of the traditional rights framework of people's movements. But, the strategies delineated above can be used as a scaffold to build upon while one is discussing advocacy for women's political participation. However, one could initiate the process with a synthesis of the varied strategies to suit the requirements and the complexity of the problem at hand.

Advocacy for Women's Political Participation: The Need and Challenges

In the past two decades there have been important changes in the social, economic and political spheres, both within the nation and internationally. The twin processes of privatization and liberalization have resulted in rising levels of poverty and unemployment. The existing situation considerably worsened with the government and state structures drastically reducing social sector expenditure.

This becomes more problematic in the Indian context where despite claims to being a democratic polity - a democratic culture has not taken root and the rights associated with democracy is not assured for all. The process of changing people's relations to the government and the government's interaction with the people is far more complex and difficult[21] This is especially true for people who have been historically excluded from decision making such as women, and groups from the lower echelons of society.

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[21] Veneklassen, 1997

Both the state and its citizens have, slowly over a period of time, lost their commitment to raise and improve the quality of life of the majority of the poor. The state has increasingly withdrawn from social sectors like health and education which has resulted in the rising dependency on the private sector. Simultaneously, there has been an increase in consumerism both in the urban as well as rural areas. Unfortunately, the satisfaction of these needs, i.e., the consumerist needs of the population has now been accepted as national development.[22] At the individual household level this has resulted in a change of priorities in favour of consumer goods *vis-à-vis* basic needs.

The state too has undergone tremendous changes due to the pushes and pulls of the seemingly contradictory processes of globalisation-decentralisation. On the one hand, the past decade has seen the weakening of the legislature at the centre and state. The absence of a single largest party has led to the formation of a number of unstable coalition governments. Even in individual states where a single political party has formed the government, the state assemblies have been weakened due to internal dissidence. On the other hand, the structure of the state has been changed with the introduction of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution - a three-tier decentralized structure has been introduced at the district, taluk, and gram panchayat level. Any advocacy, effort especially, an advocacy plan focused on increasing women's participation in the political sphere has to be situated within

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[22] Rajagopal. 1994

this complex reality of erosion of existing institutional structures as a result of competing interests and the emergence of a new institutional matrix.

The policy of reservation for women as well as weaker sections in the Panchayat Raj institutions has provided an opportunity for the participation of a greater number of previously excluded population. However, it is now becoming apparent that the existence of multiple interest groups even at the local level tends to have a polarizing effect. In order to make citizen participation effective especially with respect to increasing women's political participation it is important to recognize the presence of a myriad of cultural identities resulting from religious and caste affiliations.

Drawing from the above discussion, it becomes imperative to redefine the term 'political'. The need to redefine emanates from the fact that the term political is defined in the narrow sense of being a member of a formal political body. This has limited the possibility of developing it further to enhance participation in other spheres like decision making in the family, community, etc. And, in the political bodies too it has been reduced to a number game[23]. In other words, women's political participation is understood in the limited sense of number of women representatives in these bodies.

Further substantiation can be drawn from a human rights perspective. Human rights are addressed at two levels: social

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[23] See Vidya K.C 1997, Bhargava and Vidya,1992.

and economic, and civic and political. In the Indian context, the issue of women's rights, to a large extent, has been related to social and economic rights rather than civic and political . At the same time, it is a fact that the political right for a large section of women is limited to voting rights. This has been extended to their representation in political bodies at the lower level through reservation. But as already discussed, the mere representation does not enhance their political rights, unless their participation becomes effective. It is significant here to address the political participation of women as a human rights issue as this also has the advantage of drawing a larger audience.

Hence, **being political is to be aware and assertive of rights as an individual in all the spheres / multiple roles of / in life.** Adhering to this, the basic assumption is that the ability to assert the rights in public sphere will percolate down to the private sphere and vice - versa. Any effort to make her effective in these bodies will not have the desired impact if one does not recognize the fact that she carries a subsumed identity and plays subjugated roles in other spheres.

In this sense, the attempt to redefine itself would form a major challenge / the first advocacy measure for effective women's political participation. This redefinition in turn should lead to an alternate discourse amongst all concerned individuals who interface or have the potential to impact on women's political participation. This will include the multitude of actors ranging from women's groups, NGOs, research bodies, political parties, decision-makers both at the policy and implementation level and the community at large.

From the definition of political as assertion of rights, it follows that for a woman to assert her rights, the immediate hurdle would be the constructed masculinity and femininity that she confronts in every role that she plays. Any advocacy measure becomes successful only when the affected can create a support group of the concerned. Therefore, creating a support group amongst men at the local level and at the national level of the political bodies, should form an important agenda of women's advocacy. Targeting those who are at the implementation level would be a follow up action of the above agenda. Providing 'experts' who can impart the set agenda of women's rights to different training programmes aimed at officials, and collaborating with NGOs who are working on developmental issues to provide them with research insights and scientifically proven data base for their work, so that women's rights becomes agenda for them also falls in the realm of women's advocacy.

