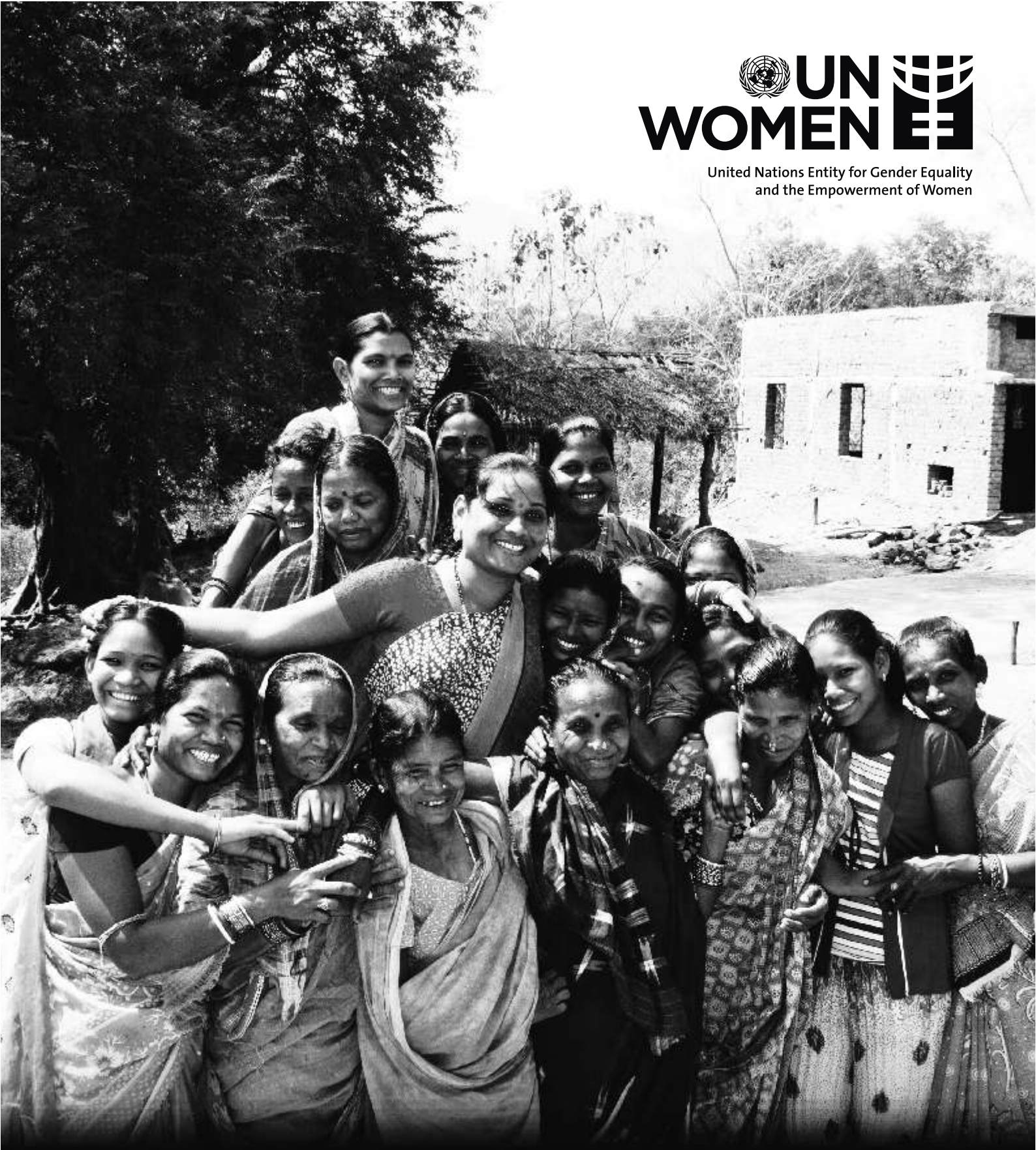




United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women



HEARTS & MINDS

WOMEN OF INDIA SPEAK

SHAPING THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE & AGENDA

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This report and photo-essay are aimed at sharing the “lived experiences” of women and girls in India and ensuring that the voices of especially those who remain socially, economically and geographically marginalised are meaningfully reflected in the emerging post-2015 development discourse and agenda. The analysis contained in this report is based on in-depth interviews with women and focus-group discussions with almost 200 elected women representatives — a constituency over a million strong in India and considered as equal and important stakeholders in helping shape the post-2015 global development agenda.

THE REPORT TEAM

This report is the product of a collective effort under the guidance of the Representative, Ms. Anne F. Stenhammer and Deputy Representative, Ms. Sushma Kapoor, UN Women Office for India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka. UN Women’s Gender Responsive Budgeting Specialist, Yamini Mishra, worked with the team of authors mentioned below and UN Women staff to make this report a reality. A number of people provided detailed comments and advice throughout the research process, from UN Women’s programme specialists, partners to field staff.

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FOREWORD

In the life of every nation, there are moments and events that register in public consciousness as signalling a clear before and after — when something shifts fundamentally; when something occurs that changes a country or even the world forever; when we are forced to look in the mirror and ask ourselves, how did we get here?

In late 2012, a tragic event took place, which involved the brutalisation, rape and eventual untimely death of a 23 year old girl in India's capital, New Delhi. This was one such moment, or so it is hoped by millions of people across the country. The tragedy made international headlines and pried open a much-needed debate on women's safety and the unacceptably high levels of violence against women — by no means a uniquely Indian phenomenon and often sidelined by development agendas and public policy. Thousands of young women and men mobilised for collective action to make their government accountable and enforce the rule of law. It also presented a rare historic window and the necessary pre-cursors often required for major social transformation and course correction — public mood and opinion — to possibly begin to deliver genuine safety, empowerment and equality for Indian women and girls now and into the long run.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were arguably an ambitious and unprecedented attempt to seriously try to resolve, in a time-bound manner, the greatest human challenges of our time — an increasingly threatened planet suffering from uncomfortably high levels of human indignity and preventable deprivation, hunger, disease, inequality, conflict, violence and death.

Against this backdrop, the MDG framework did try to address what it considered at the time as the most pressing challenges facing women and girls such as increasing access to education for girls and reducing maternal mortality. It even delivered considerable, though not sufficient, progress on its gender-related goals. However, with the passage of time and benefit of hindsight, it has become clear that the framework did not do justice to the degree, range and complexity of challenges facing women on a daily basis, particularly the most marginalised women who have the least voice and agency. The feedback from women in this report reveals that there are, in fact, disturbing trends of either stagnation, slow progress or even reversal in many areas determining women's basic needs and survival, leave aside greater progress, well-being, empowerment and equality. For instance, in the Indian context:

1. Although the MDGs included wage employment for women in the non-farm sector as an empowerment indicator, it has stagnated for the past five years;
2. An increasing “feminisation” of poverty, agriculture, old age, migration and HIV and AIDS is taking place, while social security and protection measures remain grossly inadequate;
3. Shifting weather patterns are leading to crop failure and food insecurity, which are disproportionately impacting rural women — the majority of marginal farmers; and
4. Gender-based violence remains all-pervasive and the existing legal safeguards are insufficient to protect women and girls.

Despite the shortcomings of the MDG framework, as it turned out, a development took place over time, which was perhaps hoped but not expected by the United Nations — a majority of its 193 member countries that had adopted the framework, began aligning their national development

policies with the attainment of the MDGs. In some countries, accountability mechanisms were also erected or built into existing structures to fulfil targets. Thus, regardless of whether there was a complete buy-in of the MDGs within countries or not, eventually, substantial resources were mobilised to try and achieve them. Furthermore, there has even been noteworthy progress on some targets and indicators in almost every country, including India.

Recognising this very real influence that global development agendas have on domestic policy-making and their potential impact on millions of the most vulnerable people of the world, this report is an attempt to inform the emerging post-2015 agenda through the lived experiences of Indian women at the grassroots. Their stories are representative of millions of others whose extraordinary daily courage and human resilience hold the tapestry of families, communities, countries and humanity together; who absorb the violence in society at great personal peril, pain and unimaginable sacrifice and have increasingly become its silent and unsung peacemakers and peacekeepers.

For too long, development agendas and frameworks have been prepared without truly consulting or giving voice to those whose lives they aim to improve the most. This report is a humble but conscious attempt to address that gap. The challenges highlighted and analysed here in all their complexity, multi-dimensionality and inter-relatedness will hopefully resonate among women in all societies and countries across the globe —the indignity and desperation of poverty and deprivation, the pangs of hunger and worse still, the pain and helplessness of seeing their children go hungry, the physical weakness from toiling away in their households and farmlands all day to take care of everyone else's needs first, the exhaustion from hours spent fetching water and fuel wood from far, the insecurity and instability of threatened livelihoods, the dejection of unemployment, the anger and humiliation of suffering inequality and discrimination and the silent erosion of confidence, self-esteem and struggle to maintain self-respect and protect their very lives in the face of daily mental, emotional and physical violence.

At the same time, the analysis contained in this report is based on discussions with almost 200 elected women representatives (EWRs) in local self-government — a constituency that is over a million strong in India now. These EWRs are not only the change themselves, but are leading it and have the potential to bring about lasting positive transformation in women's lives.

India is considered a “swing state” in shaping not only the post-2015 agenda but also the emerging global order, thus providing the pragmatic imperative for why we should hear and understand what both the “other Indias” are telling us — “women” at the “grassroots.” And when tragic events and loss make the people of a country or humanity at large feel like they will never quite be the same again, they provide the moral imperative and emotional spark that lights the prairie fire for desired change to take place.



Anne F. Stenhammer

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We would also like to thank the District Collectors of all eleven districts across five states where the field work for the report has taken place: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan. These districts are part of the UN Women programme - Promoting Women's Political Participation and Leadership in India and South Asia. The District Collectors include Mr. M. Purushotham Reddy (Mahabubnagar District) and Mr. M. Veerabrahmaiah (Vizianagaram District) in Andhra Pradesh; Mr. Sameer Shukla (Dharwad District) and Mr. Harsh Gupta (Deputy Commissioner, Mysore District) in Karnataka; Ms. Jaishri Kiyawat (Jhabua District) and Mr. Kavindra Kiyawat (Sehore District) in Madhya Pradesh; Mr. Girish S.N. (Dhenkanal District) and Mr. Prakash Chandra Das (Gajapati District) in Odisha; Mr. Ashutosh A.T. Pednekar (Alwar District), Ms. Punam (Dungarpur District) and Mr. Muktanand Agrawal (Tonk District) and in Rajasthan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1000-day countdown to achieve the MDGs recently kicked off, at a time when the international discourse on a post-2015 development agenda is intensifying and may culminate in a concrete road map at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in September 2013, or so it is hoped. Simultaneously, a parallel human narrative is playing out in the homes and villages of millions of women who are telling us this — ***we toil for hours in our houses, fields and construction and village work sites to feed our children and families; we suffer violence of all types silently day in and day out and we would have dreams if we had the time or had been educated. If you want to and can help, then give us good work and we'll do it, give us safe drinking water and the dignity of our own toilets, protect our human rights and get dowry and drinking banned so we can lead more peaceful and happier lives. Hear our voices! We matter!***

Objectives

This report is thus aimed at ensuring that the voices of women living at the grassroots are meaningfully reflected in any emerging global development agenda by:

1. Sharing women's lived experiences to understand how challenges manifest in their daily lives.
2. Capturing the social, economic, political, cultural and personal challenges and aspirations of women living in rural India.
3. Channelising the growing voice of elected women representatives as important and equal stakeholders in informing the global post-2015 development agenda and discourse.

Methodology

Keeping the above objectives in mind, the analysis in the report is based on:

- In-depth interviews with 20 women in 11 districts across five states on a wide range of issues including destitution, old age, child marriage, working conditions and livelihood pressures facing women in the informal farm economy, tribal women living in remote areas, the impact of migration on women as well as challenges faced by women migrants, unemployment among educated women, illiteracy among adult women, the spectre of gender-based violence, the unique challenges of women from a religious minority, the impact of lack of basic infrastructure such as housing, water, sanitation, roads and electricity, new challenges such as climate change, social exclusion and the triumphs and tribulations of elected women representatives.
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) with close to 200 elected women representatives across five states of India — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan. The overall analysis and recommendations contained in this report are largely based on 20 FGDs conducted in ten districts across these states. Half of the ten districts are among the most backward¹ in India, namely Dungarpur (Rajasthan), Dhenkanal and Gajapati (Odisha), Mahububnagar (Andhra Pradesh) and Jhabua (Madhya Pradesh).

¹ In 2006, the Government of India (GOI) launched the Backward Region Grants Fund (BRGF) to address “persistent regional imbalances in development.” Out of a total of 640 districts, 250 were identified as the most backward districts that qualified for special development funding. Available from www.nird.org.in/brgf/reports_next.html (accessed 10 June 2013).

Report Structure

The report is structured under seven umbrella themes, which are aligned with the MDGs in order to simultaneously identify gaps and inform the post-2015 development agenda from a gender perspective. They include:

1. Poverty, Deprivation & Social Security (MDG 1)
2. Livelihoods, Employment & Skills (MDG 1)
3. Nutrition, Food Security & Hunger (MDG 1)
4. Education & Literacy (MDG 2)
5. Health & Well-Being (MDG 4, 5, 6)
6. Access to Infrastructure, Adaptation to Climate Change & Environmental Sustainability (MDG 7)
7. Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment (MDG 3)

The seven theme-based sections include:

1. **Definitions** - Broad and inclusive definitions of the umbrella issues or themes.
2. **Intersectionality** - Brief analysis of how issues interact with each other and impact women and why marginalisation is strongly linked to vulnerability.
3. **MDG critique** - Brief critique of the relevant MDG from a gender perspective.
4. **"Women of India Speak"** - Summary of insights, thoughts and experiences shared by elected women representatives.
5. **Profiles** - In-depth first person accounts containing a raw and deeper examination of the challenges faced by women as manifested in their daily lives.

The **20 profiles**, listed below, correspond with the following issues:

1. Where the name roams the streets (Destitution)
2. When tomorrows bring more sorrow (Child marriage and old age)
3. Life's tough, with or without you (Impact of migration)
4. Toil, sweat, tears and no high (Tobacco Grower – Informal farm labour)
5. No wind beneath my wings (Unemployment among educated women)
6. Life's all downhill (Tribal women living in remote areas)
7. Home is where the heart and hunger is (Seasonal migration among women)
8. 'Twas fate or I'd know ABC (Low literacy among adult women)
9. Allah would want us to read and write (Unique challenges of Muslim women)
10. How seen is my valley? (Impact of lack of health services)
11. Fighting the last betrayal (Women living with HIV)
12. I get by with a little help from myself (Women living with disability)
13. Enduring heights (Dowry – Gender-Based Violence)
14. Where men brutally tread (Domestic violence – Gender-Based Violence)
15. The Gods must be angry (Impact of climate change)
16. Water is life, toilets are dignity (Impact of lack of water and sanitation)
17. Stand by us (Social exclusion – Lack of access to water)
18. Life on re-charge (Impact of lack of electricity and power)
19. One flew over the patriarchal nest (Elected women representatives as role models)
20. Swimming in the same rip tides (Elected women representatives – Challenges)

KEY FINDINGS

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

In terms of *women's empowerment*, most women feel that there have been positive, even some transformative, changes in their lives over the past decade compared to previous generations. Women shared that they have greater visibility; more education and employment; better health-related access; facilities and social security cover especially for pregnant and lactating mothers; reduced maternal mortality; increased political representation, participation, leadership; and awareness, especially about girls' education and maternal and child health. Elected women representatives feel that they are more self-aware and their general awareness of government schemes and functioning has also increased.

However, women raised several issues that remain unaddressed such as access to water and sanitation, housing, roads, electricity, lack of employment options and skills training especially among women farmers and poor quality of health care. They also shared emerging and new concerns, which are affecting them adversely such as climate change, food insecurity, indebtedness, landlessness and migration. Certain categories of women feel especially vulnerable and disempowered such as single women, widows, elderly women, women abandoned by their spouses or families or children, orphaned girls and women and girls with major health conditions, especially those associated with high levels of stigma and discrimination such as HIV and AIDS and disability.

Greater political representation has allowed women to step out of their homes and participate in meetings and the public life of their community and villages. However, genuine empowerment, political voice and freedom in decision-making will take a lot longer to be realised. They hinge on greater education of women, their increased conscious mobilisation, training and intensive sensitisation and awareness-generation in ways that do not lead to more violence against them by the entrenched patriarchal structure but instead empower them in organic and evolutionary ways. Elected women representatives can act as catalysts in bringing about a transformative shift in women's lives but political will, corruption and deeply entrenched patriarchy limit their own efficacy as elected leaders.

Regarding *gender equality*, women feel that their continued subordinate position in society vis-à-vis men is due to traditional roles and duties thrust upon them, which deprive them of their freedoms and growth-related opportunities. They unanimously agreed that they received no help from their husbands in household chores. On the contrary, any mistake or delay is an invitation for admonishment or possible violence. They also attributed their subordinate position to low literacy and a resulting lack of employment opportunities and financial independence. Women strongly feel that this gender gap also results in violence against them. Lack of access to information also makes women's lives different from men and more difficult. Gender equality seemed greater in areas with improved access to basic services, implying a strong positive correlation between women's access to basic services and their overall standing as well as reduced vulnerability. Contrary to popular perception, however, gender inequality is not only prevalent but is reportedly growing in tribal areas. The lives of girls were found to be as difficult as women in rural areas due to restrictions on their mobility, expectations to assist in domestic work, livelihood generation and farming-related work and preparation for matrimonial roles to marry early.

Poverty, Deprivation and Social Security

Women feel that they largely shoulder the burden of poverty in rural households rather than men, work twice as hard and take care of their families first and themselves last. Single women of all categories (elderly, widows, abandoned) were found to be most vulnerable to poverty as

were socially and geographically marginalised women and those suffering from health conditions associated with high levels of stigma and discrimination (HIV and AIDS, disability and psychiatric illness). Orphaned children, especially girls, were singled out as being extremely vulnerable and a “blind spot” in development policy. Women drew strong links between alcoholism, climate change, lack of infrastructure (housing, water, sanitation, roads and electricity) and increased poverty. Women in all states brought up a major governance and public-service delivery challenge — people living below the poverty line (BPL) are not correctly identified and thus cannot access their basic entitlements whereas those with assets, land or means are often wrongly categorised as poor and are misappropriating benefits. However, women living in peri-urban areas felt poverty has decreased over time due to factory-related jobs becoming available nearby.

Livelihoods, Employment and Skills

While professional employment opportunities for educated girls have increased in rural India over the past decade, women farmers feel cornered by the lack of viable alternative livelihoods due to shifting weather patterns and resulting crop failure. A majority of women in rural India are engaged in agriculture and are largely illiterate. As a result, they compromise and accept low wages and low-skilled work without worker protection and rights. They are increasingly forced to work as daily wage labour in village works and fields of richer farmers or as seasonal migrants in construction sites and brick kilns. Livelihood-related challenges are multiplied in harsh terrains such as desert regions where lack of water renders agriculture-based livelihoods unviable. Tribal women are especially concerned about reduced forest produce over time. Skill-based employment and related training are not readily available and most women are not covered or linked to self-help groups (SHGs), which at least help tide over immediate or emergency needs. Rural women, especially the very poor, still find it very difficult to access low-interest credit and financial services.

Nutrition, Food Security and Hunger

Women reported positive changes and improvements in village-level nutrition facilities and centres for children and pregnant women. However, tribal women in many areas still find these facilities relatively far and inaccessible. Women are gravely concerned about climate change, which is impacting nutrition and food security in their households. Since farming on their own lands is becoming increasingly unviable, they are being forced to buy vegetables instead of growing them, which is more costly. Women farmers said they screen food items based on cost rather than nutritional value. They are the worst sufferers because women eat last or the least due to existing cultural norms that still promote nutritional discrimination against women and girls in favour of men and boys, especially in rural households. In some villages, women cited cases of severe malnutrition among women and children and irregularities and inefficiencies in the government’s food distribution system², which, they reported, is failing to uniformly deliver rationed food to people below the poverty line. Women shared that alcoholism also impacts their food security as men who drink are willing to sell the family’s subsistence grain for liquor.

Education and Literacy

Functioning of primary schools and the attendance of girls in primary schools has improved considerably. However, in many rural families, there is still a preference for investing in education for

²Public Distribution System (PDS) is an Indian food security system established by the Government of India (GOI), which distributes subsidised food and non-food items to people living below the national poverty line. Major commodities distributed include staple food grains such as wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene, through a network of public distribution shops, also known as ration shops, established across the country. The Food Corporation of India (FCI), a government-owned corporation, procures and maintains the public distribution system.

boys as compared to girls, especially beyond the primary level. Secondary schools and colleges were found to be far-off and inaccessible, generating safety and security concerns and resulting in a large number of girls continuing to drop out after primary school. Poverty, lack of promising employment options and social norms and expectations for girls to perform domestic work and marry early came up as factors for lower or discontinued investment in the higher education of girls. Women living in remote areas also cited rains, bad roads and poor infrastructure as constraining factors. Education and literacy levels continue to be very low among tribal and adult women, making it very difficult for them to access their basic entitlements and increasing their vulnerability to economic exploitation. Women acknowledged that their awareness levels about government schemes and services for education are still very low, especially in remote areas. However, awareness levels regarding the importance of education and health for girls have increased considerably over time.

Health and Well-Being

Women gave positive feedback about improvements in healthcare services for pregnant women and lactating mothers, infants and children, free vaccinations and immunisations, reduced maternal and child mortality (although infant mortality among young mothers was a concern), greater awareness of women and children's health and family planning and greater proximity to primary health care centres and hospitals, although tribal women or those living in remote areas still can't access medical facilities easily. Women raised concerns about quality of health care services such as administrative delays, absenteeism of doctors and nurses, long waiting hours, overcrowding and lack of sensitive and respectful treatment of patients. As a result, many rural families are still forced to go to private facilities and incur high out-of-pocket expenses. Women drew a strong link between poor roads and infrastructure and the danger to women's health, particularly during pregnancy. They also feel that lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation increases water-borne diseases, mostly impacting women and children. Women shared that climate change is also impacting their health adversely as they are working longer hours in fields, walking longer distances to collect water and fuel wood and erratic and heavy rainfall is giving rise to more water-borne diseases.

Women unanimously cited *gender-based violence (GBV)* as a widespread and persistent challenge, directly fuelled and exacerbated by the twin problems of alcoholism and dowry. Some women, however, did feel that they are more aware of their rights and more women are reporting violence to the police than before. Child marriage is still common as is female foeticide, although at reduced levels than earlier due to legislation that has made sex-determination illegal. Violence against women in the work place was identified as another "blind spot," especially in industries and areas where women work as informal labour without any rights, such as in the garment industry or as while working as domestic help.

Although there is greater awareness about *HIV and AIDS* in select quarters in rural India, the awareness levels remain very low while associated stigma and discrimination is very high. Rural women are in a "high risk" category as the most common way they contract the disease is unknowingly through their husbands. The stigma adversely impacts their health and nutrition, ability to earn a livelihood and their children's lives, which women living with HIV and AIDS are most concerned about. Although there is greater awareness regarding disability, women with disabilities were similarly found to be highly vulnerable on multiple fronts including poverty, health, sexual harassment and exploitation, lack of employment opportunities and stigma and discrimination. In the absence of social support, old age itself leads to serious health issues, especially among *single women* (widows, abandoned, divorced), who can't rely on anyone for their survival needs.

Access to Infrastructure, Adaptation to Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

One of the gravest concerns women shared was about successive rain and crop failure, which they attributed to *shifting weather patterns* such as intense rain, no rain, erratic rain, more intense summers and winters and deforestation. Rural farmer women said it is impacting their lives very negatively and giving rise to poverty and food insecurity because they are primarily dependent on agriculture as subsistence farmers. It is also leading to increased debt burden and, in extreme cases, landlessness.

Many poor women, especially elderly ones, demanded better *housing* with solid and permanent structures to ensure proper shelter and security. They also shared related concerns with temporary dwellings such as water seepage during rainy season and the financial burden of regular maintenance. Some women cited frequent displacement from their homesteads as property owners are clearing those areas for projects.

Women identified lack of water (access, availability and quality) and sanitation as a major, if not the foremost, challenges in their lives. They feel the lack of water and sanitation most acutely during menstruation and pregnancy. Women and girls in most villages visited still fetch water from long distances. They find it highly time-consuming and it keeps them from pursuing and attending to productive activities (employment for women and education for girls). Water shortage is acutely felt during the summer months and rapid depletion of ground water is forcing people to adopt their own coping mechanisms such as purchasing water on a regular basis, which poor families can ill-afford. Poor water quality and related water-borne diseases are a continuing challenge, exacerbated by lack of sanitation. Women drew a strong link between lack of toilets and retention of girls in school, especially beyond the primary level. They find *lack of infrastructure* such as poor roads and transport a major deterrent to their mobility, ability to fetch water, collect fuel wood and go to work in their fields, especially during the rainy season. It also negatively impacts women's health and children's education. Women, especially living in remote and tribal-populated areas, cited *lack of electricity*, as a major challenge negatively impacting mobility, health and education and overall living standards.

POVERTY, DEPRIVATION & SOCIAL SECURITY

Although definitions and estimations of poverty are highly contested within country contexts and at the global level, the below-stated definition³ by United Nations of poverty does attempt to capture the **multi-dimensionality of poverty** as it manifests in people's lives and the human condition:

“Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means a lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.”

Profile 1 on page 13 of a destitute, single, illiterate and landless woman, strongly demonstrates this multi-dimensional nature of poverty.

INTERSECTIONALITY: When defined in the above terms, all development challenges are a cause, consequence or manifestation of poverty. According to some poverty researchers and experts, there is an increasing “feminisation of poverty” underway, implying that women represent a disproportionate percentage of the world's poor,⁴ which, in turn, is attributed to the rising

incidence of single mother households.⁵ A contested and controversial claim, the important take away from the concept is that it doesn't treat poverty only as a function of loss of income but associates it with a deprivation of capabilities and gender biases present in societies, which preclude women from living long, healthy, creative and empowered lives. In fact, they keep a majority of women from enjoying even basic rights, freedom, respect and dignity, which has been strongly substantiated by the findings of this report. For instance, women across the board felt that they shoulder the burden of poverty more than men because they do all the domestic work, carry out most of the care-giving duties and functions of family and perform the more labour-intensive and time-consuming work in the farm-based and related activities that rural households are typically engaged in. Increasingly, they are also taking on the traditional “breadwinning role” of men, which was strongly evident across all the states visited, where women formed the overwhelming majority of the labour force in village construction works and farmlands. The more socially or geographically excluded a woman is, the more acutely she experiences poverty and the more likely she is to fall in and out of it and pass it down the generations. Certain categories of single women were found to be extremely vulnerable to poverty such as elderly women, widows, abandoned or destitute women, homeless and women with disabilities, HIV and AIDS or other health conditions associated with stigma and discrimination. New challenges such as climate change are accentuating poverty and food insecurity and leading to migration among women in large numbers. Gender-based violence, which remains pervasive, is both a cause and consequence of poverty, with devastating psychological and physical impacts on women and their children.

³ United Nations statement signed in 1988 by all heads of United Nations agencies (accessed 10 June 2013). Available from www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ydiDavidGordon_poverty.pdf

⁴ Sylvia Chant, “Re-thinking the “Feminization of Poverty” in Relation to Aggregate Gender Indices, *Journal of Human Development*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2006), pp. 201-220. Available from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2869/1/Re-thinking_the_feminisation_of_poverty_%28LSERO%29.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁵ Ibid.

MDGs: Poverty, Deprivation & Social Security



MDG 1 - ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 1A: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day	1.1 Proportion of population below \$1 (PPP) per day ⁶
	1.2 Poverty-gap ratio
	1.3 Share of poorest quintile in national consumption

Goal 1 of the MDG framework included in its fold three major and complex development challenges — poverty, employment and hunger — each of which merit a distinct gender-based analysis.

1. The poverty-reduction target in the MDG framework was not based on a multi-dimensional definition resting on the three pillars of human dignity, human rights and human equality, all of which were explicit in the United Nations Millennium Declaration⁷ from which the MDGs were derived. Instead, it was based on a narrow definition of poverty (1.25 United States dollars per day) and a global definition, which was not even pegged to national poverty lines in many countries that adopted the MDGs, including India.
2. Although the MDG framework included gender-specific goals, most of the goals did not include gender-specific indicators, which are crucial to close the systemic and structural gaps between men and women and boys and girls on an array of human development indices.
3. The framework was entirely silent on inequality and inequity — the greatest and mounting twin challenges of our time. The indicators of progress for all MDGs were based on national level aggregates, which disregard the spatial,⁸ vertical⁹ and horizontal¹⁰ dimensions of inequality and have unique implications for women.
4. The entire MDG framework failed to factor in the strong intersectional nature of gender, which cuts across all forms of deprivation and exclusion. As such, it altogether left out many issues with strong poverty and gender linkages such as the lack of infrastructure (housing, roads, water, sanitation, electricity and energy), the need for social security for those facing multiple forms of vulnerability and marginalisation (old age, single women, widows, abandoned or destitute, homeless, people with disabilities, HIV and AIDS or other serious health conditions associated with a high level of stigma and discrimination), gender-based violence, impact of climate change and lack of adaptive strategies, lack of access to financial services and social exclusion.

⁶For monitoring country poverty trends, indicators based on national poverty lines should be used where available. (Official footnote on revised MDG list effective from 15 January, 2008). Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/MDGsOfficialList2008.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁷Following the 2000 Millennium Development Summit, the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which was adopted by 193 countries, emphasised the observance of international human rights and humanitarian law and treaties on sustainable development. Available from www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁸Inequality based on geography - Rural versus urban, hills and deserts versus plains.

⁹Inequality based on income - High-income versus middle-income versus low-income groups.

¹⁰Inequality based on culture, ethnicity, caste, religion, gender, disability and sexuality.

Women of India Speak

- When asked how poverty impacts men and women differently, responses ranged from, “Men don’t experience poverty. Women shoulder the burden of poverty” to more generous answers acknowledging that men and women both experience poverty but women shoulder a much larger burden of its negative impacts as compared to men.
- Women living in peri-urban areas differed starkly on the issues of poverty and employment. According to them, poverty is not a major challenge any longer. They shared that in the past, only one member was the breadwinner but now all family members work, which has enhanced family incomes over time. Factories and industries that have sprung up in close proximity to their villages have provided opportunities and more options for viable incomes. They feel that villages located far away from a city are at a disadvantage and that full-time salaried people in professional jobs are much better off than those primarily dependent on agriculture.

“A few people are getting richer by the day and others are so poor that they do not even have food to eat.”

“Poverty affects both, men and women. If a man doesn’t earn and bring in income, how will the woman take care of the family and prepare food? We have to do everything — farming and related activities, go to the jungle to collect firewood, cook food and take care of the family. If there is no food in the house, no ration, oil or spices, it’s a big problem and women face it. Men remain outside.”

- Many rural women feel that poverty has increased in the past few years and there is a very uneven distribution of wealth and growing inequality. They also felt that the proportion of poor people to rich people is much higher.

- Elderly women and widows were found to be extremely vulnerable to poverty. A majority of them found existing social welfare schemes wholly inadequate to meet even their basic needs and security. Many cited difficulties in accessing their pensions.
- People with disabilities and orphans were also found to be highly vulnerable to poverty and identified as blind spots in policy-making and public-service delivery. Some women related personal stories, underscoring a very strong link between disability and poverty. If the main breadwinner of the house is disabled, it especially has a spiralling effect on the family’s ability to earn, meeting the household’s basic food requirements and educating children.
- Women across all states unanimously cited alcoholism as a major challenge. Many drew a strong and direct link between alcoholism and poverty. They shared how it leads to a vicious cycle of income loss, decreased employment and employability, increased domestic workload for women, increased vulnerability and pressure on women to earn income to compensate for financial loss,

Profile 2 on page 16 sheds light on this extreme vulnerability of elderly, illiterate women in rural India and how they fall through the cracks of the existing public-delivery system.

psychological and emotional stress and a high probability of increased gender-based violence. It also has a negative impact on the entire family's nutrition, children's education and overall well-being.

- Poverty is seen to have an adverse impact on retention of girls in schools, as very poor families find it particularly difficult to meet transportation costs if they are distantly located. Some poor women felt that only people with land and jobs can afford to educate their children properly.
- Women in many states strongly felt that climate change and crop failure is causing poverty. In the case of failed crops or any other exigency, borrowing money from unscrupulous moneylenders is the only available option. Moneylenders charge exorbitant interest rates, often leading to an inescapable debt trap. Mostly unable to offer collateral, poor women also find it exceedingly difficult to access loans from banks. This especially poses a challenge for women-led households who need to access credit to meet immediate, emergency or even daily expenses.
- Some women also pointed to an over-dependence on micro-finance institutions.
- Women across all five states raised a major governance and public-service delivery challenge — people living below the poverty line are not correctly identified and cannot access their basic social welfare entitlements, whereas people with land and assets are being wrongly categorised as poor and are mis-appropriating their benefits.

Profile 3 on page 19 examines the physical, emotional and psychological impact of male-out migration on women in a remote rural village.

GOWRAMMA HIREGOWDER

Where the name roams the streets



Photo @ UN Women/ Mayank Pratap Singh

“When you have money, people respect you. Otherwise, no one bothers. There are times when I am forced to beg but I have refrained from doing so. I hope that I am not compelled to beg in the future.”

At 45, Gowramma appears to be almost 60 years old, for she has weathered the exigencies of life. She lives in a dilapidated house in a small village in Karnataka’s “cultural headquarters” — Dharwad district — located about a three-hour drive from Goa. There are painful cracks on the soles of her feet. She walks around bare feet as the only pair of slippers she owned, broke. There is a deep sadness in her dim cataract-infected eyes, which well up with tears, as she relates her life story. Each line on her face and grey strand of hair tells a story of deprivation, rejection and cruelty in the face of adversity but, above all, of human resilience to survive despite the odds.

Destitution or “absolute poverty” can be described as a state of extreme deprivation, coupled with the complete absence of a social security net. Destitution is also a form of spatial¹¹, horizontal¹² and vertical¹³ inequality. Women experience destitution and poverty in particularly vulnerable and oppressive ways and a majority of them are found¹⁴ to be “physically malnourished, sick, disabled and some of them are working-age addicts, sex workers.” In a disturbing trend, destitution among women increased¹⁵ in India between 1991-2001, particularly among older woman compared to men. Due to the difficulty in tracking destitution and the associated “invisibility,” the considerable challenges and pronounced vulnerability facing destitute people are not factored into public policy.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Single, landless, illiterate, unskilled, lacking viable and dignified means of livelihood, proper shelter, electricity, adequate water, food, nutrition and security.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Gowramma. My father was a farmer and owned his own land. My mother was a housewife but she helped my father in farming. We are three sisters and one brother, who is the eldest. He got married and started living separately from my parents long back. A suitable match was also found for my older sister and she was married off. As my parents were unable to find a match for me, they got my younger sister married off, too. They did try to get me married but as I was their only support left, they didn't try too hard.

“I have to request my neighbours for water every day, which is limited to just one bucket.”

When my father was alive and an active farmer, I used to help cook food for the labour that worked on my father's fields and in other farm-related activities. My entire youth passed by doing this and in taking care of my parents later. I was 25 years old when I lost my parents. After their demise, my brother took all the family land and I was left alone and destitute. My father had been a habitual gambler when he was alive and so my brother and village elders forced him to will his property to my brother so he wouldn't lose all of it in gambling. I was left with nothing. I continued living in my father's house, which is in shambles. There is no power or water. I have to request my neighbours for water every day, which is limited to just one bucket. It is difficult to make ends meet and I want work but whenever I went out looking for it, the village people would taunt me saying, “I was worthless and should beg for food.” I have always been an object of ridicule for the villagers and nobody

supported me. Initially, my brother used to give me 50 Indian rupees (1 dollar) per month. Gradually, he stopped that, too.

My house was in such a dilapidated state that parts of it collapsed. So, I applied for the relief fund for repair work. Women in the village used to discourage and tease me by saying, “Why do you need to repair your house? For whom are you doing all this? You have no husband, no family no children. You will soon die and go to waste.” I received 5000 rupees (92 dollars) from the fund to repair the house, which I deposited in the bank. I withdraw 500 rupees (9 dollars) every month to take care of my expenses and have no clue how long the money will last. When my house fell, my ration card¹⁶ and other belongings were also destroyed. So, I have not been able to access the free or subsidised ration I am entitled to for almost a year now. I have been trying hard to renew my card but to no avail. I have also tried many times to access government schemes but failed because I don't have awareness or the ability to do paperwork. Since I am a single woman, I don't qualify for widow or old-age pension.

