

# GROOTS

GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS OPERATING TOGETHER IN SISTERHOOD (SOUTH ASIA)

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*Editorial*

## Can Swachh Bharat Campaign be Inclusive?

**S**wachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign) is a laudable development and well recognized agenda. The deplorable environment conditions are the major cause for ill-health, mal-nutrition and other infectious diseases in the country. Common scenes in the country everywhere are the heaps of garbage, filths, broken construction materials on either sides of the road. This inconvenience is further aggravated by the stench of open defecation. Open defecation is a major unhealthy practice everywhere in our country.

The cream and essence of Swachh Bharat Campaign of India as initiated by the government of India is the essence and strength of Gandhian ideology, and all pervasive programme to protect the human dignity of every individual. The Father of the Nation wanted everyone to clean up their own toilets and infact it was in vogue and well practiced both in



Sabarmati and Wardha (though scavengers were available in plenty at that time). Despite legislation and public opinion prohibiting employment of manual scavengers, the abhorrent practice still continues in many parts of the nation.

In order for the Swachh Bharat campaign to be successful, it needs to be transformed from the level of campaign, media coverage, VIP participation to actual implementable work program. This will not only make India free from filths/garbage, but also benefit various sections of vulnerable population who are already engaged in such efforts.

Looking into the grimness of the problem, the Clean India Campaign is easier said than done. Implementation of the same requires strong will and a firm mindset to adopt the same as it requires a firm executive system through a strong



intelligence workforce to follow up the daily functional aspects of the campaign. Further it needs an inclusive mindset in a vast country like India - the world's second populated country. When this happens, there is no doubt that this campaign will certainly be an excellent/courageous effort, benefitting several sections of people particularly the most vulnerable. As an inclusive effort relieving India from poverty, ill-health/sickness and above all cleaner to be appreciated by us and the world.

Coming to the existing options available to execute Swachh Bharat agenda, at present dependence will be primarily on the conservancy staffs, who spend their life time in cleaning up the awful public toilets and the sewages. Secondly those that need our immediate attention on this agenda are the waiting rooms/toilets of Indian railways and bus stops. Further our responsible and sympathetic consideration is certainly needed to the drudgery of rag pickers (particularly the children) who spend their valuable time in these activities rather than spending their time in school. Therefore where is Gandhiji's ideology here to protect the human dignity and the policy of inclusive agenda for welfare of the masses?

This is also a warning from public side that every aspect of Swachh Bharat Campaign will certainly remain a real challenge to the government's initiative on several fronts unless, severe efforts like the regularization of Municipalities where the elected representatives are not quite responsible as expected. It is common that the elected Municipal councilors promise the moon to the electorates during the election campaign but are often seen having subjectively political agenda instead of working towards the socio-economic and welfare of the electorates. They forget that it is on their support

they have elected Municipal councilors. Similarly countrywide panchyats need strong orientation in benefitting rural areas as 70% of the masses in India live in villages. The foremost agenda in the Swachh Bharat campaign should be to orient the staff and office of the panchayats towards creating the massive waste available in villages into wealth. This will facilitate farming through organic manure. In fact this can be taken up even as an entrepreneurial activity, during agricultural off-season so that the rubbish and the waste in the villages can be recycled in the form of organic manure. Have not the environmentalists a role in spreading this message to utilize the waste towards organic manure for agriculture purposes instead of using chemical fertilizer?

Even after 68 years of independence the situation one can say with clear conscience, is getting bad to worse i.e., people are even ignorant of using toilets in many slums and rural areas. We hear that the government plans to build more than 100 million toilets in the country but building them is just not enough. It has to spread the message through massive campaign/orientation to change sanitation preferences from the open, to use toilets linking it to the welfare of the families and masses.

The Swachh Bharat campaign requires changing the mindset of the people. Education is required at the level of every individual household in the country. In fact this was the option made available at the outset in the US and Europe, where citizens welfare committees are very active. Different containers infact are provided to each household to segregate the wastes into bio-degradable and non-biodegradable waste. The meeting of the municipal staff and the members of citizen's welfare committee often meet periodically. This

puts a pressure on the municipalities to perform better. In certain areas where the households need assistance a part time worker is provided to facilitate segregation of the household wastes in different containers. This facilitates the part time employment options too.

