

GROOTS

GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS OPERATING TOGETHER IN SISTERHOOD (SOUTH ASIA)

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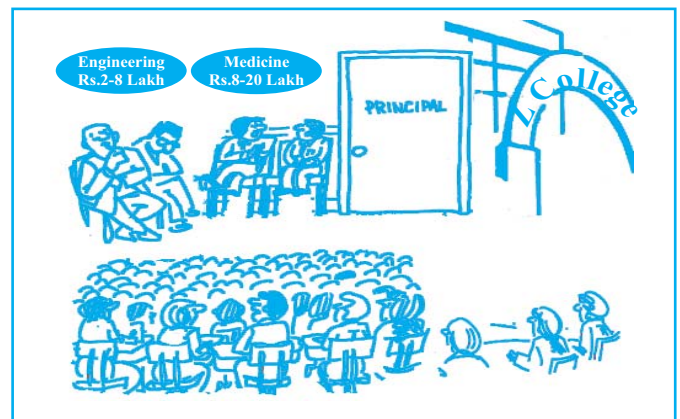
January - June 2009

Editorial

HAS EDUCATION BECOME COMMERCIALIZED?

It is indeed a welcome move both by the Central Government and the Human Resource Development Minister to enact 'Right to Education Bill' at a time when India, even after 60 years of independence, has failed to ensure access to basic, free and compulsory education. It is most unfortunate that only a miniscule percentage of our population has access to higher education, especially in the backdrop of tall claims regarding high rates of economic growth and technological advances in a fast growing liberalized economy.

Since independence there is a rapid increase in institutional capacity for higher education. From 1950 to 2008, the number of universities has increased from 20 to 431, colleges from 500 to 20677 and teachers from 15000 to 5.05 lakh. Also the enrollment of students has increased from 1 lakh in the year 1950 to over 1.16 crore*. Unfortunately, this



does not mean everyone has everything in the country. In fact growth is inclusive but discriminative as only a very few could prosper and many are lagging behind.

Day-to-day happenings in the field of education are truly deplorable with educational institutions being run mostly on a commercial basis with an intent to exploit the hard earned income of parents. The parents, out of desperation to ensure good education for their children admit them in institutions that levy heavy fees despite other government run institutions providing the same kind of education. This is because of the parents' ego-centric attitude and their efforts to gain a social status by admitting their children in so called elite educational institutions. Thus, educational centres are becoming commercialized venture and are charging exorbitant capitation fees.

* Deccan Chronicle 14 March 2009



During the academic year, there is a mad rush for admission both by the students and parents for professional courses. It is a hard fact that even the middle class parents, who have to run their families on limited income, have to pay between Rs.1 lakh and Rs.8 lakh for engineering/medical courses and thus become debt ridden for life. It is even worse than the dowry menace, a social evil that is still practiced.

Today, the educational sector has become uncontrolled, unchecked and is a money spinning industry for a handful of people at the cost of parents. What is the quality and standard of class room teaching available to the student population today? As many of educational institutions offer luxurious facilities to the students and many of the students are not from well-to-do families, their parents borrow from moneylenders and banks to pay the fees. But when they pass out after enjoying luxurious facilities, seldom do they understand the realities of life. They

are not only half baked, arrogant and confused but also prove to be a third rate group of youngsters while competing in the international sphere.

These institutions seldom understand the real aptitude of students. The students are pushed both by the parents and the management, faculty of the institutions to choose from a closed set of options and do not really benefit. It is the educational institutions which truly benefit in this rat race. These experiments may be suitable for upper classes, but how will it benefit the 'have nots'?

It is high time that the Central and State governments wake up. Will the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) get on with the effort of regulating such unchecked malpractices? Will the parents be protected from such anomalies? Will students get a fair deal? ■

WE NEED YOUR INPUTS !!!

Letters, Ideas, Comments, Articles or Contributions for our Newsletter

To

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EYE CAMP FOR WOMEN



Inauguration of the eye camp

Working Women's Forum (India) in association with *Rajan Eye Care Hospital* organized a free eye camp for the grassroot women workers on 19 April 2009. Nearly 400 women participated in the event. In the welcome address the President, WWF emphasised the status of women's health. She highlighted the fact that women give high priority to their family and household responsibilities thereby neglecting their own health. Therefore, she pointed out that the Forum was committed in empowering women in extreme poverty by providing opportunities to help themselves through sound healthcare.