“My only pair of slippers broke and so, I walk bare feet now.”

When work is available, I go to the fields and separate the cotton from the pod. For every kilogram of cotton that I collect, I am paid 5 rupees (0.1 dollars). This is seasonal work. I can manage to do 10 to 15 kilograms a day and earn anything between 80-92 rupees (1.3-1.5 dollars). It is strenuous and my back and neck begin to ache after a few hours. It's

¹¹ Inequality based on geography - Rural versus urban; hills and deserts versus plains.

¹² Inequality based on income - High-income versus middle-income versus low-income groups.

¹³ Inequality based on culture, ethnicity, caste, religion, gender, disability and sexuality.

¹⁴ Dr. P. K. Bhargava and others. *Trends and Patterns of Population, Development and Destitution in India* (Princeton, 2006). Available from <http://epc2006.princeton.edu/papers/60259> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ A ration card or stamp is issued by the government to allow the holder (particularly people living below the poverty line, in the Indian context), to obtain food or other commodities at subsidised rates.

been a long time now since I have been to the fields to work. I have no strength left. My bones ache and my feet have developed deep cracks and hurt when I walk. My only pair of slippers broke and so, I walk bare feet now.

Everything seemed fine when my parents were alive. People used to talk about my single status but it did not affect me. I was busy working the

“I prepare whatever food is available. Mostly, it is boiled rice with red chillies for some flavour. When things are good, I can afford to put some vegetables in the rice and cook the meal in oil.”

entire day. After my parent's died, things changed drastically. People started disrespecting me and as time passed, I grew weak and frail. When you have money people respect you. Otherwise, no one bothers. There are times when I am forced to beg, but I have refrained from doing so. I hope that I am not compelled to beg in the future.

A day in the life of Gowramma

7am - 9am: For the past few years, I've been waking up late, at around 7am. When I was living with my parents, I used to wake up at 5 am because I was responsible for so many chores back then. Now, I live alone. What is the point of waking up early? I wake up and go to my brother's house with a *lota*¹⁷ to request him for some milk to prepare my morning tea. I also collect my daily quota of one bucket of water from my neighbour. I come home, prepare tea and then take a bath. The walls around the area where I take a bath have also fallen. So now, I just tie a *sari*¹⁸ around it for cover. I prepare whatever food is available. Mostly, it is boiled rice with red chillies for some flavour. When things are good, I can afford to put some vegetables in the rice and cook the meal in oil.

9 am-7pm: If I find work, I leave for the fields and spend the entire day working there and return home by about 7pm. If the owner is kind-hearted, I am offered lunch. Otherwise, I spend the entire day working without food. On my way back, I collect fuel-wood. When there is no work, I stay at home, wash clothes, visit the temple, collect fuel-wood and make cow dung cakes.

8pm-9pm: In the evening, I have to ask my brother for milk again to prepare my evening tea. When I reach home, there is no power. So, I prepare tea in complete darkness, drink it and then sleep. I am left with no energy or the desire to prepare dinner for myself.

¹⁷A globular water-holding mug.

¹⁸Also spelt as “Saree,” a Sari is a strip of unstitched cloth ranging from four to nine yards in length that is draped over the body by women in various styles, which is native to the Indian Subcontinent.

SARSI

When tomorrows bring more sorrow

Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta



“I can’t see very well now and am weak but still have the need and desire to work and earn some money.”

Sarsi was barely 12 years old when she was married to a 40-year-old man. Fifty years later, at 62, she bears all the signs of old age and more — her body is frail and emaciated; her bones jut out; her voice quivers when she speaks; her hands shake and her movements are slow. When she cooks, she’s so visibly weak that she can barely stir the cooking pot. Her 90-year old husband lies like an old behemoth on a charpai¹⁹ inside their dark mud hut, tucked away in a winding village alley in Dungarpur, one of India’s most backward²⁰ districts located in the northern desert state of Rajasthan. As her life story unravelled, tears rolled down Sarsi’s cheeks, even as her hands remained folded throughout — partly in respect, partly to comfort herself perhaps but mostly, out of some inexplicable hope.

Almost a decade before the MDGs were outlined, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution²¹ on principles for older persons in 1991, which asserted their rights to independence, care, participation, dignity and self-fulfilment. The gendered nature of old age is such that universally, women tend to live longer than men but demographic trends point²² to a growing “feminisation of old age.” By 2050, the number of elderly in India will soar²³ to over 320 million from the currently estimated 90-100 million and the number of elderly women will exceed men by almost 20 million. The predicament of elderly women and widows is aggravated by a lifetime of gender-based discrimination. Ageing women are more likely to be excluded from social security schemes due to lower literacy and awareness levels. Social bias often results in an unjust allocation of resources, their neglect, abuse, exploitation, gender-based violence, lack of access to basic services and denial of ownership of assets.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Old age, child marriage, upper-caste (Rajput²⁴), below the poverty line, lack of proper housing, electricity and water.

Footnotes overleaf

I've lived a life full of sadness and struggle ever since I was born. I've never experienced real peace and happiness.

I was born into a poor household. My father was a farmer. We are four sisters and two brothers and I am the eldest of the siblings. I was maybe just 10 years when I started doing household work. I used to help in the farming, labour work and domestic work. I never studied — there was no awareness at the time and we were so poor, that nobody even thought of education.

Fifty years ago, girls were married very early among the Rajput community but now they get married at 20-21 years of age. I was barely 12-13 years old when I got married. My husband was over 40 years at the time and was not getting a girl to marry. In such cases, where the man is much older but financially settled or better off, he doesn't demand dowry. In many cases, he even covers the wedding expenses. Dowry was practised widely in the Rajput community and is still prevalent — if a girl has to be married, at least 15-16 *tola*²⁵ of gold is given to the boy and his family. We couldn't afford it. We were a poor family and my father passed away rather early. So, my family thought it best to marry me off. In

such cases, the girl's wish is not asked. In fact, when the man is rich, sometimes they even take the girl by force. My family did what they had to, but in my heart, naturally I felt bad.

After marriage, the situation was the same — poor and difficult. But my husband was an older and wiser man. So, I went along with him to the fields and slowly started to understand how to

“Women can work in old age according to their capacity and ability but it is better to give us house-based work because it is more secure and easier than construction and village work.”

do all the work and manage my household. I had my first child at about 20-21 years of age and had five girls in total. I couldn't educate any of them because of poverty. Somehow, we managed to get all of them married.

¹⁹Charpai also spelt as Charpoy or Charpay and known as Manja, it is a traditional woven bed consisting of a wooden frame bordering a set of knotted ropes.

²⁰In 2006, the Government of India launched the Backward Region Grants Fund (BRGF) to address “persistent regional imbalances in development.” Out of a total of 640 districts, 250 were identified as the most backward districts that qualified for special development funding. Available from www.nird.org.in/brgf/reports_next.html (accessed 10 June 2013).

²¹Economic and Social Council Resolution 1991/46 on “UN Principles for Older Persons” adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December, 1991 at the 74th Plenary Meeting. *Implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and Related Activities*. Available from www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r091.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

²²Frederika Meijer, “The feminisation of old age,” *The Hindu*, 1 October 2012. Available from www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-feminisation-of-old-age/article3951968.ece (accessed 10 June 2013).

²³Ibid.

²⁴Rajput is a member of one of the patrilineal clans of western, central, northern India and some parts of Pakistan, which claim to be descendants of Hindu warrior classes of North India prominent during the 6th to 12th centuries and were considered a “martial” race during the British rule in India. Several practices common among the Rajputs have been considered restrictive and oppressive towards women ranging from the “ghoonghat,” which refers to the veil used to cover the face of married women, minimising the movement of women in public spaces and limiting interactions to only other women or immediate male relatives and child marriage, to more extreme practices of “Sati” or self-immolation of a married woman on the funeral pyre of her husband, “Jauhar,” which was the honorary self-immolation of women and subsequent march of men to the battlefield (against any odds) to end their life with respect and female infanticide widely practised historically among Rajput clans due to strong preferences for a boy child and heir.

²⁵The tola also transliterated as “tolah” or “tole” is a traditional South Asian unit of mass derived from the Sanskrit word “tol” meaning weight. It is now standardised as 180 troy grains or exactly 3/7 troy ounce and was the base unit of mass in the British Indian system of weights and measures introduced in 1833 and also used in Aden and Zanzibar. Troy weight is a system of units and mass customarily used for precious metals and gemstones.

²⁶Veil used to cover the face of married women especially among Hindu upper-caste women belonging to the Rajput clans of Rajasthan although the practice has spread to other communities such as among tribal women. The practice among the Rajputs originally came from the Muslim rule of India during the 15th-17th century. The end of a sari or dupatta is most often used as the veil. Dupatta is a piece of cloth that accompanies another commonly worn traditional outfit among women in the Subcontinent called a salwar kameez. The salwar is a loose-pyjama like trouser and the kameez is a long shirt or tunic.

About 25 years ago, women from the Rajput community didn't venture outside the house, let alone do labour work. We covered our faces with our *ghoonghat*.²⁶ We had to think a hundred times before going out or talking to someone. Men could not even talk to Rajput women — there was a complete social ban. There is much more freedom and mobility among women of other castes and communities, especially among tribal women. Even today, it is the same but because there is so much difficulty to make ends meet, I have done all kinds of labour. I lifted and dumped mud at construction sites even back then and have even done more intense work such as lifting water and rocks until last year as part of the employment guarantee scheme. Towards the end, I used to get lighter and easier jobs like filling drinking water for everyone or lifting mud. Fellow workers also gave me less strenuous work out of pity and respect for my age. Rajputs also receive more respect from other communities and castes. I am not working anymore because of weakness and since I don't have any daughter-in-laws, I have to do all the domestic work myself.

I have always been thin and frail. There was never enough to eat in the house. There has always been anxiety about how to make ends meet and how to feed my daughters. So, I've become weaker because of stress also. I also couldn't go out and get much work due to our restrictive traditions. My husband has been mostly lying on the bed for the past 20 years because of old age — he must be 90 years old now.

I live below the poverty line and receive old-age pension of 500 rupees (9 dollars) per month, which provides some relief. If the amount was increased to 1000-1500 rupees (18-28 dollars), then it'll really benefit us. The most important thing for us is to get support to build a house because it is in such a bad state that we live in constant fear of it collapsing during the rainy season. We also don't have electricity. A neighbour has given us connection for one bulb out of pity so that we have some light. Even in

this age and state, I have to walk one kilometre to fetch one small *ghada*²⁷ of water. I can't carry the big one. I get dizzy and so, I have to stop 2-3 times on the way, take rest and then proceed. Sometimes, I collect water 3-4 times a day.

Women can work in old age according to their capacity and ability but it is better to give us house-based work because it is more secure and easier than construction and village work. I can't see very well now and am weak but still have the need and desire to do work and earn some money.

A day in the life of Sarsi

6am-11am: I have two buffaloes and so, the first thing I do when I wake up is collect their dung, put it aside and then feed them with grass and grain chaff. One buffalo gives milk once a day. So, I milk it and then drink some tea. Then, I wash the utensils, clean the house and cook food.

11am-1pm: I prepare water for my husband's bath and then feed him. We either have *roti* and *dal* or if there is some money, then some vegetable and if not, then *roti* with milk. After that, I wash clothes and then have lunch myself.

1pm-3pm: I check on the buffaloes to see if they need grass or water. It takes almost two hours. I can't walk easily and the buffaloes are tied at some distance from my house because we don't have space nearby.

3pm-5pm: Then I go to the field and collect grass and if we have grown something in the field, then I attend to that farming work.

5pm-7pm: I come back and have to look after the buffaloes again and feed them.

8pm-10pm: I make food and have a small meal. First, I serve my husband and then I eat. I wash up, clean and then go to sleep.

²⁷Earthen pot or pitcher made of clay or mud and used in rural India to carry or fetch water.

PHATUDI

Life's tough, with or without you

Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta



“What if my child gets sick or some other need comes up? I had to wait for months to receive any money from my husband and that, too, only 1000 rupees (18 dollars) at a time.”

For a young woman who attempted suicide not too long ago, Phatudi sure sports a ready smile, even while speaking about the episode, when her expressions do turn a shade sheepish. She's blessed with naturally attractive features but under her head cover, there's a lot more grey in her hair than there should be at just 32 years of age. Belonging to the predominant Pataliya tribe of the region, she lives in Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, located in the heart of India. The lack of livelihood options has forced a high degree of male-out migration in the state, leaving behind a landscape increasingly dotted with women-led households. Left alone to fend for themselves and their children, these women gingerly navigate life alone in a village and are often forced to take on unsustainable debt from usurious moneylenders to make ends meet and stay financially afloat.

Migration denotes²⁸ any movement of groups of people from one locality to another and takes different forms. In this movement of people, women's location and spaces are defined by their positioning within the society and state. The process²⁹ of migration thus has a constraining effect not only in structural terms (lack of choices) or cultural terms, but also in the sense in which it may include abuse, exploitation and emotional and psychological distress. In the absence of their husbands at close proximity, female-headed households bear the added responsibilities of managing the household budget, fuel and water needs, participating in community meetings, storing crops, marketing produce and meeting their children's welfare, financial and growth needs. A high level of male out-migration from rural to urban areas has also led to the “feminisation” of agriculture.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Tribal, illiterate, living in remote terrain poorly connected to health care facilities, mother of five children, marginal farmer, woman-led household due to male-out migration, little or no access to low-interest bank credit and financial services.

My father was a labourer. He was a bit insane and mostly remained outside the house. My mother raised the children mostly. We are two sisters and one brother. I had dreams of studying

“I feel that life is easier as a migrant than being alone as a woman in your own village... Only you can know your own problems fully. How can you share everything? The psychology becomes that somehow, I have to manage.”

and getting a job and earning but we were so poor that life went in a different direction. I was quite young when I started working in cotton fields. I used to get 5 rupees (0.09 dollars) for collecting cotton the entire day and would give it to my mother so she could buy grain for the house. I must have been just 10 years old. Now you get 100 rupees (1.7 dollars) per day for the same work.

I got married and had six children but one girl died when she was just a few years old. My husband started working in another state leaving me alone to take care of the children and everything else. I had to cook and feed them, send them to school, do all the housework, fetch water from far away several times a day, take care of my livestock and run about trying to keep them in check. I also had to work in the fields. We didn't have a phone at that time. So, I used to request someone else to call him and send messages through others requesting him to come back. He stayed away for three years and didn't even come back in the rainy season. Once, it must have been about a week before Holi³⁰ and I sent a message requesting him to come back and to stay home this time. He said how could

he come back when he has to work and earn? I got angry and took poison — the one you put in cotton to keep insects away. After that episode, I finally convinced my husband to stay back to help me with raising the children and taking care of the household and fields and manage the expenses.

I feel that life is easier as a migrant compared to being alone as a woman in your village. But our land is here, so I have to stay and take care. Sometimes, women go along and with children. I went once with my husband to Gujarat along with two children. I left the other children behind with relatives. You work all day and earn something, eat and sleep. There's a tap right at the site to access water. In the village, you have to do everything yourself — feed everyone, fetch water from long distances, do house work and feed livestock and take them grazing. Only you can know your own problems fully. How can you share everything? The psychology becomes that somehow, I have to manage.

“I sent a message requesting him to come back and stay at home. He said how could he come back when he has to work and earn? I got angry and took poison — the one you put in cotton to keep the insects away.”

When I needed money, I had to borrow it and I could pay it back only when my husband returned home. Women like me have to keep borrowing money from each other in the village. What if my child gets sick, or some other need comes up? I had to wait for months sometimes to receive any money from my husband and that, too, 1000 rupees (18 dollars) at a time. My husband earned around 5000 rupees (85 dollars) per month but it was expensive where he worked and lived.

²⁸ Sansristi (Odisha), A research study on impact of increasing migration on women in Orissa. Available from http://ncw.nic.in/pdfreports/MigrationWomeninOrissa_Sansristi.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Indian festival of colours celebrated to commemorate religious events in Hinduism, the beginning of the new season, spring and saying farewell to winter and celebrating good harvests and the fertile land.

Earlier, we had to walk quite far even to go to the market. If you got sick, it was difficult if your husband was away because you had to walk quite a distance to reach the hospital. I would worry the most if my children got sick. My father-in-law also used to remain sick and a lot of money was spent in taking care of him.

*“My workload didn’t change much
after my husband came back.
He does some work in the fields,
there’s a little less stress
and debt but that’s it.
I still do most of the work.”*

I used to look fine earlier but look at my hair now; it’s already so grey. Earlier, I had to walk very far to fetch water. My house structure was also not very strong. I couldn’t sleep much at night. All this stress has resulted in premature ageing. There is also a fear of living alone without your husband — you have to watch over your shoulder more and go out of the house less after dark. Had the government been providing some opportunity to work from home, it would have helped us a lot. If toilets were provided within homes, women wouldn’t have to go outside. There is more security when your husband is at home. Women who go with their husbands are happier and even divide work when they come back home.

A day in the life of Phatudi

5am-10am: When my husband was away, I used to get up at 5am and heat up water for a bath and make some *rotis*.³¹ I also had to feed my cows and goats. Then, I would bathe my children and send them to school. Then, I would go take my cows, buffaloes and goats to graze up in the mountains, come back, quench their thirst and throw them some grass to feed on.

10am-3pm: I would then go to my fields to work. I also had to take care of my buffaloes’ calves, once they were born. I would tie them up at home, fetch water, prepare food, feed the children and wash clothes. I had to fetch water several times a day from quite far away.

3pm-9pm: Then, I would take the livestock for grazing again, cook dinner, feed the children and family, then eat myself, clean up and sleep. My workload didn’t change much after my husband came back. He does some work in the fields, there’s a little less stress and debt but that’s it. I still do most of the work.

³¹ South Asian bread made of stoneground wholemeal flour.

LIVELIHOODS, EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

When employment is viewed in the most holistic and inclusive terms, it is only a sub-set of livelihood, which from a sustainable livelihoods approach can be defined³² as *a set of economic activities involving self-employment and or wage employment by using one's endowments (both human and material) to generate adequate resources for meeting the requirements of the self and household on a sustainable basis with dignity.*

INTERSECTIONALITY: A lack of livelihood or unemployment directly results in poverty. In extreme conditions, it leads to an inability to meet the most basic human needs such as shelter, clothing and food. It also leads to indignity, lack of self worth and confidence, loss of freedom and control, psychological stress and depression, poor nutrition, inability to pursue growth opportunities and compromises overall mental, emotional and physical health. Women experience all of the above more acutely than men and the more patriarchal a society is, the greater are the repercussions of unemployment for women, including increased vulnerability to all forms of gender-based violence. Among the most vulnerable are women and girls belonging to any excluded or marginalised group such as tribal women, *Dalit*³³ (Scheduled Caste) women and women belonging to religious minorities such as Muslims. The ability of women living with disabilities or psychiatric disorders, HIV and AIDS and other major illnesses and diseases to earn income or find employment is greatly reduced and compromised, largely due to crippling stigma and discrimination. In the absence of viable and decent income-earning opportunities and a reliable social safety net, single women (elderly, widows, abandoned, destitute, homeless) are extremely vulnerable to infirmity, disease, exploitation, violence and death. The advancing global challenge of climate change is further inflicting a devastating blow on agriculture, which is the main source of livelihoods for millions of poor rural families, especially women who form a majority of marginal farmers in developing countries.

MDGs: Livelihoods, Employment & Skills



MDG 1 - ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER

TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 1B: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people	1.4 Growth rate of GDP per person employed
	1.5 Employment-to-population ratio
	1.6 Proportion of employed people living below \$1 (PPP) per day
	1.7 Proportion of own-account and contributing family workers in total employment

³² Oxford Dictionary of English, Oxford Reference Online, Oxford University Press, 2010 (3 ed.). Available from www.oxfordreference.com (accessed 10 June 2013).

³³ The national government of India classifies some of its citizens based on their social condition, typically implying they are educationally or socially marginalised, which fall under the category of either "Scheduled Castes" or "Scheduled Tribes" or "Other backward classes." Scheduled Castes constitute approximately 16.2 per cent or 166 million out of a total of 1.2 billion people according to the most recent 2011 census of India. The term "Dalit" has been used interchangeably with Scheduled Castes and they include all historically discriminated communities of India's "out-caste" or "Untouchable" castes.

1. The employment-based MDG targets and indicators were not based on a holistic livelihoods approach, which emphasises organic, bottom-up and community-based economic empowerment, dignity of labour and the pursuance of livelihood and income-generating activities in harmony with the environment.
2. Although the revised MDG-based target to “Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people” was a step in the right direction, it came eight years late, eating into the MDG progress timeline. The corresponding indicators under the target were not adequately revised to help achieve it in earnest. They remained focused on national aggregates and proportions, which failed to trigger the requisite public policy shifts to deliver a genuine and effective employment policy based on actual human needs and rights.
3. As the MDG framework did not include any gender-specific targets or indicators on livelihood and employment, women’s contribution — unpaid and underpaid — to all economic sectors remained unrecognised. Therefore, the challenges that impede their economic well-being also remained unaccounted for and unaddressed. Inclusion of indicators such as “number of women working on minimum wage” or “number of women working in formal wage-based employment in the farm and non-farm sector” would have more likely influenced policy, built in accountability and helped promote genuine economic empowerment of women.
4. The framework completely left out farm-based livelihoods and employment, which engages the bulk of the labour force in most developing countries. Women form a large portion, if not a majority, of this agricultural labour force.

Profile 4 on page 26 of a tobacco grower provides a clear sense of the strong role that millions of women farmers play in the overwhelmingly informal farm economy and the dual workload they silently carry.
- Profile 5** on page 29 captures the deep personal dejection experienced by an unemployed college graduate and the heavy psychological and financial toll exacted on a low-to-middle income family in the absence of social and economic returns on investment in education.

5. MDG 3 pertaining to gender empowerment and equality included only non-farm based wage employment for women as an economic empowerment indicator. However, the share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector stagnated³⁴ at 18.6 per cent over five years from 2004-2009.
6. Since it lacked the livelihood approach as a basis, MDG 1 also did not factor in geographical exclusion and how spatially disadvantaged people find it very hard to earn income or access livelihood opportunities.

Profile 6 on page 32 of a tribal woman living on a remote hilltop demonstrates the strong links between such marginalisation and the increased likelihood of poverty, hunger and lack of education, employment opportunities and mobility, especially for women and girls.

³⁴ India, Central Statistical Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Millennium Development Goals, India Country Report* (New Delhi, 2011), Appendix 3, pp.11-13. Available from http://mospi.nic.in/mospi_new/upload/mdg_2011_24apr12.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

7. The MDG framework also eclipsed the entire gamut of labour, worker or migrant rights as it was not rooted in a human rights framework or linked to any accountability mechanisms.
8. The MDG framework entirely missed any emphasis on enhancing skills and vocational employment and education — key indicators to promote economic empowerment, which women repeatedly demanded across the board for their economic betterment.

Profile 7 on page 35 sheds light on how hunger and lack of livelihood options are increasingly forcing women to work as migrants without any social security, social protection or workers' rights.

Women of India Speak

- Most women attributed their subordinate position in the household and society to low literacy levels or lack of education and the resulting inability to find proper jobs and attain financial independence.
- Women feel burdened by their daily roles and responsibilities, which are depriving them of personal growth-related opportunities.
- Women working in farming and allied activities such as livestock management reported a complete lack of employment options except for working on farms as daily wage labour or in construction sites and brick kilns as migrant labour. As a result, women are willing to settle for low wages and work long hours in poor conditions.

- Women, especially living in harsh terrains (deserts, remote areas, drylands), reported major livelihood-related challenges. In Rajasthan, for instance, they shared that farming is difficult due to lack of water and rain. As a result, women find it hard to feed and take care of their families. Most women work under the

*“Women toil away in dust and heat all day
in the employment guarantee scheme.
It is filled with women labourers.
We do it so that our children don’t die of hunger.
If the odd man does work, he loses it in drinking
by the evening. The entire responsibility
for bringing up children falls on us.”*

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme³⁵ (MGNREGA). Often, they aren’t paid wages fully, or for the full number of days they worked or suffer long delays in wage payments. Sometimes, they are not able to finish work due to tough and oppressive working and weather conditions. Some women even felt that the hard physical labour they perform is not appropriate for them, but they do it to feed their children.

- Women living in close proximity to towns and cities felt that they have better employment opportunities than women living in rural interior villages. Some elected women representatives

³⁵ The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), formerly known as NREGA, is an Indian employment scheme enacted by legislation on 25 August, 2005. It provides a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public-work related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage, which differs by state. For more information, see http://nrega.nic.in/circular/WageRate_1jan2011.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

also shared that local development funds were facilitating loans for women and could be used to set up small businesses.

- Many women reported shifts in weather patterns and climate change, how it is killing their main source of livelihood — farming — and increasing food insecurity and poverty.
- Women pointed to the lack of skill-based training and employment and where available, they felt that there are no opportunities to use those skills effectively to earn income or a livelihood.
- Some women living in peri-urban areas shared that women in their villages worked as housemaids in cities with no job security.
- Women reported that those who are members of SHGs,³⁶ most of which are linked to government banks, can take care of their immediate needs and emergency expenses and have better cash flow and liquidity. Women who are members of SHGs are also more confident than those who are not. There is a difference inside their homes in terms of a more equal power dynamic with men because they get trained, including on financial management. They are more familiar with government schemes and are better able to identify and leverage income-generating opportunities.
- However, women also shared that typically only a quarter of the women in a village or less are in SHGs. Also, very poor women find it difficult to join SHGs because group membership requires saving and pooling of individual resources, which poor women lack. Still, some elected women representatives advocated that if efforts are made, even they could save and pool small amounts as many poor women already deposit money in savings accounts of their local post offices.
- Women feel hindered by lack of infrastructure such as roads to move freely between their house, agricultural fields and other village sites where they work.

“Women understand saving and are in the habit of it because they know they might need it for a child’s marriage, for purchasing livestock or for other necessities. Men might earn but they don’t save much at all.”

“We already work in construction sites and farms. If we can do such difficult work, then we can easily do other work. We can also set up shops and tailor clothes. We can do many things — give us proper work.”

- Women in many states drew a link between reduced investment in girl’s education and higher dropout rates due to lack of employment opportunities. Parents question why they should educate their girls if they will not find jobs. So, many of them discontinue their daughters’ education after primary and secondary school.
- Women shared concerns about where to leave their children when they go out to work, implying a lack of child care infrastructure and crèches in work places.

³⁶ A village-based financial intermediary usually composed of 10–20 local women. Members make small regular savings contributions over a few months until there is enough capital in the group to begin lending. In India, many SHGs are ‘linked’ to government banks for the delivery of micro-credit.

GAURAMMA

Toil, sweat, tears and no high

Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta



“We do double work because we do domestic work and the bulk of tobacco farming. Sometimes, I do feel that why do I have to do this double work? But I have to because otherwise, how will we eat?”

It was a full house at the gram sabha³⁷ in Periyapatna, a tobacco-growing belt and administrative unit located in Mysore, which is the “cultural capital” of India’s southern state of Karnataka. 48-year-old Gauramma was in quiet attendance but after the meeting was over, she was the most forthcoming among a group of women tobacco farmers huddled together to share their challenges. From Karnataka’s dominant Gowda caste — primarily agriculturalists — she’s conscious of bringing a guest into her humble surroundings, scrambles to find a chair and clears space to sit. Soft-spoken with a pleasant smile, there is a simplicity and innocence about her manner, a matter-of-factness in her responses and no time for self-pity.

In most developing countries, women constitute a large proportion or majority of the agricultural labour force, both in sheer numbers and their contribution to food production. Women constitute 40 per cent of India’s agricultural work force³⁸ and all farm-related activities. Their average contribution is estimated at 55-66 per cent³⁹ of the total labour. Most of the women farmers are also marginal or small farmers, landless tenant farmers and farm labour. They mostly cultivate on small plots of 1-3 acres and are very often involved in labour-intensive activities such as transplantations and weeding operations. In addition to dependency on rains, they are also limited by lack of access to innovative technologies, capital or credit facilities and low levels of awareness on how to increase production.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Illiterate, small-scale marginal tobacco farmer, seasonal migrant.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Gauramma. I'm married and have two sons and a girl. All three are married. My younger son stays with me along with his family. We have two acres of land and grow tobacco, which is our main source of livelihood. We also grow Ragi⁴⁰ and some other crops but only when it rains. For the last two years, it has rained very little and so we have been working on rich people's farmlands nearby or slightly far away as migrant labour for stretches of 8-15 days at a time.

I work for four months non-stop during the tobacco-growing season. On a small portion of good, fertile land, I first sprinkle the seeds to grow saplings. They have to grow in a secure, controlled environment — there should not be too much sand, shade or rain. Depending on the season, we grow anywhere between 1000-5000 saplings. One sapling gives 35 leaves. Then, I transfer the saplings into tiny containers and nurture and water them for a month before transferring them to the field. There, we sow each one at least 10 centimetres apart.

“We women do a lot more work than our men — I feel this from my heart.”

We women do a lot more work than our men — I feel this from my heart. Men work the tractors in the fields but women do all the hand-based and time-consuming work. It is women who take care for three months daily until the saplings grow into big tobacco leaves. We tend to them, water them, remove weeds regularly and apply fertiliser.

At least 10-15 women work together on a tobacco farmland. It cannot be done alone and so, we hire each other. When the plant is ripe for the leaves to be clipped off, again women do it and

pile them onto the tractor. The entire tractor can be filled in one day but it takes 8-9 hours. Then, we carefully take each leaf and weave it into a rope tied to a stick — it's like making a hair plait and once the stick is covered completely with tobacco leaves, I hang those sticks up in a room behind my house, apply heat for them to dry and then make big bundles to load into a truck.

“I live on medicines and painkillers everyday. The day I don't have medicine, I can't sleep.”

We do double work because we do domestic work and the bulk of tobacco farming. Sometimes, I do feel that why do I have to do this double work? But I have to because otherwise, how will we eat? So, life is difficult — the pressure is always there.

When it's time to sell, mostly men go to the market with the tobacco bundles on a tractor or trucks come to our doorstep through agents as well. If the rains are good, we can grow tobacco properly on our land. For producing 1500 kilograms, the investment is 100,000 rupees (1688 dollars) and the profit is about 50,000 rupees (845 dollars). If it doesn't rain well, then if the investment is 40,000 rupees (675 dollars), you get the same amount back — there is no profit. So, we have to assess how much work to put in if we anticipate losses in some year due to the lack of rainfall. Recently, there has also been inflation. We get different rates for black leaves [40 rupees (0.70 dollars) per kilogram], green leaves [80 rupees (1.35 dollars) per kilogram] and yellow leaves [170 rupees (2.85 dollars) per kilogram], which is the best variety of tobacco. If the government can help us to get the highest rate of 170 rupees per kilogram (2.85 dollars) for all types of tobacco we sell, whether it is black, green or yellow, I will be satisfied and happy.

³⁷ Gram Sabha is a meeting of all the adult citizen voters of the village. It is empowered to support or topple the gram panchayat body, which is the local self-government at the village level in India. This gram sabha can pressure the gram panchayat to take decisions and facilitate the modification of weak decisions, whenever they feel. According to a government act, gram sabha meetings should compulsorily be held two times in a year at a minimum, although they can be convened as and when necessary and as many times as needed.

³⁸ India, Planning Commission, Report of Sub-Group on Gender and Agriculture (New Delhi, 2007), p.6. Available from http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/wrkgrp11/wg11_subgenagr.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

³⁹ Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology. *Impact of WTO on Women in Agriculture* (National Commission for Women, New Delhi, 2005), p. 1. Available from <http://new.nic.in/pdfreports/impact%20of%20wto%20women%20in%20agriculture.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁴⁰ Finger millet, which is abundantly produced in the southern Indian state of Karnataka.

Growing tobacco generates a lot of heat in the body. I try to eat food that cools the body. I used to get a lot of stomach aches. The doctor told me I have stones and need an operation. My chest hurts occasionally but my hands and knees hurt often because of the all the bending in the field. Picking tobacco leaves for hours in the sun gives me headaches. I live on medicines and painkillers everyday. The day I don't have medicine, I can't sleep.

*“When I don’t work
in the field,
my hands and feet
remain cleaner and softer.
Women who don’t work
out in the fields or do as much
physical work as women
farmers remain cleaner
and happier.”*

When I don't work in the field, my hands and feet remain cleaner and softer. Women who don't work out in the fields and do as much physical work as women farmers like me remain cleaner and happier. If I didn't work so much, I could spend more time with my children and grandchildren, take them to school, give them tiffin⁴¹ and help my daughter-in-law out with housework. I could try to earn some income weaving rope and making beds, making Ragi flour at home, stitching and making pillows and bed covers made from saris⁴² — it is also hand-based work but less difficult and tiring.

A day in the life of Gauramma

4:30am-7am: During the tobacco-growing season, I get up by 4:30am; otherwise by 5am or 5:30am. Then I make tea for myself and rice breakfast. If there is yogurt at home, then I mix it in. Otherwise, I just put some *hari mirch*⁴³, salt and tomatoes, which I only buy if they are not expensive. There's no time to think too much about food. Our staple food is *dal*⁴⁴ and rice. We can't live without it. So, I make that for the day and take some for myself to the field for lunch. The rest is for my family members. There's no water at home either so I have to fetch water everyday before I leave for the field, which is latest by 7:30am.

7:30am-6pm: I haven't been able to grow anything on my land for two years because of lack of rain. So, I work on other people's farms for 150-200 rupees (2.5-3.4 dollars) per day. I barely have 10-15 minutes for lunch break and there's no time to rest either. (When I work as migrant labour away from home, I start work at six in the morning and come back at 5:30pm Then I make food after all that work. We take whatever food we need for our stay from home like rice, *dal*, vegetables, spices, etc. It's a lot to carry but it's cheaper to take it along. We're not given food there. I get a daily wage of 250 rupees (4.2 dollars) per day.

6pm-8pm: I wash clothes and also have one cow to tend to when I come back because my son runs a daily needs shop and only comes back at 8-9pm Then I make dinner, which is *dal* and rice again.

8pm-10pm: We eat dinner and then I clean up. My husband drinks but he has not hit me. I clean up and take medicine before going to bed to prevent back and body pains at night.

⁴¹ Lunch box.

⁴² Sari, worn by women in the Indian Subcontinent mostly, is a long piece of cloth draped over an under-skirt and blouse on top.

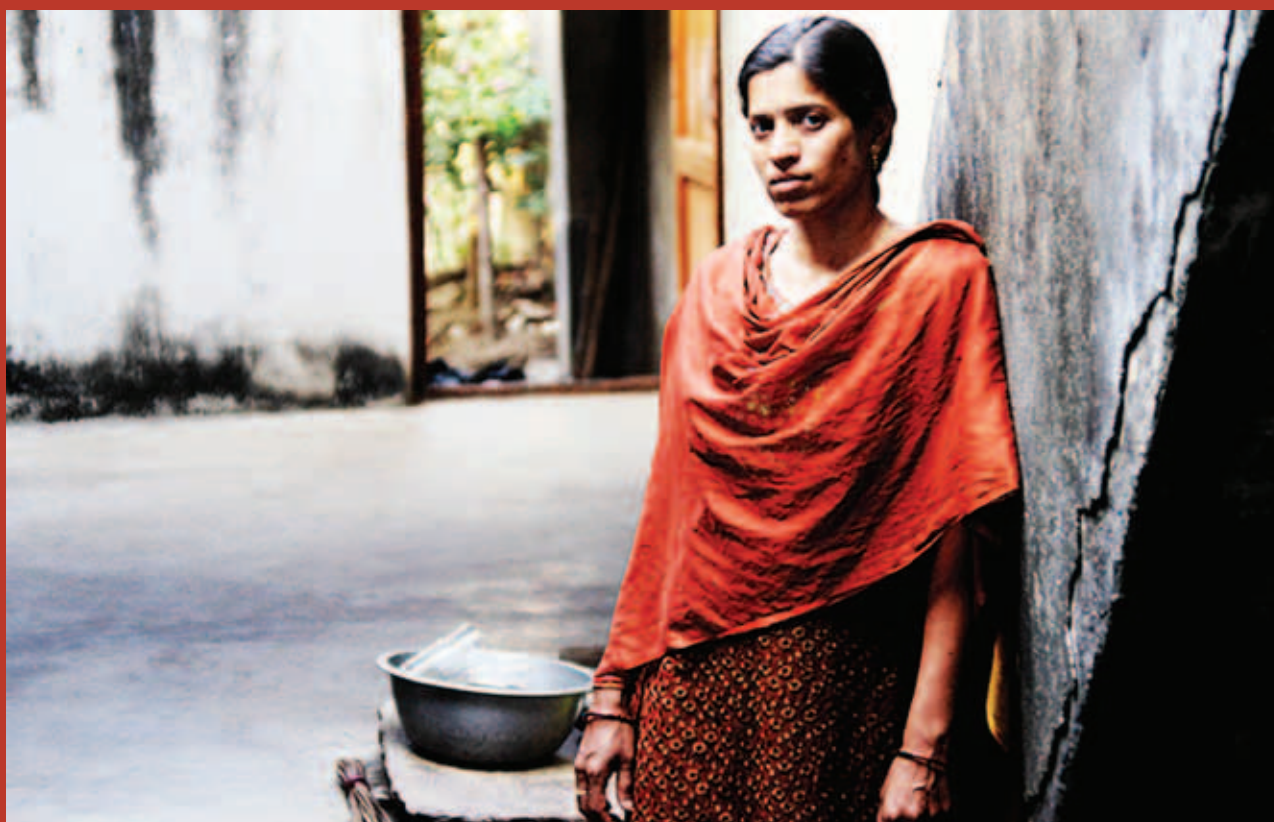
⁴³ Green chillies.