This gives an idea that such options if implemented in a big way in India too where employment is very crucial for every individual (part time or full time) be it illiterate, semi-literate or literate will prove beneficial. This would provide good wages for rag picking adults particularly the men/women to use their time here in rural areas both to collect and segregate the wastes and get paid. This will also relieve the rag picking children to go to school. Every locality in India particularly in the cities, a resident welfare committee needs to be formed, this will be a watch dog on the municipalities/ panchayats. Swachh Bharat campaign therefore can be used to create wealth out of waste if and when the above suggestions are implemented.

This certainly will lead to an effective entrepreneurial effort benefiting the individuals, residents, and above all will result in clean India.

Such effort of orientation has to be the educational effort of responsible citizens' initiative to facilitate the functioning of the municipalities/ panchayats and the need to become aware of sanitary preferences among the masses.

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## Visitors to Working Women's Forum (India)

Working Women's Forum (India)/ Indian Cooperative Network for Women, as usual have had the pleasure of receiving prominent visitors during this half-yearly period too. Ms. Shalini, Mobiliser & Placement officer from Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Chennai, visited WWF on 2 August 2014 to acquaint with the various short term courses on basic computers, tally, pre-primary teaching, hospitality and other job-oriented courses, that facilitate the underprivileged women. The intention of the visit was to publicize the courses so that it would benefit WWF women. 

Mr. Samuel.F.Rothenberg, Political/ Economic officer, American Consulate General, Chennai along with Ms. Anjana Chatterjee, Political/ Economic Specialist visited WWF on 5 August 2014. Dr. Jaya Arunachalam, President WWF briefed on the objectives/work of WWF. Various programmes of WWF were highlighted during the discussion especially on gender sensitisation as it has been the focus of WWF for more than three decades. Another strength of WWF is its training programme that has been highly appreciated by the officer for its unique methodology and further visit to the cooperative



Mr. Samuel. F. Rothenberg briefed on training methodology

bank impressed the consulate general for its systematic procedure adopted to bring the women folk under its fold. 



Mr. Laurent in discussion with WWF/ICNW core group

Mr. Laurent Le Danois, Attache-Development and Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to India, New Delhi, visited the headquarters of WWF/ICNW on 11 September 2014, to get familiar with the programs it offered to the vulnerable women in the slums and rural areas. In discussion with the founder President, it was implied that he was moved towards these programmes as they were need based focusing on the welfare of the women. He was keen to get familiar with the programmes especially social security scheme and inter-caste marriage. Besides women members preference to cooperative model was discussed indepth. The highlight of the discussion was the positive impact the programme created in the individual lives of the women members and their children at various level especially on education.

Later visiting the Kanchipuram branch gave an overall view of the working of the forum and the purpose of its initiation. An area meeting arranged at Pillayarpalayam, enabled the visitor



Mr. Laurent's visit to weavers house, Kancheepuram and interacting with fisherwomen in Adiramapattinam



to observe the vigour of forum's programme. While interacting with the women members he said accepting the invitation of Dr.Nandini Azad, President, ICNW he visited the forum to understand its work and witness the gradual progress of women members both in their family and work. Hearing the stories of the women and the challenges and hurdles faced in weaving trade, he was impressed with their progress and the facilitation offered by the forum to uplift them in times of crises. Meeting the women members engaged in other trade like pappad enabled the visitor to get an indepth view of their income and profit.

On 12 September 2014, he met the fisherwomen members in Adiramapattinam branch in Thanjavur district and observed their work and fish trade in the fish market. Later in the area meeting held at Sethubhavachathiram, the members acquainted him about their occupation and their living and working conditions. Apart from their working pattern the members also shared their experiences and the benefit of training especially skill and leadership training. Later the staff briefed on the significance of refresher training, training of trainers/ field workers and on banking operations. Impressed with the unique activities of the forum he quoted,

“Though it's over a 30 year institution, the Cooperative and the Forum is still very much alive, required and useful.”

