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## BEIJING+15

IAW was founded in 1904 to achieve voting rights for women all over the world. So the focus of IAW is in the first place on Women in decision-making in all fields of life.

As a contribution to the global shadow report to be produced for Beijing + 15, IAW decided to ask its member organisations contributions about women in decision making in some areas of concern.

At the International Meeting in Switzerland, June 2009 the members decided to concentrate on four areas: violence, armed conflict, education/health and economy. Of course all these subjects are interrelated. Answers to the Questionnaire came mainly from the Asian, African and European members. Together they give some insight in the common problems. We hope some good practices will be an inspiration to others.

In line with the plans for the global shadow report our questions were about achievements and barriers in the chosen areas, with an emphasis on decision-making.

Our first observation is that about the best decision a women's group can make is to compile a shadow report. This research shows the achievements and the gaps, it raises awareness about what has to be done, it strengthens sisterhood because of shared insight in good practices and shared anger and frustration about barriers.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

## BREAK THE SILENCE!

The closer to home, the fiercer the violence. The violence is growing, and the women are younger. In Sweden 7 women a day are raped! From all over the world **domestic violence** is reported. Often within partner relations, also in countries like India and Bangla Desh between daughters-in-law and their in-law family. **NGO's cooperate with governments** to make legislation, to instruct police and the judiciary. They work with local governments in prevention and awareness raising campaigns, they help with hotlines and shelters. Very important is their work in teaching women their rights. In Europe restraining orders can keep perpetrators from the home for a certain period while they receive counseling.

Violence within the family comes often from the misguided idea of honour. The issue of honour-related violence is one of the most urgent problems among immigrant women in Europe. Honour-related violence is a complex problem of traditional male dominance in the collision of two cultural environments and world views.

In cases of honour-related violence, women suffer from violence because they are thought to have violated the virtue principles of their community and thus defamed their family's honour. **WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE TERRORIZED INTO SUBMISSION.** Other families may gang rape them when 'honour' is involved. This happened to Mukhtar Mai in Pakistan. Instead of taking the traditional 'women's' route of committing suicide, she brought her rapists to justice, built schools to improve the condition of women and became an advocate for education in her country. A play 'SEVEN' about her and six other brave women was brought to The Hague by the Swedish Embassy as a prelude to the international conference 'Women in War Zones' held by the Dutch and Swedish governments in December.

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## **Achievements and barriers at once**

Notwithstanding the legal provisions in Bangla Desh all kinds of abuse and violation continued with a sudden rise in throwing of acid on the females for vengeance sake. Outcries of protest brought about enactments of Acid Control and Acid Prevention in years 2002 and 2003.

The government has set up Victim Support Centres and also One Stop Crisis Centres (OCC) in a few state run hospitals. As a follow up of the Stockholm Declaration in 1996 the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs announced a National Plan of Action against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children including Trafficking thereby attaching high priority to the task of combating those abuses.

Various laws to protect women against violence exist in Zimbabwe. Women and girls are empowered to speak out on rape.

But some girls are still afraid to speak out fearing stigmatisation. The high number of rape victims is strongly associated with low status of women, illiteracy, poverty and poor health. Post-Exposure Prophylaxis to prevent HIV/Aids is not readily available in remote parts of the country. Delays in reporting the case can be costly because PEP is effective after being taken immediately after the rape. After 72 hours it will be too late.

This reluctance to speak out is a world wide problem!

## **GOOD PRACTICES**

**All India Women's Conference conducts Legal awareness programmes every year, through its branches spread across India, to disseminate knowledge on Criminal laws and Women, Rape, Commercial sexual exploitation, Child Marriage, Dowry, Domestic Violence Act, Sexual Harrassment at workplace, Free legal Aid, Property Rights of Women in India and its Maintenance. AIWC is also running 10 short stay Homes for Women in Distress and Victims of Violence which has a family counselling centre and a 24 Hour Helpline service. Nearly 2000-2500 women are saved from violence in the form of generating legal awareness, rehabilitation, counselling, and by providing shelter to victims. Its Recent achievement was to get the Mobile Helpline Van for Women in Difficult circumstances, this is also a 24 hour service for women.**

**Forced marriages are a form of violence**, which of course is forbidden. European countries report a rise. In Holland schools make a contract with girls before summer. If they don't return to school a search is set in. Norway made a plan of action against forced marriages in 1998.