⁴⁴ Lentil or split grain or pulses, common food for consumption in India.

KALYANI SATPATI

No wings beneath my feet

Photo @ UN Women/Pranab K. Aich



“Earlier, I still had a few dreams but now I don’t have any because they never get fulfilled. I did not get any returns from my education. I was better illiterate than having wasted everyone’s energy over nothing.”

With great difficulty, Kalyani’s widowed mother ensured that all her nine children were educated at least till college, so that they would not be dependent on anyone later in life. The youngest of the siblings, 27-year-old Kalyani has been unemployed for four years, facing rejection after rejection, despite having a graduate degree in Computer Science. She lives in Odisha’s Dhenkanal District, a densely forested former princely state located on India’s southeast coast and among the most backward districts in the country. With every passing day, her sense of disillusionment grows. Her inability to support her now old and ailing mother, eats away at her. In a desperate act, she carries her educational certificates wrapped in a plastic sheet in her bag, ready to share them at any chance meeting that might result in a job.

For the past several years, women’s wage employment in the non-farm sector in India has stagnated⁴⁵ against the backdrop of otherwise relatively strong economic growth despite the global downturn. Since 2001, it has possibly decreased⁴⁶ from 25.6 per cent to 23 per cent⁴⁷ as of June 2012. It is also half the male WPR (56 per cent). The wage differentials⁴⁸ between men and women workers also vary widely, both as salaried employees (INR 322 for men; INR 202 for women) and casual labour in rural (INR 149 for men; INR 103 for women) and urban areas (INR 182 for men; INR 111 women).

INTERSECTIONALITY: Educated, graduate in computer science, unemployed, single, father died early, eight siblings, lives with mother.

My name is Kalyani Satpati. My father expired a long time ago. I have two brothers and six sisters. My mother made sure that all nine of us were educated. Everybody in my family has completed graduation but they have been unable to find good jobs.

I graduated with a major in Computer Science. Everything was very good until I completed my education but after that, my problems started. My aim was to get a good government job and

“Clearing the exams was not an issue. The problem is that some people have direct influence with higher authorities and so, are able to get the jobs easily. In fact, at times the job is booked for them and the selection exercise is just a farce.”

earn about 7000-8000 rupees (118-135 dollars) per month, thinking it will be sufficient to be financially independent and yet contribute to the household expenses. But it was not fulfilled.

I took an exam to become a staff nurse and was rejected. I also applied to join the police force, then to a teacher’s post and even in the

banking sector but was rejected everywhere. I am very frustrated because of this constant disappointment. Clearing the exams was not an issue. The problem is that some people have direct influence with higher authorities and so, are able to get the jobs easily. In fact, at times the job is booked for them and the selection exercise is just a farce. People who have more education and money can avail of anything and people like us suffer. We are dependent only on luck. I tried for government jobs but only people with above 60 per cent marks are able to qualify for them. I can understand if they have a high cut-off but if there is manipulation in the selection of candidates, then it is not acceptable.

Then there is the quota system. More than half the seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes⁴⁹ (STs) and Other Backward Classes⁵⁰ (OBCs). They don’t even apply for jobs and their seats are all vacant. People belonging to these communities can come after a long vacation, apply for a job and they will still be able to get it but that is not so for general category people like me. For general seats, the competition is very tough. It is like 2 laddoos⁵¹ and 2,000 rats (Too many candidates applying for too few seats).

Four out of six sisters are yet to be married because we are unable to fulfil the dowry demands made by the families of prospective grooms. In today’s age, nothing is possible without dowry. Everybody is demanding it.

⁴⁵ India, Central Statistical Organisation, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), *Millennium Development Goals, India Country Report* (New Delhi, 2011). Available from http://mospi.nic.in/mospi_new/upload/mdg_2011_24apr12.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁴⁶ Office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Census 2011. Available from http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/workpart.aspx (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁴⁷ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), 68th round survey, Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India, 2011-2012. Available from http://mospi.nic.in/Mospi_New/upload/press%20release-68th-E&U.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Scheduled Tribes refers to specific indigenous peoples whose status is acknowledged to some formal degree by national legislation and the Indian Constitution. The list of Scheduled Tribes consists of 645 district tribes and collectively Scheduled Tribes constitute approximately 8.2 per cent or 84 million of India’s total population of 1.2 billion people. The terms “adivasis” is used interchangeably with Scheduled Tribes and is an umbrella term for a set of ethnic and tribal groups claimed to be the aboriginal population of India. They comprise a substantial indigenous minority of the population of India.

⁵⁰ The list of other backward classes is a dynamic list of castes and communities considered backward and marginalised but which do not fall under Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. Among the most notable recommendations of the first “Backward Classes Commission” set up by Presidential order in 1953 in India was that all “women” be treated as a backward class.

⁵¹ Ball-shaped popular sweet made of flour, sugar and other ingredients.

The minimum dowry demand is for 200,000 rupees (3377 dollars). This is for any kind of boy. Where do we get that kind of money from if there is no employment? There are very few educated people who don't want dowry.

When we were young we had a lot of farmland and we used to earn a lot from the crops we grew. That was our main source of income but nowadays, no one is ready to work on the agricultural land. When the government is giving rice for 1-2 rupees (0.02-0.03 dollars) per kilogram, then who will work on farmlands? So, we have land but it is lying barren.

When I was studying, my aim was to become a teacher and so I focussed on the subject of education. As soon as I completed, the topic was removed from the state subjects and so, there were no more vacancies. I worked as a teacher in a private school but the salary was not sufficient for me. It was 800-1000 rupees (13.5-17 dollars) per month — too much work for too little pay. Taking private tutorials is very difficult. Government school teachers don't teach during the day but tell students to come to them for private tutorials later at home. So, the students obviously go to them. Whether they learn something or not is of no concern to these teachers.

*“I try to sleep and be positive
about the next day but
the disappointment has
already set in very deep.”*

Taking a loan and starting something on my own is difficult. I am scared of the government system and corruption. And what is the guarantee that the business will be successful? With regular jobs, one is at least sure that you will get some money at the end of the month.

Right now, I am only taking tuitions for 8th and 9th class students in computer science and nothing else. I want to get a job desperately for the sake of my mother. She has suffered throughout life to raise us and give us this kind of life. I cannot be a burden on her anymore. I have no wish or desire of my own. Earlier, I still had a few dreams but now I don't have any dreams because they never get fulfilled. I did not get any returns from my education. I was better an illiterate than having wasted everyone's energy over nothing.

A day in the life of Kalyani

5:30am-9am: I usually wake up at 5:30am and after freshening up, I prepare tea for everyone. I then do other household-related work, including preparing lunch for my sister. Since I don't have anything else to do, I fulfil such responsibilities.

9am-11am: My sister leaves for her work while I stay with my mother and help her with routine activities. I wish I was also doing something; it would have made my mother very happy.

12pm-6pm: I reheat the food prepared in the morning for lunch and then am usually free until 6pm. So, I try to search newspapers for job opportunities or speak to people about future possibilities. Most of the times, I end up being disappointed. When I am idle, all sorts of thoughts cross my mind.

6pm-8pm: I look forward to my sister coming back home and I prepare dinner for all of us. Sometimes she helps me but I feel guilty and so, ask her not to.

8pm-10pm: We have our dinner and all of us sit together and watch some television. My sister tells me about her day. Sometimes, I don't like it. I do not express any demands or wishes in front of anyone because I don't want to feel like a burden. Everyone goes to sleep by 10pm. I try to sleep and be positive about the next day but the disappointment has already set in very deep.

SAVITRI BOIYAN

Life's all downhill

Photo @ UN Women/Praveen Kaliga



“If someone is sick in our village, we have to carry him or her down on a cot for three kilometres; sometimes people just die on the way down.”

Belonging to the Sabar tribe, Savitri lives on a remote hilltop in Gajapati District, located in the southern coastal state of Odisha and among the 250 most backward districts in India. There are no schools, colleges, hospitals, proper roads or reliable electricity connections available in her village. To earn income, she carries a bundle of broomsticks on her head and a polythene bag containing some rice and water for the day and travels to the local weekly market, which is 8-9 kilometres away from her village. On a good day, she earns 50-80 rupees (0.85-1.35 dollars) by selling the broomsticks. She knows the money is not sufficient but has no other livelihood options. Her greatest fear is that her children will lead the same life of insecurity and deprivation that she has.

It is widely known and recognised⁵² that the most marginalised and poorest people have been largely by-passed by MDG progress. Tribal people, living mostly in hilly, forested or remote terrain, constitute 8.6 per cent⁵³ (approximately 84 million people) of India's population. Almost half the tribal population lives in poverty and their poverty level⁵⁴ is closer to where the general population was 20 years ago. At 52 per cent, the literacy rate⁵⁵ among tribal women in rural India is more than 20 per cent lower than the national average (74 per cent⁵⁶). Child and maternal mortality remain much higher⁵⁷ among tribal people than the general population. Tribal women are also the most malnourished and tribal children are most likely to be undernourished, stunted or wasted than any other social grouping.⁵⁸

INTERSECTIONALITY: Tribal woman, illiterate, lives on remote hilltop, lives in a stone house, marginal farmer.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Savitri Boiyan. I am from Badaonjao village, located in the hills. I am married and have two children. In our tribal culture, we choose our own husbands. The only important thing is the girl's consent.

“There was no material available to build our houses except big stones. We used to heat these big stones in fire to a very high temperature. When they would weaken, we would break them into small manageable pieces and use those to build our houses. We used mud to bind the stones together. After the rains, we had to build our houses afresh.”

Since my birth, I have been living in the same place. My father and mother also stay in the same village. When we were young, there was nothing in my village but forest — no electricity, no water, nothing. There was no material available to build our houses except big stones. We used to heat these big stones in fire to a very high temperature. When they would weaken, we would break them into small manageable pieces and use those to build our houses. We used mud to bind the stones together. After the rains, we

had to build our houses afresh. The land on which our house stands is not even balanced. The condition is slightly better today but there is still no material available to build houses. We cannot use cement or any other binding material because vehicles needed to transport these materials cannot reach our village.

It is very difficult to farm here, too. We try to grow Ragi, maize and other crops. We cannot grow paddy because there is no water available for irrigation. There are no fields as such; it is a cleared forestland. We only farm for self-consumption and even that produce is not sufficient. It has also decreased with time. There is no food security of any kind. We live a very day-to-day existence — we might have something to eat today and might not have anything tomorrow.

I am not educated and so I cannot apply anywhere for work. To work in someone else's field as agricultural labour requires owning some cattle, which we can't afford. Also, where is the time? I have to finish all the household work and I live on the hilltop. I try earning by selling broomsticks, tamarind and *tendu*⁵⁹ leaves but there is not enough money in it. One broomstick is for 40-50 rupees (0.70-0.85 dollars) or whatever price we can get for it. Nothing is fixed. It takes three kilometres to just reach the base of the hill and then another 3-4 kilometres to the nearest bus stand. From there we either have to take a bus and spend money or walk down another two kilometres to sell our things in the local weekly

⁵² *The Millennium Development Goals Report*, 2011 (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.11.I.10) Available from http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/11_MDG%20Report_EN.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁵³ Office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Census 2011. Available from http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/workpart.aspx (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁵⁴ Maitreyi Bordia Das, Gillette Hall, Soumya Kapoor, and Denis Nikitin, “India's Adivasis,” in *Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Development*, Gillette Hall and Harry Anthony Patrinos, eds. (2012). Available from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTINDPEOPLE/Resources/407801-1271860301656/India_brief_clean_0110.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁵⁵ Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI), Government of India, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), 2009-2010. Available from <http://www.nird.org.in/Rural%20Development%20Statistics%202011-12/data/sec-10.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁵⁶ “India's literacy rate rises to 74 %: Census,” *Livemint* (New Delhi), 31 March 2011. Available from <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/UtHyRhLul24cT4TlhgyrQN/India8217s-literacy-rate-rises-to-74-Census.html> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁵⁷ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), 2005-06. Available from <http://www.tribal.gov.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201306110212435208455HEALTHPROFIL EOFSCHEDULEDTRIBES.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁵⁸ Fred Arnold, Sulabha Parasuraman, P. Arokiasamy and Monica Kothari. 2009. *Nutrition in India*. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3), India, 2005-06. Mumbai: International Institute for Population Sciences, Calverton, Maryland, USA: ICF Macro.

⁵⁹ Coromandel Ebony or East India Ebony, which is a species of flowering tree that is native to India and Sri Lanka. Tendu leaves make excellent wrappers and are responsible, in part, for the success of the *biddi*, a thin Indian cigarette filled with tobacco flake. *Bidi – A short history*. Current Science, Bangalore, India. Current Science Association.

market. The money earned is not even sufficient to buy onions, peppers, oil or anything else. So, my focus is on producing food for my family so that we can at least eat something.

We want to live in the plains but there is no land available there. We don't have enough money to buy land even for a house, so we have no option but to stay on the hilltop. Who will give us the land? Who will let us stay on their land? If we lived in the plains, we would find better employment. Everybody there is able to do something. They are leading a better life than us. They are more modern. There have been changes in our village, too, but we are still lagging

*“If we lived in the plains,
we would find better employment.
Everybody there is able to do
something. They are leading a
better life than us. They are more
modern. There have been changes
in our village, too, but we are still
lagging far behind.”*

far behind. The poles are there but we do not receive any electricity. There is no availability of drinking water, especially in the months of April and May. We really have to struggle for those two months. We have to travel a minimum of three kilometres to access an *anganwadi*⁶⁰ or medical centre. If someone is very sick in our village we have to carry him or her down on a cot for three kilometres; sometimes people just die on the way down. We have a school, but hardly anyone comes to teach because of the up-hill climb. I got my younger son admitted in a school but he had to walk a distance of five kilometres each way everyday. So, he left it.

It is unlikely that there will be a working school or hospital in my village ever. I want to stay in the plains because it will take a lot of time for development to reach the hilltops. I don't want any car, money or big things. I just want enough for my family to live and eat well.

A day in the life of Savitri

3am-5am: I usually wake up at 3am and get out of bed even if I don't want to. If I don't, then the entire routine for the day gets disturbed. After freshening up, I immediately start working and want to finish everything quickly, so I can get some rest before leaving home for work, which is latest by 8am

5am-7am: I wake up my children and husband so that they can start their day. Meanwhile, I quickly prepare the first meal of the day so that everyone is served in time.

7am-8am: After having our meal, I leave for the field or forest with my husband. I ask my elder son to go to school but I do not know if he goes or not. Since I'm out working all day, I can't keep a check on him.

8am-2pm: I work in the field with my husband so that we can get something to eat. When I am in the forest, I collect forest produce all day. I get very tired working long hours in the sun but cannot refuse to do it. It is my *kartavya*.⁶¹

3pm-4pm: By 3pm, I reach home and tend to my forest produce — it has to be done the same day, otherwise the whole day's hard work goes to waste.

4pm-6pm: I take a bath and then prepare dinner. My husband usually goes out to drink with his friends.

6pm-7pm: My children and I finish our dinner because I know there is no point waiting for my husband. He usually returns home late after 7pm. If there is no quarrel in the house after my husband comes back, we usually go off to sleep by 7pm. I get so tired after the day's work that it hardly takes me two minutes to go off to sleep.

⁶⁰ *Anganwadi* means “courtyard shelter” in Hindi and refers to nutrition centres that were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services Schemes to combat child malnutrition and hunger at the village level.

⁶¹ “Duty” in Hindi.

LACHAMMA

Home is where the heart and hunger is

Photo @ UN Women/Praveen Kaliga



“The routine at the construction site was only work and sleep; there was no interaction because everybody was so tired. Village life is certainly better but there is no source of income here.”

Lachamma keeps staring at her hands, which have developed hard skin edges, signalling that she's been engaged in hard physical labour to earn a living. She lives in Salur, a predominantly tribal municipality about 100 kilometres away from the port city of Vishakapatnam, located on India's south-eastern coast. Dressed in a sari⁶² with torn ends, she is a widow and 40-45 years of age although she feels like an 80-year-old “buddi⁶³ amma.”⁶⁴ Desperate for regular income, her physical appearance is telling of her abject state, which has forced her into seasonal migration and to perform backbreaking labour at construction sites far away from home. She vows never to go through that anguish and drudgery again, even if she goes hungry.

The United Nations International Convention⁶⁵ on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as far back as 1990. It constituted a comprehensive treaty for the protection of migrant workers' rights and entered into force in 2003. Although India has not ratified the treaty, in 2001 an estimated 309 million⁶⁶ people (approximately 30 per cent of the population) were recorded as migrants in the country. Over the 30-year period between 1971-2001, the increase in female migrants (57.2 per cent) was more than double⁶⁷ of men (21.8 per cent). Migration⁶⁸ can provide a vital source of income for women and their families and earn them greater autonomy, self-confidence and social status. However, particularly if they are seasonal or irregular migrants, it also exposes them to greater possible verbal, physical and sexual abuse, poor housing and living conditions, low wages and economic exploitation, long working hours, insecurity and upon return, broken families, ill-health and poverty.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Seasonal migrant, tribal woman, illiterate, widow, abandoned by children, hunger, landless, asset less, unskilled, no source of livelihood in village.

My name is Lachamma and I am a widow. I have two children — a girl and a boy. They are both educated but don't live with me anymore. I am so old now that I must be 80 years old.

As a young girl, I remember working a lot in the forest and fields with my family. Three days after my birth, my mother expired. My father remarried soon after. My stepmother's treatment towards me was not very good and I used to feel very bad about it. After some time, my father expired, too. Our stepmother abandoned my younger sister and me and so, the responsibility to take care of her fell on me.

“When I left the village, I was told that it is not very hard work but when I went to the construction site, I found out that the work was very hard and we were not paid enough for our work.”

My sister and I used to make very little money and whatever we made was spent on her education. I took it upon myself to educate her so that she could do something with her life. She completed 9th standard and is an *anganwadi*⁶⁹ worker today. At the time, when I was young, I did not realise the importance of education because there was so much work to do but today, when I see others, I realise that I should have studied, too.

My neighbour, who is a close family member and also like my father, took the initiative and got me married to a boy from the neighbouring village right after I gained puberty. My husband was a good man; he smoked but never drank. He never beat me even once. He understood that I had to take care of my sister and supported me. He died at a very young age, when my children were still babies. He suffered from tuberculosis. I brought up my children all by myself and financed their weddings but they abandoned me and now, at this age, there is no one to support me. I used to work in the fields earlier but now there is no work. So, I chose to work outside our village. Since I live all alone, my neighbours forced me to come along with them and I was told that I would be paid good money for work outside the village. The widow pension of 190 rupees (3.2 dollars) per month is not sufficient.

I travelled from my village to Vizianagaram, which is about 60 kilometres or an hour away by bus. From there, I went to Bijopur by train and then travelled the whole day to the construction site by bus. It was a very tiring journey. I went there twice — this year and the year before last, for two months each.

Life at the construction site was very tiring. I have never done such work. I used to sieve and dump mud from nine in the morning to six in the evening, with only a lunch break in the afternoon. We were three people working together, taking turns to sieve and carry the sand. We were paid 130 rupees (2.2 dollars)

⁶² Also spelt as “Saree,” it is a strip of unstitched cloth, worn by women, ranging from four to nine yards in length that is draped over the body in various styles which is native to the Indian Subcontinent.

⁶³ Old or aged.

⁶⁴ Amma means mother in many languages, originally derived from the East Syriac word Emma. It can also mean grandmother. In colloquial usage in the Indian Subcontinent it is often used to describe an old woman in a somewhat mocking manner.

⁶⁵ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/cmw.htm> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁶⁶ R. Lusome and R.B. Bhagat, “Trends and Patterns of Internal Migration in India, 1971-2001” 7-9 June, 2006, Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Indian Association for the Study of Population (IASP), Thiruvananthapuram (Eldis, 2009). Available from <http://community.eldis.org/.59b6a372/Trends%20and%20Patterns%20of%20Internal%20Migration%20in%20India%201971-2001.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Susie Jolly and Hazel Reeves, “Gender and Migration”, Cutting Edge Pack, BRIDGE, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) (Brighton, IDS Bookshop, 2005). Available from <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/CEP-Mig-OR.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁶⁹ *Anganwadi* means “courtyard shelter” in Hindi and refers to nutrition centres that were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services Schemes to combat child malnutrition and hunger at the village level.

per day and provided food and a makeshift shelter. It was very difficult to live in those houses. Everybody had to cram up and sleep in one room. The routine there was only work and sleep; there was no interaction because everybody was so tired. The contractor at the construction site did keep a first aid kit but he would not even give us a tablet if we fell sick. Even when we were sick, we had to work. They were not concerned about our health; we helped each other. My village people were my main support. Whenever I felt feverish, I used to drink hot water to get better.

It was very tiring work; nothing like the kind of work we used to do in the forests. I felt cheated because we were told that the work would not be very laborious.

When I left the village, I was told that it is not very hard work but when I went there, I found out that the work was very hard and we were not paid enough for our work. We were also not used to it. I felt very bad there. There was no way I could have left that place alone and we could not leave the construction site before completing two months.

Village life is certainly better but there is no source of income here. I used to earn 150-200 rupees (2.5-3.4 dollars) per day in the village through the government employment guarantee scheme but the work is not always available. It is only for 100 days and the agricultural season is also for a period of 3-4 months only. For the rest of the year, there is a gap.

Still, I missed my village all the time when I was at the construction site. Sometimes, I used to cry in the night and couldn't sleep. I will never go back to that kind of work now.

A day in the life of Lachamma

5am-8am: We used to wake up by 5:30am and stand in queues to use the toilet. I used to relieve myself in the nearby fields and take a bath in the makeshift bathrooms we had created ourselves. It was a horrible experience.

8am-9am: We were given tea and bread for breakfast. We are not used to such food but adjusted somehow.

9am-7pm: We used to work at the construction site with a lunch break in the afternoon. It was very tiring work; nothing like the kind of work we used to do in the forests. I felt cheated because we were told that the work would not be very laborious. I did not want to do it but I had no other option till the work was completed.

7pm-8pm: We would wait in queue to be served dinner.

8pm-9pm: After dinner, we would go back to our rooms to sleep. There were too many people sharing the same room and could hardly find space to even fit somewhere. I used to cry often thinking of my village and the forest. I did not want to stay there. My village people used to console me and so I stayed, thinking that it will all be over soon.

NUTRITION, FOOD SECURITY & HUNGER

Food security⁷⁰ exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, as defined by FAO. Conversely, a household is considered food-secure⁷¹ when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation.

Nutrition⁷² is the sum total of the processes involved in taking and utilising food substances by which growth, repair and maintenance of the body are accomplished. It involves ingestion, digestion, absorption and assimilation. Nutrients are stored by the body in various forms and drawn upon when the food intake is not sufficient.

Hunger⁷³ is the uneasy or painful sensation and the exhausted condition caused by want of food and the scarcity of food in a country.

Starvation⁷⁴ is a state of extreme hunger resulting from lack of essential nutrients over a prolonged period.

INTERSECTIONALITY: As the definitions above reveal, hunger or starvation are the most basic and immediate consequences of poverty, while nutrition and food security are holistic measures for long-term development.

Women, especially in rural societies, are the fulcrum around which a family's food security revolves. A majority of rural women are engaged in agriculture as small-scale and marginal farmers and when successive rain failure threatens their livelihoods and food security, women are the first to feel the impact and respond to the threat. In recent times in India small-scale farming is becoming increasingly unviable and is more acutely impacting women, who form the majority of marginal and small-scale farmers. They are thus being forced to work as daily wage agricultural labour or migrant labour to make ends meet and feed their children and families. Women are also taking on the traditional breadwinning role of men as they now form the majority of labour employed through the government employment guarantee scheme in village construction works. The government's public distribution system is not addressing the basic food needs of poor households adequately due to corruption, leakage and incorrect identification of the poor.

In addition, existing social and cultural norms still promote nutritional discrimination especially in rural households. The nutrition of boys and men is given priority over that of girls and women and the whole family's nutrition takes precedence over that of the woman of the household. In marginalised populations, undernourishment and malnutrition are pronounced due to remoteness,

⁷⁰ FAO Practical Guide: Basic Concepts of Food Security (EC - FAO Food Security Programme, 2008). Available from www.fao.org/docrep/013/al936e/al936e00.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁷¹ Food Security, Policy Brief, FAO, June 2006, Issue 2. Available from ftp://ftp.fao.org/es/ESA/policybriefs/pb_02.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013)

⁷² www.healthguidance.org/entry/9975/1/What-Is-the-Definition-of-Nutrition.html (accessed 10 June 2013)

⁷³ World Hunger Education Service, World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics (2013). Available from www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm (accessed 10 June 2013)

⁷⁴ wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn (accessed 10 June 2013)

lack of livelihood options and structural neglect and discrimination. There is also an increased threat to the traditional sources of nutrition and protein accessed from forests by tribal people due to escalating conflict over natural resources, found in abundant supply where such populations are concentrated. Again, single women (elderly, widows, disabled, orphaned, abandoned, living with disability or HIV and AIDS) are found to be the most vulnerable in terms of food insecurity, hunger and starvation.

MDGs: Nutrition, Food Security & Hunger

 MDG 1 - ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER	
TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 1C. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	1.8 Prevalence of underweight children under-five years of age
	1.9 Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption

1. Addressing starvation and extreme hunger is certainly the most immediate priority of any country's food policy. However, it was a minimalist target to set for an otherwise ambitious global development framework with a 15-year timeline, which should have included targets to promote strong nutritional intake at the individual level, especially among the most vulnerable sections of the population and strongly bolster food security at the country level.
2. Consequently, the MDG framework failed to factor in multiple aspects with a bearing on addressing hunger and food security such as sufficient food production, equitable and effective distribution and factors such as rise of food prices, which can be extraneous.
3. Every third woman in India is under-nourished and every second woman is anaemic.⁷⁵ In rural India, anaemia and malnourishment is more pronounced among women and girls due to the nutritional discrimination⁷⁶ they face within the family. Pregnant women are likely to be more anaemic than non-pregnant women⁷⁷. Maternal under-nourishment⁷⁸, in turn, can lead to birth of underweight babies who may be more prone to illness as children and adults. It has serious adverse implications for physical growth (stunting) and intellectual development. Maternal deprivation adversely affects the health of the foetus, which, in turn, leads to long-term health risks that extend into childhood and adulthood. Despite such alarming trends of systemic under-nourishment found among women over time, the MDG on hunger did not factor any gender-specific indicators, or crucial social, cultural, economic, geographic and generational factors responsible for these trends or the strong links between women's nutrition and child health.
4. Although the goal did include an indicator on minimum level of dietary energy consumption, its efficacy was again diluted due to the emphasis on national aggregates and calculating "proportion of population" rather than more direct and accountable indicators such as "number of people" living below a minimum level of dietary energy consumption. It was also not entirely clear what the minimum level of dietary energy consumption entailed as measures of calorie and nutritional consumption also differ from country to country, like poverty lines.

⁷⁵ Aasha Kapur Mehta, Sanjay Pratap and Akhtar Ali, "Integrated Child Health Services," No Policy is Gender Neutral, UN Women (New Delhi, 2012). Available from www.unwomensouthasia.org/category/digital-library/un-women-resources/ (accessed 10 June 2013)

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Women of India Speak

- Many women in different states identified shifting weather patterns and successive rain and crop failure as the reasons for increased food insecurity and poverty. These women said they can no longer work on their fields and climate change manifests in the shape of reduction in crop yield as well as loss of fertile soil. The effects are being felt in the form of displacement from their primary occupation, food insecurity, debt burden and, in extreme cases, landlessness.

Strength comes from eating proper food but women think of themselves last.

- Women are concerned about the impact of climate change on nutrition and increased household expenditure as they now have to buy vegetables instead of growing them. They also screen food items based on cost rather than nutrition. The reduced intake of nutritious food is especially impacting women, who eat the last or least due to their nurturing caregivers roles and nutritional discrimination in rural households. **Profile 15** on page 81 examines the devastating impact of climate change on rural livelihoods, especially in entirely rain-dependent areas and how it is adversely impacting nutrition and leading to extreme food insecurity.
- Some women pointed out that food security is not an issue with villages who have alternate irrigation sources, as they are not dependent on the rains. These villages have green pastures and the yield is excellent. On the other hand, villages without irrigation are suffering from crop failure and food insecurity and are caught in a debt trap. Women from these villages shared that they faced such a crisis this year, that their fields dried up and there was no food or water even for the livestock. Women belonging to this group reported a total regression in their standards of living. **Profile 7** on page 35 sheds light on how the lack of livelihood options and resulting hunger are forcing women to increasingly work as migrants without any social security, social protection or workers' rights.
- Some women reported cases of severe malnutrition among women and children in their villages.
- Women cited challenges with the government food distribution⁷⁹ system, targeted mainly at people living below the poverty line. They shared that food insecurity is so acute that they have witnessed incidents of violence over even one kilogram of rice distribution.

“Earlier women used to eat well; they ate desi ghee (clarified butter) and had more strength; now they use refined oil, and are, therefore, weak. Earlier women used to eat healthy food and chakki ka atta (grounded flour). Earlier they didn’t work outside so much because there wasn’t so much alcoholism among men and they used to work more. Men were also more aware of their responsibilities earlier. Now women have to work more because their men are in the habit of drinking and remaining idle.”

⁷⁹ Public Distribution System (PDS) is an Indian food security system established by the Government of India, which distributes subsidised food and non-food items to people living below the national poverty line.

- Many women drew a link between alcoholism and greater poverty, food insecurity and gender-based violence in the household.
- Women shared that there is better availability of nutritional facilities for children through *anganwadis*⁸⁰ and increased number of institutional deliveries, resulting in improved overall health of mothers and children. However, women living in remote areas reported concerns about nutrition centres being too far from their villages to access, inadequate infrastructure of the centres and arbitrary distribution of meals.
- Some women pointed out that ensuring nutrition for people with disabilities requires greater attention but there was positive feedback regarding the current availability “food cards” for people living with HIV (PLHIV) in some places.

“Men are not bothered if there is anything in the house to eat or not but at the time of eating, they want a full meal. If it is not provided or served late, it becomes a reason for violence”

⁸⁰ *Anganwadi* means “courtyard shelter” in Hindi and refers to nutrition centres that were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services Schemes to combat child malnutrition and hunger at the village level.

EDUCATION & LITERACY

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) identifies the relationship between literacy, education and development by first defining⁸¹ **development** as a *process for enlarging people's choices, which primarily reflect the desire to lead a long and healthy life; acquire basic knowledge and have access to resources essential for a decent standard of living.*

Development thus is thought of as a **dynamic process**, which empowers people and promotes important changes in their lives but also requires the participation of educated, skilled and competent people in order to take place.

Based on the above, it defines⁸² **education** as a *process that provides knowledge, information and skills, which, in turn bring about desirable changes in the way people think, feel and act. They also build a strong sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and contribute very consciously to the realisation of human potential.* The impact of education on development thus depends on content and teaching methods. For education to become meaningful, it must provide the knowledge and skills of reading, writing, simple arithmetic, and problem solving for improving the quality of life, which implies⁸³ **literacy**, defined by UNESCO as the *“ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.”*

Education, organised and oriented along the lines mentioned above, UNESCO argues, will have a lasting impact on income, agricultural productivity, fertility rate, birth spacing, pre and post-natal health, nutrition, knowledge, attitudes and values. People with reasonable literacy and numeracy skills tend to produce more farm crops, have limited number of children and enjoy a relatively better quality of life.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Lack of education, employment and financial independence determine, shape and perpetuate women's subordinate status in their households, marriages and society. Several factors hinder girls' education, especially higher education — distance to schools and colleges, security concerns, poverty, poor infrastructure such as poor roads and lack of sanitation, heavy rains, social norms and pressures of contributing to household work, fetching water, early marriage, producing children and working on farmlands. All of the above result in higher dropout rates among girls, especially after primary school. Alcoholism and gender-based violence in the household also impact children's education adversely. Adult women suffer from very low levels of literacy and thus find it difficult to access their basic entitlements, leading to a life of hardship and struggle and exposing them to economic exploitation. Women belonging to marginalised communities such as scheduled tribes and castes similarly suffer from low levels of literacy due to historic neglect, social discrimination, poverty, socio-economic factors, living in remote areas and inaccessibility to schools and colleges.

⁸¹ UNESCO, “Relationship between literacy, education and development,” (Training Manual for Local Government Representatives in Non-Formal Education). Available from <http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/TrainingManual/MODULE1.PDF> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

MDGs: Education & Literacy



MDG 2 – ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 2A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	2.1 Net enrolment ratio in primary education
	2.2 Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary
	2.3 Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds, women and men

1. Based on the definitions and concepts above, while parity in number of girls and boys attending school is important to promote gender equality of a certain kind, the quality of education is equally important, if not more, so that children can actually learn, absorb, gain knowledge, grasp concepts, open and grow their minds and develop the capacity for clear, original and independent thinking. For these to take shape, especially for girls and women, other enabling factors⁸⁴ in their environments, referred to in the intersectionality section above, are crucial.
2. Evidence also demonstrates⁸⁵ that enrolment and completion rates are more accurate indicators than the ratio of girls to boys in schools.
3. Although female literacy is a good indicator of women's advancement, the quality of the literacy data can be questioned⁸⁶ as some countries collect literacy information using sophisticated and comprehensive techniques while others are not even able to provide the most basic information. Different countries also measure literacy differently.
4. The MDG framework as a whole failed to address social exclusion implicitly or explicitly, which has meant that certain categories of women with historically low levels of education and requiring targeted attention have instead been largely by-passed. In India, they include adult women, tribal women, *Dalit*⁸⁷ women and Muslim women.
5. The MDG framework also missed vital components of education such as vocational education, legal education and life skills, all of which have very strong utility for poor people with little or no formal literacy.

Profile 8 on page 46 sheds light on the impact and pitfalls of low literacy among adult women in rural India, the resulting economic exploitation, inability to access basic entitlements and the increased vulnerability, especially of single women.

Profile 9 on 49 takes a journey into the world of a Muslim woman, who managed to get a good education and professional opportunities unlike a majority of women from her community, but not without going through all the hoops of resistance to her mobility, freedom and choices from childhood into adulthood.

⁸⁴ Jamilah Ariffin, "Gender Critiques of the Millennium Development Goals: An Overview and an Assessment," Paper presented at International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), 31st International Conference on Social Progress and Social Justice, 16-20 August 2004, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Available from www.docstoc.com/docs/27903190/A-Gender-Critique-of-the-Millennium-Development-Goals (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Dalit* or Scheduled Caste is a designation for a group of people regarded as "untouchable" and occupying the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system, which ordered and ranked humanity by innate spiritual purity.

Women of India Speak

- On the positive front, women felt that awareness levels have increased among rural people about the importance of education and health. This has helped accelerate development and improve living standards. Women are more awakened and have started raising their voices. In some communities and villages, women's self-help groups are vigilant about girl child education and are monitoring the activities of government programmes.
- Women also reported positive changes in primary education and improvement in the functioning of schools. They felt that there is no discrimination between girls and boys. However, some women did share that poor rural families still prefer to invest in education for boys rather than girls, especially beyond primary level. Others alluded to subtle caste exclusion and differential behaviour in child care and nutrition services delivered in villages through government schemes.
- Girls who complete secondary school are getting jobs such as managing the *anganwadi*⁸⁸, which is a good trend. Those who study further are getting private jobs in hospitals as nurses or in schools as teachers but these are still few.
- Several factors such as distance, inaccessibility, safety and lack of transportation still constrain girl's education, especially after primary school.
- Gender roles remain an impediment for education-related growth for girls, as they are expected to assist their mothers in daily household activities, taking away time from their study or play, both of which are important for experiencing childhood and overall growth. Social norms and pressures for early marriage among girls in rural households are also strong inhibiting factors against their education.