Working Women's Forum/ Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW) had yet another surprise visitor on 20 October 2014, Madam Kathleen Stephens, U.S Charge d' Affaires, India. Accompanied by Mr.Phillip, Consul General and their Consulate team from Chennai she visited WWF/ICNW to observe its programme executed among the vulnerable group (women from urban slums and the landless group from rural areas). The President WWF, acquainted the visiting team with the programs of the women's bank



Madam Kathleen Stephens, U.S. Charge d' Affaires welcomed by Dr. Nandini Azad, President, ICNW



Madam Kathleen Stephens, U.S. Charge d' Affairs disbursing loan and glancing at members' products

i.e. ICNW- its credit, insurance, training and orientation, besides the other requirements of the members. It was also emphasized that all these facilitated the enhancement of poor women's entrepreneurship towards productivity. Further, President WWF said that the organization is an example and a model to be replicated by other civil society initiatives in the country.

Dr. Nandini Azad, President, ICNW recalled with great pleasure, that the members of WWF/ICNW were fortunate to have Madam Hillary Clinton in the year 2011. She briefed Madam Kathleen Stephens on ICNW's activities, its credit assistance to poor women entrepreneurs like fisherwomen, street vendors, pavement hawkers, weavers, landless women in rural areas, etc. She also highlighted events and programmes have set an example where in fact the government itself has been motivated to take up these activities as part of their financial inclusive programme. The women members shared their experiences at this meeting. Madam Kathleen Stephens thanked everyone for their presence despite the bad weather that day. She said that the women seated there were not only beautiful but more beautiful was their passion, energy, love and concern for their families. She further

said "I am impressed to see your hard work and you are leading a much better life today, providing a good future for your daughters and your country". She also stated that returning to US, she would share with Madam Hillary Clinton her experiences at the forum and the accomplishment of its women members. Later visited the bank and disbursing the loan she quoted "I am inspired by the incredible spirit in every woman. I can't wait to see what more you can accomplish".

Mr. Laurent Le Danois experiences and inspiration at WWF prompted Ms. Hema Rangunathan, Craft Design and Development Consultant, Bengaluru to visit WWF on 22 October 2014. She was given a brief lecture by the President and the core group of management regarding the occupations of the members. Expressing her desire to study the artisans of WWF, applying the technique of Participatory Action Research (PAR). She promised to meet forums artisans at the earliest.

Karthikeyan and Sharmila, students of Meenakshi College of Engineering, Chennai visited WWF on 2 December 2014, to discuss about a competition as proposed to be conducted by the National Association for Students of

Architecture, on the subject of Gender Sensitivity in Architectural Designs. The students shared their views on the proposal of designs for gender sensitivity, which they have planned to opt for. During the long conversation, the President WWF highlighted the origin of high level of public consciousness in India and around the world, also the spread of gender sensitivity consciousness through the four UN Women's Conferences. Initiating at Mexico (Latin America) in 1975, the conferences continued at Copenhagen (Europe) in 1980, at Nairobi (Africa) in 1985 and finally culminated at Beijing (China, Asia) in 1995. She recalled how a country like India too has become a highly gender-sensitive nation, particularly in the year 1994-1995 and has led towards the implementation of several national machineries as a result of the UN Conferences. The most appreciative effort of the former Prime Minister late Shri.Rajivji Gandhi, who at the outset commissioned a National Perspective Plan, to

see that India gets ready to reach 21<sup>st</sup> century, to rank itself among the front ranking nations of the world. He also put forward the concept of 33  $\frac{1}{3}$ % reservation for women in the Panchayats and Municipalities and was keen to establish the same in the Parliament too, but he couldn't live long to accomplish it. As per the Perspective Plan, the above mentioned important machineries for women included the National Commission for Women and the National Credit Fund for Women.