While inaugurating the programme, Dr. C.K. Gariyali, Retd. IAS, former Principal Secretary to the Governor of Tamil Nadu complimented the efforts taken by WWF in bringing about a change in women's lives. Despite all such efforts of WWF, many women in society still do not know their rights. She also recalled her association with Dr. Jaya

Arunachalam and WWF's participation in the World Bank assisted healthcare programme of Tamil Nadu government. She stressed that non-governmental organizations, play a crucial role in empowering women. Such efforts have really brought out an improvement in the standard of living of women.

Dr. Mohan Rajan while addressing the gathering said that Dr. Jaya Arunachalam is a pioneer and could be named as 'puratchi puyal' (a storm in renaissance) and felt Dr. Jaya Arunachalam has enough strength to initiate new party. The Forum has ensured freedom and confidence for women and they utilize these to provide education to their children. He assured that through this eye care programme, the patients referred would be provided with privilege cards which they could use it in future. Dr. Sujata Mohan stated that she gives preference to women because women shoulder the entire family burden. Out of 205 patients referred, 103 women were suggested for spectacles and 29 for surgery.



Dr. Mohan examines grassroot workers

PROGRAMMES/ACTIVITIES IN THE WORKING WOMEN'S FORUM (INDIA)

Workshops in Dindigul/Dharmapuri



Members interaction at the workshops in Dindigul and Dharmapuri

In the Dindigul and Dharmapuri branches of Working Women's Forum (India), workshops were organized from 17 to 19 February and 2 to 5 April 2009 respectively. The President of WWF participated in all these workshops. The aim of these workshops was to create awareness on the pressing local issues and provide a way to solve them. The workshops further facilitated women to learn additional skills, earn more income and become part of the mainstream production process. The members took advantage of this meet and presented several petitions to the President regarding the local issues/problems faced by them and the same were presented to the concerned authorities and district Collectors of Dharmapuri/Dindigul. ■

Orientation Programme for Organizers/ Supervisors

Orientation programmes for field staff/trainers were organized from 9 to 13 February 2009 in Palakol (Andhra Pradesh), 23 to 27 February in Bangalore (Karnataka) and from 9 to 13 March 2009 in



Participants at the orientation programme

Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu). The main objective of the orientation programmes were to identify the issues and create awareness on the working of WWF among the poor women clients in new areas. Also, the programme was a refresher programme for the existing employees and focused on the activities/ programmes of Working Women's Forum (India)/ Indian Co-operative Network for Women / National Union of Working Women.

The programme focused on healthcare related issues such as reproductive healthcare, population stabilization and emphasized on decision making



Role play and demo sessions

role, particularly among women, on the number of children and choice of contraceptive method. Further the trainees were oriented on childcare awareness, need for immunization, rights/privileges of the girl child, awareness on human right issues such as domestic violence, female foeticide/infanticide etc.

The trainees were trained in microfinance and its inclusive process as handled by ICNW/ WWF, where savings, collection, client enrolment, training, importance/benefits of insurance programmes for life, disability, accident, flood, fire and maternity benefit. Also the programmes focused on the new skills to diversify their economic roles. ■

WWF CO-ORDINATORS/STAFF ATTEND SEMINARS/TRAINING/ORIENTATION PROGRAMMES

The five day refresher programme for 31 supervisors, organizers and 2 co-ordinators from the 14 branches of WWF was organized at the Gandhigram Rural University, Dindigul from 16 to 20 in February 2009. The training focused on motivational techniques, mobilization of rural/urban community, methods adopted in bringing up children, identification of new/good members, basic nutrition, education, role of micro-credit, conflict- resolution, stress management and marketing techniques. During the refresher programme, the causes and symptoms for diabetic, cancer and other ailments and the strategies to be adopted to prevent them were discussed. ■

On behalf of the President of the Working Women's Forum (India), Dr. R. Asha, Programme Co-ordinator, WWF participated in Women's Day Celebrations at GKM College of Engineering and Technology, Chennai on 17 March 2009. Queries on the programmes of WWF activities, current status of women members, educational status of children, expectations of women members, future plans of the Forum were the center of discussion. The discussion was wound up with the appreciation for the services of the President, WWF for over three decades. ■