“Girls have to work and they help their mothers in cooking, cleaning and going to the forest. Boys? They play cricket”

“If someone has the means like a car or motorbike, then they drop their girls to school or college. If they can afford even a horse-pulled rickshaw, it is possible. Most of us are poor, so how do we send them? We can't send them alone. If someone's the daughter of a government official or has a government job or a professional job or has some land and their farming work is good and abundant, they can study well; those who are poor cannot.”

- Poverty came up repeatedly as a constraining factor for investing in girl's education. Some women shared that poor families tend to discontinue girls' studies after primary school as it is free until then.

- Women living in remote areas cited rains and bad roads, lack of electricity and generally poor infrastructure as constraining factors for girl's education.

⁸⁸ *Anganwadi* means “courtyard shelter” in Hindi and refers to nutrition centres that were started by the Indian government in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services Schemes to combat child malnutrition and hunger at the village level.

- Although the importance of education, especially for girls, has increased among tribal communities, literacy levels are still very low among tribal women. Women also cited untimely delivery of study material, school uniforms and scholarships as contributing factors for dropouts, especially among girls. Teachers in hostel-based schools and colleges admonish girls for returning to their villages frequently to attend festivals and family functions, which also leads to dropouts.
- There is an increased trend of sending children to private convent schools in tribal areas, which cost more than government schools. Since parents prefer to invest in educating their sons more, the education of girls suffers.
- Literacy levels among adult women also remain very low. Some women estimated that more than 70 per cent of adult women are illiterate in their villages. However, 90 per cent of girls are attending schools and the 10 per cent who are not studying, are from very poor families.
- Women drew a strong link between alcoholism and its negative impact on children's education.
- In Rajasthan, elected women representatives felt that although it is good for women to study, they might have to deal with more oppression and domestic violence, suggesting a possible backlash to woman's education and employment, especially in settings with entrenched patriarchy and feudalism.
- Women acknowledged that awareness levels about government schemes and services, including for education, are still very low, especially in remote areas.

*“Our (tribal) girls
have to catch the local train to
reach school or college – still they
are studying and working hard
under candlelight.”*

MAYA DEVI

‘Twas fate’s folly or I’d know ABC



Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta

“Educated people know how to talk, negotiate, do their own work and appreciate its value. I had to be at the mercy of other people and work in their houses and fields. Since we are simpletons, we just took whatever money we got for our labour.”

Maya Devi is one of those granny figures everyone loves – she’s got a quick wit, rustic humour and is slightly overbearing in a caring and warm sort of way. Beneath her uncommonly jovial and confident nature hides a back story of a 72-year old widow who had a child marriage, lost her parents and husband early, leaving her to fend for herself and raise four daughters alone in deeply patriarchal and feudal Rajasthan – a life of hard knocks that is all-too-common among women there. Despite it or perhaps because of it, she wears an air of cool, as she amusingly oscillates between making fun of the “gentle manners” and “low threshold” of the educated and yet, bemoans her own fate for never having studied herself.

In 2010, about 50 per cent⁸⁹ of the entire adult female population (aged 15 years and above) in India could not read or write – far below⁹⁰ the 25 per cent of adult males who are illiterate. Adult illiteracy among women is particularly high in rural areas, especially among socially marginalised communities. Although a few government schemes⁹¹ exist in India to address functional literacy, there has been an increase of just 2-3 per cent⁹² in male and female adult literacy rates over the past decade. In the absence of critical forward momentum in this arena, women in rural India continue to face major impediments in accessing their basic entitlements, live lives of hardship and struggle and remain highly vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and violence.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Illiterate, orphaned and widowed at an early age, mother of four daughters, lack of land and assets, daily wage agricultural labourer.

Footnotes overleaf

I was maybe just around 10 years old when I was married. My parents were poor and at that time, there was no tradition to educate girls and send them out of the house. Also, I started helping my mother with all the household work at a very young age. So, there was neither the time nor the money to get educated. My parents were mainly worried about earning some income, feeding their children and getting us married. After some time, they passed away.

*"I have four daughters.
My husband died when
they were very young.
I've brought them up and
got them all married.
None of my daughters could study.
I'm not even sure how
I managed to feed them,
let alone educate them."*

I have four daughters. My husband died when they were very young. I've brought them up and got them all married. None of my daughters could study. I'm not even sure how I managed to feed them, let alone educate them. I did have the desire to educate them but it was not possible. I also had to protect them and take responsibility for their security since their father passed away early. I worked in other people's fields, did physical labour all day, filled water in some rich man's house — I did whatever work I could find so that my girls would not have to work outside.

I didn't have any dreams. I just thought that let life pass by somehow getting a square meal a day, that's all. Studying was not in my destiny. I do think that if I had been educated, I might have become something or got a job and earned some money. My pension would have kept automatically coming into the bank. In fact, I probably would not have even needed pension.

Educated people know how to talk, negotiate, do their own work and appreciate its value — I had to be at the mercy of other people and work in their houses and fields. Since we are simpletons, we just took whatever money we got for our labour. I didn't even know how to count earlier. I could only handle 10-rupee notes, nothing higher than that. Now, I can recognise a 100-rupee note but not higher. So many times, I have worked for just 2.5-5 rupees (0.04-0.08 dollars) for a full day's labour cutting *Bajra*⁹³ from 8am till the sun hides and coming back home with just one big bundle of livestock feed.

We used to get up at 3am and start working on the *chakki*⁹⁴, while the children were still asleep. Then, I would make food for the children and feed them. In winter, it was *Bajra* and in the summer, it was wheat mostly. I used to cut the grass, feed it into a machine to churn out smaller portions, feed and milk the buffaloes and grind more than five kilograms of flour with my hands non-stop in a day. I still grind flour. It's been 30 years since my husband died. I used to do this work for many years before he passed away, right from the time when I was a small girl. We learned how to do all the work at a very young age — going to the fields, doing labour, filling water, making *rotis*⁹⁵, sweeping the house, washing the utensils and clothes and milking the cows.

⁸⁹ www.unesco.org/uil/litbase/?menu=9&programme=82 (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Nirantar — a national centre for gender and education — has since 1993 been working towards helping rural poor women access literacy and educational opportunities, enabling their access to information and engendering educational processes. Nirantar initiated Sahajani Shiksha Kendra (SSK) in 2002. 'Sahajani' in the local language means 'one who helps women'. The programme broadly aims at empowering women and adolescent girls through literacy and education — an education that makes connections with their lived realities and rights, and enables them to develop analytical skills on gender, development and other issues. Through its different activities, the programme reaches over 2000 women and adolescent girls belonging to the most marginalised communities like *Dalits* (Scheduled Castes) and *Adivasis* (Scheduled Tribes).

⁹² UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), Adult and Youth Literacy, 1990-2015, Analysis of data for 41 countries (Montreal, UIS, 2012). Available from www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Documents/UIS-literacy-statistics-1990-2015-en.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁹³ Pearl Millet.

⁹⁴ Millstone.

⁹⁵ Bread made usually from stoneground wholemeal flour.

When my husband was alive, I used to go with him to work in the fields, carry water, carry bundles of grass and cook and carry lunch for my husband or other family members. We used to make a drink in the summer made out of *johar*,⁹⁶ mix it with yogurt and drink it all day like *lassi*⁹⁷ to keep the body cool and stem the appetite. Often, we didn't have anything to eat and used to just drink that mixture all day. We didn't even have enough clothes to cover our body. We had to borrow money on interest to get clothes. We would not wash them for months on end because we didn't have enough money to buy soap and shampoo. We would just wash clothes with mud and wash our hair and face with *multani mitti*.⁹⁸ We didn't have any warm clothes to wear during the winter and just wore regular clothes. This is how we have survived.

“So many times, I have worked for just 2.5-5 rupees (0.04-0.08 dollars) for a full day’s labour cutting Bajra⁹³ from 8am till the sun hides and coming back home with just one big bundle of livestock feed.”

Educated women are different – they will take their children to study at school, they'll wash and clean them up properly and manage their housework efficiently. My girls could not study and they can't now because even if they wanted to, they're caught in the same work cycle I was caught in while growing up. My destiny was jinxed from the start. God let me down and our time is over but all my granddaughters are studying at least.

A day in the life of Maya Devi

4am-6am: I get up by 4am, wash my hands and face and fire up the *chulha*⁹⁹ for at least two hours to keep myself warm. It's so cold in the winter that this keeps me warmer rather than just lying in bed. I get up only when the sun comes out. Earlier, when I was working, I used to get up at 3am, clean up the house quickly and head out to other people's fields for work.

6am-7am: We use biogas to fire the *chulha* to provide warmth in the winter as a sort of natural heater. I heat water and also cook on the same *chulha*.

7am-9am: I give water to the buffaloes and tie them in the shade.

9am-7pm: Then, I take out a *charpai*,¹⁰⁰ lie down and smoke my *hookah*¹⁰¹ pipe. It's good for acidity. One of my daughters lives with me, along with her husband. I remain alone at home during the day because my grandchildren go to school and my daughter and son-in-law go farming. I can't read anything and so, I keep pottering about doing light chores all day. I can only make and eat food now. I sleep early in the winter, by 7-8pm.

⁹⁶ Sweet Sorghum.

⁹⁷ A popular yogurt-based drink blended with water and spices, which originates in India's Punjab region.

⁹⁸ Fuller's Earth.

⁹⁹ Cook Stove.

¹⁰⁰ Charpai also spelt as Charpoy or Charpay and known as Manja, it is a traditional woven bed consisting of a wooden frame bordering a set of knotted ropes.

¹⁰¹ An oriental pipe with a long, flexible tube that draws the smoke through water contained in a bowl.

SYEDA NOOR FATHIMA

Allah would want us to read and write



Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta

“Muslim women don’t have a choice in what they wear, whom they can speak to and even if they want to they are not allowed – the lack of choice and freedom are the biggest challenges facing them.”

Syeda Noor Fathima’s manners are gentle and seasoned and her expressions, purposeful and intense. Her English, though heavily accented with a Kannada¹⁰² flavour, is fluent. Her thoughts hit the high notes and are visionary and idealistic. As she sprints tirelessly from one village meeting to another in Mysore District, the second largest city in the southern state of Karnataka, 34-year-old Fathima takes to the podium each time with a steady, self-assured confidence — the kind that comes from having endured life’s trials and tribulations. Ostracised by her family and community for marrying a non-Muslim, she poignantly shares, “has been more painful than the combined pain from all my other life struggles.”

Muslim women are among the least literate, most economically impoverished and politically and socially marginalised sections of Indian society. With less than 50 per cent literacy¹⁰³ rate, they are the least educated of all religious minorities in India. In rural India, an overwhelming 85 per cent of Muslim women reported¹⁰⁴ that they are illiterate. In higher education, Muslim women account for a mere¹⁰⁵ 3.56 per cent. Current research indicates¹⁰⁶ that poverty and financial constraints are the major causes that prevent Muslim girls from accessing ‘modern’ and ‘secular’ education. As a result of violent communal conflicts, there is “immense fear, a feeling of vulnerability, and consequently a visible impact on mobility and education, especially of girls.” Muslim women are also overwhelmingly self-employed or engaged in low-skilled and low-income work due to discrimination and the lack of education and technical skills, keeping them in a cycle of poverty.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Muslim woman, educated, college graduate, married to a non-Muslim, ostracised by community, suffered brain haemorrhage.

I grew up as a traditional Muslim girl in a joint family, which means offering prayers, keeping fasts, wearing clothes that cover fully, talking to elders with respect and not standing and talking in front of them. At the same time, we had freedom within the family and had fun because there were so many children.

Even though my father was from a rich family, he was addicted to alcohol and so we ran into a financial crisis. My mother belonged to a very traditional but educated Muslim family and even though she had only studied until high school, her ideas were very progressive. She never wore a *burqa*,¹⁰⁷ she never offered *namaz*¹⁰⁸ and maybe that's why, I was influenced by her at a very young age. For her ideas and ways, my granny used to scold her because she was old and conservative. She insisted that I study in a convent school and for that, too, there was opposition from my granny's family — why don't you send your children to Urdu schools? She felt that they teach religion but more than that, she felt that I will learn respectable habits there. As I grew older, the opposition within my house grew. I was doing very well in school and my mother supported me in every way but the family's financial crisis forced me to join a government aided-school because we had to pay fees at the convent school. This new school was for Muslim girls and my thoughts were channelised into religion. I even wore the *burqa* for a while but mainly out of laziness.

My first two years of college were also in a Muslim college. Just going to college was a very great thing at that time, especially for a Muslim girl. My father was not supporting me economically but my mother took up a daily wage job as a gem cutter to support my education. She worked on machines to cut big gems and stones into smaller ones and it involved a lot of work. She was drawing only 35 rupees (0.6 dollars) per day and whatever she earned, she spent on

my education fees and buying books because I wanted to become an I.A.S. officer¹⁰⁹. At around the same time, there were lots of marriage proposals coming my way and one proposal even got finalised. Even I accepted it because I wanted my mother to be happy but at the last minute, they demanded dowry and my brother refused. Then I decided to continue studying, got scholarships and opted for a Master's in Social Work (MSW) because I had seen a lot of suffering at an early age in my family itself.

“Just going to college was a very great thing at that time, especially for a Muslim girl.”

Around the same time, I met my future husband. It was very incidental. I met him during a college strike. He is from the Hindu community. Even today, my marriage is a unique thing and being a Muslim woman, I have suffered a lot of ostracisation in my community.

In 2003, after finishing my MSW, I went to Bangalore and my first appointment was as a human resources (HR) officer in a very famous garment company. Everyday, I used to see suffering. If women committed even small mistakes, they were beaten up. I resigned and after working at one more company briefly, moved back to Mysore. There, I got an offer from an NGO, which was working for the cause of victims of trafficking, prostitution and domestic violence. I got appointed as a counsellor and due to the nature of my work, I used to interact daily with trafficked victims and rescued girls. Their stories were extremely sad — how they were sexually harassed, raped and gang-raped

¹⁰² A language spoken predominantly in the southern Indian state of Karnataka.

¹⁰³ India, Ministry of Minority Affairs, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of Muslim Community of India*, Sachar Committee Report, (New Delhi, 2006). Available from http://minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/upload_files/moma/files/pdfs/sachar_comm.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Burqa is an enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover their heads and bodies, especially when they appear in public.

¹⁰⁸ Muslim prayer.

¹⁰⁹ Indian Administrative Service (Civil Service).

by men, how they were lured into prostitution on the pretext of getting employment and locked up in basements in brothels from where they couldn't escape. I have literally seen girls whose sexual organs were damaged. It was really terrible.

Unfortunately, after working there for two years, I learned that the directors of this NGO were themselves using women sexually. Then they attacked my character and I left but the harassment had impacted me psychologically. I suffered a brain haemorrhage, which also affected my womb and chances of fertility. My husband was very supportive. After that, I decided to work for the cause of women. I have seen my mothers suffering, my cousin suffering and others — all of them have been women.

Muslim women don't have a choice in what they wear, whom they can speak to and even if they want to, they are not allowed — the lack of choice and freedom are the biggest challenges facing them.

“I strongly say that development programmes, if they have to contribute, should focus on ‘progressive education,’ especially for minority women.”

The other challenge is the focus on religion — it is so strong that even if there is something wrong or illogical, people will still follow it. Being a Muslim girl and after marrying a non-Muslim man, it's not like I don't offer prayers. I do offer prayers. I believe only in Allah but I pray to him in my own way. Islam as a religion, as I have understood it, paves way for scientific knowledge and understanding, which teaches tolerance of other faiths and everything. However, nowadays, our upbringing is done in such a way that we don't even tolerate sitting

besides a non-Muslim. Where is it written in the Quran that you shouldn't tolerate other things? It is the ultimate book. I really love the Quran. Regarding women, Islam is a religion, which teaches utmost respect for them. The option to marry more than one woman is to rid them of economic or social problems they might face in

“Why should property cases for Muslim women be decided under Muslim personal law — let the court decide. As a result of this, Muslim women are neglected.”

society. Prophet Mohammad himself married a widow and said you can marry up to four women, depending on your socio-economic status and if you are financially strong. And marry whom? The needy and distressed women in order to support them. That is what Islam teaches and what Prophet Mohammad preaches. But nowadays, these fanatics marry one after another for their satisfaction and have lines of children together — they are misusing it. And even Muslim women blindly follow that. In Islamic faith, you have to pay *Mahr*.¹¹⁰ But again, male-dominated society has reversed this practice. Everything has been changed to their convenience.

Generally, Muslim communities, especially women, don't avail of government facilities and schemes. One is an attitudinal problem but the treatment in the government facilities is also very poor and disrespectful. I strongly say that development programmes, if they have to contribute, should focus on “progressive education,” especially for minority women. If you don't pay special attention to them, it will be difficult to bring them out. I also strongly advocate a uniform civil code. Why are there separate marriage laws for Muslims and for the rest of the nation? Why should property cases

¹¹⁰ A mandatory required amount of money or possessions paid by the groom, at the time of marriage, to the bride for her exclusive use.

for Muslim women be decided under Muslim personal law — let the court decide. As a result of this, Muslim women are neglected. They're not given property because the community decides. Let the property laws be equal, let the education laws be equal, let laws for violence against women and the dowry act be applied to each and everyone in the same way.

A day in the life of Syeda Noor Fathima

4:30am-5am: I usually get up by 5am — my sleep gets broken. Even if I'm lying on my bed, I am awake and thinking non-stop. For me, commitment is above everything else and I can do anything and everything for it.

6am-7am: I get up from bed by 6am. I regard myself as a very bad mother because I'm mostly thinking about work and how something can be accomplished, but because my son has to go to school, I try and make something for his box or else I'll boil a glass of milk for him.

7am-9am: I bathe and get fresh by 7:30am. Even my son has to go to school by 9am. He goes with his father.

10am-10:15am: I go to office, which is around 8-10 kilometres from my house. Before getting an office vehicle, I used to take my two-wheeler to the office.

10am-6:30pm: Once I arrive at my office, I forget everything. I don't even take lunch. I don't like keeping anything pending. On the days that I go to the field, I spend time talking to people, understanding their challenges and attending village meetings. For some reason, people really open up to me and I feel happy; sometimes there are also tears and sadness after listening to them. I work till about 6:30pm and if I go to the field, till around 7:30pm.

6:30pm-7:30pm: In the evening when I come back, I watch television for a while, news and sometimes, a programme or documentary about community and development work. I watch selected movies and am very fond of old film songs. While watching television, I work or respond to emails on my laptop.

7:30pm-8pm: I play with my son for a bit because he's just four years old. If I'm at my apartment, I prepare some rice. Rice and curry is our staple food.

10pm-10:45pm: I go to bed latest by 10:45pm. My health doesn't permit me to stay up later than that because I get headaches. The repercussions of the brain haemorrhage still continue. Before sleeping, my husband and I chat and catch up for 5-10 minutes.

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines¹¹¹ health as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*”

Within the WHO health framework as defined above, **reproductive health**¹¹² or **sexual health and hygiene** addresses the reproductive processes, functions and system at all stages of life. It implies that people are able to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and the capability to reproduce and freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. From a public policy perspective, it also implies that men and women ought to be informed of and have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of birth control, appropriate health care services and medicine to maintain sexual and reproductive health and access to health education programs.

INTERSECTIONALITY: When health is defined in the above terms, the range of issues that impact women’s health and well-being automatically widens to include the most widely experienced and mild form of compromised health in the form of “physical weakness” to the most fatal health conditions as a result of gender-based violence, including mental, emotional and psychological violence. In between this range is a sea of inter-linked health conditions such as under-nourishment and anaemia widely prevalent among women, especially in rural areas and among pregnant women. It also includes diseases that occur due to lack of water and sanitation, which impact women and girls disproportionately again. Women also experience the negative impacts of climate change in unique ways due to tasks they are responsible for such as collecting water and fuel wood from long distances, managing the household, feeding and taking care of the family and increasingly, earning a livelihood. Women suffering from health conditions with high levels of social stigma and discrimination such as HIV and AIDS and disability are extremely vulnerable, especially those belonging to socially or geographically marginalised communities. For instance, maternal mortality¹¹³ is particularly high among tribal women in India.

Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive human rights violations and global problems of our time. Every year, an estimated one billion¹¹⁴ women are subject to sexual or physical violence because they lack equal protection under the law. The WHO provides evidence-based research to support that “violence against women has profound implications for health but is often ignored.” One of the most common¹¹⁵ forms of violence against women is that performed by a husband or male partner. This type of violence is frequently invisible since it happens behind closed doors and legal systems and cultural norms do not treat it as a crime but rather as a “private” family matter, or a normal part of life.

¹¹¹ www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹¹² www.who.int/topics/reproductive_health/en/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹¹³ Mridul Eapen, “National Rural Health Mission: Identifying Critical Gender Concerns,” No Policy is Gender Neutral, UN Women (New Delhi, 2012). Available from www.unwomensouthasia.org/category/digital-library/un-women-resources/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹¹⁴ A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economics through Sustainable Development. The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2013. <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013)
UNiTE to end violence against women. Available from www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹¹⁵ World Report on Violence and Health, WHO. Available from www.who.int/gender/violence/gbv/en/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

MDGs: Health & Well-Being



MDG 4 – REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 4.A: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate	4.1 Under-five mortality rate
	4.2 Infant mortality rate
	4.3 Proportion of 1 year-old children immunised against measles



MDG 5 – IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH

Target 5.A: Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio	5.1 Maternal mortality ratio
	5.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel
Target 5.B: Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health	5.3 Contraceptive prevalence rate
	5.4 Adolescent birth rate
	5.5 Antenatal care coverage (at least one visit and at least four visits)
	5.6 Unmet need for family planning

1. The MDG framework did address women and child health under MDG 4 (reduce child mortality) and MDG 5 (improve maternal health) but failed to effectively draw the strong link between them, despite overwhelming evidence that maternal¹¹⁶ under-nourishment leads to the birth of under-weight babies (stunting and wasting).
2. The framework also failed to effectively address “reproductive and sexual health,” which accounts for 20 per cent¹¹⁷ of the global health burden for women. While some indicators such as contraception prevalence rate and antenatal care coverage were included, they were weakly designed and did not focus on crucial health education and awareness-generation required by women to practice safe sex and also go through pregnancy safely.
3. Although the MDG framework did facilitate an increase in skilled birth attendance and a related decline in maternal mortality, it did not include any indicators to measure progress on quality of health care services. As a result, despite the build-up of local level health infrastructure, quality issues persist such as poor medical infrastructure and sanitation, overcrowding, lack of medical staff and availability of basic facilities like beds and clean bed sheets. Out-of-pocket health expenditure also remains very high in rural areas. In India, for instance, over an estimated 70 per cent¹¹⁸ of health spending by rural poor people is out-of-pocket expenditure.

Profile 10 demonstrates how a tribal woman living in a remote area experienced a complicated pregnancy and was forced to run from pillar to post and pay prohibitively high out-of-pocket expenses to save her child's life and her own.

¹¹⁶ Mridul Eapen, “National Rural Health Mission: Identifying Critical Gender Concerns,” No Policy is Gender Neutral, UN Women (New Delhi, 2012). Available from www.unwomensouthasia.org/category/digital-library/un-women-resources/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹¹⁷ Department for International Development, DFID, “Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: A Position Paper,” (DFID, London, 2004). Available from <http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=1602> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹¹⁸ Mridul Eapen, “National Rural Health Mission: Identifying Critical Gender Concerns,” No Policy is Gender Neutral, UN Women (New Delhi, 2012).



MDG 6 – COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES

TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 6.A: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS	6.1 HIV prevalence among population aged 15-24 years
	6.2 Condom use at last high-risk sex
	6.3 Proportion of population aged 15-24 years with comprehensive correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS
	6.4 Ratio of school attendance of orphans to school attendance of non-orphans aged 10-14 years
Target 6.B: Achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it	6.5 Proportion of population with advanced HIV infection with access to anti-retroviral drugs

4. A significant number of new **HIV** infections are among women in monogamous marriages, who are unknowingly infected by their husbands who have multiple sex partners. Such women are at “high-risk” especially in rural areas and a gender-specific indicator aimed at reduction of HIV infections among this category of women merited inclusion in the MDG framework.

Profile 11 provides an account of the all-too-common story of a woman in rural India, who unknowingly contracted HIV from her husband, was left to fend for herself and her children, lives in constant fear of sudden death, while battling social stigma.

5. An estimated¹¹⁹ 15 per cent of the global population suffers from disabilities. In India alone, an estimated 4-8 per cent (40-90 million)¹²⁰ people suffer from disability. An additional 65 million¹²¹ reportedly suffer from psychiatric disorders. Women comprise almost half of the disabled population and suffer unique, disproportionate and adverse impacts due to disability. Instead of giving

Profile 12 illustrates the serious impacts of disability on a woman’s sense of security, ability to earn livelihood, access nutrition and shelter and experience independence, mobility, freedom, personal happiness and prospects for companionship and motherhood.

special attention to **people living with disabilities** and particularly women among them, the MDG framework entirely failed to address their challenges within its scope.

Profile 13 of a domestic violence victim who kept losing her babies due to brutalisation and violence by her husband and his family, even during pregnancy, validates this strong link between gender-based violence and women’s health.

6. As stated above, when health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity,” then the entire

¹¹⁹ *World Report on Disability*, World Health Organisation and World Bank (Malta, 2011), Available from http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹²⁰ *People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes*, Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, The World Bank (2007). Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INDIAEXTN/Resources/295583-1171456325808/DISABILITYREPORTFINALNOV2007.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹²¹ Right to Information (RTI) Act response (2009) from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in “Mind Snare,” *Tehelka*, Vol. 7, Issue 19, May 15, 2010. Available from http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main44.asp?filename=Ne150510coverstory.asp (accessed 10 June 2013).

range of physical, mental, emotional, psychological and social health symptoms arising out of **gender-based violence** assume serious importance, which the MDG framework also entirely missed.

Profile 14 of a dowry victim, who was physically, mentally and psychologically harassed, beaten and tortured by her husband and his family, provides a lens into the added dimension of devastating effects of socially entrenched practices such as dowry on women's health and overall well-being.

Women of India Speak

Reproductive, Sexual and Child Health

- Across all five states, women gave positive feedback on improvements in healthcare services for pregnant women and lactating mothers, infants and children, free vaccinations and immunisations, reduced maternal and child mortality, greater awareness of women and children's health and the importance of family planning. Primary health care centres and hospitals are closer although women in tribal-populated districts still find medical facilities inaccessible in some places. Women in these areas also shared that post-natal health issues for women and children are on the rise, indicating that progress on MDG 4 and MDG 5 has not been uniform.
- Improvements have occurred in reducing malnutrition among children although in some places cases of severe malnutrition among women and children were also reported, again indicating uneven progress. There was also conflicting and mixed feedback on the government public service delivery system and scheme aimed at checking malnutrition and supplementing women's nutrition through village centres called *anganwadis*. In one district in Rajasthan, some women reported that children who are receiving inoculations and immunisation injections, remain protected from illness and are much healthier now. Women here also felt, however, that the food distributed at the nutrition centre is not according to local taste and was better earlier, when it was served hot and fresh instead of the packaged food handed out now.
- Women in many states raised concerns regarding administrative delays, absenteeism of doctors and nurses and long waiting hours, which often force rural people to seek private health services resulting in a huge financial burden. In remote and tribal areas, women shared that overcrowding is discouraging and often, pregnant women are sent back the same day or a few hours after child delivery. When private health care is required, women also shared that when private health is required, they prioritise the health concerns of other family members over their own.
- Some women cited concerns that the monetary incentive of 1400 rupees (23.65 dollars) pregnant women are supposed to receive for delivering in government hospitals with a skilled birth attendant is often delayed by several months. Some also said that if they don't have a bank account, then 500 rupees (8.45 dollars) gets deducted to open one, which leaves them with very little in hand.

Gender-Based Violence

“Quit Drinking” – the government should take out such an order in every village. Only then will tribal society progress – if dowry and alcohol are eliminated.”

- Women interviewed across all states and districts unanimously shared that men's habit of alcoholism has remained unchanged over time and has the most damaging effect on a household. They linked alcoholism to diminished income and savings, loss of livelihood and unemployment, poverty,

psychological stress and physical violence, especially directed at women. It was also found to have a negative impact on children's education, household nutrition and women's health, resulting in their physical weakness and mental depression.

- Women identified domestic violence and abuse as a direct result of alcoholism, which affects pregnant women most adversely. They reported that miscarriages due to domestic violence are not uncommon.
- Women felt that dowry is among the most pervasive and disempowering challenges they face. They cited frequent dowry-related deaths, which some associated with prestige. Often resulting in extreme physical and mental torture for women, they felt that such violence also leads to lack of self-confidence among the victims. Viewed as a burden on the parents of the girls, it is also reflected in the upbringing and treatment towards the girl child, including her nutritional intake and care. Dowry is especially prevalent and finds social and traditional sanction among certain communities such as Rajputs from Rajasthan, where feudalism and patriarchy are deeply entrenched with serious implications for women's health, social mobility, ability to earn and opportunities for education and growth. Women also shared that cases of dowry-related domestic violence often go unreported in the rural areas.
- Women cited pollution and health and women's security and rising crime against them as emerging concerns.
- Women reported that although child marriage has declined, it is still widely prevalent. Women in a backward district in Rajasthan felt that it has increased in some pockets along with female foeticide.
- On the positive front, some women reported an increased awareness of women's rights and more instances of women seeking police assistance and legal recourse compared to the past. Some women also reported that they are coming together through SHGs and pressurising men to stop drinking or beating their wives.
- Women identified violence against women at the work place, especially in informal sectors (e.g. garment industry, as domestic help) where they are mostly employed, as a blind spot in public policy. It also has major implications for their health and well-being.

“Women are not weak but they don't know what to do about the drinking problem. Even if they do know, they can't seem to do anything about it. You have to stay in the same house, whether you are beaten or not.”

Health and Infrastructure

- Women felt that lack of water and sanitation affects them most acutely during menstruation and pregnancy.
- Women living in remote areas drew a strong link between poor roads impacting health adversely, especially during pregnancy. They reported that frequent cases of pregnancy complications and maternal deaths are reported due to not being able to reach the hospital in time. In tribal-populated areas, women shared that pregnant women face challenges during the rainy season, when village sewer canals and waterways flood.

- Women from peri-urban areas raised concerns about lack of toilets, the question of where to defecate in the absence of open spaces, scarcity of drinking water, power cuts and the impact of all of the above, especially on children's health.
- Although deaths related to common diseases have come down drastically, women also raised concerns about quality of water (high level of fluoride), spread of diseases due to untreated water and new diseases such as TB, typhoid, chicken guinea, dengue, kidney stones and cancer.

Health and Climate Change

- Women drew a strong link between shifting weather patterns, crop failure, food insecurity poverty and lack of nutrition. Some women also reported undesirable cultural traditions such as *Jogini Pratha* — marrying young girls to “Gods” — making them vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation.
- Women farmers shared that working in harsh weather is impacting their health adversely. For instance, in desert-covered Rajasthan, they drew a link between the nature of physical work that women perform in rural areas in village and construction works and common health symptoms they experience as a result such as headaches, acidity and dizziness.
- Women, especially in remote and tribal areas, reported discomfort and health-related issues from using firewood for cooking purposes.

HIV and AIDS

- It was reported that it is very common in rural India for women to contract HIV and AIDS from their husbands unknowingly and transmission of the virus is far more likely through sexual intercourse than through blood transfusions and injections.
- The stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS is very high in rural India while awareness levels remain very low.

*“A man does not like eating only at home
— he likes to taste different meals
from different hotels.
Women become the sufferers.
The husband usually dies and the
woman, whether she wants to live or not,
has to stay alive for her children.
A woman thinks of her family;
a man thinks only of himself.”*

- Women living with HIV are most concerned about their children, as they find it difficult to earn a living and if the community knows the status, their children also suffer stigma and discrimination. One woman living with HIV shared that “they are made to sit in a corner and away from other children in schools and other public places; nutrition centre workers discriminate against them by not serving them food; marriage proposals are hard to come by when they grow up; they find it difficult to get accommodation on rent; nobody speaks to them and even extended family members stay away.”
- On the positive front, women especially in south India reported that anti-retroviral therapy (ART) is provided in a timely manner and people living with HIV are also provided food cards so their basic nutrition needs are taken care of.

Disability

- A woman with disability shared that earlier, one would not come to know if there is a disabled person in a neighbour's house. There is no focus or programmes for disabled people. She cited improvements in her own village and area over time with the coming of a local NGO. However, she emphasised that discrimination and stigma against people with disabilities is still very strong and starts within the family. A lot of superstitions are also associated with disabled people, which pose a further challenge.
- Women with disabilities were found to be extremely vulnerable to sexual harassment, exploitation and violence. Parents prefer to keep their disabled daughters inside the homes to protect them, which severely restricts their freedom and mobility. In cases of psychiatric disability, the restrictions, vulnerability and stigma are magnified.
- Marriage is normally not an option for women with disabilities and they are not able to enjoy any of the emotional, physical and psychological joys of romantic companionship, leading to feelings of loneliness, frustration and depression. Financial dependency, neglect by family members and society and lack of any assets including inheritance and property, which they normally do not receive, exacerbates the vulnerability and feelings of worthlessness. In many cases, it leads to suicidal thoughts or acts.
- Old disabled women were found to be among the most vulnerable, lacking basic health care provisions and any social security blanket.

Old Age

- In the absence of proper social security or health care, old age itself becomes a serious health issue for all categories of single women who cannot rely on anyone else for their survival needs.

KALI

How seen is my valley?



Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta

“The cost for child delivery came to 65,000-70,000 rupees (1098-1182 dollars) at the private hospital. We don’t make so much in farming. I had to call an aunt to borrow money and also pawned my jewellery.”

22-year-old Kali belongs to the Pataliya tribe and lives in a Gundipada village in Jhabua, which is located in central India in Madhya Pradesh. Jhabua’s terrain is unforgiving — degraded wastelands, highly drought-prone and so spread out that people from the same hamlet of 50-100 families can be living several kilometres apart from each other. In 2006, it was named among the 250 most backward districts in the country, qualifying for special development assistance from the government. Shy and very soft-spoken, Kali was breast-feeding her 4-month-old infant intermittently throughout the conversation, which was punctuated with sudden silences and vacant stares as she recalled her close brush with mortality in the final month of pregnancy.

The MDG framework has been critiqued for limiting reproductive and sexual health to reducing maternal mortality and increasing skilled birth attendance. The Government of India’s policies and schemes, aligned with meeting these twin objectives, have undoubtedly resulted in progress. Maternal mortality has been reduced¹²² by 51 per cent since 1990 but an estimated¹²³ 56,000 maternal deaths still take place in India each year during childbirth from preventable causes. A lion’s share of these deaths occur among tribal women in India’s central and northeast states, due¹²⁴ to geographical and social inaccessibility of medical facilities and infrastructure, their socio-cultural background, tribal women’s distrust of health facilities and the health system’s inflexibility and inability to accommodate tribal realities.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Tribal woman, illiterate, lives in remote and harsh terrain, complicated pregnancy, lives below the poverty line (entitled to free medical health care), forced to go to private hospital for child delivery resulting in high out-of-pocket expenditure, indebted, pawned jewellery.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Kali. I belong to the Pataliya tribe. We are three sisters and two brothers. All of us were delivered at home — natural deliveries with the help of midwives. Nowadays, so many difficulties arise with having just two or three children.

I got married two years ago. I still remember the night my labour pain started on 19th September. The next morning at 5am, we went to the nearest government-run Community Health Centre (CHC) in Kalyanpura District. It's about 8-10 kilometres away from my village. We went in the government car, which brings pregnant women to the hospital free of charge. We stayed there during the day but they told us that they can't operate and we should go to the government hospital in Jhabua, which is another 12 kilometres away. Many normal deliveries take place at the CHC but my case was more complicated and the district hospital in Jhabua has more doctors.

*“Only junior doctors were on duty
(at the government hospital).
They said, “Who’s going to call the
doctor at 12 at night?”
So, we thought it best to proceed
further. Who’s going to argue
when your child’s life and your
own are at stake?”*

So, we went to Jhabua that evening at 8pm, in the same government car. The main doctor was not on duty when we reached. Only junior doctors were on duty. They said, who will call the doctor at 12 at night? So, we thought it best to proceed further. Who's going to sit and argue when your

child's life and your own are at stake? Then we left for Dahod, which is another 45 kilometres away in the neighbouring state of Gujarat. We took a private car because the government car was not going further. It cost 3000 rupees (50 dollars) to hire.