As the agenda today is to advocate for women's effective political participation, it is necessary for all concerned individuals and institutions to not only learn from previous experiences, but also to use the existing people's networks. Therefore, **the point here is not to singularise women's political participation to particular agencies, but to resignify it as a common concern and appropriate the shared grass roots base for achieving the overall goal.**

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The Case Studies

The focus of each of the presentation was on the need for advocacy and the strategies involved in it. The importance of networking amongst organizations / movements / people who were involved in a spectrum of activities was also emphasized. Two sessions were allocated for the presentation of six case studies in two panels of three each. This was followed by discussions. The following format was provided for the presentation :

- A brief description of the experience of the organization with advocacy.
- Hurdles and problems in organizing and sustaining the effort with specific reference to conflict resolution.
- Lessons learnt.
- Use of political bodies at all levels to advocate for the cause
- Based on the experience, suggest the modality of initiating an advocacy effort across the southern region to ensure effective participation of women in political bodies.

Case 1: National Alliance of Women's Organization (NAWO)

The presentation was made by the founder member of NAWO, Ms. Ruth Manorama. She introduced National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO) as a new alliance formed following the Beijing conference and said that it has a membership of over 2,000 grass roots women organizations.

According to her, the aim of the alliance is to provide voice to the political aspirations of women who are invisible and marginalised. Apart from this, they are also engaged in raising awareness on gender violence. One of the major advocacy efforts of NAWO has been to mobilize support for women's reservation bill. It is based on the belief that without adequate representation of women in politics, there can be no democracy.

She believes that the entrance of women into politics will necessarily broaden the agenda of politics by redefining political priorities - bringing into focus gender specific concerns, values and experiences. In other words, women's exclusion from decision making in governance deprives the state of a rich reservoir of resources.

For this reason, NAWO initiated a 'platform for action' (PFA). PFA facilitates dialogues between various women leaders from all parties. PFA is a participatory process wherein manifestos are framed at the regional levels and then these are fed into the NAWOs national manifesto. NAWO lobbies with its manifesto, to try and incorporate gender perspective into the electoral manifesto of various political parties.

Ms. Manorama also went into details of women's reservation bill - a topic of current political interest and strife. As is well known, although individual parties agreed on the one third reservation for women, the bill was defeated in the parliament for various reasons. NAWO followed this with various non-violent protests like dharnas, hunger strike, etc. NAWO is still

fighting to pass the bill in the parliament. Meanwhile, she said that it has taken up various other strategies that will strengthen their struggle. Accordingly, the political action committee initiated a campaign to raise funds by collecting one rupee from every women. However, NAWO felt that they were unable to draw adequate support to make this bill a public concern or an agenda of the political parties. This is primarily because of the inherent patriarchy in all the political parties. To confront this, it was decided to rework the strategies. The alternate strategies are demanding and occupying a critical number of positions in all political bodies. Identifying potential candidates from the women's movement, strengthen women's wing of all political parties by ensuring that they have a more pro- active role in decision-making, encouraging women to join polotical parties on their own, to break the brigade of *beti, behan, bahu and bivi* and to support the women candidates, irrespective of the political parties. Ultimately, NAWO dreams to set up a political academy for women.

Case 2: Mahila Samakhya (MS)

The Director of Mahila Samakhya, Dr. Revathi Narayan, presented the experiences of MS. MS was set up in 1989 for the empowerment of the rural women by the government of Karnataka in collaboration with donor agencies. It was conceptualized by the women's movement and was implemented in 3 states.

MS took up the political participation of women after the amendments. Working through the sanghas at the village level it aims to create a pool of nursery from which women can be selected for panchayats. During the last elections women were supported by MS. Pre-election training was conducted and supporting network was also organized for these women. The training included awareness of rules and regulations as well as attitudinal/behavioural hazards of women. A film was developed and used for discussion to incorporate gender component to the training. This was under the GRASAT programme and 35 camps were held simultaneously using this. Half the number of candidates contested were elected into panchayats in 5 districts.

Sangha women take sanga agendas to gramsabhas. This is to create an organic linkage between policy and implementation. But the real issue is how many women who were elected manage the links with sanghas. The experience is that only half of them retained the link. MS is conducting a study to probe into this to rectify the lacuna so that all the supported candidates retain the link. The other issue is whether MS can give training for other women, who are not a part of sangha, so that they will also support the sangha women to push the agenda.