After listening to the President, the students of Architecture from their point of view shared that they too wanted to put an end to the anomalies such as harassment of women through their own architectural designing of toilets, buildings, bus stops, etc. The President offered the students an opportunity to share their study with the women members, also if they required to conduct an individual survey. An area around Guindy was allocated for their study.

## EXHIBITION

On 22 August 2014, the Forum organized an exhibition at its premises where members of the Forum displayed their products ranging from hand embroidery items, fancy items, soft toys etc. Two women staff from Sri Sankara Vidyashram, Chennai and many outsiders visited the exhibition. The exhibition was really successful as most of their products were sold out within few hours of the day.



## TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN WWF/ICNW

Staff orientation program is one of the important, regular activities of the Forum aimed at improving the overall personality/productivity of the staff. A three-day Refresher Training Program took place at the Silver Jubilee Auditorium of Working Women's Forum, Chennai from 17 to 19 September 2014, where 29 staff, 22 trainers/supervisors and 15 organizers participated. The training program being more interactive facilitated them to update their technical and personal skills.

President WWF inaugurated the training program and made use of the occasion to brief the participants on the new publication of WWF titled "Destitution to Leadership", as part of tracing the history of the movement. Most participants of the orientation program being senior functionaries, it was easier to share with them the details contained in the new publication that mainly highlights the role of members, functionaries in the growth of Working Women's Forum (India) to its present status.

The three-day training program was conducted to remind the functionaries to recall the objectives of WWF/ICNW, remembering the purpose of its origin such as consciousness

raising in the slum neighborhoods, identification of entrepreneurs amidst poverty and promoting their leadership qualities, besides the following topics mentioned below. The major impediment to poor women's entrepreneurship being credit, the program stressed/emphasized the importance of credit extension to them, field visits, entrepreneurship, collection methodology, profit & loss were discussed thoroughly. Considering the fact that women's health is yet another important aspect of working women, especially to the women among the poorer sections with large families, the hygiene and health aspects, insurance cover, claims and settlements were also included in the training program. Socially, women in every household were victims of gender-based violence. The Forum collectively had to take care of this to bring them out of total complexity of health and resources they suffered. Therefore to provide them courage, the training insisted them to stand up for their own rights. In fact despite being senior functionaries, the participants found the training program very useful and informative. This was very well reflected in the participants' feedback information about their learning new technical skills and new work ethics. They further assured to implement the same in their respective branches.



Glimpse of Working Women's Forum / Indian Cooperative Network for Women staff at refresher training programme

## PRESIDENTS' PARTICIPATION

As a member of the board, Dr. Jaya Arunachalam attended the 54<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Council for Cooperative Training, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation, New Delhi on 11 July 2014. The meeting focused on various agendas of administration, finance, training and other programs of NCCT in various states of India, particularly in Cooperative colleges and Institutes. 

On 12 July 2014, President WWF attended the Board of Trustees meeting of the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Trust, New Delhi. The major decision taken was to revisit the political values of Respected Sri.Sardar Patelji by organizing a series of memorial lectures, seminars and meetings countrywide on his birth anniversary on 31 October. 

President WWF attended the 9<sup>th</sup> Rajaji Memorial Lecture of the Triplicane Cultural Academy on 2 September 2014, where the chief guest Mr. Vaghul, former Chairman ICICI and Chairman IFMR spoke on “Indian Economy: Has it reached the inflexion point or is it a mere illusion”. 

The Department of Home Science, Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI), Gandhigram invited

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam, President WWF to deliver Dr.T.S.Soundram memorial endowment lecture on ‘Women’s Empowerment Need of the Hour’ on 28 October 2014. This was organized to recall the services of its founder, Dr. T.S. Soundram on her centenary year.

Dr. Natarajan, Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute, in his introductory address gave an overview of the prevailing current status of women and the increase of violence against women such as rape, murder and other forms of harassment. He further queried whether the decision-making-power of women, illiteracy, poverty and poor health condition have actually been improved when compared to those days of Dr. Soundram Ammal. The other luminaries such as Padmashri Krishnammal Jegannathan, Secretary, Workers Home, Dr.Kousalyadevi Advisor, Kasturba Hospital and Dr.G. Pankajam, Former Vice-Chancellor of GRI reminiscences the services of Dr. Soundram.