When we went upstairs to the private hospital in Dahod, at first they told us that we might have to go even further, either to Baroda¹²⁵ or Ahmedabad.¹²⁶ This time, family members who were accompanying me told the staff to just proceed with the operation and leave the rest to God. Finally, they said, they will try to have a normal delivery and we even bought injections for 1500 rupees (25 dollars) but it was not possible. I was having immense pain in my stomach and the baby had just got stuck in the womb. I had been in labour for two days and even the labour had stopped. There was no place for the baby to come out. In such circumstances, it's even difficult for the mother to survive. I only survived because of the caesarean operation. The baby was also in danger because it was not moving anywhere in the womb and it was difficult for it to breathe. Then, finally, we deposited 5000 rupees (85 dollars) in the hospital and called the doctor. He had also gone out. It took the whole night. The baby finally came out at four in the morning. It was a boy.

The baby stayed with me for one day and then had to be admitted into another hospital because he was weak and his blood had frozen. So, we were both alone and separate. They kept me for eight days and the baby for 12 days and the total cost for both of us came to almost 65,000-70,000 rupees (1098-1182 dollars). When we were discharged, the outstanding amount was still 15,000 rupees (253 dollars). We don't

¹²² Vidya Krishnan, “India has the highest incidence of maternal deaths, find report,” *Livemint*, May 7, 2013. Available from <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/XyiNo8IgT6kJQQRhm1LtN/Over-300000-dayold-babies-die-each-year-in-India-report.html> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Mridul Eapen, “National Rural Health Mission: Identifying Critical Gender Concerns,” No Policy is Gender Neutral, UN Women (New Delhi, 2012). Available from www.unwomensouthasia.org/category/digital-library/un-women-resources/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹²⁵ Baroda is the third largest city in the state of Gujarat in western India and is located about 200 kilometres from Gundipada village in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh where Kali lives.

¹²⁶ Ahmedabad is the administrative headquarters and judicial capital of the state of Gujarat in western India and is located about 260 kilometres from Gundipada village in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh where Kali lives.

make so much in farming. I had to call an aunt to borrow money and also pawned my jewellery. The baby is still on medicines, which costs about 2500-3000 rupees (42-50 dollars) every month. Our family is categorised as below the poverty line but we could not avail the free medical services that we are entitled to. I also couldn't get the 1400 rupees (23 dollars), which pregnant women are suppose to receive if they deliver with skilled birth personnel in a government hospital because I had to go to a private hospital.

*“In government hospitals,
they don't charge but they also don't
take care because the staff members
get salaries anyway.
They write a prescription,
give you some medicines and
send you packing off.”*

Women are more aware and are having fewer children now because they understand it increases poverty and you have to feed your children, too. They also deliver more frequently in hospitals now. Still our community is sceptical of government health services and I don't like the behaviour and environment at government hospitals. They only keep you for one day after the delivery is done. Many times, they send you back after a few hours of delivery because the hospital is so crowded. Private hospitals cost more but the service is better. They change sheets every morning and evening. Nurses keep checking on you. They charge so much. So, I guess they have to take rounds. In government hospitals, they don't charge but they also don't take care because staff members get salaries anyway. They give you some medicines, write a prescription and send you packing off. After my experience, I feel that I don't want to have any more children. I want to just take care of my child now and he'll take care of us when we get older.

A day in the life of Kali

6am-1pm: I get up almost every day at 6am. Then I clean and sweep the floor, make food and wash clothes and utensils. There are four people in the house including my husband, my in-laws and myself. I was doing all the housework until the day I got labour. Elders who have gone through childbirth tell you that you experience more difficulty if you rest but if you keep busy and moving, you don't experience as much difficulty.

2pm-6pm: I repeat the same schedule in the evening — make food, clean the house if it's dirty and also work in the fields. Even until the last day that I got labour, I was cutting grain in the fields. Only on the last day, when my labour started, my husband's sister came over to cook.

7pm-9pm: We eat dinner. My mother-in-law and I serve the men of the house first and then eat. But when I was pregnant, my husband also made food many times. After I came back from delivery, I had to take rest for one month. My mother-in-law did most of the housework then. I am lucky — normally it does not happen like this. Women start working 2-3 days after delivery or sometimes, even the next day.

9pm-10pm: We go to sleep. These days, my son keeps me awake at night sometimes. He's only four months old and is still on medicines because of the weakness and condition he suffered from after delivery.

BHARATHAMMA

Fighting the last betrayal

Photo @ UN Women/Praveen Kaliga



“My husband did not give me any security or love, only this disease. I think of this and feel angry. But what can I do now? Half the cases I come across are like mine. One man contracts this disease and spreads it to five women.”

The quiet manner in which Bharathamma¹²⁷ sits and observes everyone talking camouflages her own inner thoughts and feelings as a woman living with HIV. She only uses her own water bottle and maintains a safe distance from everyone out of fear of inviting any suspicion of her HIV condition. Fuelled by lack of awareness and intolerance, it invites life-crippling and soul-crushing stigma and discrimination, especially in rural India. She lives in Mahbubnagar District, among the most backward districts in India, ironically located only a 100 kilometres from Hyderabad, known as the country’s “pharmaceutical capital.” A frail 45-year-old widow showing signs of undernourishment and weakness, Bharathamma unsuspectingly contracted HIV from her husband, who died and left her to fend for herself and their two children alone.

Although India is moderately on track to achieve MDG 6 on the target of halting or reversing the spread of HIV and AIDS, the incidence of related deaths remains very high and an increasing “feminisation¹²⁸ of HIV and AIDS” is taking place. There are an estimated 5.7 million¹²⁹ people living with HIV and AIDS in India, of which an estimated 38 per cent are women. In rural India, women are particularly at “high-risk” as a significant number of new infections occur in women who are in monogamous marriages and have been infected¹³⁰ by their husbands, who may have multiple sex partners. Bharathamma’s story underscores the especially adverse impact of HIV and AIDS on women and their children, the resulting heavy burden of care, domestic work, economic vulnerability and social stigma they face.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Woman living with HIV, widow, mother of two children, works as domestic cleaner (informal labour), works with an NGO on HIV-related issues, lives in rural village where HIV-related awareness is low and associated stigma very high.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Bharathamma. My husband died in 2006 from HIV and AIDS. He knew about it since a long time but did not inform anyone at home. He only told us about it about one month prior to his death, when he became very ill. I have no idea where he contracted it. He never informed me of anything. He just kept sick for long periods of time. He finally died of tuberculosis.

“After his death, I got myself tested and was diagnosed with HIV. I was in disbelief. I thought, how could this happen to me? I am a healthy woman.”

After his death, I got myself tested and was diagnosed with HIV. I was in disbelief. I thought, how could this happen to me? I am a healthy woman. I don't get frequent fevers, no body ache, no leg ache; I am fine. I cried for nearly a year and thought I am going to die in the same way that my husband did. I feared for my children, who were not even married then. At that time, my daughter was 16 and my son was 20 years of age. That was when I lost a lot of weight.

I am 46 years old now and found out about my condition six years ago. I was scared of how I will afford the treatment. Luckily, when I consulted the doctor, he referred me to a local government hospital, where they gave me free tablets. Since then, I have been on anti-retroviral therapy. I have never been late in taking them.

I am still under a lot of stress though because I have no money to sustain myself. I wash utensils at other people's homes. They don't know of my HIV status. If I tell them, they will fire me. If I cut myself while washing utensils, then I don't go to work for a couple of days and take care of myself. My neighbours also don't know because if they did, my landlord will remove me from my house.

Nobody comes forward to disclose their status. When we are given tablets for anti-retroviral therapy, we hide them in a paper so that no one can see them. Even my friends do not know, otherwise I will face a lot of discrimination. I fear that they will not speak to me.

People do not treat us well. Villages are the worst. In cities, people still have some awareness and the treatment is better but in villages, if one person comes to know, a hundred others will also come to know. Their whole behaviour changes — they won't touch us, talk to us or sit next to us. They cover their mouths and noses while talking to us out of fear that it will spread if we sneeze or talk to them. Even other people

*“People do not treat us well.
Villages are the worst.
In cities, people still have some awareness and the treatment is better but in villages, if one person comes to know a hundred others will also come to know. Their whole behaviour changes — they won't touch us, talk to us or sit next to us. They cover their mouths and noses while talking to us out of fear that it will spread if we sneeze or talk to them. Even other people with HIV treat us poorly — they think that their infection will increase if they are near us. At least, they should treat us equally.”*

who have HIV treat us poorly — they think that their infection will increase if they are near us. At least, they should treat us equally.

¹²⁷ Name changed to protect identity.

¹²⁸ www.unicef.org/india/children_2358.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Basanta K. Pradhan and Ramamani Sundar, *Gender Impact of HIV and AIDS in India*, UNDP, NACO and NCAER (2006). Available from www.undp.org/content/india/en/home/knowledge-and-solutions/gender-and-inclusion/gender_impact_ofhivandaidsinindia.html (accessed 10 June 2013).

Our own NGO treats us badly — other staff members do not even offer us a glass of water, no matter how hot it is. They give us hard water instead of normal water. When we go to the field, we carry our own water bottles and lunch boxes. When they organise daylong trainings, they don't even provide us with a cup of tea. If an NGO is treating us in this way, then how can we blame others?

I managed to find work with an NGO but generally, we don't get jobs. Private organisations don't give us jobs at all. The NGO pays me 4000 rupees (67.55 dollars) per month. We have to travel daily to interior villages to talk to people living with HIV and AIDS, which can cost 100 rupees (1.7 dollars) per day. We pay out-of-pocket, which eats up half our income. For a house about 15 square yards in size, we pay a monthly rent of 1500 rupees (25 dollars). In that small house, we do everything — cook, sleep and eat. The room rent and bills have also increased. In this amount of money, how can we take good care and afford a nutritious diet?

My husband didn't give me any security or love, only this disease. I think of this and feel angry. But what can I do now? Half the cases I come across are like mine. One man contracts this disease and spreads it to five women. He will have sex with a different woman daily and spread this disease to each one. The husband usually dies and the woman, whether she wants to live or not, has to stay alive for her children. So, women suffer more. Some people with HIV are marrying each other. It is better to eat salt and *roti* than get married again or have a partner. Even if he has HIV, he will still drink, hit me and be cruel towards me. It will only create more problems for me.

Our biggest fear is for our children. My daughter is very pretty but no one was ready to marry her because people came to know of my condition. Even my relatives were not ready to take responsibility or support me. I got her tested for HIV and only when it came negative and there was proof, could my daughter finally get married. My son supports me but till when? He also has to get married someday and I feel that he is not getting the right proposals because of my condition. Sometimes, I feel that it would be better if I die soon. At least, they won't have to suffer all this ostracisation. We live for our children and if their lives are getting ruined because of us, then what is the purpose of our living?

I know that I have no control over my life and can die at any moment. I feel tired all the time but just to be sure, I get my CD4 count test done every six months, so that I know well in time if something is wrong. We hope that a cure for HIV and AIDS is developed in our lifetime. If not in our lifetime, we want to see a cure for our children's generation. Our life is almost over now.

Day in the life of Bharathamma

5am-9am: I wake up by 5am to finish all the household work. I clean my house and prepare lunch for my son and myself. If I keep myself busy, then I don't think about my condition.

9am-11am: After my son leaves for work, I leave the house, too. I clean utensils at other people's houses to earn some extra money. I cannot let them know of my HIV status, otherwise they will remove me from the work.

11am: I leave for office at the NGO and attend trainings and meetings with women who have HIV. I like being a part of these groups. They give me a sense of belonging and I feel that I am contributing towards something.

5pm-6pm: I have to come back and clean utensils at people's homes. I get tired by the evening but constantly want to keep pushing myself.

6pm-8:30pm: I return home by around 6pm and after freshening up, I start with household work and prepare dinner for my son and myself.

8:30pm-10pm: After dinner, I watch television. My son always fights with me because he wants to watch something else. I enjoy these fights because I don't know how long I will live. I go to bed but am not able to sleep immediately. The thought of my condition keeps coming into my mind. This has become routine now.

MUGALLAMA

I get by with a little help from myself



Photo @ UN Women/Praveen Kaliga

“Financial independence is the answer to everything. Today, if I was not earning, I would be dependent on others. It gives other people the power to dominate you. Financial independence provides us security.”

When 33-year-old Mugallama came out of the auto-rickshaw, it was surprising for all the bystanders to see how well she managed herself. Maybe it always is. Paralysed from waist down, she swiftly crawled her way inside the village rural department office, shaking hands and greeting people as she passed them by. All eyes were fixed on her as she climbed the stairs and took the chair in her unique style. Easily offended if offered help, Mugallama, who lives in Mahbubnagar District located 100 kilometres from Hyderabad, is confident and determined to lead a “normal” life.

An estimated 4-8 per cent¹³¹ (40-90 million people) of India’s population lives with disabilities of which, almost half are women. People living with disabilities are recognised to be multiply disadvantaged,¹³² experiencing exclusion on account of gender and disability. Social pressures deprive women with disabilities of their social, economic and political opportunities. As a result, they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, abandonment, social exclusion, improper medical facilities and lack of education. They remain largely unrepresented and are invariably left out of the decision and policy-making processes, including those that affect their own lives the most. For women suffering from psychiatric disorders, all these challenges are further intensified.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Disabled (paralysed from waist down), single, lives with parents, NGO worker (on disability issues), tailors clothes to earn extra money to sustain herself.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Mugallama. I was born without any disability. In fact, I was born a very healthy child. When I was 10 months old, I developed a few boils on my back. My mother took me to a local doctor for treatment. He gave me two injections on both the sides of my waist. Later that night, my legs stopped working and I could never use them again. Around the time I was given those injections, there were similar cases of infection — maybe polio — being reported in surrounding villages, too. I have heard in disability trainings that when one suffers from polio and very high temperature, no injections should be given at all as it only aggravates the situation. We are sure that my condition developed because of the injections.

My mother took me to local faith healers, temples and applied a lot of pastes and leaves on my legs but nothing worked. I could not walk or even stand again. There is a big hospital to treat people with disabilities about three hours south of Hyderabad in Kurnool District. My father sold two acres of land to take me there but the doctor gave a final diagnosis that nothing can be done about my condition and this is how I will have to live. After that, we did not get any more treatment.

My parents were supportive and my mother was especially dedicated. She made sure I learned how to do everything myself, including housework and taking personal care of myself (health and hygiene). Like other girls, I went to a normal school and college. Although I didn't feel any discrimination in my immediate family, the extended family was very mean. I also knew I will never be able to get married.

Earlier, there was no focus on people with disabilities. After coming to this region, the NGO I work for — “Commitments” — created awareness among people with and without disabilities. I was very inspired by one person in particular who also had a disability. His name is

Venkateshwar and he had organised a detailed training in Hyderabad. I learnt a lot, especially how we — society — discriminate against people with disabilities, which results in their poverty. Since then, I have been working for the rights of the people with disabilities in my village.

In the entire Kosgi Block, there are 750 people with disabilities of which over 300 are women and girls and 250 are children. They suffer from a wide range of disabilities — sight, speech, hearing, locomotor disability and, to some extent, mental disabilities, but not severe ones. I am also an activist for the rights of people with psychiatric disorders.

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My work is to mobilise and motivate people with disabilities to lead a better life. I have been doing this work for the past 13 years. I either go to the office or the field directly in an auto-rickshaw. There, I usually organise or attend meetings with disability groups to discuss various problems such as how to procure disability certificates or arrange for physiotherapy needs or deal with nutritional requirements of the people with disabilities. I return in an auto-rickshaw after work is over. In my own village, I use a tricycle to get around.

¹³¹ *People with Disabilities in India: From Commitments to Outcomes*, Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, The World Bank (2007). Available from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INDIAEXTN/Resources/295583-1171456325808/DISABILITYREPORTFINALNOV2007.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹³² United Nations, Factsheet on Persons with Disability. Available from www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18 (accessed 10 June 2013).

When I started working with Commitments, I did not join it for money. I was self-motivated to work for the cause of disability. However, very honestly, my monthly salary of rupees 6000 (101 dollars) is not sufficient. I travel to a lot of villages and have to bear the related out-of-pocket expenses. I hardly save anything. I do tailoring work on the side to earn some extra money.

People with disabilities face so many challenges. The discrimination begins with family members, who think a person with disability is a burden. It is very necessary to provide counselling to family members so that their outlook changes. People with disabilities also have talents and we should promote them effectively instead of treating them as a burden.

Then comes the discrimination from society. Women with disabilities especially face a lot of unique challenges. Sexual harassment and rape are big challenges for disabled women, especially for those suffering from psychiatric disorders. Marriage is mostly not an option available to disabled women. Property rights are another problematic area. Even if a disabled woman is unmarried and living with her parents and serving them, she is still seldom given any property. We are neglected a lot.

I have experienced many challenges as well, but decided to go beyond them and am leading a better life for it. My work taught me how to move around, travel and speak to people. I lacked confidence before because I hardly ever went outside. When I look back, I can see how far I have come.

Financial independence is the answer to everything. Today, if I was not earning, I would be dependent on others. It gives people the power to dominate you. Financial independence provides us security. Ten to 20 years from now, I want to see all people with disabilities well educated, earning decent livelihoods and well represented everywhere — in politics, education and business. We do not require anything special. If you can support us, well and good, but if not, then it is more important that everybody studies and stays together in the same community so that people grow more tolerant towards us. There is a child here, Nootan Srikar, who cannot use his hands. So, he taught himself how to write using his toe fingers.

A day in the life of Mugallama

5:30am-9am: I wake up at 5:30am and my first task of the day is to make my bed. It takes me some time, as it is a little difficult. After that, along with my mother, I move onto other household chores.

9am-10am: I finish household work and leave for office. I have to depend on my auto-rickshaw driver. On some days, if he is late, then I am late as well. Sometimes, I think that there should be some other way devised, so that I don't have to depend on anyone.

10am-5pm: I am either at the office or in the field, attending meetings. If I am at the office, I am aware of people looking at me constantly. I prefer being in the field. Although it is difficult moving around and I have to plan everything in advance and take help, I know I am with people who understand my condition through their own experience. It also motivates me to work hard.

6pm-8pm: I make it a point to reach home latest by 6pm. I would prefer being home before dark. Once I am home, I help my mother with cooking and cleaning.

8pm-9pm: We finish our dinner and then watch some television. I would like to watch for longer periods but have to attend to my tailoring work. It helps me make some extra money. I don't like being dependent.

10:30pm: I usually finish work by 10:30pm. I have to admit that I get really tired by this time and wish life was a little easier but will not complain and make excuses.

VIJAYA

Enduring heights

Photo @ UN Women/Praveen Kaliga



“I hope I am able to study and earn something for my children and myself and raise my sons in such a way that they do not become like their father — the reason for someone else’s sorrow.”

Married at the young age of 13, mother of two by 19 and divorced by 26 — Vijaya, who lives in Vizianagram District located on India’s southeast coast by the Bay of Bengal, has seen and experienced more in 10 years than most others do in a lifetime. Now 31, when Vijaya quit studying and was sent to her matrimonial home at the tender age of 16, she never imagined that her husband and his family would trap her in a vicious cycle of mental torture and physical violence to extract dowry. As the greed and abuse escalated, Vijaya endured for seven arduous years for the sake of her children and her own parent’s honour, before finally managing to escape. Five years on, still trying to heal her broken spirit, she seems surprised when asked about her dreams. “Dreams?” she asks, nonplussed.

Despite comprehensive anti-dowry legislation including the Dowry Prohibition Act, which prohibits the request, payment or acceptance of a dowry and associated criminal laws that make it a non-bailable offence, official figures show a steady increase in dowry-related crime in India. In 2011 alone, 8618 dowry harassment-related deaths¹³³ were recorded. Unofficial figures suggest that these numbers are three times as high. In 2000, when the United Nations Millennium Declaration¹³⁴ was signed, India officially ratified the United Nations Convention on Elimination of all Forms Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and reports on its implementation to the United Nations Human Rights Council¹³⁵ (UNHRC) under the Universal Period Review¹³⁶ (UPR) mechanism. However, the MDG framework did not address gender-based violence, which necessarily includes the widely practised and largely under-reported crimes against women related to dowry.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Child marriage, mother of two children, divorced, suffered dowry-related mental, psychological and physical abuse, lives with parents, member of a SHG¹³⁶.

My name is Vijaya. I am 31 years of age and divorced. I have two sons; my elder son is 12 years old and my younger son is 10 years old. I got married when I was just in 6th standard in school. I had not attained maturity and so, I was sent to my husband's house a few years later. It was an arranged marriage and my husband was 12 years older than me. He was distantly related to my parents. He used to get government contracts for repair works of village roads and construction of tanks or other small work in the village. On some days, he earned very well and on others, he would sit idle at home. It is a ritual to give something in dowry for marriage. So, my parents gave my husband and his family a piece of land and 25,000 rupees (422 dollars).

I had my first son when I was 17 years old. I was carrying my second son by 19, when the problems started. At first, it started with mental torture. My husband, his mother and brother would taunt me by saying nasty things about my parents. At first, I did not understand why until they started saying that my parents had not given anything to their family during the wedding. Every time, it was a different demand. We are three sisters and a brother — our parents cannot afford to give too much to one child only.

One day, all three of them started beating me with sticks. They hit me and when I fell on the floor, they beat me with thin sticks. Whenever they beat me, they also gave me some tablets, which kept me unconscious for long periods of time. They have broken my wrists a few times. They would hold my head and hit it on the corner of the bed. I bled and developed a big bump.

I was pregnant at that time with my younger son. Today, he is suffering from kidney disease. My elder son is fine.

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My husband and I were married for 11 years and I was never happy with him. He was never very loving or even approachable but did not say much or do anything. My father-in-law also died because he was harassed and beaten by my mother-in-law, husband and his brother. When he was alive, my father-in-law was staying in a separate house by himself. So, after the wedding I persuaded him to come and stay with us in the same house. Since then, I became the scapegoat in the family. Suddenly, if anything went wrong in the house, I would be blamed for it. Thereafter, the events of the house shocked

¹³³ India, National Crime Records Bureau. Available from www.unwomen.org/2012/12/confronting-dowry-related-violence-in-india-women-at-the-center-of-justice/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹³⁴ The United Nations Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000 by 193 countries at the end of the Millennium Summit and had chapters and objectives stressing the observance of international human rights and humanitarian law and treaties on sustainable development. Available from www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹³⁵ The United Nations Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations and one of its most prominent institutions. It is the successor to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and a subsidiary of the United Nations General Assembly. A key component of the Council consists in a periodic review of all 193 members states of the United Nations states called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which is based on reports from different sources, including NGOs.

¹³⁶ The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process, which involves a review of the human rights records of all United Nations Member States. The UPR is a State-driven process, under the auspices of the United Nations Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations. As one of the main features of the Council, the UPR is designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed. Available from www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx (accessed 10 June 2013).

me. My husband and his brother used to beat their own father. Once, I found my father-in-law lying unconscious by the bed. I took care of him and when he regained consciousness, he told me repeatedly to leave the house. One night, he just passed away. I never came to know how he expired.

“I filed a case against my husband and his family in the court. Initially, the court gave a decision that I should stay with my husband for a few more days so I went back. It was worse after that — they used to employ new methods of beating me using all kinds of things.”

Initially, I did not inform my parents about the mental and physical torture. I used to think that I will be able to handle it on my own and what is the point of troubling my parents? However, when the torture increased, I informed my mother and maternal uncle and they suggested that I wait and watch for some time so the situation is resolved by itself. Waiting for things to improve, I had to bear the abuse for seven years. Finally, I decided that I could not stay with them anymore. Seven years of beating and mental harassment was too much for me. My kids were also suffering because of it.

Hiding from everyone, I wrote a letter to my parents one day but could not post it for a long time because I could not go out of the house. Somehow, I managed to post it but I knew it would take at least 15 days for them to receive the letter. My parents came and took me back to their home. I filed a case against my husband and his family in the court. Initially, the court gave a decision that I should stay with my husband for a few more days so I went back. It was worse after that — they used to employ new methods of beating me using all kinds of things.

I had decided to kill myself, as there was no point in living anymore but then thought that

if I leave, there will be no one to take care of my children. So one fine day, when there was no one in the house, I took my children and went to the bus stand. I was sitting there and thinking about where to go because if I went back to my parents home, I would be a burden on them but I had no place else to go to. When the bus to my mother’s village stopped right in front of me, I decided to go to her place and see what happens. My priority was to get my children out of that place.

After that, I finally filed a case for divorce and the court agreed. My husband transferred all his property to his brother. So, at time of deciding the alimony it was proven that my husband has no property and so the maintenance was settled at 100,000 rupees (1688 dollars) only, which my husband has not paid till today. It has been five years since we have been divorced.

For almost two years, I did not do anything. I was very disturbed at that time. I was not mentally well. I had suicidal tendencies. My

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family was supportive and they encouraged me to start working somewhere so that I earn money for my children. So, I joined a SHG in the village. I wanted to join something desperately so that I was not reminded of my past. It gave me some hope for the future and being among women gave me strength.

I am living only for my children. I want to be independent. I do not want to get married. Once has been enough for a lifetime. If such a thing happens to you then the world does not let you live peacefully. My family is kind and has supported me through everything. If it weren’t for them, I may not have been alive today. Not everybody is as lucky. In most cases, the girls

either suffer throughout their lives or die because of such torture. Ten to 20 years from now, I want that no other girl should suffer what I have gone through. There should not be any dowry demand or giving of dowry involved in the marriage. I hope I am able to study and earn something for my children and myself and raise my sons in such a way that they do not become like their father — the reason for someone else's sorrow.

A day in the life of Vijaya

5am-7:30am: I definitely wake up by 5am and after freshening up, begin with household work. Otherwise, my mother will start doing it, which I don't like. By 7:30am, I am done with most of the household work like cleaning, washing clothes and utensils and preparing breakfast and lunch.

7:30am-9am: I wake my children up. Otherwise they'll miss school. I bathe and dress them up and help them with putting their books in their school bags. I don't want anyone to think that my children and I are a burden in any way.

9am: After sending my children to school and having some breakfast, I leave for the village where I organise meetings and meet people as part of my role as a community motivator. I try to finish my work soon so that I can join my brother at his ration depot for a while. If I am staying at my parent's place, then I want to be as much help as possible.

3pm: I reach the ration depot and ask my brother to leave for home and take rest. I feel indebted to him as he is mostly paying for my children and my needs. I do worry about how long this can continue.

6pm: I close the ration depot and leave for home. As soon as I reach home, I wash utensils and prepare dinner.

7:30pm: Although I am not very educated, I sit down with my children and ask them about their day at school. I try to inculcate good values in them so that they do not become like their father.

9pm-10pm: I finish my dinner with my family. Everyone goes off to sleep but it is hard for me to do so easily. I am constantly worried about our uncertain future.

BHURI B

Where men brutally tread



Photo @ UN Women/Swapna Bist-Joshi

“I was deserted by him and was staying at my mother’s home when my daughter was born and this time the baby survived, maybe because I was not beaten and tortured during pregnancy.”

Bhuri lives with her 4-year-old daughter in her maternal village in Sehore district of Madhya Pradesh, located in central India. She has a forlorn look in her eyes and talks nervously. At times, her recollection of the past sounds incoherent, as if she is frozen in time. Life’s cruel experiences and adversity have scarred her and taught her to mistrust. Her life revolves around her daughter, who is her sole emotional reason for existence. Shabbily dressed, with a mud stained face and a runny nose, the little girl clings to her mother and does not let go even for a moment.

In India, about 40 per cent¹³⁷ of married women between the ages of 15-49 have experienced emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by their husbands. The impact of intimate partner violence ranges from moderate to severe and manifests in physical and psychological terms. The consequences are severe in cases of violence during pregnancy. Research points to increased likelihood of premature labour, lower infant birth weight¹³⁸ and increased probability of stillbirths. The probability of desertion is also high, which leaves women particularly vulnerable and without recourse to social protection and legal aid, further affecting their health, nutrition and economic and physical security.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Illiterate, daily wage casual labourer, suffered domestic violence (including during pregnancies), suffered three miscarriages as a result, abandoned by husband while pregnant with their fourth child, lives alone with 4-year old daughter.

Footnotes overleaf

I was born into a family of seven siblings — we are five sisters and two brothers. My father was a beggar and my mother worked as a labourer in the fields. I was 17 years old when I was married into a family settled in Indore. After marriage, I stayed with my husband and mother-in-law in a *basti*¹³⁹ in Indore.

Six years ago, my husband threw me out, as he did not want to stay with me anymore. I lost three children. They were stillborn. He accused me of not being able to procreate healthy babies and deserted me. He used to beat me up without any reason. It was an everyday affair. I had multiple miscarriages. My husband had no work or source of income. He used to wander around with friends through the day and drink at night. When he came home drunk, he would beat me with his bare hands and sometimes, even with belts and sticks. I had no money. I used to wash utensils and do odd jobs at my brother-in-law and sister-in-law's house, for which they would give me food. This is how I have filled my stomach.

When he finally abandoned me, I was already expecting again although I was not aware of it then. I was staying at my mother's home when my daughter was born and this time the baby survived, maybe because I was not beaten and tortured during pregnancy. My husband was informed about it, but he accused me of being an adulteress and that it was not his baby. He said that no matter what, he would not accept me back into his home. He got another lady before this child was born. She has three children from an earlier marriage.

I spoke to his family members — my husband's older brother and his other siblings. They were well aware of my plight but supported him. When my daughter was born, they told me, "Take care of your child. We are not responsible

for her upbringing." When they shunned and humiliated me, my mother told them that if she could nourish me as a child in her womb then she could also take care of me and feed me.

I was happy with my mother and daughter but my mother died five years ago. She was my only support. Now I live alone with my daughter. I have to work every day of the week to ensure that she gets enough food. After my mother's demise, my brothers did not want me to stay with them. It was my mother's house. They resented my staying with our mother and that she looked after me. They wanted my mother to give them everything. I was seen as a competitor. My brothers forcefully encroached

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on my mother's property and live in the main section of the house. I was told to leave after my mother died. Initially, when I protested, they beat me up. The neighbours had to come to my rescue. They have given me a corner in the house. I prepare my own food. The ration card¹⁴⁰ is in my mother's name. My brothers take half the ration in exchange for the space they have provided me in the house. Now I don't talk to them at all so there is no conflict. When my own brothers don't empathise with my plight, then what is left to talk about?

I work as a casual labourer, mostly at the brick kiln near the village. I work the entire day and earn 100 rupees (1.7 dollars) per day. There

¹³⁷ India, National Family Health Survey (2005-06) in "Spurt in registered cases of domestic violence" by Kelly Kislaya, Times of India, January 31, 2013. Available from http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-31/ranchi/36657827_1_domestic-violence-dowry-cases-police-station (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹³⁸ Alissa C. Huth-Bocks ; Alytia A. Levendosky ; G. Anne Bogat, *Effects of Domestic Violence During Pregnancy on Maternal and Infant Health*, Violence and Victims, vol. 17, No. 2 (2002).

¹³⁹ Slum Settlement.

¹⁴⁰ A ration card or stamp is issued by the government to allow the holder (particularly people living below the poverty line in the Indian context), to obtain food or other commodities at subsidised rates.

are times when there is no work at all. I take my daughter with me wherever I go, as I don't trust anyone. She is 4 years old. I don't even want to leave her at the *anganwadi* centre. I am scared that someone will hit or torture her at the centre. I never let her out of my sight.

"I take my daughter with me wherever I go, as I don't trust anyone to leave her alone with them. She is 4 years old. I don't even want to leave her at the anganwadi centre. I am scared that someone will hit or torture her at the centre. I never let her out of my sight."

I was advised to go for a family planning operation so that my daughter can benefit from the "Laadli Lakshmi"¹⁴¹ Scheme" as a single daughters' parent. But I am scared to go for the operation, as I will have to leave my daughter alone. Who will take care of her and who will feed her when I am off to the hospital for the procedure? I am told that it will take only an hour but am also scared. I already feel so weak and faint at times. What if the operation affects my health further? Who will take care of my daughter then? She was very weak and malnourished when she was three years old and had to be admitted into a Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre¹⁴² (NRC). They provided good care and nutritious meals. I also stayed with her. I was compensated for the wage loss incurred for the 14 days that I stayed there. I received rupees 1400 (23 dollars). Since then, my daughters' health has improved. I really hope that I get money to build a small dwelling for her and myself to live peacefully.

A day in the life of Bhuri B

6am-7:30am: I wake up at around 6am every day. I take a bath and make tea for my daughter and myself. I clean the house and wash clothes. I then prepare something for both of us to eat and also to take some food to the work site.

8:30am-6:30pm: I leave for work by 8:30am. At times, I know where I have to go, but at other times, I have to find work, which takes a lot of time. I primarily work at the brick kiln, which is a half hour walk away. I have to carry my daughter, as she is too frail to walk. We have our lunch at around noon. Then, I make her sleep in a shady spot within my sight. I work till 5:30pm in the evening, collect my wage and walk back home. I purchase a few essential items on my way back.

6:30am-9:30pm: When I reach home, I prepare tea for both of us again. I bathe my daughter and take one, too, if there is enough water. It is refreshing and helps to get rid of the dirt and sweat of the daylong labour. Then, I prepare dinner for both of us. Normally, it is just boiled rice with some flavour. My daughter is a poor eater. Sometimes, we also sit with our neighbours, who are good to us. I serve dinner by around 9pm and then clean the kitchen, *chulha*¹⁴³ and utensils. Then, I spread the mat on the floor and put my daughter to sleep. At times, she wakes in the middle of the night and I have to soothe her back to sleep.

¹⁴¹ Laadli Laxmi Scheme was introduced by the Government of Madhya Pradesh with the objective to lay a firm foundation of girls' future through improvement in their educational and economic status and to bring about a positive change in social attitude towards birth of a girl. Following its success, other Indian states have emulated the scheme.

¹⁴² Nutrition Rehabilitation Centre is a joint initiative of Department of Health and Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India. Launched in July 2007, the primary aim of the centres is to reduce severe to moderate malnutrition.

¹⁴³ Cook stove.

ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURE, ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

*Since the 1980s, sustainability has been used more in terms of human sustainability on Earth. The most widely quoted definition¹⁴⁴ of **sustainable development** is that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The definition encompasses the inherent tension and constant reconciliation required between the three pillars of sustainability as identified at the 2005 World Summit on Sustainable Development — environmental, social equity and economic demands.*

Adaptation to climate change can be defined¹⁴⁵ as a response that seeks to reduce the vulnerability of biological systems to the ecological and social changes caused by the rise in global temperatures. It is especially important in developing countries, which are predicted to bear the brunt¹⁴⁶ of the effects of climate change and where the capacity and potential for humans to adapt is unevenly distributed¹⁴⁷ across different regions and populations. Adaptive capacity for humans to climate change implies, in the immediate instance, the ability to ensure basic survival for oneself and closest of kin, that basic needs continue to be met in the face of climate variability, that there is minimum destabilisation in the short term and creating conditions to ensure alternative survival and means of livelihood over the medium to long-term.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Before meeting social equity and economic demand imperatives, basic needs require that everyone must have the right to water, safe housing and shelter, sanitation and basic infrastructure such as electricity and access to proper roads to live a life of dignity. The lack of any of these negatively impacts women and girls in disproportionate ways. In rural contexts, the responsibility of managing and procuring water for all household needs falls on women and girls, with implications for their health, time, opportunity cost to earn a living and pursue growth-related opportunities or education, in the case of girls. Lack of sanitation violates their sense of dignity and privacy. It impacts women and girls far more than men and boys due to security concerns, biology and the need for hygiene and privacy, especially during menstruation and pregnancy. Lack of water and sanitation even impacts the ability of women to carry out their traditional roles and tasks of washing dishes, clothes, fetching water, cleaning up their children and infants, cleaning the house, feeding the livestock. If women do not perform these roles properly on a regular basis, they are faced with the threat of gender-based violence. Lack of proper housing impacts the entire household but especially women, who spend the maximum amount of time at home and are most susceptible to accidents such as a collapsing roof or structure. For single women, elderly, widows, abandoned women, destitute, women suffering from HIV and AIDS or disability and orphaned girls,

¹⁴⁴ World Summit Outcome Document, Resolution A/60/1, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 September 2005. Available from http://data.unaids.org/Topics/UniversalAccess/worldsummitoutcome_resolution_24oct2005_en.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁴⁵ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Glossary of Climate Change Acronyms. Available from http://unfccc.int/essential_background/glossary/items/3666.php (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁴⁶ Daniel H. Cole, “Climate Change, Adaptation, and Development,” *Faculty Publications*, Indiana University, Paper 386. (2007). Available from www.repository.law.indiana.edu/facpub/386 (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁴⁷ M.L. Parry and others, Eds., *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Available from www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_wg2_report_impacts_adaptation_and_vulnerability.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

proper housing provides basic social security whereas its absence leaves them highly vulnerable to poverty, hunger, exploitation and premature death. Lack of access to proper roads impact mobility for women and girls, ability to earn a livelihood, pursue education and health, particularly during pregnancy and child delivery. Lack of electricity similarly impacts women — the chief managers of the household — by restricting their ability to carry out household work, earn a livelihood, care for their children and take care of their health as well as their own, especially during summer months. Socially and geographically marginalised women suffer the most from lack of basic infrastructure.