MS is a unique opportunity for negotiating the space within the government. It focuses on using the existing space for subversion, and sensitizing the existing institutions. Being part of the state, while at the same time retaining their links with the village women, MS remains rooted in the agenda of

the people. It strategically uses its 'dual' mandate and identity as it were, to promote the concept of 'women as a citizen' and to educate public opinion. The entire structure of MS is meant for an advocacy forum- a process of facilitating and creating an informed public opinion which will demand accountability of government structures.

While working within the system, they have more reach and resources, MS tries to get more women to politically participate both as elected women and as citizen. Accordingly, in the coming years, MS wants to spread the sanghas to taluk and zilla level, so that ten years from now they can support a women representative to the legislative assembly. The replicability of MS is also being worked out. However, the dream of MS is, sangha meetings becoming the gram sabha meetings.

Case 3: PREPARE

Mr. Elangoan and Mr. Prabhakar jointly did the presentation for PREPARE. It works with the indigenous fisheefolk in Andhra Pradesh for the past two decades. It began its work with the aftermath of Divi cyclone which claimed thousands of lives and crores worth of property. In the initial years of work, it used to prepare the target communities to face the disasters by training the youth. It also organized people to fight the exploitation of the middle men. PREPARE took up advocacy when it found that their work with the people in the eco-fragile regions would come to naught with the entry of the ecologically devastating shrimp farming.

The first threat to the livelihood of the fisherfolk came with the introductionof mechanized boats and trawlers. But the situation in the coastal lines worsened with the advent of the shrimp industry. The industries began to buy lands from small and marginal land owners. Agricultural lands were soon cleared. The concern of PREPARE was to protect the fisher folk and the natural resources. It formed a forum called 'PROFAM' - an alliance of 9 local NGOs and a draft bill was prepared featuring people's rights over natural resources. In 1991, public interest litigation was filed against the industry. Following this, local level campaigns against the industry were launched. The first step was a social ban on the collection of seedlings by influencing the traditional leadership of both the fisher folk communities. From two districts, the campaign was spread to other districts to prevent the land sale by the communities. Scientists were consulted to provide scientific proof to prove that the industry is polluting. Based on this, awareness camps were conducted and exposure visits were arranged for those villages which were not affected .The issue was taken to the media, especially the district edition was used to create public opinion. Public concern was raised also by organizing demonstrations and submitting memorandum to the district collectors. The government reacted by putting pressure on the local communities - by using police and arresting youths. But what really sparked off people's anger was the unbailable arrest of Chittibabu, an animator and a journalist for writing about the local aqua farm and the problems caused by it in a local daily. During the late 1994, support was sought from many environmentalists, lawyers and important personalities for the cause. It stepped up

awareness education among various communities. Meanwhile, the case in the court was linked to the existing two cases in the supreme court which was directly related to the shrimp industry. Simultaneously, PREPARE collected evidences for the court cases involving structured research, multi-sectoral specialists, documentary evidences and audio-visual documents. The team commissioned by the supreme court was influenced and made to visit the affected areas to gather direct evidence from the people. Industries started producing counter reports. But PREPARE infiltrated the meetings of the industries and could present counter arguments. PREPARE also initiated steps towards an international campaign linking up with activist groups in different countries.

Finally, the central government passed a landmark judgment allowing only the traditional shrimp industry. Presently, PREPARE is engaged in helping people to reclaim the land legally and convert it for agricultural purposes.

Some of the important points highlighted by PREPARE were: 1) it is more sustainable to move from activism to advocacy; 2) there is a need to identify a neutral group which can steer the activities of alliances; and 3) striking strategic alliances necessarily means appreciating differences, understanding limitations of individual groups.

Even though the efforts of PREPARE could democratize the traditional leadership and the social control institutions of the fisherfolks, the participation of women in the struggle remained mostly in public attention seeking efforts like demonstrations

and hunger strike. The other bottleneck was the kith-kin network that operated with respect to women's participation. It is learnt that since politics is a career, career-oriented women should be encouraged . For PREPARE, advocacy is **AIDS**- drawing **attention** initially to an issue, sustaining the **interest** and **desire** through campaigns and ultimately making the state to act to people's **satisfaction**.

Case 4: Samaj Parivartan Sanghatan (SPS)

The SPS started with integrated rural development but moved to mobilizing people on the environmental issue of the pollution of the river Tungabhadra. However, to bring out the strategies and practice of advocacy by SPS, one of its major struggles to protect the forest land is discussed.

Dr. Hiremath in his presentation narrated the eight year old people's movement for reclaiming 75,000 acres of forest lands given for captive plantation of eucalyptus to an industry-government combine called the Karnataka Pulpwood Ltd. (KPL). It also had the larger agenda at the national level to defeat an ill-conceived proposal of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, led by the then minister to give 2 million hectares of land for captive plantations to the industry.