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam payed her tribute to Dr. Soundram Ammal, who was the earliest torch bearer of initiating several welfare programs for women in India after the colonial rule and also a role model for many Gandhian social



Dr. Jaya Arunachalam delivering Dr. T.S. Soundram Memorial Endowment lecture at Gandhigram Rural Institute, Dindigul

activists. Through her presentation, Dr. Jaya Arunachalam promptly responded to the remark of the Vice-Chancellor on how the Working Women's Forum (India) has empowered poor women workers socially/ economically, by providing them a social platform to discuss their problems, finding solutions through participatory methodology, thus enhancing their status as the alternate heads of households. She added that the economic power certainly facilitated the decision-making power of poor women.

She utilized this opportunity wisely by visiting the children of Rabo Home and women members in Dindigul Adiramapattinam branch.

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam President WWF reviewed the Dindigul branch, on 29 October 2014 and attended the area meeting in Govind Chetty area, where a group of women members participated. Majority of the women were new members and were involved in dosa/idli flour sales. Addressing the members she acquainted them with the nuances of work techniques and the mode of making it profitable.

Another meeting in a temple courtyard in Thadikombu, Dindigul was organized, where around 50 members participated. Majority being successful entrepreneurs involved in a wide range of occupations, the members shared their views with regard to their needs to the President WWF, while the president expressed her wish of prompt repayment so as to rotate the fund in facilitating new membership. Finally addressing the staff meeting at Dindigul branch, she emphasized that reducing over-dues and increasing membership should be the priority of the branch for seeking continuous assistance as Dindigul being a drought prone area.

Dr. Jaya Arunachalam later visited the Rabo Home for Children in Muthanampetti village where landless children are provided boarding/lodging and education in the nearby school. She distributed sweets and spent time with the children and moved on to Adiramapattinam.



President, WWF welcomed at Adiramapattinam branch

On 30 October 2014, President WWF visited the Adiramapattinam branch in Thanjavur district. Dr. Jaya Arunachalam was overwhelmed to see the huge gathering of over 300 members and said "I am too happy to see you all, it feels like coming in the midst of my close relatives after a long time, equally more pleased to see that all of you are doing well in your trades/business. Later after a marathon discussion, where the requirements of branch were discussed with the staff, the President assured that she would consider their fair requirements after discussing with the core group at the Headquarters. ▀

On 12 November 2014, President WWF attended the program organized by Triplicane Cultural Academy to commemorate the 139<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary celebration of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Shri. Gopal Krishna Gandhi, former Governor of West Bengal was the chief guest.

The subject of discussion was “quality of Civil service then and now.” During the discussion it was put forth that that civil service is a medium that can help fulfill the socio-economic, cultural and political needs of our changing country. The civil service should set a role model as a successful administrative system in India, as it was during the days of Sri. Sardar Patelji. 

Dr. Nandini Azad, President ICNW attended the Annual General Body Meeting of the National Cooperative Union of India, New Delhi on 27 September 2014. In this meeting the discussion was on the consideration of work programs of NCUI and budget estimates for the year 2015-16. 

The staff meeting of WWF/ICNW was held on 22 October 2014 at Chennai where Dr. Nandini Azad, President ICNW presided and stressed on the need to improve membership and the concept of one-to-one interaction/discussion with members with regard to the problems faced by them both at work and at home. 

The periodical review of all branches of ICNW was held on 26-27, December 2014 at Chennai headquarters. The meeting was presided by Dr. Nandini Azad, President, ICNW to assess the



Dr. Nandini Azad with ICNW staff at review meeting

performance of branches. The objective of the meeting was to determine the effectiveness of ICNW branches and identify the improvement/deficiencies of the branches. The meeting not only focused on the revenue aspects but also the key areas that require attention for effective functioning and develop action plan for better performance. Dr. Nandini Azad, President, ICNW reviewed each branch separately to have thorough knowledge of their activities.