As reported¹⁴⁸ by Oxfam Canada, climate change has made the risky business of farming all the more difficult, which implies that women — the majority of small-scale and marginal farmers in the world — work harder and their families eat less. Climate change has increased floods, droughts and water-related diseases, which alone kill over two million people every year, most of them women and children. Women are also the primary caregivers for the sick. Indigenous women bear a triple burden, as climate change is threatening their natural habitats and way of life, identity and overall well-being. Women's long workdays are even longer as unpredictable rainfall leads to scarcity of food, fuel and water and women have to walk longer and farther to collect these resources, often putting themselves at greater risk of violence.

MDGs: Access to Infrastructure, Adapting to Climate Change & Environmental Sustainability

 MDG 7 – ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY	
TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 7.A: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources	7.1 Proportion of land area covered by forest
	7.2 CO ₂ emissions, total, per capita and per \$1 GDP (PPP)
	7.3 Consumption of ozone-depleting substances
	7.4 Proportion of fish stocks within safe biological limits
Target 7.B: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss	7.5 Proportion of total water resources used
	7.6 Proportion of terrestrial and marine areas protected
	7.7 Proportion of species threatened with extinction
Target 7.C: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation	7.8 Proportion of population using an improved drinking water source
	7.9 Proportion of population using an improved sanitation facility
Target 7.D: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers	7.10 Proportion of urban population living in slums ¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ www.oxfam.ca/what-we-do/campaigns/stop-harming-start-helping-womens-rights-and-climate-change (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁴⁹ The actual proportion of people living in slums is measured by a proxy, represented by the urban population living in households with at least one of the four characteristics: (a) lack of access to improved water supply; (b) lack of access to improved sanitation; (c) overcrowding (3 or more persons per room); and (d) dwellings made of non-durable material (Official footnote on revised MDG list effective from 15 January, 2008).

1. While all the indicators related to environmental sustainability were aimed at protecting the earth's environment, the goal did not factor in the very real, extensive and devastating impact of shifting weather patterns and climate change on people's lives and livelihoods. Women — the main caregivers of families and majority of small scale and marginal farmers — are especially impacted in unique ways, which merit separate gender-based indicators.
2. The MDG framework rightly addressed the twin issues of lack of water and sanitation. However, instead of aggregate indicators measuring “proportion of population,” sharper indicators such as “number of people with a toilet in their household” or “number of people with a “piped water connection in their household” would have been more effective at delivering desired public policy shifts and success in extending reliable cover of water and sanitation.
3. The framework left out critical aspects of infrastructure such as access to roads and electricity, both of which have major implications for health, education, poverty, livelihoods and all other measures of well-being, especially for women and girls.

Women of India Speak

- One of the gravest concerns women shared is of successive failure of rains, which, in the absence of alternate sources of irrigation, is resulting in crop failure, hunger and poverty. It is adversely impacting those primarily dependent on rain-fed¹⁵⁰ agriculture, especially subsistence farmers. The effects are being felt in the form of increased debt burden, displacement from primary occupation, food insecurity and, in extreme cases, landlessness.
- Women shared that climate change is impacting household nutrition, as they now have to buy vegetables instead of growing them, which has increased expenditure. Women are screening food items based on costs, resulting in reduced nutrition for the family and especially women, who eat the least or last due to their nurturing caregivers roles and existing nutritional discrimination against them and girls in favour of men and boys, especially in many rural households.

“We faced such a (water) crisis this year that our fields dried up. There was no food or water even for livestock — cows and buffaloes were literally dying of thirst.”

Profile 15 on page 81 examines the devastating impact of climate change on rural farming households, especially in entirely rain-fed areas (absence of irrigation facilities) and how it is forcing women into daily wage-based agricultural labour or migration.

Housing

- Many poor and old women expressed major concerns about temporary housing (thatched) and living in constant fear of their houses collapsing. They also shared related concerns about, poor dwelling structures such as water seepage during rain, health issues and the financial burden of regular maintenance.

¹⁵⁰ Due to fewer opportunities and higher population of landless households and agricultural labour, poverty is most concentrated in rain-fed regions. Bharat R. Sharma and others, *Realising the potential of rain-fed agriculture in India*. Available from http://nrlp.iwmi.org/PDocs/DReports/Phase_01/11.%20Potential%20of%20Rained%20Agriculture%20-%20Sharma%20et%20al.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

- Some women cited examples of frequent displacement from their homesteads, as property owners are clearing those areas for their own projects.

Water and Sanitation

- Water — access, availability and quality — are of utmost priority for women. In almost all states, women cited lack of water as a major, if not foremost, challenge in their lives.

Profile 16 on page 84 sheds light on the nature and extent of challenges women and girls face due to lack of water and sanitation through the personal account of a woman living in rural Rajasthan — a desert state where the lack of water is particularly pronounced.

Profile 17 on page 87 provides the perspective of a *Dalit*¹⁵¹ woman i.e. belonging to a socially marginalised community and how members of their community are unable to access a water source in their village due to caste-based discrimination.

“It’s not possible for poor people to make a toilet themselves. What if I take debt, make the toilet and the government doesn’t reimburse the cost up to the amount we are supposed to get as support as a family living below the poverty line? Right now, we are managing somehow and living in peace. At least we don’t have to deal with the stress of paying debt.”

- The challenges of managing, procuring and fetching water from far distances remain key concerns for a majority of women. They feel that water shortage and collection is very time-consuming and keeps them from attending to more productive activities. They

are also concerned about lack of drinking water facilities, which leads to sending girls to fetch water from an early age.

- Women shared that water shortages during summer months are particularly severe and affect them the most. They reported rapid depletion of ground water. In some cases, water scarcity is so acute that people are finding their own coping mechanisms such as purchasing water on a regular basis, which is increasing the financial burden of poor families.
- Some women reported that they had piped water connection in their villages but the water flow or quantity is very low or inadequate. Some shared that the number of hand pumps per village are inadequate.
- Water shortage is especially a major issue in villages without any irrigation.
- Women also raised water quality concerns such as high level of fluoride or contaminated water. They correlated improved water and sanitation facilities with better quality of life and less disease burden. They shared concerns about many new diseases (kidney stones, TB, typhoid, chikungunya¹⁵², dengue fever and cancer), which they felt is due to the use and consumption of untreated water. Some women also shared that most villagers consumed water without boiling it or using any purifying methods.

¹⁵¹ *Dalit* or Scheduled Caste is a designation for a group of people regarded as “untouchable” and occupying the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system, which ordered and ranked humanity by innate spiritual purity.

¹⁵² A virus transmitted to humans by virus-carrying Aedes mosquitoes with symptoms similar to dengue fever with an acute febrile phase of illness lasting only two to five days, followed by a prolonged arthralgic disease that affects the joints.

- The major challenges women face with regards to sanitation are non-availability of toilets, poor drainage facilities, poor services in peri-urban areas and behavioural challenges in terms of people's use of sanitation facilities and services and lack of maintenance.
- Women feel the shortage or lack of water and toilets most acutely during menstruation and pregnancy.
- In some districts, women shared that their villages are a 100 per cent free of open defecation but this is a rare exception rather than the rule. Women living in peri-urban areas raised concerns regarding urbanisation, which is eating up all the open space and land. In the absence of toilets and expanding population, they are concerned about the shrinking space to defecate.

“If there were sufficient toilets, villages would remain cleaner and repeated cases of diarrhoea among children might also be avoided. It will be transformative for us.”

- Women identified three reasons, which motivate people to build toilets — space crunch, government incentives and increased levels of awareness regarding the ill-effects of open defecation on health.
- Women from very poor households or villages shared that they don't have the space to build toilets, or money or water availability and thus focus on other priorities.

- Women also drew a link between lack of toilets and water in schools and a higher school dropout rate among girls as a result, especially among teenagers.

Roads

- Women cited lack of good and well-connected roads to villages as a critical challenge.
- In many states, women drew a strong link between health-related concerns (especially pregnancy) and poor roads. Frequent cases of pregnancy-related complications and even maternal deaths are directly associated with poor roads and infrastructure.
- Women found lack of road infrastructure and transport facilities, especially in the rainy season, as major deterrents to their mobility, ability to fetch water, collect fuel wood, go to work in the fields and their children's education.

Electricity

- In tribal and remote areas especially, women cited major power-related problems and drew a strong link between the lack of electricity and negative impact on children's education and health.
- Women living in remote villages shared that while a power connection exists, they don't receive reliable electricity supply. Women living in peri-urban areas complained of frequent power cuts.

Profile 18 on page 90 reveals the full magnitude of lack of electricity on a poor household from a tribal woman's perspective.

SUVARNA AMRUTAPPA ALKATTI

The Gods must be angry



Photo @ UN Women/Mayank Pratap Singh

“Due to changes in climate and scanty rainfall, the agricultural output has decreased. We have lost hope of seeing returns on the investments we made in our land.”

At first glance, one may dismiss Suvarna as one among many rural women. Demure and petite, with an unassuming personality, she happens to be the vice-president of her gram panchayat¹⁵³ in Dharwad District, located in the southern state of Karnataka and a 3-hour drive away from Goa. She reluctantly shares the stage with other elected representatives and maintains complete silence through the duration of the gram sabha,¹⁵⁴ hiding the unceasing undercurrents in her mind — the daily rigours of life, her struggle for survival and an uncertain future in the face of shifting weather patterns and climate change.

In most developing countries, women are the main users and managers of natural resources and they depend on agriculture-related activities for their sustenance. In India, women constitute 40 per cent¹⁵⁵ of the agricultural work force and all farm-related activities. Their average contribution is estimated at 55 per cent to 66 per cent¹⁵⁶ of the total labour. Women also form the majority of small and marginal farmers, who constitute over 80 per cent¹⁵⁷ of farming households in India and are the worst affected by climate change. As agricultural labour, they experience loss of production and livelihoods, food insecurity, further vulnerability and marginalisation, fall in a debt trap and in extreme cases, suffer landlessness. Developing countries such as India, which are highly vulnerable to climate change, also experience¹⁵⁸ patterns of persisting poverty. The ripple effect has impeded the progressive realisation or even reversed¹⁵⁹ progress of many development efforts, including the MDGs.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Small scale farmer, married, mother of four children, owns small plot of land, daily wage agricultural labourer, indebted.

Footnotes overleaf

I was 19 when I was married to my maternal uncle. Life was good. My husband took good care of the family, my in-laws loved me and we were happy in our little world. I have spent almost 16 years in this village, Ingalhali. I have four children — two girls and two boys — and they all attend school. I am also the vice-president of my *gram panchayat*.

“Earlier, we grew crops and vegetables of our choice in our fields. There was variety in the food I prepared at home. Now we have to purchase all the grocery items and vegetables. We have to prioritise spending on food items according to the cost and not nutritional value. Only the bare essential is purchased on a regular basis.”

We are farmers and we own two acres of agriculture land. That provides our sole source of livelihood and income. Till recent times, there was ample produce and we had enough to last us for a year. We grew crops and vegetables in our fields. There was enough fodder for the livestock, food for the family and also cash crops to sell in the market.

Life has changed drastically in the past 16 years, since my marriage. The past two years have

especially seen a change for the worse. The climate has changed drastically and this has impacted rains. Due to poor rains, agricultural productivity has suffered. The produce is not even enough to feed the family, let alone earn income from it. This has been the case with all subsistence farmers in our village. The agriculture in this region is rain-fed. There is no alternate source of irrigation. If rain fails, our crops suffer. For such a small land holding, it is not economical to dig a bore well, as it is very expensive.

“For the past two years, I have been working as daily wage agricultural labour in fields in a nearby village because our crops failed. There are times when I have to go asking for work and search for opportunities, which is time-consuming and physically exhausting. The nature of work depends on the season. It is different during harvesting but regardless of the season, it is intensive and backbreaking.”

Under the present circumstances, farming is no longer a viable option for us. We have to spend money on fertilisers, manure and seeds. We have to take loans hoping that we will repay them when we reap a good produce. Due to changes

¹⁵³ Local self-government at the village level in India.

¹⁵⁴ A meeting of all the adult citizen voters of the village.

¹⁵⁵ India, Planning Commission, Report of Sub-Group on Gender and Agriculture (New Delhi, 2007), p.6. Available from http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/wrkgrp11/wg11_subgenagr.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁵⁶ Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology. Impact of WTO on Women in Agriculture (National Commission for Women, New Delhi, 2005), p. 1. Available from <http://ncw.nic.in/pdfreports/impact%20of%20wto%20women%20in%20agriculture.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁵⁷ Ariel Dinar and Others, “Measuring the Impact of Climate Change on Indian Agriculture,” World Bank Technical Paper 402 (The World Bank, 1998). Available from <http://books.google.co.in/> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁵⁸ German Watch, *The Millennium Development Goals and Climate Change: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead*. Available from <http://germanwatch.org/klima/klimdg10e.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁵⁹ The existing pattern of failure in achieving the MDGs correlates with areas where high climate vulnerabilities are expected. Yohe, G.W. and Others, 2007: Perspectives on climate change and sustainability. Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, M.L. Parry and Others, Eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 811-841. Available from <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4-wg2-chapter20.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2013).

in climate and scanty rainfall, the agricultural output has decreased and we have lost hope of seeing returns on the investments we made on our land. There is no point working hard to farm on our own lands now. We need money for our daily survival needs. We take loans to sustain ourselves. Our earnings are spent on repayment of loans and then we take another one and find ourselves trapped in the debt cycle.

Earlier, we grew crops and vegetables of our choice in our fields. There was variety in the food I prepared at home. Now we have to purchase all the grocery items and vegetables. We have to prioritise spending on food items according to the cost and not nutritional value. Only the bare essential is purchased on a regular basis.

I have two cows. Maintaining them is an expensive and arduous task. We now purchase the fodder for the cows, which was sourced from our own field until a few years ago. The milk output has also dwindled from 3-4 litres to 1-2 litres per day. I spend 2-3 hours in a day tending to the cows. It is labour intensive and very expensive maintaining them. Most villagers including myself use fuel wood for cooking. We gather it once a week as we have to trek almost five kilometres and it takes almost two to three hours.

For the past two years, I have been working as daily wage agricultural labour in fields in a nearby village because our crops failed. There are times when I have to go asking for work and search for opportunities, which is time-consuming and physically exhausting. The nature of work depends on the season. It is different during harvesting but regardless of the season, it is intensive and backbreaking. I also have the added responsibilities of an elected leader and have to take time out to attend to work and meetings. At times, it feels like a double burden and also leads to loss of daily wages.

I want my children to study. I never involve them in household chores or in farming. If the rain fails again, we will never be able to free ourselves of debt. I may also have to sell my cows. I am not very optimistic about our future.

A day in the life of Suvarna

5am-6am: I wake up and prepare tea for the family and then wake everyone else up. The children have to get ready for school.

6am-6:30am: I have to rush to the nearby fields before daybreak to find a covered, secluded place to defecate. I take my daughter along, as I am scared to leave her alone.

6:30am-7am: I clean the cattle shed. This is a lot of work. It is important to maintain hygiene in the shed, as it is part of the dwelling enclosure. I fill up the water and food containers for the cattle and then milk the cows.

7am-7:30am: I take a quick bath in the little kitchen. There is no bathroom. I also wash as many clothes as I can in the morning but there are days when there is no time for this.

7:30-8:30am: I boil the milk. Prepare the meal for the family. Now that we work in the agriculture land in the neighbouring village, I have to ensure that everything moves like clockwork. If I'm late for work, then either we miss the day's opportunity for labour or our wage is slashed. I make tiffin¹⁶⁰ for my husband and myself to take to work. The children are provided free mid-day meals in the school itself through a government scheme.

8:30am-6:30pm: I leave for work in a hurry. At times, the work place is fixed. I have my meal in the farms with other labourers. I return home by about 6:30pm. On the way home, I collect twigs and agricultural waste —anything that can be used as fuel. My children are grown up, so I don't have to worry too much about taking care of them when they return from school. There are days when I visit my farm to see if any work is required there.

6:30pm-7:30pm: Once I am back home, I freshen up and then milk the cows and clean the shed. I ensure that they have sufficient water and fodder.

7:30pm-9:30pm: I prepare dinner for the family. After everyone is done with dinner, I clean the utensils and kitchen. I have to clean the *chulha*¹⁶¹ as well as it needs to be prepared for the next day.

10pm-10:30pm: We all go to sleep.

¹⁶⁰ Lunch box.

¹⁶¹ Cook stove.

SAVITRI

Water is life, toilets are dignity

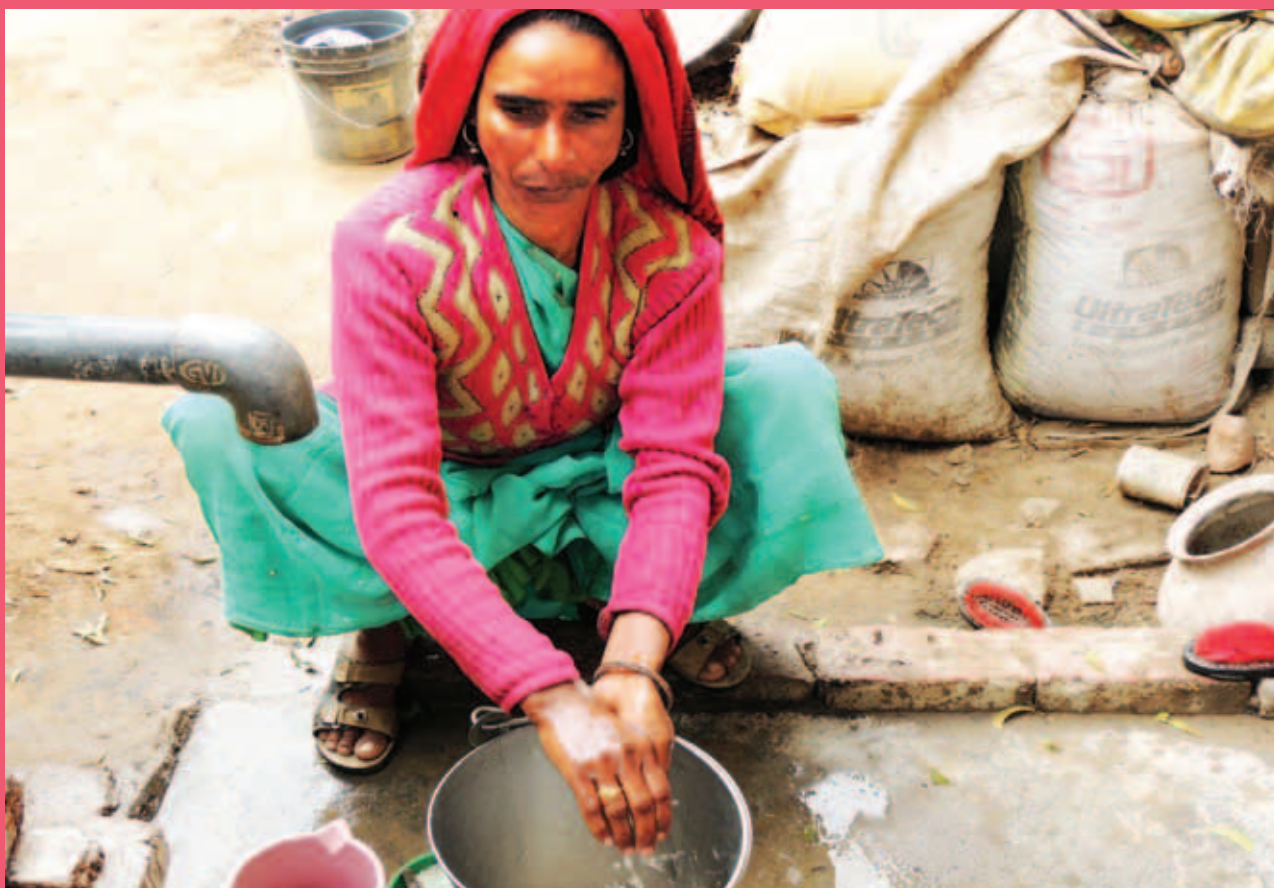


Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta

“The children bathe everyday but I normally have to bathe every alternate day. What to do? One has to tell the truth.”

It must have been the largest mahila sabha¹⁶² gathering in Alwar District in recent times. Over 150 women clad in Rajasthan’s famed bright-coloured saris¹⁶³ and jewellery made a banal school classroom appear like colourful coral life under sea or a Van Gogh painting coming alive. The mood was heated at the start — women weren’t happy with the village president sitting across and weren’t hiding it. And yet, fellow women were frowning upon anyone speaking up, which didn’t stop a lanky but assertive lady from getting up and making her point anyway. Luckily, for Savitri, who was attending her first such meeting, she raised an issue that found resonance across the room and immediate murmurs of support — their demand for access to safe water and toilets.

Across developing countries, cultural norms and expectations place the burden of fetching and managing water for all household needs on women and young girls. As a result, they walk long distances, carry heavy buckets and wait for hours in queues at a well or a sole hand pump. The work is time-consuming and back-breaking, often performed during oppressive heat or weather. The water can be contaminated, even deadly. Women and young girls thus face a difficult choice - certain death without water or possible death from illness. Lack of sanitation further violates their sense of dignity, self-respect and privacy while compromising their health and safety. It leads to girls dropping out from school, especially after reaching puberty. Although the MDG target on providing access to safe drinking water was met in 2007 in India according to official statistics, women reported a widespread and crippling lack of safe water and sanitation facilities.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Below the poverty line, mother of three children, lack of safe water and sanitation, *Dalit*¹⁶⁴ (scheduled caste).

Footnotes overleaf

Water is life. You need water for everything — to drink, clean the house, bathe, wash clothes and utensils, mop floors, cook, farm and grow crops and wash and feed livestock. I grew up with five sisters and two brothers. My father was poor and so we didn't study. My mother was weak and so we started doing housework and fetching water at an early age. One of the sisters used to carry a heavy rope on her shoulder to pull the water bucket out of the well; one used to carry the *ghada*¹⁶⁵ and another sister used to carry a bucket. On the way back, it was difficult carrying all the water along with that heavy rope as well. The well was at least half a kilometre away and so we walked about one kilometre daily at least.

Nowadays, if someone has money, they can get a hand pump installed. If they are rich, they can even get a motor pump installed that sends the water up from underground through electricity. Otherwise, in most rural houses, women and girls fetch water and walk at least half a kilometre one way with buckets and pots. The way to our village well is also *kuccha*,¹⁶⁶ not *pucca*.¹⁶⁷ We wear slippers but at the well, slippers are not allowed. Earlier, people of my *Dalit* caste were not allowed to wear slippers in front of Thakurs¹⁶⁸ but now nobody is scared. This change came about because of community awakening brought about by following our leader, BR Ambedkar.¹⁶⁹

Our water requirement for a day is at least 20-25 earthen pots. Sometimes, we had to go almost 10 times a day. If we have guests, the water consumption increases. But the water in our village well dried up a few years ago. So, what to

do? You can't die thirsty? I did a lot of labour on contract work and finally saved enough money to buy a hand pump. It cost 25,000 rupees (422 dollars) but I thought that it's best to spend the money on getting water facility right at home, especially for the children. It provides only three buckets of clean water in one go. By the fourth bucket, it starts throwing up mud. So, we fill the water and keep it aside and wait for the mud to settle down before using the water. The water level is also going down. In another year or two, it will provide only one bucket of clean water.

*“Men and boys can still manage
but women and girls really
struggle. Where should they sit?
They have look for a spot where
there are no men.
Either they have to go very
early in the mornings
or a girl's mother has to
go along in the dark.
After all, we have to
take care of a girl's security.”*

The children bathe everyday but I normally have to bathe every alternate day. What to do? One has to tell the truth. I have all the domestic work to do and have to reach the work site in the morning. If we are late for work and an official takes attendance and I'm not there, then my wages get cut. So, I'm in a hurry in the mornings.

¹⁶² While the gram sabha is a meeting of all the adult citizen voters of the village, the mahila sabha is the women's counterpart of a gram sabha meeting with participation only by women in the village. It is meant to provide a platform to discuss challenges facing women that can be raised by them comfortably without fear of the power dynamics present in a full-fledged official village meeting with men present as well.

¹⁶³ Also spelt as “Saree,” it is a strip of unstitched cloth, worn by women, ranging from four to nine yards in length that is draped over the body in various styles which is native to the Indian Subcontinent.

¹⁶⁴ *Dalit* or Scheduled Caste is a designation for a group of people regarded as “untouchable” and occupying the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system, which ordered and ranked humanity by innate spiritual purity.

¹⁶⁵ Earthen pot or pitcher made of clay or mud used to carry or fetch water.

¹⁶⁶ Dirt track of mud.

¹⁶⁷ Black tar-topped road.

¹⁶⁸ Indian feudal title used by landowners or upper-caste royalty members.

¹⁶⁹ Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was an Indian jurist, political leader, philosopher, anthropologist, historian, orator, economist, teacher, editor, prolific writer, revolutionary and a revivalist of Buddhism in India. He was also the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Born into a poor Mahar family (considered an “Untouchable” caste), he became one of the first “Dalits” to obtain a college degree in India and campaigned against social discrimination and the Hindu caste system and converted to Buddhism.

I still don't have a toilet. So, we have to go outside to relieve ourselves and bathe by erecting artificial walls using chairs and *saris*. I have to choose a time when no one is at home. We keep our blouse and petticoat¹⁷⁰ on while bathing, just in case some male family member comes through. If that happens, I reach for the shawl right next to me and cover myself and just sit there until he has finished his work and gone. During menstruation, it is most inconvenient. We never used pads; we had to use cloth. We wash the cloth and recycle it for use, alternating with another clean cloth. Now there is a hospital, so women get pads there but mostly poor women have to use cloth. They can't even talk about these things openly.

You can take small children anywhere but once children become mature, like my three sons are now, they feel more conscious. When children go to relieve themselves in someone's fields, then people don't let them use that area. They fight with us and complain that your children went in our fields. And there's no space to go anywhere now since more people have settled in the village. Men and boys can still manage but women and girls really struggle. Where should they sit? They have look for a spot where there are no men. Either they have to go very early in the mornings or a girl's mother has to go along in the dark. After all, we have to take care of a girl's security.

If I were given a chance, I would request the government to build toilets in our houses so children and women don't have to go outside. Also, if we get proper water supply in houses or at least a tank close by from where women of the village can collect water and outfit the tank with 8-10 taps, then people will stop fighting. For tapped water supply in houses, the government can take out a scheme in five years but toilets are really urgent — we need them now.

A day in the life of Savitri

4am-5am: I get up and tie the buffaloes outside the house and then feed them some fodder. Then, I sweep the area where the buffaloes are tied. After that, I take their fresh dung to the fields, make cakes out of them and leave them to dry so they can be used for fuel and cooking purposes. Then, I come back and make tea.

5am-9am: I give tea to my children, my husband and in-laws and then drink a cup myself. I then clean the tea utensils and sweep and clean the whole house and wash clothes. Then I prepare food for everyone. My husband leaves for work at 8am and so I have to get it ready for him and then I help the children to get ready for school, prepare their tiffin¹⁷¹ and they leave for school. When we didn't have the hand pump, I used to carry two *gaddas* on my head and maybe take one in the hand and go to collect water at the well. There were long lines and it took at least one or two hours to get the amount required. For the evening, I had to collect water again.

9am-4pm: By 9am, I also leave for work on the days that it is available through MGNREGA¹⁷². Then, I go back home and repeat the morning cycle of housework in the evening. I collect some grass on the way back home. If work through the scheme is not available, then we work in other people's fields. People in our condition have to work, no matter what.

4:30pm-9pm: I feed the livestock and then prepare dinner. After my children, husband and in-laws eat, I finish my dinner, too. If there's food left then well and good but if there isn't any left, then I even go to bed hungry sometimes.

9pm-10pm: I clean up the kitchen area, wash the utensils and go to sleep.

¹⁷⁰ An ankle-length underskirt worn with the Sari by women in South Asia, usually matching the colour of the sari.

¹⁷¹ Lunch Box.

¹⁷² The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), formerly known as NREGA, is an Indian employment scheme enacted by legislation on 25 August, 2005.

NAGARATHNAMMA

Stand by us

Photo @ UN Women/Swapna Bist-Joshi



“I know that caste-based discrimination is an offence but we cannot complain. It is a question of our daily bread and butter. Most of us have no land. Only some families possess smallholdings. Working in the upper cast fields provides our only source of income.”

Nagarathnamma lives an hour away from south India’s culturally rich city of Mysore. Born into a family of human scavengers, she has breathed and lived social exclusion and marginalisation throughout her life. Like other members of her community, she has internalised this marginal status as a constant in life. She does have a modest desire — the right to equal access and control over the natural source of water provided by a small lake in her village. Upper-caste families of the village have barred her and members of her community from using or even going near it. Nagarathnamma exudes an air of self-assured confidence and is optimistic that justice will be served. Her dream and aspiration for her children is a just and equitable future, which she hopes to experience in her lifetime.

Social exclusion is a discriminatory practice that segregates and excludes a group of people on the basis of identity leading to oppression and exploitation of such groups. This phenomenon is mostly inter-generational and deeply entrenched. Poverty is both a cause and consequence of social exclusion. The incidence of poverty declined in India over the past two decades and was estimated at 32 per cent¹⁷³ in 2009-10 but it was higher¹⁷⁴ among marginalised communities such as scheduled castes (almost 37 per cent in rural areas and 40 per cent in urban areas). The Access Index of asset ownership (defined as the share of assets owned by the community divided by the community’s share of population) across social groups was the lowest¹⁷⁵ for scheduled castes as of 2002-03. Marginalised people such as scheduled castes have suffered social exclusion and alienation for generations, exhibit poor human development indicators and capabilities agency as compared to the general population and are often bypassed¹⁷⁶ by development efforts and progress.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Woman belonging to a scheduled caste, father was a human scavenger, has 11 siblings, studied till 5th standard, owns a small plot of land, lives in a segregated hamlet for scheduled castes, unable to access water and other common resources due to caste-based discrimination.

My name is Nagarathnamma. I was born in Satyagala village of Mysore District. I was part of a huge family. We are 10 brothers and two sisters. My father worked as a human scavenger. I have studied only till the 5th standard. My parents married me off when I was 18 years of age. My husband works as a daily wage agricultural labourer. I have three daughters and one son. The eldest daughter is married. My son contributes to the family income and also works as a labourer in the village. My younger two daughters are studying in school. We live in our own house and own a small piece of agricultural land.

“The village has a natural source of water — a small lake. The Gowdas (upper caste) have total control over who uses it. We are Dalits or “untouchables” and so, we are not permitted even close to it, let alone use it. They tell us, ‘You cannot use this water and pollute it.’ My community never tries to break this unwritten rule. It is firmly followed.”

We are *Dalits*.¹⁷⁷ In my village, there are at least 33 families belonging to my community. All these families are clustered into a hamlet that is segregated from where the upper caste families live. Gowdas form the dominant upper caste community in the village. They own all the agricultural land in the village. Our community’s primary occupation is to work as agricultural labour in the “land of the Gowdas.”

The village has a natural source of water — a small lake. The Gowdas (upper caste) have total control over who uses it. We are *Dalits* or “untouchables” and so, we are not permitted even close to it, let alone use it. They tell us, ‘You cannot use this water and pollute it.’ My community never tries to break this unwritten rule. It is firmly followed. If someone from our community is ever found using that water, the dominant community will group up and physically shove the person away. We tried to build a channel across the road that could transfer water from this source to the other end. By doing so, we thought we would be able to use the water and also avoid the risk of polluting the water source by accessing it directly. The Gowdas resented that. They choked that channel with stones and mud. The channel is now completely blocked. This is our most immediate and pressing concern.

There is a bore well for our community. We have to collect water only from that bore well and wash clothes and utensils close to our house. The water supply is intermittent from the bore well and not sufficient for everyone. We also have to queue up for hours to wait for our turn. The bore well also keeps malfunctioning. In dire circumstances, the only alternative is an old well in the village. We have to pull bucket loads from it, which is strenuous. The quantity of water in the well is also not sufficient.

If we have access to the lake we will be able to use the water at our convenience. There will also be no waiting. It is much more comfortable for us to wash our clothes at the lake as ample water is available and it’s a time saver. The upper caste community also has a bore well. We are not permitted to even come near it, let alone touch it or take water from there. Even our kids cannot wander near it.

¹⁷³ India, Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Planning Commission, *India Human Development Report 2011: Towards Social Inclusion*. Available from http://www.im4change.org/docs/340IHDR_Summary.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ S. Subramanian and D. Jayaraj, “The Distribution of Household Wealth in India,” Research Paper No. 2006/116, World Institute for Development Economic Research, United Nations University (Finland, 2006). Available from www.wider.unu.edu/stc/repec/pdfs/rp2006/rp2006-116.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁷⁶ *The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2011* (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.11.I.10) Available from http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/11_MDG%20Report_EN.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁷⁷ *Dalit* or Scheduled Caste is a designation for a group of people regarded as “untouchable” and occupying the lowest rung of the Hindu caste system, which ordered and ranked humanity by innate spiritual purity.

I know that caste-based discrimination is an offence but we cannot complain. It is a question of our daily bread and butter. Most of us don't own land. Only some families possess smallholdings. We are subsistence farmers. Working in the upper caste fields is our only source of work and income. If we react and complain, we may have to suffer the ire of the dominant community and lose our only source of living. We cannot afford to make them unhappy and work against their wishes. We also take loans from them, when required. If we make them unhappy they will also not loan us any money. How will we take care of our family and their needs then? There are no other employment options close to our village.

We are not permitted to visit the village temple as upper caste people visit it. We are not even permitted to set foot near the *dewal*.¹⁷⁸ We go to the neighbouring village, where our community has built a *dewal*. Our children and men are not permitted a haircut at the village barbershop. If we go forcefully or complain, then the barber will be boycotted. None of the upper caste members and children will use his service. It will hit his business and he will suffer losses. So we take our children to the barbershop in town. There, no one knows our caste and so, there is no discrimination.

In schools, all the children study together but women from my community are ostracised and barred from preparing the free mid-day meals that children are supposed to get under a government scheme. Only members from the upper caste can cook and serve food to the children. At the local village tea stall, the cups and glasses (mostly disposable) are separately designated for our community. The tea is poured into them from a distance. The person who pours the tea then leaves the spot. Then, we pick our cups from that spot. After we drink the tea, we have to throw our cups or wash our own cups and glasses.

We can bear the rest but the social ostracism related to water affects us the most and our daily routine. Time is precious for us. We are daily wagers and receive payment according to the number of hours worked in a day. It impacts women the most because we have to wash clothes and manage water. If excessive time is spent collecting and managing water, it impacts our daily wage. I just want that there should be a designated spot for us to wash clothes at the lake. It could be any corner.

¹⁷⁸ Place of worship or temple.

¹⁷⁹ Cook Stove.

A day in the life of Nagarathamma

6am-7:30am: I wake at six in the morning. I go to the fields to answer the morning call. We don't have toilets in our houses. On my way to the field, I place empty buckets in the queue in front of the sole tap water connection for the community. On my way back, I check the status of the queue and fill the buckets. At times, when it's my turn, the water supply stops. I carry the bucket load back home. My children and husband also help with this. I prepare tea for everyone, clean the house and tidy it up.

7:30-8:30am: I take a bath and then prepare food for the family. The children leave for school. I wash the utensils and clean the kitchen. I also try to wash clothes if I have the time and water. After completing the morning chores, I leave for the fields owned by the Gowda community to work as a daily wager.

8:30am-6pm: We work from eight in the morning till six in the evening and receive 100 rupees (1.7 dollars) as our labour charges for a day. We also take our food with us. My husband and I work together. On the way back from the fields, I collect fuel wood from the nearby forest or fields. This takes up almost 1-2 hours a day.

6pm-9pm: I come home, prepare the evening tea and wash clothes if there is water. In the evening, we have to queue up for water again. A lot of my chores and time management is contingent on this. I prepare the evening meal and serve it to the family members. I clean the kitchen, wash the utensils and prepare the *chulha*¹⁷⁹ for the next day.

9pm-10pm: I am totally exhausted by 9pm-10pm and go to sleep. The next day, we follow the same schedule. Nothing changes for us.

MAMINA SAHU

Life on re-charge

Photo @ UN Women/Pranab K. Aich



“In my village, the metre shows that there is electricity in our homes but the voltage is so low that if you touch the wire with your bare hands, you will not even feel a slight shock. You will not feel anything.”