The campaign began by mobilizing the affected people to meet the concerned officials starting from the tahsildar to the chief minister, claiming the right over this land and trying to convince them that the survival of the local communities is

threatened in many ways. When this fell into deaf ears, a case was filed in the Supreme Court.

One of the very strong points was that SPS could bring together people who could identify with the cause and were willing to share the trouble. This included group of professionals-engineers, doctors, lawyers, and scientists who had a history of four years of involvement at the grass roots level through a voluntary organization called the India development Service. Dr. Ramachandra Guha studied how local people are dependent on the forest land and submitted the report to the supreme court. Similarly, Dr.Shivaram Karanth, Jnanpith awardee also joined hands and brought out the issue for a public debate in the local dailies.

But the most important strategy was to make it a political issue in the 1989 elections. Dr. Karanth mobilized the teachers and students to come to the villages and made it a powerful issue in two constituencies. People who supported the movement won the constituencies. Following this political victory, 72 legislators supported the issue in the assembly.

The same kind of network was pulled at the national level. One of the effective methods at this level was also the close contact with the press. SPS could also invoke people like Dr.Saxena, Director of the Lal Bahadur National Academy of Administration, Arvind Khare from the Society for the Promotion of Waste Land Development, Samal Singh from WWF etc., to say that what is being sanctioned is against forest conservation act and the National Forest Policy. The

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National Forest Policy adopted by the Parliament unanimously in 1988 is thus a major landmark in the advocacy efforts and SPS. But the struggle is on with the campaigns for people's right over natural resources and, from independence to self-rule.

Coming to the specific question of the workshop, women were a part of the struggle right from the beginning of the movement. Women played a central role in the 'Pluck and Plant' satyagraha in 1987 and a four women committee engaged in various negotiations at different stages of the struggle. However, the general leadership was taken by the middle class men in the villages.

The ultimate goal SPS sets for itself is the dream of Gram sabhas deciding the management of the natural resources and not the Supreme Court.

In making their advocacy a success, the cycle of *theorizing, action and reflection* was found helpful in seeking alliances and networks with other groups, media, people of power and position etc.

Case 5: Young India Project (YIP)

The case of YIP was presented by Mr. Narender Bedi and Ms. Bhagya. Young India Project works with the agricultural labourers in A.P. The basic premises by which YIP has organized itself was discussed as an important aspect of advocacy. .Development is change in the socio-political and

economic life and systems brought about by the oppressed. The present system cannot be changed unless people are organized on a permanent basis to conduct a permanent struggle. The struggle is to obtain power for the poor at the local level; to ensure proper implementation of programmes at the state level; to ensure that policies which are not pro-poor are confronted and new policies are brought in their places.

Guided primarily by this conviction, YIP organized the agricultural workers to form unions- inclusive of other identities such as women, Dalits etc., not only for the implementation of programmes but also for power. In 1984, they founded their first Mandal union. Over the 15 years they have succeeded in spreading the union to 6 districts.

To delineate the concept of advocacy, two parallel issues taken up by YIP were presented. One is the union's struggle to appropriate power at the local level and the other to bring in Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in the state.

In the initial stages of the union itself there was a suggestion to form a separate union for women. But as the union is for the oppressed, it should be sensitive to all forms of oppression and any issue of oppression is a union issue, whether it is rape, wife beating or untouchability. YIP was clear that there would be no giving up of the common space to the men. Women may not speak if the husbands are present in the same fora, but it should be addressed as an ongoing struggle, rather than leave the arena to men. Accordingly, the configuration of

the unions are adequately represented, 50 per cent dalits, 50 per cent BCs and Minorities, and in both the categories 47-51 per cent are women. With the spread of the union into 209 mandals, in 1987, they campaigned at the state level for EGS following the lines of the state of Maharashtra. In 1993, after 7 years of struggle through public meetings, memorandums, Employment Assistance Scheme (EAS) was formulated , not as a right but as a programme. With the change in the state politics and the populist programmes of the then chief minister, the state went bankrupt and the funds were stopped in the year 1995.

The efforts to empower people at the local level was extended from the union level to the Panchayat Raj institutions after the amendments of 73rd and 74th. In 1994 Panchayat Raj elections, YIP put 65 union leaders at the Mandal level and won 45 seats. And, at the grama level, it was a tremendous victory for YIP with 560 women presidents. But the new chief minister came up with the order that government officers should conduct gram Sabhas. YIP protested by representations and petitions at various levels and then went for boycotting. However, boycotting was withdrawn soon to challenge this interference in the supreme court.