WWF/ICNW staff attend the Orientation programme at Community Services Trust, Salem

Community Services Trust, Salem organised a three day orientation programme for 10 staff from few branches of Working Women's Forum (India)/ Indian Co-operative Network for Women from 25 to 27 in March 2009. At the orientation, the participants were exposed to the operational details, credit programme of the trust that also included a field visit to the entrepreneurial group for observation. ■



Mega TV, a private Tamil Channel, presented Dr. Jaya Arunachalam with “social activist award” on 8 March 2009 for her contribution towards welfare of the poor women.

STUDY TEAMS

*National**Visit of Women Leaders from NCUI Co-operative Education Field Project, Thiruvananthapuram to WWF**Thiruvananthapuram team interacting with the fisherwomen*

An entrepreneurship orientation programme for 19 women leaders from various SHGs of NCUI co-operative education field project, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala was organized by WWF from 21 to 25 March 2009. The members were accompanied by a lady mobiliser and an instructor. The team was briefed on the activities of the Forum, visited a fish market and tsunami hit areas in Chennai followed by visit to other branches of WWF in Kanchipuram, Vellore, Adiramapattinam in the Tanjore coastal area and Dindigul. The team gained knowledge about the micro-credit programme and was exposed to various training methodologies at WWF. Direct interactions with the members of WWF were extremely useful and enabled the team to compare the quality of WWF's programmes with theirs. Suggestions were given to the participating team to select women from the grassroots and train them to take up leadership roles as a future course of action. The women self-

*Women leaders from NCUI in briefing session*

help group members from Thiruvananthapuram were impressed with the methodology adopted and expressed their utmost satisfaction of the Forum's programme. In addition they said that the methods of WWF could be emulated in Kerala if and when financial assistance is provided to SHG members on same conditions like that of WWF. ■

Ms. Lydia Durairaj, a consultant from Justice Ventures International (JVI) Chennai, visited Working Women's Forum (India) on 29 May 2009. Ms. Lydia wanted to have all the basic information about the microfinance. JVI conducts research and evaluation of justice ventures and documents best practices to inform practitioners and policy-makers regarding effective strategies to eradicate various forms of injustice. ■

Three students from White Swan Consulting Group, Chennai visited WWF on 20 June 2009 in connection with the preparation of the case study about various NGOs in the city. On observing the services rendered for the upliftment of poor women, they felt proud to be women. ■

International



Students from Leuphana University engrossed in work

Ms. Bruni Landwehr led a team of 22 students from various disciplines of Leuphana University, Germany to Working Women's Forum (India), Chennai on 26 February 2009. The students were briefed on the origin of the Forum and its activities. A visit to ICNW clarified all their doubts pertaining to the micro loan process of the bank. At the training session of WWF, the students were exposed to various kinds of training and socio-cultural details of members. Queries such as the duration of the training, skills taught to the members, mode of handling women members, reaction of men to women taking up employment, group formation were put forth to the WWF members. The students termed the visit as “very inspiring” and wished that all Indian women get better life in future. ■

Similarly, 27 students from Semester at Sea from various Universities of U.S.A., visited WWF on 5 March 2009. The team from various disciplines and with varied interests were interested to know the programmes of the Forum, its origin, details of training including empowerment and skill training,



Students from Semester at Sea interacting with WWF staff

attitudes of men towards women, etc. The team further analysed the work of the Forum in depth. ■

Individual Visit of International Student

Ms. Nithya, Ph.D student in Computer Science at the University of California visited WWF on 4 May 2009. She visited the Forum in connection with the project to know about the current plight of women employed in the informal sector in procuring/ selling and marketing services. ■



An exhibition in partnership with the Citibank, Chennai was organized on 6 March 2009. The products displayed were lacework of Narsapur, silk sarees, silken scarves of Kanchipuram and cotton sarees from Dindigul.