No one notices Mamina sitting quietly in a corner with her son during the proceedings of the local mahila sabha¹⁸⁰ in Dhenkanal District, located close to India’s south-eastern coastline and among the most backward districts in the country. She intently listens to the discussion being held on female foeticide, simultaneously checking the movements of her 8-year-old son, who is busy playing with a bamboo stick. Her main worry is that her son has not completed his homework and soon the sun will set. Electricity is a luxury for Mamina, which she receives for a maximum of one hour a day. If she misses charging her “rechargeable” torch today, she will lose her only source of light to last the night.

Mamina is among the 400 million¹⁸¹ Indians who live with no or little access to electricity. Globally, of the estimated 1.2 billion¹⁸² people (20 per cent of the world population) living with limited or no access to electricity, India has the single largest concentration. The unequal distribution of energy has the largest impact on the vulnerable poor, especially poor women and children in rural areas, argues a 2008 report entitled “The Case for Meeting the Millennium Development Goals through Access to Clean Electricity,” by the Global Energy Network Institute. Rural women spend much of their income and time on trying to access energy sources, it states, citing examples — women and young girls spend almost six hours a day gathering fuel wood and water, cooking and farming; they walk long distances, averaging 4-5 miles per day, risking their own safety and health and that of their children.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Studied till 12th standard, married, mother, gets electricity for an hour a day.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Mamina Sahu and I am 31 years old. I was a good student and among the very few in the village who completed 12th standard but college was too far and so, I was not sent to study further. I live with my husband, 8-year old son and mother-in-law.

In my village, the metre shows that there is electricity in our homes but the voltage is so low that if you touch the wire with your bare hands you will not even feel a slight shock. You will not feel anything. We receive proper voltage for an hour or less but not always. We do all our work during that time — charge our mobiles, watch television, charge a rechargeable torch for the night, which takes one hour and can work up to 24 hours, or we use a lantern. Otherwise, we have to live in the dark. At all other times, the electricity is very dim. In other words, the voltage is not sufficient for any kind of proper use. Even a filament inside a bulb does not show any sign of lighting up. We have no idea when or for how long the electricity will come? When there is proper voltage in the house, there are always fights because one person wants to do something; another wants to do something else.

It's always been like this since I came to this village. The present life is full of sorrows. When I was at my parent's home, I was very happy. There was sufficient water and electricity and everything inside the house worked — the tubewell, television and fridge. I had to work there, too, but life was easier because biogas was available. We never had to worry about gathering firewood for our kitchen. Everything was quicker and done in a hassle-free manner. Through biogas, we had electricity in our house and could cook properly and watch television. Even washing clothes was easier. I would switch on the motor and the clothes could be washed in our compound only. We did not have to travel to any pond or lake to wash them like we have to do now. When I came to this village after marriage,

I used to cry the whole day because there was too much work and no comfort. Later, I got used to it.

Right now, the winter season is going on and so I wear something warm and sleep peacefully at night. During the summer and rainy season though, we face terrible times. People in other villages use coolers in the summer afternoons or at least fans; I just keep rolling the hand-fan throughout the day. The house roof gets so hot during the summer that I have to pour water on the rooftop, which provides only temporary relief. We usually go outside to get shade under some tree because the heat inside is unbearable. Children get sick; elders suffer from sunstroke. There is also no hospital nearby and the roads are not good.

“The biggest problem children face is the loss of their education—they are not able to have the right frame of mind for studying. They will be able to study only if the feel comfortable, right?”

It is also unbearable to cook in the summers; it gets too hot near the *chulha*¹⁸³. If I cook both times in a day, then I start developing health complications. We suffer from prickly heat the size of big boils. So, I cook only in the evenings and then reheat the food in the morning and serve everyone. To avoid food from getting spoilt, I somehow adjust and mostly cook fried food and use a gas stove but it is very expensive these days. So, sometimes I cook my food on the *chulha* especially during winters to save on gas.¹⁸⁴ It works out to be much cheaper.

During the rainy season, there are different challenges. It is dangerous to go out for fear of snakes, insects or other animals. Children cannot go out in the dark even if they have to

¹⁸⁰ While the gram sabha is a meeting of all the adult citizen voters of the village, the mahila sabha is the women's counterpart of a gram sabha meeting with participation only by women in the village.

¹⁸¹ Energy, Facts, World Bank. Available from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTENERG/Y2/O,,contentMDK:22855502~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:4114200,00.html> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Cook stove.

¹⁸⁴ Liquid Petroleum Gas.

relieve themselves. The windows have to be kept open sometimes for some air. The whole house is full of insects and mosquitoes because they are attracted to the lantern light.

The biggest problem children face is the loss of their education – they are not able to have the right frame of mind for studying. They will be able to study only if they feel comfortable, right? My son often complains that he is feeling hot; if the fan is not working then he is not able to concentrate. He has to finish his work before it gets dark or use the lantern or the torch to complete it. I charge the torch especially for him. Children also cannot play because by the time they finish their work, it is dark and not safe outside. There are locally made lanterns available, which are much cheaper than the rechargeable torch and work on kerosene. But my son's nose bled from the smoke emitted by a kerosene-based lantern.

“If you could live the kind of life we are leading daily for even 2-3 hours, it would be a big thing. You would not be able to survive the heat for even 2-3 minutes.”

Most of the time, we lose our crops because there is no way to irrigate the fields. We cannot use generators because the water source is far. If my husband was in some service, then we might have moved but he is a farmer and has land, so we cannot think of going out of this village. But I am not going to bind my son in any way. He is free to move out and settle down wherever he likes. Why should he suffer?

Ten to 20 years from now the situation is not going to change; it is going to remain the same. If you could live the kind of life we are leading daily for even 2-3 hours, it would be a big thing. You would not be able to survive the heat for even 2-3 minutes.

A day in the life of Mamina

5am: It is still dark when I wake up. After freshening up, I start doing household chores, which includes cleaning the house and tending to my cow.

8am: I wake up my son and prepare him for school. I cook a small meal for his school lunch. I want him to study and leave this village so that he does not have to suffer like his parents.

9:30am-4pm: I take my bath, prepare lunch for everyone and take care of my ailing mother-in-law. It is extremely difficult for us to survive the summer afternoons without a fan. I keep moving a hand fan for hours in front of my mother-in-law to keep her cool and protect her from a heat stroke. I wait for the electricity eagerly so that I can charge my rechargeable torch for the night. Sometimes, I have to wait the whole day.

4pm-6pm: After my son returns from school, I immediately ask him to finish his homework while there is still some daylight. He gets upset with me because he doesn't get enough time to play but I don't want his education to suffer.

6pm-8pm: We light all the kerosene lamps in the house by 6pm because it becomes pitch dark by then. I realise my family members are getting allergic to the smoke from these lamps.

8pm-10pm: I am now used to preparing dinner in dark. Everyone eats dinner in the dark, too. I clean up and by 10pm, we go off to sleep.

GENDER EQUALITY & WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

When **empowerment** is thought of in broad humanistic terms, it can be defined¹⁸⁵ as a “process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions, which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.”

It can also be defined as trying to bring about the opposite of any kind of **marginalisation** based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender or the “process¹⁸⁶ of obtaining basic opportunities for marginalised people, either directly or through the help of others and encouraging and developing the skills for self-sufficiency.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Based on the above definitions, *women's empowerment* necessarily includes promoting a range of enabling conditions, skills and access starting with wholesome nutrition, health care (especially reproductive health care), opportunities to pursue education, decent livelihood, self-development and growth, skills (life and vocational) enhancement and income-generating capabilities, equal access to resources and assets, participation in decision-making at all levels, freedom from all forms of violence, access to soft and hard infrastructure to meet basic needs and for physical and social mobility, actionable knowledge and awareness of basic service entitlements and rights and legal recourse and agency to access them. In developing countries, gender-based power asymmetries tend to be more pronounced due to entrenched patriarchy and feudal structures. Historically, these have been and continue to be highly detrimental for women and their survival, let alone active empowerment. Thus, a concerted effort is required through public policy-making and implementation to deliver all of the above, particularly to marginalised women. Inevitably, women's empowerment goes hand-in-hand with **gender equality**. At a minimum, it can be defined¹⁸⁷ in terms of men and women (and boys and girls) being able to enjoy the same rights, opportunities and protections.

MDGs: Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment



MDG 3 – PROMOTE GENDER EMPOWERMENT AND EQUALITY

TARGETS	INDICATORS
Target 3.A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	3.1 Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education
	3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
	3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

1. The MDG framework's targets and goals for measuring and promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) seem conceptually aligned with the Gender Empowerment

¹⁸⁵ <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTEMPOWERMENT/0,,contentMDK:20245753~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:486411,00.html> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁸⁶ <http://sughosh.in/Empowerment.html> (accessed 10 June 2013)

¹⁸⁷ UNICEF, *Promoting Gender Equality: An Equity-Focused Approach to Programming*. Available from www.unicef.org/gender/files/Overarching_2Pager_Web.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

Measure (GEM), which has been critiqued for, inter alia, holding an elite bias and limited emphasis on women's relative incomes, participation in high-paying positions with economic power and access to professional and parliamentary positions.

2. Goal 3 included only one indicator to measure political empowerment — the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament, entirely ignoring the entire spectrum of sub-national and local level decision-making, which impact the lives of the poorest women in developing countries the most. A brief analysis of the Indian experiment with political representation for women in local self-government institutions is instructive for any emerging development agenda in terms of women's political empowerment. Refer to the section "Active, Meaningful and Independent Participation in Decision-Making" on pages 100 to 105.
3. Under the MDG framework, the sole indicator to measure economic empowerment was the "share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector," which was minimalist. It was also a curious choice as the bulk of the labour force in development countries is engaged in agriculture as informal labour and women constitute a large percentage and often a majority of this labour force category.
4. The MDG framework did not address skills development and training, which is crucial for economic empowerment and came up as the most common demand from women across all states for their economic betterment.
5. On gender equality, Goal 3 focussed solely on parity between girls and boys in education, which itself is not a strong measure of equality. For instance, it was found that in many places girls are attending primary school in an even higher ratio than boys. However, various factors such as security, poverty, distance, cultural norms and expectations and lack of soft and hard infrastructure impact education and retention of girls in schools, especially beyond primary school. A more comprehensive measurement of gender equality could have included targets for greater awareness of rights among women and girls through legal literacy and communication campaigns, increasing their access to property rights and common resources, levelling the playing field for women's entry and participation in all spheres of society on an equal footing with men starting from the household (fighting nutritional discrimination through targeted nutrition schemes for girls) to going to school and college without obstacles, learning new skills, securing jobs, equal wages for equal work and equal representation in all decision-making public institutions and parity in political representation at all levels.

Women of India Speak

Gender Equality

- Amongst most women, there was a marked sense of the subordinate role they occupy in society and their households, which was attributed to the traditional roles and restrictions imposed on them. Men have a dominant position in the society because there are no restrictions on them; they are not burdened by various duties and are free to move out, grow and develop more than women, who do not enjoy such freedoms. However, some women believed that the difference is an illusion and men and women are born to fulfil different duties. Others felt, men and women form a system, which has to work together for the family. Still others felt that men are demanding, authoritative and also critical of the work women did.

"Men oppress women with the fear of violence and humiliation. In some households, women also dominate but in very few."

- Women also attributed their subordinate position to their low levels of education and resulting inability to find good jobs and achieve financial independence.
- Women shared that they get no help from their husbands in household chores. In fact, they said that if they fail to do something or serve a meal on time, then men quarrel or it often becomes an excuse for violence.
- Women also identified lack of information as a big factor that makes the lives of men and women different and difficult, for them especially.

“My husband and I both earn. My husband spends all is money on himself and then asks me what I did with mine. If I answer back, he beats me. So, I end up giving him my money. How can you say there is equality between men and women?”

the difference is that men spend the money on themselves whereas a woman will spend it on her family. Other women felt the situation is similar in non-tribal areas and even if they earn money and contribute to the family income, the credit always goes to the head of the family. A man will say he is maintaining the family even though he might not be doing anything to contribute towards the family.

- Areas where access to basic services of water, education, health services had improved also reported an improvement in women’s overall status and well-being, implying a very strong link between access to basic needs and services and greater gender equality.

“If husband and wife are educated, then both of them will work equally. The problem is with uneducated families, where women have to work more.”

roles and contributing to domestic work and livelihood and income-generation for the family impede their opportunities for education, employment and growth. The situation is improving in urban areas but in rural areas, women felt that the priority for girls is still to fulfil their traditional roles first.

“Men don’t even carry a bucket from the courtyard to the bathroom. You think they will go collect water from 4-5 kilometres away?”

- Violence against women due to the existing gender gap came up as a big challenge. Women expressed their helplessness in this regard as they are living their lives under daily restraint and fear.
- Feedback from women in tribal regions revealed clearly that contrary to popular perception, gender inequality exists among tribal societies and is in fact widening, not decreasing. Women living in tribal areas felt that both men and women earn money but

“If a boy is born, then people say that all our sorrows have gone. If a girls is born, then they say that our sorrows have now begun.”

- A girl’s life is as difficult as a woman’s life is in the rural context. Boys enjoy a favourable position and conditions for their growth and development, whereas the same can not be said for girls. Restrictions on their movement by family members, fulfilling gender roles, early marriages, preparing for matrimonial

- Women also felt that no matter how educated people might become, when it comes to help in the household, it is always expected from girls and women. Boys are not asked to help. Some women even acknowledged that women love boys more and parents are to blame for this. Cultural norms and traditions also contributed to assigning a higher position in society such as boys performing the last rites on a parent's death.

Women's Empowerment

Most women did feel that there have been positive, even some transformative, changes in their lives over the past decade compared to previous generations. Women shared that they have greater visibility, more women are educated and employed now than before, there is better social security cover especially for pregnant and lactating mothers, reduced maternal mortality and greater health-related facilities. They have greater representation in governance and increased levels of awareness. Government schemes specifically aimed at women's development have also increased. However, they also pointed out several issues that remain unaddressed and new concerns, which are affecting them adversely.

Based on the definitions and concepts outlined above, feedback on **women's empowerment** has been broadly encapsulated under the seven categories below:

1. Nutrition and Healthcare

- There was general consensus regarding improvements in health care services for pregnant women and lactating mothers, reported decrease in maternal and child mortality in villages, mushrooming of primary health care centres in villages and hospitals closer to them to access and greater awareness regarding family planning and the importance of a small family. However, women did raise concerns regarding administrative delays and absenteeism of medical staff (doctors and nurses), overcrowding, long waiting hours and unpleasant and insensitive treatment at government hospitals, all of which combined, led poor families to often seek private health care, placing a huge burden on them.
- Many women across different geographies identified shifting weather patterns and successive failure of rains as the reason for crop failure and greater food insecurity. These women said they could no longer work on their farms and are being forced to work either as labour on other people's farms or as migrant labour without any rights and ability to negotiate wages.
- There has been a negative impact on nutrition, increased expenditure on buying vegetables rather than growing them and screening food items according to costs rather than nutrition. Women, who eat last or the least due to their nurturing and caregiving roles and existing nutritional discrimination, are the worst sufferers.
- Women are increasingly performing the majority of labour in farms and village and construction works. Due to the nature of physical work women are performing, they now commonly experience health symptoms such as headaches, acidity, weaknesses, body and joint aches and dizziness.
- Although nutrition facilities have improved at the village level, there was mixed feedback on the quality and taste of the food provided at these government-run nutrition centres. Some women living in remote areas such as tribal women shared that they still couldn't access nutrition centres close-by easily, which dissuades them altogether.
- Many women cited poor roads as a challenge that negatively impacts children's education and women's health, particularly pregnant women and their ability to reach hospitals for delivery safely and in time.

2. Freedom from all forms of violence and exploitation

- Violence against women came up as a major challenge in all states although, there was some acknowledgement that women are more aware of their rights now and also seek more police assistance and legal recourse than in the past.
- Women unanimously shared that one thing that has not changed over the years is men's habit of alcoholism, which has the most damaging effect on women's lives and led to poverty, ill-health and overall insecurity. Domestic violence and abuse is a direct result, which women said, affects pregnant women the most.
- Women found dowry to be highly disempowering. Cases of dowry-related deaths and child marriages were also reported.
- Women shared that one of the main reasons they stay in oppressive and abusive marriages is because it is seen as dishonourable in society to go back to the parent's house. Since, that is not a viable option, they feel that they have to adjust somehow. Women also shared that they cannot get married again, even in tribal communities, which are generally considered more liberal. Women also shared their concerns of the repercussions a separation might have on children.
- Women identified violence against women at the work place, especially in informal sectors (e.g. garment industry, as domestic help) where they are mostly employed, as a blind spot in public policy. It also has major implications for their health and well-being.

Collective Action by Women (Sehore District, Madhya Pradesh)

"Alcoholism was adversely affecting many women. All men and even young boys in the village were drunkards. When we met in self-help group meetings (*mahila samuhs*), women discussed their woes. Everyone realised it was affecting everyone. Money earned through SHG activities was also not spared by men, who used it to buy liquor. Women used to discuss how to save their money? We decided to take action and formed a group and visited the houses where country liquor was being brewed. We smashed all the pots. Even the furnaces were destroyed. We also reported it to the police and got those men arrested. Since then, things have changed drastically."

3. Education and Growth Opportunities

- Women pointed out that their lack of education, security concerns and the traditional gender roles that women and girls have to perform daily continue to collectively shape and define their subordinate position in society, their communities, households and marriages.
- Awareness about girl's education has increased and a lot more girls are going to school (even more than boys) than before. However, constraining factors remain, especially for their higher education, such as expectations to assist in the household, distance to schools and colleges, security and poverty, costs for a college education and arranging dowry for marriages and lack of employment opportunities.
- Literacy levels among adult women remain very low, especially among tribal and *Dalit* women.

4. ***Livelihood, Employment, Skills Enhancement and Access to Resources***

- Women feel burdened by their daily roles and responsibilities, which they felt are depriving them of their growth-related opportunities.

Collective Action by Women (Dharwad District, Karnataka)

“We had a primary school in our village; there was no high school. Many girls had to drop out, as parents were not comfortable with sending their daughters far off. In 2000, we all got together in the village and wrote an application stating that we desperately need a high school in our village. Our daughters are keen to study. Due to our advocacy, a Member of Legislative Assembly sanctioned a high school. That is why our village has educated youth. Now we also have a college in our village. We believe that education is the key to progress and development.”

- Women engaged in farm labour feel cornered by the lack of employment options except as daily wage agricultural labour, working in brick kilns, construction work or village works through the employment guarantee scheme. As a result, they are willing to compromise on amount of wages, work hours and working conditions, especially if illiterate.

- In harsh terrains such as deserts, women reported major challenges with earning livelihoods.
- Women also raised the issue of lack of skill-based employment and training opportunities. Some women said there are several skill-based trainings but no opportunities are available to use those skills to earn a livelihood.
- Mostly unable to offer collateral, poor women find it exceedingly difficult to access loans from the banks.

5. ***Access to infrastructure (housing, water, sanitation, electricity, roads) and ability to adapt to disaster and climate change***

- In almost all states, women cited lack of water (access, availability and quality) as a major, if not the foremost, challenge in their lives.
 - The issue of water management and fetching water from far distances remains a big challenge for a majority of women. They feel it is time-consuming and keeps them from attending to more productive activities. Lack of drinking water facilities and an associated practice of involving girls in fetching water from an early age was a related concern.
- *“If we have proper water availability and access, our problems will be reduced to half.”*

- Water shortage is severe during summer months, which women feel affects them the most.
 - Women raised concerns about water quality such as high level of fluoride or contamination and linked it to many new diseases such as kidney stones, TB, typhoid, chikungunya¹⁸⁸, dengue fever and cancer.
 - Women feel the lack of water and sanitation most acutely during menstruation and pregnancy.

¹⁸⁸ A virus transmitted to humans by virus-carrying Aedes mosquitoes with symptoms similar to dengue fever with an acute febrile phase of illness lasting only two to five days, followed by a prolonged arthralgic disease that affects the joints.

- Women also linked lack of toilets and water in schools as a factor negatively impacting girl's education, leading to dropouts, especially among teenage girls.
- Women cited the lack of good roads connecting villages, especially in hilly areas, as a critical development challenge. In a few states, women drew a strong link between health related concerns (especially pregnancy) and bad roads. Frequent cases of pregnancy related complications and even maternal deaths was directly associated with poor roads and infrastructure.
- Women also found the lack of infrastructure related to roads and transport facilities to be a major deterrent in their mobility, ability to fetch water, collect fuel wood work, go to work in the fields and for children's education.
- In tribal and remote areas especially, women cited major electricity related problems and drew a strong link between the lack of power and the negative impact on children's education and even health. Women from peri-urban areas complained more of power cuts.

6. Actionable Knowledge and Awareness of Rights¹⁸⁹ and Public Entitlements and Human Agency to access them

- In all states, most women acknowledged that their awareness levels of health, education, the importance of a smaller family, children's and especially girl's education and women's health (especially reproductive) had increased over the past decade. They said they want their girls to study even beyond college. Some women feel that there is increased awareness regarding hygiene, the need for sanitation and about diseases such as HIV and AIDS. Some women even feel that increased awareness has led to accelerated development of their villages and communities
- However in most states, the levels of literacy and awareness about government schemes and their entitlements and how to access them still remains poor. Knowledge of girl child schemes is especially poor. Women in many states could identify some schemes because people in their village are receiving benefits through them but did not have much knowledge about them when probed further. They also feel that various restrictions posed on women by parents and husbands make access to information all the more difficult for them.
- Knowledge about laws and rights related to dowry or domestic violence is almost negligible.
- Many women were critical of schemes such as the employment guarantee scheme due to delays in payment of wages.
- Women cited corruption and the negative role of middlemen as challenges in accessing their entitlements. They also cited the lack of a direct complaint mechanism for grievance redressal.
- Some elected women representatives feel that their levels of self-awareness and general knowledge of government schemes, government machinery and politics have increased since coming into elected office.
- Elected women representatives were found to be generally better informed than non-elected women of the village but not uniformly. Many of them are illiterate, lack knowledge of basic government schemes and are unable to communicate effectively.

“Before introducing a programme, the government should see whether that programme is beneficial or not. They should conduct surveys to assess this. Most government programmes are useless.”

¹⁸⁹ Human, legal rights and constitutional rights.

- Many elected women felt that village community meetings and women's meetings are important awareness-raising and problem-solving platforms, help build accountability and transparency and facilitate grievance redressal, especially if government officials are also present and help to identify the most deserving or truly intended beneficiaries for various government development schemes. Some women felt that they are a waste of time if grievances are not redressed and promises are not kept.
- The *mahila sabhas* or women's meetings¹⁹⁰ were found to be especially useful to receive information on government schemes, entitlements and discuss women-specific concerns, as they can express their opinions without any hesitation or restrictions, which either can't be taken up as openly at village meetings or don't receive priority. They also allow women to prepare for the larger village meetings to bring up issues with more confidence, collectively and forcefully. The presence of elected women representatives in village meetings, it was felt, has also encouraged more women to attend them and raise issues.

“If government officials are present, at least they'll listen to our problems, whether they do something about them or not.”

7. Active, Meaningful and Independent Participation in Decision-Making

Context

As far back as 1952, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention¹⁹¹ on Political Rights of Women — the first international legislation of its kind protecting women's political rights to vote and hold political office, “as established by national law on equal terms as with men and without discrimination on the basis of sex.”

Women's representation in government is increasingly considered as an important component of their overall empowerment and necessary to achieve gender equality. The United Nations has identified six avenues by which female participation in politics and government can be strengthened. They include equalisation of educational opportunities, quotas for female participation in governing bodies, legislative reform to increase focus on issues concerning women and children, financing

“Women can't stand for elections if there is opposition inside the house.”

gender-responsive budgets to equally take into account the needs of men and women, increasing the presence of sex-disaggregated statistics in national research and data and furthering the presence and agency of grassroots women's empowerment movements.

As of April 1, 2013, the global average¹⁹² of women in national assemblies was about 20.8 per cent, which is almost double the percentage of seats held by Indian women¹⁹³ in national parliament, which stands at 11 per cent. However, many countries including India, are exploring and adopting

¹⁹⁰ While the gram sabha is a meeting of all the adult citizen voters of the village, the mahila sabha is the women's counterpart of a gram sabha meeting with participation only by women in the village.

¹⁹¹ www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/convention_political_rights_of_women_10741.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁹² Women in National Parliaments: World and Regional Averages, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Available from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁹³ Ibid.

measures to increase women's participation in all levels of government. In India, it began in earnest in 1993, when a constitutional amendment¹⁹⁴ mandated that a randomly selected third of leadership positions at every level of local government be reserved for women. An estimated 1.2 million¹⁹⁵ women have been elected to political office at the grassroots following these political reforms.

Profile 19 on page 106 profiles an elected woman representative who belongs to a backward class and yet, was able to win elections in an entirely tribal-populated village as a result of the unprecedented opportunity that women's reservation in local-self government institutions has generated for their political and social empowerment

Profile 20 on page 110 sheds light on the challenges that elected women representatives face while navigating entrenched power and patriarchal structures, vested interests and lack of political will and the changes they can bring about despite them.

Despite these transformative trends, women in government continue to face numerous obstacles and challenges to participating in decision-making in an "active, meaningful and independent" manner.

Summarised below is a slice of the Indian experience based on focus-group discussions with close to 200 elected women representatives across 10 districts in five Indian states — Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan. Most of the women interviewed were elected in 2009¹⁹⁶ and have had at least three years of experience.

Motivations for contesting election

- Almost everyone agreed that reservation for women in the local self-government system¹⁹⁷ was the main trigger for their contesting elections. They felt that otherwise, it becomes rather impossible to compete with established men leaders with years of experience. There were a few exceptions who contested from the general seats and did not avail the women's quota.
- Desire to serve the people of the village
- Desire to enter politics and change people's lives
- Perform community service and development
- Encouragement from family members and village people
- Confidence people have reposed in them

"No matter how much women cover their face, they should still get power and position."

"Ghoonghat chahe jitna bhi lamba hai, pad to milna hi chahiye"

¹⁹⁴ Women in National Parliaments: World and Regional Averages, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Available from www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁹⁵ India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Annual Report (2011-2012). Available from <http://www.panchayat.gov.in/> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁹⁶ National Elections, India, 2009.

¹⁹⁷ Refers to the Indian Panchayati Raj system or Rule of Village Committee, which is a three-tier system in the state with elected bodies at the Village, Block and District levels. It ensures greater participation of people and more effective implementation of rural development programmes.

- Good rapport with the villagers
- Encouraged or prompted or forced by their husbands and/or family
- Previously husband held same position; people already knew the family
- Already from a political background and continuing family legacies of politics; inadvertent hints of family domination being a factor in village politics and clinching an election
- Felt they had or were told they had certain qualities such as a gentle manner with people, confidence, persuasive skills, interactive, ability to convey the wish and challenges faced by people to the powers that be in the village
- Sense of pride, honour and power associated with the position
- To earn respect and glory in society
- To get information at meetings
- At sub-village level, a desire to accomplish specific things such as getting a tap, sewage pipe or hand pump installed, building a road or securing and building housing and toilets
- Quite a few stood unopposed
- Some were elected against their wishes and said they would resign, if they could

“Even family members respect us now, which was not the case earlier.”

Understanding and Carrying Out Roles and Responsibilities

“Initially, we were reticent and people suspected our abilities to deliver and thought we were just rubberstamps. As time passed, we gained more exposure and confidence. Now we are more assertive. Initially, men were disappointed but now they understand that we have the right to speak, express our opinion and also take decisions.”

- Some women inadvertently admitted that they only involve themselves with the household chores and their husbands manage their elected responsibilities.
- Some women openly admitted that all their official decisions are taken by their husbands; they just sign on documents where told and attend meetings.
- At first, not aware of their powers and responsibilities, elected women representatives would sign anywhere they were asked to but after receiving training, they became more aware, confident and assertive. They can now “handle situations,” talk to senior officials and resolve matters.

Changes in women’s lives since election (self-image, personality, awareness, general perception, abilities/capabilities)

Most women agreed that there have definitely been changes in their lives since winning elections, more positive than negative as it emerged.

Positive

- Feeling of making a difference in peoples’ lives, which has been very empowering
- Feel a sense of pride

- More confident in performing their roles; the exposure has been a huge learning experience raising their confidence levels substantially
- People now recognise and respect them as individuals, value their advice and counsel
- Have become more seasoned and worldly wise
- More social acceptance and women's voices are heard more
- Women have gained status, self-awareness and change in thinking
- Increased levels of knowledge and awareness, especially about government schemes
- Better understand the challenges of the community
- Given rise to personal aspirations to reach higher levels of political office and lead healthy, peaceful lives free of any discrimination
- Greater respect received from people, especially government officials and community members
- People's mindsets, their orientation and perceptions regarding women and their abilities have also changed

*“Once I have won the election,
I have accepted that you have to
work uniformly for
those who gave votes
and those who didn't — you have
to work for everyone.”*

*“I am the first woman elected
leader. Prior to that, there were
only male leaders for 45 years.
When I wanted to campaign,
people asked me if I would be able
to do the work of a man.
I had to request them to give me a
chance and then decide if
I would be able to or not.”*

- Mobility was restricted before assuming the role but they have more freedom now
- Few years ago, restrictions were imposed on women to attend meetings; now there is increasing acceptance towards women assuming a leadership role and people take them more seriously
- In the beginning, women did not attend village meetings, let alone express their views and opinions. Ever since women have assumed the role of elected leaders, more women have started attending the meetings, which are viewed as very important

Negative

- Increased workload due to the twin responsibilities of managing their households and performing their elected roles. Some women said they are skipping meals as a result. Few also mentioned that people come to their homes seeking help for their problems, which affects their household-related work
- Some women felt nothing had changed for them and they have felt no difference in their lives

Challenges faced in discharging their roles and responsibilities

- Mostly faced challenges in the beginning of the tenure but as time has progressed, they have learned more on the job and gradually acclimatised to their new responsibilities.
- Illiterate women were not able to speak very confidently or openly
- There is a confidence gap mainly also attributed to women being confined to the four walls of the home for so long; lacking confidence in dealing with people and officials
- Domination of political system by men and their attempt to dominate them as well; incidence cited of husbands taking over the responsibilities of their elected wives
- Family members ask too many questions and restrict their mobility from attending meetings and performing their duties
- Unable to pay sufficient attention and spend enough time with their children due to increased workload
- Lack of motivation and feeling of the job becoming a liability and “headache” as people are never happy
- Lack of awareness among people and their unwillingness to elect women due to restrictions imposed on their mobility by family members and their inability to carry out their responsibilities – general feeling was that they are not taken seriously only because they are women and that they were elected through a ‘reserved quota’
- Facing problems in reaching out to the higher authorities and in accessing funds for development-related activities
- Elected members at the sub-village level felt that they work more than the village president but their work is still overlooked

Perceived differences between men and women elected representatives

- Battling a common perception that male leaders can perform much better than their female counterparts but feel they are no less – only difference is women manage a much greater workload due to their dual responsibilities
- Women have an advantage of being more sensitive and responsive to the needs of women (and children), better able to identify hidden problems and thus in a better position to respond to them than men; male leaders do not concern themselves much with women-specific issues
- Village women are more comfortable approaching women elected leaders compared to male leaders
- Women leaders felt that they have proven that they are endowed with more problem-solving acumen than men

“If a woman goes to the village head with her problems of domestic violence or alcoholism, then she says that the village head himself is abusing his wife and torturing her; what complaint will she go and register with him? Men leaders never give value to a woman’s complaint of violence.”

- Believed that women in general are better leaders than men due to their greater sincerity towards work; they felt that men can be a little deceptive whereas women will engage with a more sincere heart
- Women felt they are more reliable and committed than their male counterparts
- If a woman is determined, she will finish a task efficiently but male leaders have a very casual attitude towards addressing problems.
- Sometimes, there were differing responses. Some women said men in their village are extremely supportive and have never made them feel that they are any less. In another village cluster, they said men would not let women even participate in meeting deliberations; they just sit silently feeling miserable all the time. They have no say in decision-making and commanded no respect. Men in their village are overbearing and elected women representatives in other villages are performing much better as they have the support of the men in their village and family members.

“However many efforts we make, the other male elected representatives will not let us grow.”

“(Hamara patta kaat denge)”

- Some women felt men are more competent compared to women as they are better informed and more articulate but women are better leaders as they spend more time with people and listen to their problems.
- Some women were outspoken about how men create problems for them, as they cannot see a woman in a powerful position.

SANGHMITRA SABAR

One flew over the patriarchal rest

Photo @ UN Women/Praveen Kaliga



“I expect my husband to support me but not every time and everywhere. There is nothing wrong in taking advice or suggestions. Sometimes maybe what the other person is suggesting makes better sense but decision-making should be personal.”

She enters the mahila sabha¹⁹⁸ with an unassuming air of authority, greets everyone with a “namaskar”¹⁹⁹ and a humble bow and takes the central chair. The respect that she commands is evident from the affectionate manner in which other women gather around her in Parisal village, located in Gajapati District of India’s south-eastern coast and among the most backward districts in the country. In a seasoned manner, she occasionally nods her head and listens to them, offering suggestions along the way. The only graduate sarpanch²⁰⁰ in the entire district, Sanghmitra takes pride in having reached where she is due to her hard work and without anyone’s help. She dreams of “100 per cent education among girls” in the village because she believes that only education can make competent future leaders.

Exactly 20 years ago, a constitutional amendment resulting in 33 per cent reservation for women in the three-tier Panchayati Raj²⁰¹ Institutions (PRIs), heralded the start of a quiet revolution for it paved the way for thousands of Indian women at the grassroots to assume political leadership. It allowed them to step into the public realm and politics in an unprecedented manner in what is still a deeply entrenched patriarchal society and an arena still overwhelmingly dominated by men. Many consider this an achievement in and of itself, continuing debates and questions regarding women’s true political empowerment notwithstanding. Over roughly the same period, however, political participation of women in national parliament, included as an indicator for gender empowerment under the MDG framework, has increased from only 5 to 11 per cent²⁰² since 1990 and remains considerably lower than the world average of 20.8 per cent.²⁰³

INTERSECTIONALITY: Elected woman representative, belongs to a backward class but won election as president in a tribal-populated village, married, mother of two children.

Footnotes overleaf

My name is Sanghmitra Sabar. I come from a service class and well-educated background. My mother and father had a dream to make their youngest daughter an advocate. My father wanted me to marry an uncle's son but I was in love with someone else — my future husband. He had a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) and dreamt of working in big companies someday. I got married in haste and my parent's blessings were not with me. My father left this world but I could not meet him for a last time. That is a regret.

When I was in the second year of college, a friend stood for local elections and we supported and campaigned for him. He won and that inspired me. I thought I would do something similar one day. In the final year of college, I stood for college president unopposed and was given the post. That was a very big achievement for me; it was the day that I felt that if I stand for elections, I have a chance of winning.

Twelve years ago, when I came to Parisal village after marriage, I faced a lot of challenges. I was the only girl from a backward class in an entirely tribal village. People never accepted me initially. They used to say things like “her caste is not good” or “she is not good looking” and “couldn't she have found anyone else in her own community.” My father-in-law never liked me. Initially, I used to cry a lot and think that this is my destiny — I wanted to study and work but couldn't do any of it. Today, I have proved myself but after a lot of struggle.

“When I came to this village after marriage, everyone ordered me around. So, I did the same in the field. My supervisor told me that bossing people around would not work. She taught me to meet people, build relationships, make eye contact while speaking to them and only then people will listen to you. I learnt that the first important thing is public relations and the way to win people's hearts is by meeting and talking to them.”

In 1999, I started working in an NGO — PREM PLAN, which works on education. When I came to this village after marriage, everyone ordered me around. So, I did the same in the field. My supervisor told me that bossing people around would not work. She taught me to meet people, build relationships, make eye contact while speaking to them and only then people will listen to you. I learnt that the first important thing is public relations and the way to win people's hearts is by meeting and talking to them.

Working in an NGO means that your time is not your own. They might call you in the morning or evening depending on the work. I did a lot of community service. My starting monthly salary

¹⁹⁸ While the gram sabha is a meeting of all the adult citizen voters of the village, the mahila sabha is the women's counterpart of a gram sabha meeting with participation only by women in the village.

¹⁹⁹ A common greeting or spoken salutation originating from the Indian Subcontinent, where a non-contact form of salutation such as “namaskar” or “namaste” is preferred.

²⁰⁰ Sarpanch is an elected head of a village level statutory institution of local self-government called the panchayat.

²⁰¹ The oldest system of local government in the Indian Subcontinent, “panchayat” literally means assembly of five wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community. Over time the concept has evolved and become synonymous with “democratic decentralisation” in India.

²⁰² Millennium Development Goals Indicators. Available from <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Default.aspx> (accessed 10 June 2013).