The point is that, however strong a movement is built-up, the political reasons and policies decided by the government can have an impact that will totally wipe out all the gains made by the movement. The two instances narrated above clearly indicates even after the people's movement won the struggle for power, the government could take away the power it had

given. The lesson, therefore, is that the struggle is endless. And, what is needed is more permanent organizations for the poor, just like a political party- a party for the poor. Equally important is to make these organizations self-reliant. In other words, how can they generate income to sustain themselves. While continuing the struggle for EGS and the autonomy of the Gram sabhas, a permanent, self reliant organization of the poor, which can take up any issue, at any time within their mandals is what YIP is working for.

The women representative of YIP, Ms Bhagya, reiterated the need to grab power at the local level. One needs to work against power with power. All programmes and NGO facilitators are temporary, what is permanent is the power of the individual. For women, trainings are very important on two counts: 1) it brings exposure to the problems of the society as well as problems of day to day life as problems of inequality; and 2) the mere act of coming out of home itself makes a lot of difference to the self-esteem of the women.

Case 6: SAHAYOG

SAHAYOG's approach is to see the health situation of women as a product of denial of basic rights. The presentation by Dr. Abhijith Dasgupta began with a description of the socio-economic situation of Uttarakhand, and women in particular, to understand the specific health hazards of women. The caste composition of this region is 70 per cent caste Hindus, 20 per cent Scheduled Castes and another five per cent of BCs and minorities. Not much of class disparity is visible

since most of them own land. Therefore, the social positioning of women has to be understood *vis-a-vis* their day-to-day activities and involvement in the movements. In spite of the fact that, women of this region have participated in struggles - in the Chipko movement and in the anti-liquor movement, it is important to understand the kind of role and participation women played in these movements. Even though Chipko was initiated by a woman, it did not raise any voice or limited voice about the internal wood smuggling which was controlled by local men. It also did not raise any question about the role stereo-type of women *vis-a-vis* water and forest. Even in the anti-liquor programme, the question of violence on women was never taken up, instead, the prohibition resulted in the exploitation of an economic situation by local men. Though, women have a certain degree of freedom - in making decisions relating to agriculture and in being mobile, it is interesting to see that this freedom is related to the tough work schedule women have. Another important aspect to be noticed in understanding the women of Uttarakhand is the deeply internalized social and religious scriptures. It is against this background that SAHAYOG placed its endeavours of advocating for women's reproductive health.

In most cases, women are a part of the large oppressed group. But for SAHAYOG, women are the oppressed group. Men are not a natural support group for they do not share any commonality with the concerns of women. Therefore, empowerment of women necessarily involves disempowerment of men of the same community. Addressing of reproductive health from a women's right perspective is, in a way, a direct

confrontation with patriarchy. Because even when a woman has social, economic and political right, there can be no control over the body. And, this is the benign patriarchy which needs to be confronted.

According to Dr. Dasgupta, the major issues involved in this are : to identify some of the major infringements in women's health as a product of denial of basic rights and to understand - who denies these rights; and what are the strategies and activities to deal with it and what are the supporting factors and the hurdles. Finally, how to use the political fora for this?

He identified some of the major infringements as follows: 1) Denial of the right to menstruate with dignity - a majority of the women in this area come from a relatively upper caste/ upper class background, have to spend about five days a month in a cow shed. 2) Denial of the right to appropriate care in pregnancy and after childbirth - here also the rituals involved are unhygeinic, unhealthy, risky and inhuman 3) Denial of the right to appropriate care in upbringing - the web of custom, tradition and religion are so strong that women are seen as passive caretakers and are, therefore, 4) Denied the right to appropriate health care services.

Having identified this, the next issue becomes who denies the access to this right. According to Dr. Dasgupta, for all other problems in the classical situation it is the state and its machinery which deny the access; here, family and society are the major institutions which are denying women their right. But, the major constraint is that women do not perceive these

as denial of their rights. Therefore, what are the strategies? First, is to prepare women to perceive their rights. Following this, create a broad based understanding about health issues as rights. For this, organize a forum of meetings and prepare a common understanding. This forum has to prepare strategies for community awareness and policy implementation.

The activities undertaken by SAHAYOG as part of these strategies are a collaborative study of the status of women's health in Uttarakhand, sharing this finding with the community, other NGOs and various available fora. Bringing out newsletter to share the issues and understanding . This is accompanied by working with women to empower them for their health. Another activity is the training of NGOs and government paramedics in gender sensitive women's health including reproductive rights.