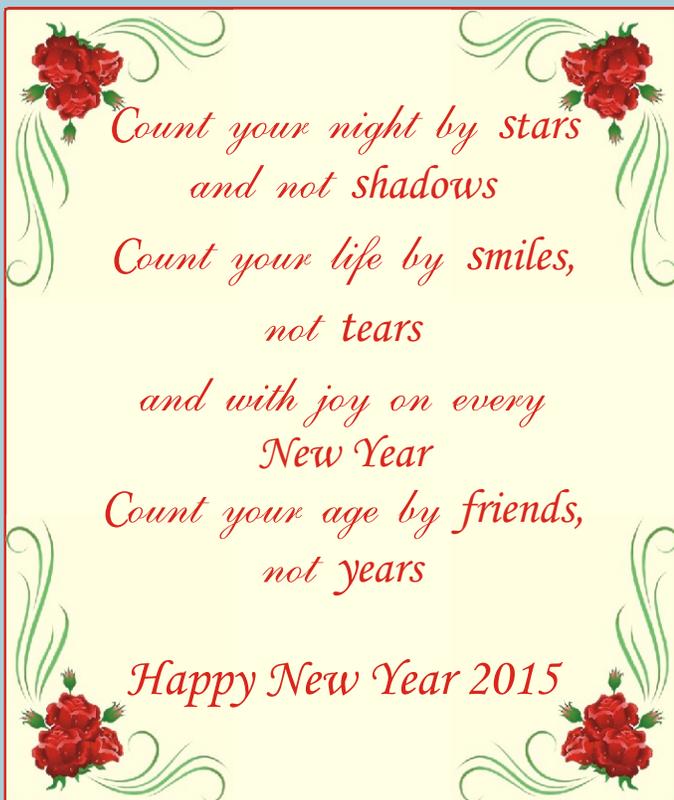
The discussion focused on the income generated, internal monitoring, percentage of repayment of clients, default collection, etc., by reviewing the consolidated data of previous and current years. Besides the meeting was a platform to share their reason for success/failure. In specific areas of concern a reasonable step was taken to ensure that the branches perform better and address its deficiencies by taking corrective action through an action plan.

On 27 December 2014 the action plan was discussed and Dr. Nandini Azad emphasized on the education of women's right, good rapport with the members and identify/enroll good members and wished everyone a Happy New Year. Later President, WWF asked the staff to improve the branches and wished everyone a Happy New Year. 

## Branch Review

Mr. Lakshamanan, Internal Auditor, Ms. Rajeshwari, CEO, ICNW along with Ms. Nandini Programme Coordinator, reviewed the branches of Andhra Pradesh i.e., Palakol, Bhimavaram and Narsapur from 19 to 21 August 2014. At the meeting of staff, trainers and field workers held at Headquarters, the need to enroll more new members and proper maintenances of records in all the three branches of Andhra Pradesh was emphasized. 

# GROOTS



## WE NEED YOUR INPUTS!!!

Letters, Ideas, Comments for our Newsletter

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## What Readers Say about GROOTS/ New Publication

Groots has focused on a lot of topics of National concern. My Heartiest congratulations to Groots for being a responsible Institution in the interest of society and its development with greater attention towards women and vulnerable community.

Ms. Rajalakshmi. S  
Senior Associate Analyst  
ICRA, Chennai

Thrilled to receive the volume **Destitution to Leadership**. The volume is a significant resource in providing brief yet detailed articles on the social and economic context of women's engagement in productive work in India, as well as specific initiatives undertaken by WWF to create opportunities for women to engage in productive work. I teach a college course on women in South Asian Tradition that is very much focused on women acting in today's world in a manner that addresses both tradition and current realities. WWF's combination of both Gandhian tradition and economic progress, as described in several volume's articles, is very relevant to this class and I plan to have students read and discuss these articles.

Prof. Karen Pechilis  
NEH Distinguished professor of Humanities  
Professor of Comparative Religion  
Drew University (USA)