VISITORS



Ruth Bergan & team in conversation with WWF staff

Ms. Ruth Bergan, campaign officer, Home Workers Worldwide, U.K. visited Working Women's Forum (India) on 3 April 2009. She was accompanied by Mr. Ramadass, Project Director and five members of Read Foundation, Pudukottai. The purpose of Ms. Ruth's visit was to analyse the organisations working for women's rights in India. In this perspective, Working Women's Forum (India) was chosen by them as it works for the women workers cause in protecting their rights, be it in negotiating for minimum wages for the workers, lobbying for reduction in bus fare hike, closure of liquor shop functioning in the vicinity of their neighbourhood. Further, they were keen to explore the conditions of women engaged in home based industries/activities and their income level.

Mrs. Malathi Dileepan, a housewife from Hixson, USA accompanied by her husband came to Working Women's Forum (India) on 29 May 2009 for an informal visit. She was of the view that women have a

birth right to freedom and dignity. They have to understand and take it. It is the duty of men to support them. WWF helps women to get closer to realize this fundamental right. ■

Ms. Christina Weller, Director, Small Voices Business, U.K., visited Working Women's Forum (India) on 19 June 2009. Ms. Christina was very interested in women working in government services. She was eager to know women's roles in decision making process, reaction to policy changes and the priorities of women. ■



Working Women's Forum (India) was selected as Best Practice for Dubai International Award by the international juries in the year 2008 for its outstanding contribution towards improving the living environment of poor.

MR. VIKRAM KAPOOR, I.A.S., MEMBER SECRETARY, CMDA VISIT WWF



Member narrating her experience

Mr. Vikram Kapoor, I.A.S., Member Secretary, Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), along with Mrs. Kapoor, visited WWF on 20 June 2009 to observe the programme/ activities of Working Women's Forum (India). They were briefed on the origin of WWF/ICNW and the micro loan programme to the women workers in Chennai city slums. Their queries were on the formation of groups, number of women in a group, marketing prospects of the producers, profit earned, utilization of loan, rate of interest, etc. At the training session, he was able to analyse how each woman became a member, the

purpose of availing micro-loan, whether their husbands help them particularly in taking care of the children during their absence. He also wanted to know the usefulness of skill training. Later at the meeting in Pattinapakkam, tsunami affected area in South Chennai near Marina beach, Mr. Kapoor in a casual conversation asked them their requirement, to which the members stated that housing is their main priority. He also visited some of the badly affected houses that were damaged during the tsunami disaster. Later he visited the fish market where WWF clients were proudly showed him their business. ■



Mr. Vikram Kapoor extends micro loan

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

President, Working Women's Forum (India) Participation in Seminars/Conferences

The President, WWF attended the meeting of ***National Co-operative Union's Sub-committee for Empowerment of Women*** and ***National Committee on Co-operative Education*** on 29 January 2009 in New Delhi. The meeting was a serious discussion on

the types of training programmes that women need in co-operatives and also stressed the need for 1/3 seats for women in co-operatives and elected boards. ■

Plural India invited Dr. Jaya Arunachalam to deliver a speech on Enhancing the Social Impact of Micro-Finance Programmes at the conference on ***Rethinking Microfinance*** held at Gurgaon on 30

January 2009. During the conference, she addressed the gathering on the impact WWF's microfinance has created in enhancing the economic status of women members. The participants raised several questions to elicit information on the slow/gradual progress the clients made over the last three decades. ■

The President, WWF attended the 67th Meeting of General Council of *National Co-operative Development Corporation* on 24 February 2009 in Delhi. Shri. Sharad Pawar, Hon'ble Union Minister for Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution presided over the meeting. He added that the efforts of everyone should be to ensure that cooperatives continue to play an important role in the economy of the country. ■

The President, WWF was honoured on the International Women's Day celebration by the *Centre for Women Studies, Justice Basheer Ahmed Sayeed College for Women*, Chennai on 9 March 2009. Addressing a special lecture on the role of microfinance today, she briefed the participants on microfinance in WWF/ICNW and the need based programmes implemented for the welfare of the poor women entrepreneurs, the challenges WWF had to handle, the transformation taken place in women's life i.e. self confidence, social/financial independence. ■

The President, WWF visited Dindigul to participate in a series of workshops from 17 to 19 February 2009. Prior to the meeting, she participated in the inaugural