²⁰³ Women in National Parliaments: World and Regional Averages, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Available from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (accessed 10 June 2013).

was 1500 rupees (25 dollars) and by the end, I was earning 8000 rupees (135 dollars) per month and could support my children as well.

In 2006-07, I pushed my husband to stand for *sarpanch*,²⁰⁴ supported him and also campaigned for him and he won. While campaigning, everyone told me, “*Didi*”²⁰⁵, why your husband and why not you? You should stand for the election.” I also felt the same way. Although, I was a community worker, as a woman belonging to “Other Backward Classes” (OBC)²⁰⁶ in a completely tribal village, I did not think I stood a chance. Before the elections, a village meeting was conducted where the women

“The biggest problem of women is that they understand everything but are not able to speak out. If there is no education there will be no voice and there is no education among women here.”

of my village suggested my name for *sarpanch*. The 50 per cent reservation for women boosted my confidence, too. I contested unopposed and won. I left the NGO in 2012, after winning the *sarpanch* election.

A *sarpanch* does not get a salary but does get a lot of respect. He or she does get a sitting allowance of rupees 100 (1.7 dollars) for attending meetings and a monthly honorarium²⁰⁷ of 1000 rupees (17 dollars). There are many women in the PRI system but I don’t want to be like them.

I expect my husband to support me but not every time and everywhere. There is nothing wrong in taking advice or suggestions. Sometimes maybe what the other person is suggesting makes better sense but decision-making should be personal.

The biggest problem of women is that they understand everything but are not able to speak out. If there is no education there will be no voice and there is no education here among women. They don’t even want to learn; that is another big problem.

Since becoming *sarpanch*, my responsibilities have increased. Sometimes, I am required to work late and odd hours, which my husband doesn’t like. My children are always telling me that I am not a good mother because I don’t devote any time to them. There are societal pressures to deal with, too. Some people think that after becoming *sarpanch*, you become arrogant and don’t mix with other people. Still, it is my dream to make political life my professional life and become a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA)²⁰⁸ someday. It has been only a year since I became *sarpanch* and there is still a long way to go. I have very big dreams. There are two villages in my *panchayat*,²⁰⁹ which are on top of mountains. The people there do not have anything — no electricity, health facilities or schools. Developing those two villages are the goals I have set for myself.

As for the women of my village, whenever they had complaints, they used to go to a man and never a woman. I want to make a special office in the village where only women can come with their problems. If a woman goes to another woman, she will be able to share more. This is one of my dreams for the women of the village.

²⁰⁴ Sarpanch is an elected head of a village level statutory institution of local self-government called the panchayat.

²⁰⁵ Generic colloquial term to address a fellow woman with respect and affection.

²⁰⁶ The national government of India classifies some of its citizens based on their social condition, typically implying they are educationally or socially marginalised, which fall under the category of “Other backward classes.”

²⁰⁷ Panchayati Raj (local-self government) is a state subject under the Indian Constitution and hence, the states have discretion on most related matters including salary amounts for elected leaders. A village president in Orissa may thus be earning a different salary from one in Rajasthan.

²⁰⁸ An elected representative by the voters of a constituency to the legislature or legislative assembly of a sub-national jurisdiction. In India, an MLA is a member of a state legislative assembly.

²⁰⁹ Local self-government at the village level in India.

A day in the life of Sanghmitra

4am-6am: I have to wake up by 4am because tribal people knock on my door with their problems before they leave for the forest for their workday. At this early hour, I have to listen to them and provide solutions, while everyone in my house is sleeping. Initially, it was very disturbing when someone knocked on the door every five minutes but now I have adjusted to suit their needs.

6am-9am: I wake my husband up and immediately start the daily household chores of cooking and cleaning. I have to hurry because usually, I have an early meeting scheduled somewhere.

9am: I leave home for work and am usually out for the entire day. I have my lunch in the meetings, office or with people in the field. Most of the times, I have to skip meals. There is a lot of paperwork, which needs to be finished and especially in a tribal village, it is very difficult to catch the appropriate people and explain the importance of documentation.

5:30pm-7:30pm: I usually come back home by 5:30pm. If my children are back from hostel, they demand that I spend time with them, which I cannot do because in addition to attending to village work, I have to complete the household chores of cooking and cleaning in the evening.

7:30pm: We finish having dinner and after that, I try taking some rest by watching television but if my children are around, they surround me and start chatting. Sometimes, I do not have the strength to even listen but I don't want them to feel bad and so pretend that I'm being attentive. On their way back from the forest, tribal men and women again come with their problems. It becomes difficult to manage everyone at once.

9pm: I make preparations for the next working day, including a list of the tasks to be finished before going off to sleep. My daily routine is very hectic but it is very satisfying at the end of the day.

CHHAVI RAJAWAT

Swimming in the same rip tides

Photo @ UN Women/Divya Gupta



“Five years is enough time to make a difference, if you really want to. The people of the village themselves have been my biggest asset.”

Chhavi Rajawat has a family history of politics and village development. Twenty years ago, her grandfather was sarpanch²¹⁰ of Soda, where she now serves as sarpanch herself since her election in 2009. On a sunny winter morning in January, Rajawat, dressed sans frills in jeans and a cotton tunic, drove her SUV from India’s “pink city” of Jaipur to Soda, which is an hour away. As we turned into the winding and dusty roads of the village, with a strong hint of pride, she pointed to markers that still bear the imprint of her grandfather’s legacy. When asked her age, she smiles first. When asked her religion, she says, “spiritual.” Soon, she turns into the gate of a primary school for girls, which she is helping to re-build. There is a palpable fondness and sense of comfort when the village men and women greet her, clad in Rajasthan’s signature bright-coloured turbans and saris²¹¹, respectively. As 34-year-old Rajawat keenly inspects progress at the school, she appears involved and every bit the dutiful and self-described “daughter of the village.”

Although there has been an increased focus on women’s political representation at a local level in many countries, results have been mixed, at best, in terms of genuine empowerment. India is among the countries that witnessed an unprecedented decentralisation of power. The 73rd Constitutional Amendments²¹² in 1992, which mandated *panchayat*²¹³ elections throughout the country, resulted in reforms reserving 33 per cent of the seats (increased recently to 50 per cent in 12 states²¹⁴) for women and for castes and tribes proportional to their population. Over 1.2 million²¹⁵ women have been elected to local political office since these reforms but they continue to face multiple challenges in navigating entrenched power and patriarchal structures, vested interests, lack of political will and obstructionism in village development.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Elite background and education, fluent in English, elected woman representative, village president, single, financially secure.

Footnotes overleaf

In some ways, my story is representative and in other ways, it is different. It is representative because I face many of the same challenges other elected leaders do and it is different because I have family and financial support, which many others don't at the village level. Also, I question decisions and authority, which very few other representatives would be in a position to do and being educated helps. So, in these ways, I am privileged.

I never thought I would do this — the village people came up with the idea. By and large, I feel that grassroots realities are not really known and despite an increase in funding for rural development, I realised that things had only gotten worse for the village people. I had self-belief that I could make a difference and also, I wanted to be a “bridging agent” between the village and government as well as the non-government sector.

Everyone sees me as the “daughter of the village” and that works to my advantage. I get respect from men and women. The very fact that I was elected *sarpanch* has given a lot of confidence and hope to women and girls of the village. Now they're more vocal and raise their issues. Earlier, you had to really coax them to speak. I remember the first *gram sabha*²¹⁶ I held. We put a mike and recorder in place to make it more exciting and motivating. It took almost one hour to finally get the first person to speak and after that it was a piece of cake.

The *gram sabha* is a great platform if used well but it is not being used effectively for

“It's been three years in this journey so far and the biggest obstacle has been the local administration not being responsive and supportive. That's where all the disbursement of funds takes place and we are totally dependent on them. I believe the elected representatives and local administration should work like a team but that is where the biggest gap exists.”

the common good. People think there will always be negativity and especially women feel they will lose face if they speak up. I am very transparent about what we intend on doing. Whatever challenges come up, I tell the people that you need to figure out the solution and take responsibility for it. I only put in my two bits and I think they appreciate it and know that whether they like it or not, they have to carry it forward. I'm actually using *mahila sabhas*²¹⁷ to educate women on issues and what the flow of funds is because everybody thinks *panchayats* have all the money and we just need to snap our fingers and we'll get the money but the reality is far removed. It's been three years in this journey so far and the biggest obstacle has been the local administration not really being responsive and supportive. That's where all the disbursement of funds takes place and we are

²¹⁰ Sarpanch is an elected head of a village level statutory institution of local self-government called the panchayat.

²¹¹ Also spelt as “Saree,” it is a strip of unstitched cloth, worn by women, ranging from four to nine yards in length that is draped over the body in various styles which is native to the Indian Subcontinent.

²¹² The Amendment Act of 1992 contains provision for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the panchayats (local-self government units) both for the preparation of economic development plans and social justice as well as for implementation in relation to 29 subjects listed in the eleventh schedule of the Constitution.

²¹³ Local self-government at the village level in India.

²¹⁴ India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Annual Report (2011-12). Available from <http://www.panchayat.gov.in/> (accessed 10 June 2013).

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ A meeting of all adult citizen voters of the village.

²¹⁷ While the gram sabha is a meeting of all the adult citizen voters of the village, the mahila sabha is the women's counterpart of a gram sabha meeting with participation only by women in the village. It is meant to provide a platform to discuss challenges facing women that can be raised by them comfortably without fear of the power dynamics present in a full-fledged official village meeting with men present as well.

totally dependent on them. I believe that the elected representatives and local administration should work like a team but that is where the biggest gap exists. If I've been able to do something it's only because of outside help — external donations. Otherwise, I would not be able to do the kind of work I have done.

I feel the main reason for lack of village development is lack of awareness. People feel that just by giving someone the political seat or a title you've empowered the person. Unless they get training and understand the government machinery and schemes, you are not empowering them. Why do proxy leaders happen? It is because *panchayat secretaries*²¹⁸ cannot be trusted because they get a lot of wrong documents signed, the *patwaris*²¹⁹ try and frame the *sarpanches* and so people are scared. It is

*“Why do proxy leaders happen?
It is because panchayat secretaries
cannot be trusted because they get a lot
of wrong documents signed,
the patwaris try and frame the
sarpanches and so people are scared.
It is understandable that husbands
want to protect their wives.”*

understandable that husbands want to protect their wives. In one meeting, I told some husbands who were sitting in for their *sarpanch* wives to please send them instead and I will ensure that they know the contents of the documents they have to sign in their official capacity. Also, for that purpose, if they need, they can call on anyone they trust including their husbands, sons and family members. They realised with just that comment that their wives will not be taken for granted and sent them instead in five minutes.

We've also created many groups so that when I'm not there, the work goes on, although I'm focusing more on youth and women. So, the youth group has volunteered to clean the village — they do it once every two weeks. I do literacy programmes where girls go and teach women, when convenient. It's still at a very nascent stage but it's overwhelming to see the community participation and I think we'll try to ensure sustainability. Five years is enough time to make a real difference, if you really want to. The people of the village themselves have been my biggest asset.

²¹⁸ Village administrative official supporting elected head.

²¹⁹ Village accountant.

A day in the life of Chhavi Rajawat

6am-7am: I usually get up by 6am because people start coming to my house from the morning. I like to go for a walk first thing in the morning, which also gives me time to inspect the village a bit and normally, I take a few villagers along with me, especially the elderly — I tell them exercise is good.

7am-9am: When I'm back from my walk, people start filtering in and out to talk about their concerns all day. They prefer to come to my house rather than discuss things in public, especially women. I normally have a cup of tea or glass of milk only while we're talking. I don't feel comfortable eating in front of them out of respect.

9am-9:30am: Once they leave, I take a quick shower and breakfast, which is usually tea with plain *parantha*²²⁰ or corn flakes with milk because I don't have time to eat more.

9:30am-11am: I head out to inspect ongoing work. People always catch me on the way and bring their issues, challenges or even disputes to my notice. Usually, I walk but if I have to go to a hamlet, I take the car. Excluding the morning walk, I must average 3-4 hours of walking daily. Mostly, I inspect primary infrastructure development work such as construction of roads with drainage. We measure the roads ourselves and I check that a uniform width and the quality of masonry is maintained.

11:30am-1pm: I then go to the panchayat office to do paperwork and documentation. Almost every document has to be signed by me, including cheques. I review almost every entry in the accounts register, which is maintained by the panchayat secretary.

1pm-2pm: Earlier, I skipped meals or had lunch late at 5pm. Now, I go back home for lunch. I've hired and trained a person from the village – he didn't even know how to light the gas but now he's a good cook.

2:30pm-6pm: Post is delivered to me at home. Then, I go on another inspection and take the car because I feel drained out. I try to ensure that I'm present when the labour leaves to give instructions for any rectifications so that time is not wasted the next day.

6pm-8:30pm: I stretch a bit because I don't exercise during the day. I drink water because I forget during the day. By 7:30pm, farmers get free and people start pouring into my house again. Earlier, if I got time, I used to go to the market and chit-chat with people a bit but things are more restrained these days. Earlier people would not leave until 11pm, so the cook couldn't sleep till late – he's smarter now and tells people to leave by 8pm or 9pm latest.

8:30pm-10:30pm: Then I lock up and have dinner – two chappatis²²¹, dal²²² and vegetable and then read a bit. I don't have or miss television but sometimes, I wish I had it to check national news more often because the paper we get has very local news.

²²⁰Parantha or Paratha or parauntha is a flatbread popularly eaten in South Asia. It is made by frying whole wheat dough on a tava, which is a large, convex or disc-shaped griddle made from metal, usually sheet iron, cast iron, sheet steel or aluminium.

²²¹Unleavened flat bread also known as roti made of groundstoned wholewheat flour, which is common cuisine in India.

²²²Lentil or split grain or pulses, common food for consumption in India.

RECOMMENDATIONS & ASPIRATIONS

Within the vast UN system alone resides a wealth of legal and human rights frameworks, conventions, institutional knowledge, expertise and self-correcting prowess to:

- a) Build on the strengths of the MDG framework and overcome its shortcomings
- b) Reconcile seemingly divergent development and sustainability imperatives
- c) Address emerging global challenges through collective, multi-lateral efforts

To provide just one example, during the MDG Summit²²³ in 2010, there was a call to address gender equality and women's empowerment in a much broader and holistic manner, which resulted in several United Nations programmes aimed at ensuring gender parity in education, health, economic opportunities. Going a step further, attempts were made at gender mainstreaming in development policymaking and decision-making, including through shaping new legislative and policy frameworks and gender-responsive budgeting. The important role of civil society in trying to meet the twin goals of gender equality and women's empowerment was also recognised.

As another example, the MDG framework did not address gender-based violence but it is comprehensively addressed by the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women²²⁴, which India ratified in 1993. The convention has evolved to strengthen its accountability and enforceability in national contexts. A vast range of violence-related issues against women are taken up through the country reporting and monitoring processes that a member country of the United Nations is subject to by virtue of having ratified a treaty. More recently, they are also monitored through the UPR²²⁵ reporting mechanism, under which member countries of the United Nations are obliged and mandated to report on progress to the United Nations Human Rights Council on various treaties and conventions that they are party to. However, gaps may still exist even in such comprehensive human rights instruments. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women does not mention alcoholism, which the women interviewed for this report unanimously identified as a pervasive and serious challenge that impacts them adversely in an all-encompassing manner.

The broad recommendations offered below are thus based on the complex inter-linkages between challenges facing women at the grassroots, often missing in development frameworks and public policy and thus cited as a key reason for their limited success. The aspirations women shared on all the issue highlighted in this report follow in **Table 1** on page 119.

²²³ Following a proposal by the United Nations Secretary General, the General Assembly decided to convene a MDG Summit (High-Level Plenary) on 20-22 September, 2010, with the primary objective of accelerating progress towards all the MDGs by 2015.

²²⁴ www.wghe.org/pdf/CEDAW.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

²²⁵ The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process, which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States.

General Recommendations

1. Human dignity, human rights and human equality are the three moral and ethical pillars on which any future development framework should rest. All of them were enshrined in the Millennium Declaration,²²⁶ from which the MDGs were derived.
2. Gender-specific goals, targets and indicators should be built into all targets to guard against dilution and blind spots in public policy vis-à-vis women's development.
3. A comprehensive and rigorous analysis and mapping should be undertaken of the recent and future expected trends regarding all aspects of women's well being and tailored to country contexts. For example, analysis in this report reveals that destitution among women is on the rise in India, migration among women has increased exponentially since the early 90s and surpassed that of men, gender-based violence remains all-pervasive and shifting weather patterns are seriously threatening livelihoods and food security, disproportionately impacting women.
4. Any future development framework must factor in the multi-dimensional and complex nature of gender issues, which cut across all forms of deprivation and exclusion.
5. All major manifestations of inequality and inequity — the twin mounting challenges of our time — must be addressed.
6. The framework should be based on holistic and inclusive and not minimalist definitions of complex human phenomena and their manifestations such as poverty, deprivation, lack of livelihoods and unemployment, food insecurity and hunger, illiteracy and lack of education, gender inequality and lack of empowerment.
7. Indicators should be devised to measure the scale and degree of a certain condition such as poverty but also to reduce or address the nature of the challenge such as “number of women able to access financial services and low-interest credit.”
8. Sex-disaggregated reporting should be made mandatory on all parameters.
9. All concepts should be defined with specificity and should cater to the lowest common denominator. For example, very poor people require maximum access to low-interest or zero-interest credit but find it the hardest to access, as they cannot offer collateral.

Poverty, Deprivation and Social Security

10. A common definition for poverty should be arrived at to avoid shifting, contested and varying poverty estimates²²⁷ and errors of omission and commission at the country level, which has serious implications for poor people being able to access their basic entitlements.
11. A gender-based poverty mapping is required to identify groups of women who are especially vulnerable such as elderly women, single women, widows, disabled women and women living with major health illnesses. Such a mapping exercise should also ensure that “blind spots” in public policy, such as the needs of orphans and people living with disabilities, are genuinely addressed by a new framework.

²²⁶ The United Nations Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000 by 193 countries at the end of the Millennium Summit and had chapters and objectives stressing the observance of international human rights and humanitarian law and treaties on sustainable development. Available from www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm (accessed 10 June 2013).

²²⁷ Women in all states brought up a major governance and public-service delivery challenge of how people actually living below the poverty line were not correctly identified and could not access their basic and social welfare entitlements whereas those with assets, land or means were wrongly categorised as poor and mis-appropriating their benefits.

12. While devising gender-specific targets and indicators, a new framework should factor in all development challenges with strong poverty linkages, which went unaddressed in the MDG framework. They include impact of lack of basic infrastructure such as roads, energy and electricity, the need for social security for those facing multiple forms of deprivation and marginalisation (old age, single women, widows, abandoned or destitute, homeless, people living with disabilities, HIV and AIDS or other serious illnesses), lack of proper housing and shelter, gender-based violence, impact of climate change and lack of adaptive strategies, lack of access to financial services and social exclusion and marginalisation.
13. A new development framework should aim to deliver a minimum social security net as a safety valve to ensure that no one's basic needs go unmet.

Livelihood, Employment and Skills

14. Livelihoods and employment should be based on organic economic empowerment, dignity of labour and pursuing and diversifying income-generating avenues employing community-based solutions and in harmony with the environment.
15. Targets and indicators to measure economic empowerment for women should include but not be limited to wage-based employment in the non-farm sector. Indicators and targets aimed at improving farm-based livelihoods and employment merit separate indicators to measure progress.
16. Indicators developed should aim at a reduction of the challenges that impede women's economic well-being and measure their contribution — unpaid and underpaid — to all economic sectors. Examples include “number of women working on minimum wage” or “number of women in formal wage-based employment.”
17. Promoting skills enhancement, vocational education and opportunities should form part of any economic empowerment target in a new framework.
18. Geographically marginalised communities should be specifically targeted, along with gender-specific indicators.
19. All livelihood and employment related targets should be rooted in a human rights framework and linked to accountability mechanisms to ensure labour, worker and migrant rights.

Nutrition, Food Security and Hunger

20. Trends of systemic under-nourishment among women over time merit gender-specific targets or indicators.
21. Nutrition for women should be treated in a holistic way, be linked to reproductive health and factor in important social, cultural, economic, geographic and generational linkages.
22. A long-term food security policy at the country level should be de-linked from market economics and forces and be devised and implemented based on sufficient production, optimum consumption and universal and efficient distribution.
23. Special targeting is required to ensure food security for socially and geographically marginalised groups, internally displaced persons ²²⁸ (IDPs) persons and those impacted by conflict.

²²⁸ An estimated 540,000 people are internally displaced in India due to conflict and violence, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). In the absence of an official policy on internal displacement and monitoring of internally displaced people (IDPs), they live on the brink of survival in extreme insecurity and fear and with no or very poor access to basic services needed live a life of dignity. Available from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/> (accessed 10 June 2013).

Education and Literacy

24. Targets and indicators to assess quality of education should be devised so that children can actually learn, absorb, gain knowledge, conceptual clarity, open and grow their minds and develop capacity for independent and original thinking. For girls and women's education, enabling factors²²⁹ in their environments are crucial, such as access to good roads and secure public transportation, personal security and protection, reduced domestic workload through more equitable distribution among all family members, investing equally in their nutrition, holistic care and growth and lifting social pressure for early marriages to make way for them to exercise freedom of choice in making life decisions.
25. Evidence demonstrates that enrolment and completion rates are more accurate²³⁰ indicators rather than the ratio of girls to boys in schools to facilitate gender parity, which the new framework should duly factor.
26. Other vital components of education such as vocational education, enhancement of legal, vocational, financial and life-based skills, community-based education and lifelong learning all have very strong utility for poor and illiterate people, which should be built into the framework.
27. Women with low or no literacy levels such as adult women, socially excluded or marginalised women such as those belonging scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and religious minorities require special targeting to deliver all of the above mentioned forms of education, skill enhancement and learning.

Health and Well-Being

28. A future development framework should factor in the strong linkage between woman and child health recognising that "reproductive and sexual health" accounts²³¹ for 20 per cent of the global health burden among women and there is overwhelming evidence²³² of maternal under-nourishment leading to birth of under-weight babies.
29. Indicators should be developed to measure the quality of health care delivered such as availability of medical infrastructure, hygiene and sanitation, medical staff such as nurses and doctors and their ratio to patients factoring in local contexts, but also basic quality standards and training to ensure respectful and pleasant treatment of patients.
30. A new development framework should strongly aim to reduce the high out-of-pocket health expenditure²³³ poor people still incur, especially socially and geographically marginalised communities.
31. The framework should include awareness generation and health education programmes for women to safely go through pregnancy.
32. Poor women in rural and urban areas are at "high risk" of contracting HIV and AIDS unknowingly from their husbands, who may have multiple sex partners. A new development framework should recognise and aim to reverse this harmful trend as well as the crippling stigma and discrimination such women and their children (also at high risk) suffer from, by enabling economic and social support structures for them.

²²⁹ Jamilah Ariffin, "Gender Critiques of the Millennium Development Goals: An Overview and an Assessment," Paper presented at International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), 31st International Conference on Social Progress and Social Justice, 16-20 August 2004, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Available from www.docstoc.com/docs/27903190/A-Gender-Critique-of-the-Millennium-Development-Goals (accessed 10 June 2013).

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Department for International Development, DFID, "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: A Position Paper," (DFID, London, 2004). Available from www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=1602 (accessed 10 June 2013).

²³² Mridul Eapen, "National Rural Health Mission: Identifying Critical Gender Concerns," No Policy is Gender Neutral, UN Women (New Delhi, 2012). Available from www.unwomensouthasia.org/category/digital-library/un-women-resources/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

²³³ Ibid.

33. People living with disabilities require special policy attention in any future development framework. Gender-specific indicators are also required to address the needs and challenges of women with disabilities, who are vulnerable at multiple levels.
34. The entire range of physical, mental, emotional, psychological and social health symptoms arising out of gender-based violence assume serious and high prominence as a health issue and merit their own set of targets and indicators aimed at reduction or complete elimination with possible linkages to existing UN human rights instruments such as CEDAW and accountability mechanisms such as the UPR.

Access to Infrastructure, Adapting to Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

35. A future development framework must address the real, extensive and devastating impact of shifting weather patterns and climate change on people's lives and livelihoods i.e. it should include indicators to promote adaptation to climate change.
36. Women — the main caregivers of families and majority of small scale and marginal farmers — are especially impacted in unique and disproportionate ways. Thus, gender-specific indicators are required to equip them with reliable adaptation tools and strategies.
37. More well-defined and accountable indicators are required to address the persistent and widespread lack of water and sanitation such as “number of people with a piped water connection in the house” or “number of people with a toilet in the house.”
38. The framework must address access to basic infrastructure such as housing, roads, electricity and energy sources, all of which have major implications for health, education, poverty, livelihoods and all other measures of human well-being among poor people.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

39. Indicators to measure women's empowerment must be broadened beyond relative income levels, participation in high-paying positions with economic power and access to professional and parliamentary positions. They must include more holistic measure such as nutrition and health care, freedom from all forms of violence including in conflict-afflicted areas, opportunities for growth, education, livelihood, employment and skills enhancement, access to resources and infrastructure (housing, water, sanitation, electricity, roads), ability to adapt to disaster and climate change; actionable knowledge and awareness of rights²³⁴ and public entitlements, legal recourse and agency to access them and active, meaningful and independent participation in decision-making at all levels of government.
40. If gender equality, at a minimum, is about men and women (and boys and girls) being able to enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections²³⁵, then a new development framework must necessarily include ways for girls and women to become aware of their rights, access property rights and common resources, level the playing field for their entry and participation in all spheres of life on an equal footing starting from within the household (fighting nutritional discrimination through targeted nutrition schemes for girls) to attending school and college without obstacles, investing in their growth and development equally, ensuring equal wages for equal work and parity in decision-making, government and political institutions at all levels.

²³⁴ Human Rights and Legal and Constitutional Rights.

²³⁵ UNICEF, *Promoting Gender Equality: An Equity-Focused Approach to Programming*. Available from http://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Overarching_2Pager_Web.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013).

THEME

ASPIRATIONS (TABLE 1)

1.	Poverty, Deprivation & Social Security • The government should organise and undertake proper surveys or assessment exercises so that people truly in need are not left out of the development process and public service delivery. • Better and more social security schemes for the elderly and other similar vulnerable segments of society should be made available. • A monthly pension of 1500-2000 rupees (25-33 dollars) should be provided to elderly people, especially women, as they are particularly vulnerable. The pension should not be tied to any pre-conditions. For example, it should be provided regardless of whether there is an able-bodied earning member in the family or not as is currently the case because social structures are breaking down. In many cases, once children are grown up, they no longer take care of their parents the way they used to, leaving them more vulnerable than before. • The widow pension amount should be increased factoring in current market conditions. • Basic benefits should be guaranteed to poor and genuinely needy people, especially living in remote locations.
2.	Livelihoods, Employment & Skills • Women engaged in rural farming want long-term alternative and sustainable livelihood options, not temporary work. • Women should be given work separately to suit their skills and ability. • Women should be given home-based employment and skills training, especially single, elderly, disabled women and widows and which they can teach other women, too, such as sewing and embroidery. Sewing centres should be opened up in villages, which will help provide employment and income to women. Skills training should also be part of education curriculum to improve employability of boys and girls after completing secondary school and college. • Women also requested financial assistance for taking professional training courses to enhance their skills. • More women should be employed in the first line of service delivery of government social schemes. • All workers, including women, should be protected under labour regulations to ensure that poor and vulnerable people are not exploited. • Women in the informal economy should be able to negotiate wage parity and maternity benefits and be protected from sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. • Woman want full-time work for 365 days in a year instead of only 100 days under the government rural employment guarantee scheme. The government should also provide major work to employ several people instead of small village works. • Membership in SHGs should be expanded to include as many women as possible to help them with household expenses, teach them day-to-day financial management, saving, lending and how to leverage liquidity. It will also empower them to deal and make decisions about money directly and understand the nature of money. • SHGs should be linked to more income-generation activities and not just inter-lending and saving. • Women should get the type of work in which they can collectively make something and sell it in the market and earn some income. For example, in Kerala women SHG members produce spices, flour and food for nutrition centres and sell it themselves in the market to earn money. Their loan size is bigger and they get more skill-based training. Women can make many other things such as soap, <i>papad</i>,²³⁶ <i>daris</i>,²³⁷ rope, wall hangings and brooms (from palm trees). If women can be organised into a federation to channelise marketing, like a cooperative, it will economically empower them. Small-scale production units can be formed to even make fortified cereal and supply food to village nutrition centres and it would be sustainable because the government would buy the products. Each woman could make 1200-1500 rupees (20-25 dollars) additional income per month from such activities.

²³⁶ A thin, crisp, disc-shaped Indian food typically based on seasoned dough made from black gram (urad flour), fried or cooked with dry heat.

²³⁷ A heavy woven or felted fabric, usually of wool, but also of cotton, hemp, straw, resembling a carpet.

	• A factory should be opened up in or near villages, which employs men and women locally and supplies various goods and services to schools, hospitals and nutrition centres in the village. • Transparent selection procedures in job selection processes should be introduced to reduce the scope of corruption and nepotism. • Schemes are required to help place or link educated people with employment opportunities. • Women require crèches to leave their children at safe places while they go on work. • People living in hilly and remote locations require better livelihood and employment opportunities.
3.	Nutrition, Food Security & Hunger • All loans for distressed farmers should be waived, especially in areas entirely dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Alternate irrigation facilities should be built and provided urgently in these regions. • All categories of single, vulnerable and marginalised women (elderly, widows, disabled, living with HIV, destitute, etc.) should be assured food security through government schemes, the public distribution system and additional food stamps, if required. • Greater steps should be taken to combat malnutrition among women and children, especially in rural areas.
4.	Education & Literacy • Secondary schools should be located close to villages to ensure that girls don't drop out of school after the primary level, which is very common, due to security concerns and transportation-related challenges. Women said that there should be incentives provided to build schools and colleges closer to villages. If secondary schools and colleges are far away, then secure girl's hostels should be provided with adequate capacity. • In villages located in remote or harsh terrains or where there is a lot of rainfall, the primary school should be located in the village and resources should be made available to build one, if required. • There should be financial assistance and scholarships available for girls at secondary and tertiary levels of education. • Quality education should be ensured for all children.
5.	Health & Well-Being <i>Gender-Based Violence</i> • Government should take appropriate steps to close liquor shops and no more liquor licenses should be distributed. • There should be better anti-dowry campaigns to raise awareness among people. • There should be greater emphasis on the completion of education for girls and women so that they are more independent and can resist any form of violence against them. • Stricter laws for abolishing child marriages and dowry related violence should be introduced. • Boys and men should be sensitised vis-a-vis women through education so that they do not resort to acts of violence against them. • Special provisions should be made for reporting cases of violence, especially for women living in remote areas. <i>Disability</i> • Disability pension should be increased to 1500-2000 rupees (25-33 dollars) per month instead of Rupees 500 (USD 9) so that people living with disabilities can adequately take care of themselves, eat food, wear clothes and if they don't get shelter anywhere, they should be able to have their own shelter. • Counselling should be provided to family members of those living with disabilities so that their outlook becomes more positive, supportive and sensitive. Special sensitisation workshops and training should be provided to reduce the high levels of discrimination against people living with disabilities.

- There should be more, **better and targeted schemes** to support people living with disabilities. For example, education fees should be waived until completion of college for children living with disabilities, especially for those belonging to families living below the poverty line.
- There should be **direct transfers of funds** from the government account to the personal account of a person with disability, in cases where monetary benefits or pensions are due to them to ensure they receive the full amount and nothing is lost in corruption.
- Very few disabled people fall under the cover of subsidised **food distribution** provisions, which extremely poor families are entitled to and they should be more effectively targeted.
- Disabled people should be paid **better salaries**.
- Legal steps should be taken to **prevent discrimination** in employment for disabled people.
- More **private sector jobs** should be made available for disabled people through appropriate skills-based training.
- **Easy and disabled-friendly procedures** in applying for and procuring government benefits should be adopted.
- The **government frontline health workers** in the villages should also **service pregnant disabled women** and provide them information about their healthcare on a sustained and regular basis. In many cases, disabled women are under-nourished. For her child to be born healthy, it is very necessary for the disabled mother to eat nutritious and adequate food, which should be emphasised by local health workers.
- **Preference is necessary for disabled pregnant women in health care services.**
- Disabled women with speech or hearing impairment or those who suffer from psychiatric disorders are particularly vulnerable to **sexual harassment and rape**. **Training sessions** should be conducted with parents on how to **ensure greater safety** of disabled children and women.
- **Disabled children should go to government school along with non-disabled children.** Everybody irrespective of their sex or ability should remain equal in a group.
- There is a need for better educational infrastructure and facilities for children with different disabilities. Students, especially girls, with disabilities should be provided good and safe **hostel facilities with preference** and support services such as training on the use of sign language or Braille²³⁸, as required.
- Disabled people themselves require **proper training** to interact with people, increase their self-esteem, motivation and maintain positive attitudes about life.
- **Old-age homes** should be provided for women living with disabilities, either entirely separate from men or in separate living quarters within homes meant for both men and women.
- All **infrastructure should be made disability-friendly**, including public buildings, health and education facilities, public transportation, government offices and private buildings.
- Women living with disabilities urgently require proper access to toilets in their homes and in public buildings.
- **Disabled people should be a part of the political system**; they should fight elections and be in decision-making capacities. Issues pertaining to people living with disabilities should also be discussed more in village meetings.

HIV and AIDS

- Uneducated or illiterate women living with HIV and AIDS should be provided **employment opportunities**.
- More **nutrition-related schemes** and treatment provisions in existing health schemes are required for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- **Special grievance redressal mechanisms** should be created to put forward problems and seek appropriate solutions for people living with HIV and AIDS.
- **Children of people living with HIV and AIDS**, who have been orphaned, should be provided with **good and safe orphanage facilities** and state assistance with education. When they grow up, they should be provided assistance in securing jobs and legal avenues to fight discrimination.
- Early marriage and **early childbirth** among girls leads to severe health complications among them. **Parents should be sensitised** on this issue in rural areas.

²³⁸ Braille is a tactile writing system used by the blind and the visually impaired that is used for books, menus, signs, elevator buttons, and currency.

6.	Access to Infrastructure, Adaptation to Climate Change & Environmental Sustainability <i>Housing</i> • Houses should be permanent structures with proper roofing, walls and toilets so that people can live with security and dignity. • Better transportation facilities should be provided to get building material to remote villages. • Better housing finance-related schemes should be made available to women on favourable terms. • Single women should be enabled to get permanent shelters made for themselves through better government schemes. <i>Water and Sanitation</i> • Better drinking water facilities with pipd water supply should be made available in all villages. • Improve access to safe drinking water supply in hilly and remote locations. • The government should address quality of drinking water especially in areas with high fluoride content. • Government should increase the amount provided to poor families under the total sanitation campaign to build toilets and allow them to hire contractors to build them. • Schools and colleges should all have mandatory requirement for toilets with water availability and separate toilets for girls and boys. <i>Roads and Transportation</i> • In remote or harsh terrains, special effort and resources should be channelised to improve roads and accessibility to health and education services. • Provisions for funds should be made to look into building primary schools and primary health care centres within or very close to such villages where roads are poor, the terrain is difficult and remote, rain is heavy, weather conditions are harsh and climate changes are taking place. • Better transportation facilities should be made available to villages, especially for girl students and pregnant women. • Better roads where cars can run smoothly and transportation facilities for hilly and remote areas will ensure overall development of these areas. <i>Electricity/Energy</i> • Electricity should be provided for 24 hours at appropriately voltage for proper utilisation. • There should be no or fewer power cuts. • Affordable alternative fuel options should be made available. <i>Others</i> • More trees should be planted to provide clean air for our children. • A mobile tower in the village so that we can communicate easily.
7.	Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment • Husbands should divide household work with their wives equally and not drink so the household and children remain happy. • Honorariums for elected representatives should be increased. • Women should be provided proper literacy, skills and employment to achieve financial independence. • Sensitisation programmes should be run for men and boys to increase their sense of responsibility and duty in sharing household work and to earn a livelihood. • Women require more information about government schemes and how they can access them properly, even if they are illiterate. • Mechanisms should be introduced for women to report violence anonymously on a hotline and to ensure follow-up action by the police, law enforcement authorities, panchayats or social groups and NGOs, as the case requires. • Access to basic services should be made an absolute priority as it automatically improves the position of women in her household and socially.

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UN Women is a United Nations agency dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. A global champion for women and girls, it was established in 2010 to accelerate progress on these twin goals, globally. UN Women supports member states of the United Nations to set global standards for achieving gender equality and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women's Multi-Country Office based in New Delhi works in India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

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