But the major hurdle is the strong gender divide and the perception cum taboo related to gynae problems . The women's body, especially waist down is considered taboo and dirty - and most of reproductive health *is waist down!*

Regarding the use of political fora to raise awareness of women's health issues, SAHAYOG found panchayats to be the spring board. The panchayat network could also be used for identifying issues for which women need support both in their public and private lives. Consensus can be drawn in panchayat meetings for public resolutions on activities which should not be condoned and can be engaged in public education. The same can be extended to use some form of

social boycott for issues that fall within the private realm, for e.g., domestic violence. Using panchayats as a government machinery, SAHAYOG interacts and uses the local government service providers like ANMs and PHCs for awareness and sensitizing. It is also attempting to create, at the district level, a common forum of women leaders to discuss women's issues. This forum is trying to include political representatives of various parties and health care service providers. At the state and national level, it is attempting to form a group of interested activists and NGOs to link up with the media for information gathering and dissemination. Finally, it is attempting to dialogue with legislators especially women legislators as it considers this an important aspect of alliance building.

Discussion of the Case Studies

As is now clear, out of the six case studies, three of them refer specifically to women's issues, while the other three to neutral groups in the sense of having larger concerns of which women are participants. While NAWO tries to take the question of women's participation in formal political bodies to the political fora by demanding more space through reservation, Mahila Samakhya focusses on using the existing space for subversion and sensitizing existing institutions. Both, in a way, try to build women's identity for a just and democratic society. NAWO urges to build up women's identity as the primary identity and women as a category of the largest discriminated group. Mahila Samakhya attempts to promote the concept of women as a citizen. Therefore, in the discussions of these two case studies the perspective of both NAWO and Mahila

Samakhya was welcomed by the participants. Use of the existing institutions and available space, while demanding more legitimate space in all political fora by women, not as proxy men but as women representing the women's cause were agreed as appropriate strategies for effective women's political participation. However, questions were raised about the negotiations of multiple identities and interests, and possible constraints in working within the Government.

The work of SAHAYOG in the area of women's reproductive health clearly brought out the need to address women's issues from a human rights perspective. It also alarms that when an issue is framed in a women's rights perspective, the immediate hurdle and the biggest roadblock comes in the form of benign patriarchy, which is deeply internalized by both men and women. Therefore, while advocating women's political participation, the internalized patriarchal constructions like body politics and the private sphere have to be addressed as a major step. In other words, any effort towards building up effective political participation of women should aim at creating concern from the larger society and, in particular, to create a concerned group amongst men. Most of the questions pertaining to SAHAYOG were of clarificatory in nature. The entry point to the community, framing of the issue of reproductive health and the organization of the community around it, and the strategies adopted to confront and negotiate resistance were some of the issues that figured in the discussion.

SPS and PREPARE, advocating for people's power in the management of natural resources, at various stages of their

struggle, attempted deliberate inclusion of women. In the case of SSP, even though there were women in the leadership cadre, they were never identified as leaders. The major constraint faced by PREPARE in according leadership roles to women was that the traditional leadership structure adopted to organize the fisherfolk communities provided little scope for it. In both these cases, it was glaringly obvious that women in leadership roles were isolated instances in the struggle. Further, women's roles tend to taper down as the struggle gains momentum. Most of the questions, therefore, probed into the roles ascribed to women at various stages of the struggle. However, this led to a heated discussion - **Do women's identity and concerns get subsumed in movements / struggles that work for the larger concerns like power of the marginalised and environmental issues?** Even when the answer is 'necessarily not so', the experiences of the case studies affirm it. The lesson drawn is that if people are organized around a survival or an environmental issue, unless one works consciously to deal with the social constraints of women to come to the forefront, the probability of women and women's concerns getting subsumed in the larger struggle / concern is greater. Therfore, while advocating people's power by changing the existing inequality in the system, it is equally important to work towards changing the very construct of the concept of power which is deeply enmeshed in patriarchy. To reiterate, advocacy efforts have to combine strategies of struggle with strategies that enable women to be 'political'.

YIP, in providing common space as against separate space for women cautions that extreme care has to be taken to be

sensitive to women's concerns starting with maintaining equal representation of women at various levels of decision-making. Many queries were directed towards the actual roles ascribed and performed by these equal number of women or how sensitive this 'common space' was to women's issues.

Summary of the Panel Discussion

The summary of the panel discussions was provided by John Samuel and Sunita Dhar. The discussions clearly brought out the consensus on the following: the need to broaden and redefine the term 'political' to include awareness and assertion of rights; empowerment as a pre-requisite for women's effective political participation; and women's political participation as a necessary step towards democratizing the civil society. There was also consensus on the fact that issues and perspective precede advocacy. Because advocacy becomes meaningful within a particular time, space and context, it is necessarily value ridden and culturally oriented. Therefore, advocating from a women's perspective involves resisting patriarchy at all levels - individual / family and public / governance and, engaging institutions of governance to empower the marginalised. It also involves creating and using spaces within the system, not to get co-opted, but the strategic use of knowledge, skills, opportunities, alliances, etc.