**NGO's worked** with governments on laws against sexual harassment in the workplace in Greece

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and Zimbabwe. Our Greek affiliate conducts conferences and public debates, Zimbabwe ran a prize winning poster campaign. This form of violence is of course also a barrier to economic participation of women.

### **Trafficking**

The same play 'SEVEN' portrays Mu Sochua from Cambodia. She is the former Minister of Women's Affairs, now a member of Parliament after door-to-door visits to 482 villages. Ms Sochua was co-nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 for her work against trafficking of women in Cambodia and Thailand.

**Trafficking** for the purpose of prostitution **increases** around the deployment of Peace Building Missions. Though some countries brief their personnel on respect for the local population this is an **OUTRAGE!**

**GOOD NEWS** is that the Council of Europe, uniting 45 European countries, produced the Convention on Action against Trafficking in 2007. Not all countries have ratified this Convention yet. The IAW representative, Anje Wiersinga, at the Council of Europe has been lobbying for ratification ever since. LOBBYING, influencing decisions, is also a way of participation in decision-making.

### **ARMED CONFLICT      RAPE AS A WEAPON IS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY**

At the IAW International Meeting in June in Switzerland the affiliate from Pakistan told about the plight of women and girls in REFUGEE CAMPS. While they have food and shelter, they don't get any form of education or training. This is a waste of opportunities. No one knows how long it will be before they can go home and the time could be so well used for education. NGO's are willing to help, but the patriarchal family structure and the lack of funding from the government is a big barrier. IAW and many other women's NGO's petitioned the Pakistani government on the human right to education of Pakistani women during SCW 2009.

In African countries women are not even safe in the refugee camps, struggling to survive they are raped when they leave the compound. Village women of all ages are raped by enemy soldiers, often in front of their families. NGO's, for instance in Sweden and Germany, but also in Congo support women in conflict areas. Medical help and awareness raising abroad are means to mitigate the suffering. Local NGO's help by teaching victims literacy and agricultural or artisan skills.

The International Criminal Court prosecutes perpetrators of systematic rape.

In conflict areas where women have lost their husbands, they sometimes start living together. Branded as 'lesbians' they are often prosecuted by society, even killed, and punished by governments who call homosexuality a crime. Again, NGO's try to educate the public and raise funds to alleviate these women's plight.

**Wide spread poverty** is the result of armed conflict. Interestingly, in an endeavour to bring more order in the Democratic Republic of Congo, soldiers' wives who live in camps are educated and taught skills. This way they can earn some income and don't feel forced to pack up and go to the other end of this vast country to search for their husbands.

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Also from England insufficient support for wives and families of injured men is reported.

Countries and NGO's have their own ways of supporting women in armed conflict:

**France** is a fully supporting partner of the UN as regards children in armed conflicts. It wants to see the fight against rape and sexual abuse suffered by children in armed conflicts reinforced. The NGO War Child supports former child soldiers, including girls used as sex slaves.

**Zimbabwe** tries to persuade men to eradicate violence against women, but they fear this is 'unmanly'! There has been a significant proportion of female soldiers and police officers in peace missions. Female officers take care of rape victims and help them report such crimes. Unfortunately female officers are still underrepresented in the majority of security, peace and governance processes.

**The Netherlands** Defense ministry has a special police unit, headed by a woman, which works on gender mainstreaming and awareness raising about domestic violence as a consequence of armed conflict, in Peacekeeping missions, e.g. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. At the same time Amnesty International is collecting funds to help the victims of sexual violence (20.00-50.000) during the war in Bosnia (1992-95). AI pressurizes the Bosnian government to do what it is obliged to. They teach the women to stand up for their rights themselves.

The Greek League for Women's Rights supports women of Cyprus, still suffering from the ongoing occupation by Turkish troops.

### **ONE WOMAN CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**Women should have a voice** before, during and after conflicts. That is the message of SC Resolutions 1325 and 1820. Implementing these resolutions is hard work. Even under the leadership of the European Union in Kosovo a group of Serbian and Kosovar women were literally sent back to their kitchens when they offered to help in peace talks. Of course IAW and other NGO's protested. These women were later invited to the Council of Europe to discuss their plans after pressure of IAW.

**Asha Haji Elmi** is a peace activist in Somalia who won the Right Livelihood Award in 2008. When women were excluded from the peace process in Somali (which involved the five traditional clans) she formed the Sixth Clan movement to earn a seat at the table.