Dr. Jaya Arunachalam with the participants at the Gandhigram Rural University

session of the five day refresher training programme at Gandhigram Rural University on 16 February 2009. The training programme is an ongoing and regular process in WWF. The President participated in the programme and addressed the gathering. Recollecting the great contribution of the Founders Dr. Soundarammal and Dr. Ramachandran, she expressed her happiness to participate in the programme. Though she had been invited in the previous years too, she could not make it as she was preoccupied with work. She recollected the memorable days of visiting Gandhigram during the life time of Dr. Soundarammal. As the training to the WWF team was imparted by the experts of Gandhigram, Dr. Jaya Arunachalam advised the staff of WWF to utilize the opportunity and learn the nuances of training as this would facilitate them to train WWF's new members. ■

The President, WWF attended the first meeting of the Second Master Plan Committee on Economy and Employment on 27 May 2009 of Chennai

Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA). During the interaction Dr. Jaya Arunachalam stressed that microfinance is a key component in promoting and improving the informal sector and the programmes should be aimed at promoting and improving the employment opportunities in the informal sector. She also said that the focus should be on children's education, health insurance so that the

neighbourhood groups can sustain their livelihood and trade activities with a minor portion earmarked to meet internal and external eventualities such as expenditure on ill-health or social functions. The master plan aims at overall improvement in the economy of metropolis, to improve the income of all sections and reduce income disparities and remove inequalities.



Courtesy - India Today

In the river Koshi flood affected area in the state of Bihar, life became miserable after severe floods last year and adult population migrated to Delhi and other places during that period. The children were being sold for meager sum of Rs.500 - 20,000 by the families to escape from poverty and starvation. The representatives from the Abhiyan organization from Birsa Adivasi Colony, Gulzarbagh, Patna in Bihar contacted Dr. Jaya Arunachalam for facilitation. She asked them to draft a project proposal for the Pratapgunj block of Supaul district for the population they are seeking help and said WWF will be willing to sanction Rs.1,00,400/- as financial assistance for the project proposal. This facilitation would save 100 children from 54 families, help them to buy goats/sheep, enable the children to have at least a square meal a day and the adult in families to engage in some kind of rural livelihood options like rearing goats/sheep to save themselves from hunger and poverty. Eventually, this project will become a model in the flood affected areas.

GROOTS

WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT GROOTS?

It is really heartening to see the progress achieved on various fronts by GROOTS, especially the events in the Working Women's Forum (India), training programmes and national and international events. It is so rightly put in the report that this is the age of environment and environmental concerns-domestic and global are defining the way of our economy and the way of our life. We have to reinvent the path of growth so that we can have economic well being, without the pain of pollution and degradation.

*Shri. Mani Shankar Aiyar
Former Minister for Panchayati Raj and Development of North Eastern Region,
Govt. of India*

GROOTS affords an insight into how WWF is making efforts to answer the magnitude of problems in an appreciable manner. The editorial is thought provoking and rightly observes that governmental efforts are lackadaisical to address the dreaded problems we are facing. Indeed growing terrorism has only worsened the situation. We have to brace up and consolidate our efforts and support the selfless and meaningful work of organizations like Working Women's Forum (India).

*Rajen Kumar
Editor SME World*

Thank you very much for forwarding the Newsletter of GROOTS which is quite interesting. I appreciate your efforts in including the section Clinton Global Asia Meet. This section reminds me back to my three days attendance of CGI events and Google Hong Kong Ltd., training. I was also able to grasp lot of things about your organization through this newsletter.

*Sudarshan B. Mathema
Chairperson
Innovative Agricultural Initiative (IAI) Pvt. Ltd., Katmandu*

The reports of many training and study programmes for the WWF members of all ranks and levels, clearly demonstrate the importance and the value you attach to ongoing education for the sake of empowerment of women. The report about the movement against gender based violence is very innovative as it engages the whole community...

*Hanke/Joop Koopman
Former First Secretary, Women & Development,
Netherlands Embassy, New Delhi/
Development Advisor & Economist, Netherlands*

It is real fresh air to see activist doing so much to make this world a better place for many.

*Norah Matovu Winyi
Executive Director, FEMNET*

GROOTS is always interesting, bursting with energy and have ideas

*Dr. Michael Vanden Bogaert
Xavier Institute of Social Action, Raipur*