In the Indian context, advocacy is a value driven political process; if values and strategies are not compatible, the campaigning can create havoc. This is very important while advocating for women's political participation. In the west,

advocacy is influencing and persuading, but in the Indian context, it is resisting, engaging and persuading.

Advocacy is to bridge micro-level activism to macro-level policies. Hence, articulating women's perspective is not a one time process but consolidation of various positions. Therefore, in subverting the existing space and means, it is important to have alternatives. At the same time, what is more important is the processes and strategies that can validate the alternatives. For e.g., Mahila Samakhya's dream of sangha meetings becoming gram sabha meetings, NAWO's dream of a political academy for women or SSP's dream of gram sabhas deciding the management of natural resources instead of the supreme court. Validation of these alternatives can come from deconstructing various myths regarding the concept of power, the construct of women etc. Care should also be taken in forming alliances for a cause - how do we locate ourselves and the roles as individuals, organizations and movements.

The discussion also brought to the fore that any advocacy effort essentially meant 'Power to the people". Here, power is referred in the context of justice and right's assertion of every individual, be it women, the marginalised or the landless. It also emphasized the need to identify and advance people's issues with a perspective of the marginalised.

This process necessarily entails:
1) Organizing grass roots organizations to create pressure to implement long term policy change in favour of the

marginalised. The policy change must reflect the diverse interests of different groups and take into account the cultural and social conditions under which the change has to be operated. To sustain the process of organization in the long run it must be independent of funding.

2) Influencing policy and governance by direct non-violent actions and building alliances with people within the system. Influencing policies must, in turn, impact the state, family and society. For this, the underlying condition is that the group doing this must have credibility, legitimacy and skill to speak the same language of the policy makers who are in the Indian context the bureaucracy and the judiciary.

3) Creating information base which includes data, information and knowledge. There is a need to tap the existing data systems like the constitution, official data. The gap within the system needs to be located and the problems with official data systems need to be discussed. Alternate practical suggestion to generate data need to be specifically laid out to strategic actors within the system who are in a position to negotiate change.

4) Communicating the cause or the issue in an effective way. We need to identify the time, space, locate public figures, select appropriate media so as to create public opinion about the issue.

5) Transforming the issue into a political agenda which means strategic use of political opportunity and spaces. This, in essence, means increasing numbers which will mean including the middle class while use of media and active interface with political parties.

The third day began with the summing up of the two-day discussions. To emphasize the redefinition of effective political participation of women, three small groups were formed and a visioning exercise conducted. There were two tasks set for each group:

1. to visualize a society which is characterized by effective political participation of women; and
2. what are the impediments to effective political participation of women?

Vision

There should be equality for women in all aspects that allows them to operate as individuals on the basis of informed choices from a system of knowledge produced collectively. This equality means that:

- there are no gender based impediments [while biological differences are acknowledged and addressed]; the biological and gender to be separated to see 'human beings'. To take care of the biological differences, there has to be a supportive environment;

- dominance and subjugation based on sex is absent; and

the consciousness is 'human' rather than masculine or feminine. There is freedom from the compulsion of being 'male' and 'female.'

In this egalitarian society, there will be no need for affirmative action or special organizations to address or study the 'gender question.' Women will be so powerful that they are present, and their interests taken care of, even when they are absent. It is a society of equality, power and freedom irrespective of gender and sex in the family, place of work, community and polity. There will be proportionate spaces for women and men both in common and independently. Women's presence will be obligatory and articulated in the common spaces. Articulation is essential for conscientizing, and being visible. Women will have the right to dream and the opportunity to realize their dreams. They will take responsibility for public concerns. There will be responsible sexual relationships. There will be equal rights to property, natural resources, societal and cultural rights. Women will have control over their bodies. The feminine values of caring, sharing and work will be visible, appreciated and rewarded.

Impediments

The negative self-image of women in patriarchy is a major roadblock. There must be women's spaces, men's spaces and common spaces where renegotiation and rearticulation of power can take place. There has to be a total reconstruction of the concept of 'woman' - menstruation, pregnancy.... there should be an assertion of dignity and, shame removed in every sphere of women's body and sexuality.

At present, women are so conditioned that they do not have the freedom to even recognize what is violence. Moreover, most violence against women takes place in what is broadly agreed to [though defined by patriarchy] to be 'private space'. The redefinition of personal, private and public boundaries is a necessity since the present contours effectively keep the women oppressed without scope for solidarity to overcome subjugation. A major part of the violence and subjugation faced by the women are not from the legal system, but from the social and cultural systems. Therefore, while there are enabling legal provisions for effective participation the canvas must be bigger.