In countries without war women support the efforts to include women in negotiations by writing shadow reports to government reports on the resolutions (Germany). The German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and development gives important financial support to the Civil Peace Services training programme, It has also been financing or co-financing a broad spectrum of peace building projects worldwide run by different organisations. In this field an increasing number of women are involved on the decision making level.

### **WITHOUT EQUALITY NO PEACE**

**In EUROPE** the level of education for women and men is the same. However women keep choosing studies based on traditional roles: health and education primarily. Accordingly the salaries for care and primary teaching are low. Women are underrepresented in academe. Programs by governments and NGO's to encourage girls to take up science and IT studies do not have the expected results, though Germany even has a mentoring programme.

This is the area where we have to combat stereotypes most urgently.

In Sweden and Finland girls who do well in school don't have good health, the reasons are unknown. It is a subject for gender studies, that now have been introduced in Greek universities and are being taught by members of the Greek League.

In Germany The Girls' Day, 23 April, since 2001, acquaints the 10-15 yr .old with existing options and motivates them to apply for an internship or a short trial period. Government, institutions and industry/economy work together.

If native women do not fully take advantage of educational opportunities, the situation is worse for **minority- and immigrant women**. Often the immigrant women do not speak the language of the country where they live well enough to participate. Most governments now demand a certain level of knowledge before admission to the country, and civic knowledge programmes are compulsory but not effective enough. In addition immigrant women do not have the grasp of technological means necessary to function nowadays. Of course the young women, born in the 'new' country are doing well in school.

Though on the whole the level of education in the European countries is high, there is a low but persistent percentage of 'native' people, men and women who can not read or write. In France 3 million adults are analphabete, half of whom are wage earners.

News from India where female education comes from a very low percentage is more upbeat.

All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was started with an objective to educate women , this continues to be its vision and mission. It conducts several literacy programmes and also skill based literacy programmes over the year through its branches spread across the nation. Every year nearly 1500-2000 women are educated through these programmes.

Unfortunately in a few states of India, the parents still believe that women should be married and sent to her real home and therefore there was no need to educate her. So, changing mindsets is the challenge here

The Country Women's Association of India (CWAI) reports that NGO's and government are trying to spread education even in the farthest corner of the country. In villages among the poor inhabitants it is the girls who suffer more for lack of education. Mothers go to work and the girl child looks after the siblings and does household work.

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But things have changed and more girls are coming up as athletes, swimmers, players, officers, doctors, politicians and educationists. In village administration 50% of the seats have been reserved for women.

### **WOMEN ARE COMING UP AS LEADERS IN DIFFERENT FIELDS**

One of the prime contribution of AIWC has been in the area of health of women and children. **A model of this contribution to the society is the Mobile health van consisting of a Doctor and two paramedical officers** , which goes 5 days in the week to the slum and other backward areas of Delhi to provide free primary and secondary healthcare facility to the poorer section of the society . It gives medicines, vaccination, general health advice, maternal and reproductive healthcare, family planning and recommendation for operation and advanced healthcare where need be. In the family planning women still face problems of restricting to the two child norm. AIWC branches conduct healthcare camps every year and thousands of women are benefitted in the form of getting healthcare facility cum awareness generation. Our recent achievement was sensitisation of women bidi (tobacco) workers on the health hazards in making tobacco.

In health, CWAI reports, there are also departments reserved for women. Though the women neglect their health and give preference regarding health and nutrition to the males, still consciousness is creeping up where women are aware of the importance of health. There are many good lady doctors as physicians, surgeons etc.

Ida Kurth, convener of the IAW commission on the environment notes that clean drinking water is a must since even the best medication will not help when water is polluted and no hygienic sanitation provided. its absence is a barrier to good health for everyone.

**Maternal mortality:** Thanks to the hard work of our IAW representative in Geneva (and other ngo's) the UN Human Rights Council has recognised maternal mortality as a breach of human rights. **A great example of women influencing policy!**

### **WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY**

In Europe a few subjects stand out: the pay gap, the gendered choice of education and jobs, insufficient childcare, unequal sharing of work- and family responsibilities with consequently lower pensions for women .For migrant and indigenous women the situation is worse. Women are virtually absent from or are poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies as well as employment policies, tax systems and rules governing pay as well as social protection systems. Norway has successfully introduced quota and the president of the European Commission introduced a personal quota system. NGO's reluctantly start to believe that quota might help women's position in decision-making.

NGO's (Norway, Netherlands a.o.) wonder if economic independence is really a goal of the

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governments. The definition in the Netherlands is 70% of the net statutory minimum wage, which is not enough to live on. Women and especially single mothers are overrepresented amongst the poor. Involuntary part-time work is a cause. A growing number of economic sectors, where many women work, don't provide full time work any more. It is not the woman's decision to be poor! It is true that abject poverty does not exist thanks to public assistance and all kinds of allowance for low incomes, but people can not be really independent that way.

Gender budgeting might show these problems, it is virtually non-existent except for some ministries in Norway. The excuse often is that there are no gender disaggregated data. That is exactly the shortcoming NGO's keep clammering about.

Deutsche Frauenring summarizes the general position of migrant women in Europe;

The Government aims at migrants' integration into the labour force and into the market as entrepreneurs and has campaigned for this aim.

Recently the Government took part in a campaign addressing the gender pay gap of 23 % in Germany.

Migrant women keep facing another problem: their qualifications and professional career before migrating and afterwards are not recognized. There is no re-training to integrate them into the German labour market. As refugees and asylum seekers they are not even allowed to participate in the economy by working. Due to the discrimination of marginalized minority groups on the labour market their economic problems are not properly addressed, especially because migrant women are excluded by specific migration legislation, on the German level, and by the EU-level anti-migration regime.

## IT IS THE NGO'S WHO PROVIDE SKILLS TO THE WOMEN

When countries come from a departing point where women do not get adequate education and where the house work is very time consuming NGO's proudly report improvements.

All India Women's Conference has always encouraged **Socio-Economic** activities at the branches, with the long-term objective being the all-round empowerment of women. In 1997-98 Microcredit was formally taken up by AIWC for strengthening the women in terms of improving their quality of life while empowering them economically. making better homes, their daily affairs, which go to building a strong community. Capacity building and an integrated approach helps develop empowered women.

AIWC conducted the Asia Pacific Region Microcredit Summit Meeting in the year 2001 which was attended by participants from 56 countries. **At present AIWC has around 2500 Self Help Groups across India with a membership more than 3 lakh women spread all over India. 50% of these SHGs are linked to banks and are regularly managed and monitored by our branches. They have been trained and developed in different skills depending on the requirement of respective**

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states , some such activities are green energy and usage of solar technology like solar dryer, solar lanterns etc., cutting and tailoring, coir making, coconut extraction, Beauty culture, saree weaving, carpet weaving, making jute bags, textile printing, computer training and lots of other economic activities. Most of them are also running them as an entrepreneurship programme.

Micro Credit programme has been an important tool for our empowerment programme and most of our SHG formations have been in the rural and the semi-urban areas. Some of them are into consumption loans from their own savings, while quite a few have developed bank linkages and look forward to being independent entrepreneurs.

**The AIWC head office at New Delhi, added one more feather to its cap recently by opening up a Community College for school/college drop out girls from economically backward class** for providing training in Beauty culture, Textile printing, computer training, stitching and tailoring and herbal treatment center. This will help women to pick up a skill thus making them economically empowered and independent individuals. There is however a lack of adequate funding for conducting more such programmes.

CWAI reports similar results. It is working among the women in urban/semi urban/villages settings and found definite improvement in their attitude towards life. It comes forward to help the women whenever necessary.

Our associate from Zimbabwe reports some progress, but at the same time tremendous obstacles:

The coalition Government of Zimbabwe has appointed a female vice-president Joyce Mujuru and vice prime minister Thokozani Khuphe. There has been a noticeable increment in women working in public and private sectors which has contributed immensely to the successful running of the economy. Jobs previously male dominated are now being done by women, e.g. pilots, security jobs.

Although strides have been made in appointing ladies in senior positions of government, the persistence of discriminatory attitudes remains, their efficiency is always questioned. Men in Zimbabwe generally say they will never be ruled by a woman and chances of a female president in Zimbabwe with the current mindset are ZERO. There is a school of thought which also believes that women are window dressers to enable them to entice the female voters. Men still hold the highest positions in government!

## **CHANGING MINDSETS IS THE CHALLENGE**

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Edited by Lyda Verstegen,

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