A problem for women to participate in electoral politics is their narrow resource base. Therefore, the review of the political system becomes necessary so that the system enables actual representation. State funding of elections is needed as a first step. Strengthening women's wings of the mainstream political parties is also an option. However, in that case it should be recognized that the compulsions of belonging to the political parties could put pressure on the women to effectively articulate gender issues.

Another agonizing choice is that of allies. Extreme right-wing patriarchal parties favour the 33 per cent reservation for women and have agreed to make space for them. Progressive parties, even those that are at the forefront for demanding reservation, do not have even one woman in their politburo! Even so, to stay out of electoral politics is not an option since all issues are political.

The identity of women is very weak. Other identities such as caste, ethnic, linguistic and regional have a much higher binding force. While women may have identity with other women on issues, when it comes to the crux the identification with the family - a patriarchal institution based on caste, religion, class, region, ethnicity and language - predominates. The creation of a more binding identity that can overcome the existing fragmenting ones is no easy task.

Political engagement and empowerment processes have to scale up. This often requires alliances, most often based on issues, with other movements. When scaling up, gender concerns are often sidelined. So, at the macro-level, gender concerns vanish and are not addressed. Scaling up is needed. But people live in their micro-reality. Ensuring that the micro concerns of half the population are addressed at the macro-level is an important challenge.

Agenda and Action Points

The agenda for advocating for effective political participation of women seems to be quite straightforward, since effective political participation of women is, as agreed in the workshop, essentially an issue of power. Thus, advocacy will have to be rooted in the empowerment process, and the agenda will have to be set by the most vulnerable.

Organization: The organization of the concerned people - in this case women - is a prerequisite. Without this change at the grass roots it is just not possible. Creation of permanent institutions are necessary for permanent struggles.

Enter into formal governance: There are many women members of parliament and legislature. However, what is required is that women from the movements be represented there. Women *per se* are not gender sensitive. The women from the movements no longer have the luxury to stay away from politics and men cannot have the justification of proclaiming that women should not dirty their hands in electoral politics.

Mainstreaming gender concerns: As long as gender and women's issues remain women's issues, they will always remain at the periphery. The periphery does not really influence the centre. One of the means to get into the centre is to enter into formal governance. At the ideological level, it is to incorporate gender into existing areas of discourse, and existing movements. There has to be an assertive, positive, complementary approaches to constantly renegotiate and redistribute powers of work and decision-making in every institutional arena.

Creating a positive 'win-win' ideology: The myth that men are the losers in this restructuring of the present power relations into a more equitable one has to be explored. Liberation of women must be recast as a positive ideology where with less 'control' there is more 'power'.

Creating a positive self-image for women: Another myth is that the liberated woman is somehow less feminine. Here, there has to be a redefinition of what is the 'ideal woman' that is not defined as a negation of man or as a goddess. The

degrees of shame attached to perfectly natural biological functions, anatomy and desires should be painstakingly and thoroughly rooted out.

Action in the family: The family is the basic unit of patriarchy and social structuring and therefore, it is in the family that basic change must take place. Space has to be created by men and women in their personal sphere first and this responsibility has to be shared by both. This personal agenda can then be carried to all other institutions.

Sharing and exchanging responsibility: The starting point is men who are ready to learn. Rediscover the existing positive relationship between men and women and use it to reinforce positive awareness among men to be aware, responsible and responsive to women's rights and dignity. The logical step would be to progress from tolerance to acceptance to equality.

Conclusion

The workshop was designed to develop an action plan for advocating effective political participation of women. The purpose was to establish a network of NGOs who aspire to take this up as part of their main agenda. It also envisaged to form a collaborative team of partners to follow up the workshop. In the process, the workshop could redefine the term 'political' to include the awareness and assertion of rights. Consequently, there was consensus on the role of women's political participation in building up a democratic civil society.

The failure and success of the case studies clearly brought out the need for collaborative work for achieving this. Another point which came out in the discussions was that women's identity tend to get subsumed in larger struggles. Therefore, **for effective political participation of women, the identity of women has to be built up as a primary concern.** The point of contention was what could be the entry point for this -whether it has to be necessarily a survival issue or can women be organized around an issue, that is very much 'womanly ' like the reproductive health? If it is to be the latter, what can be the modalities involved in the collaboration of the partner NGOs for the same. The role that NIAS could play in this was outlined in terms of training, research support and data base, collection and dissemination of information and, facilitating the collaboration through periodic workshops

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WORKSHOP ON
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