REPORT ON

STAKEHOLDER'S CONSULTATIVE MEET

Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women in Difficult Circumstances in the State of Manipur

Organised by
Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network & Control Arms Foundation of India

Supported by
National Resource Center for Women
National Mission for Empowerment of Women
Ministry of Women and Child, Government of India

Date: Monday, 24 Feb 2014
Time: 9 am to 5 pm
Venue: Conference Hall-Classical Regency, Classic Hotel, Imphal, Manipur
Report on
Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women in Difficult Circumstances in the State of Manipur

Date: 24 Feb 2014, Time: 9 am to 5 pm, Venue: The Classic Regency, The Classic Hotel, Imphal, Manipur

Northeast India, comprising the eight states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura is facing the onslaught of multiple armed conflicts since the late 1940s. A level of militarization has engulfed India’s Northeast under the garb of insurgency and counter-insurgency. More than 50,000 people have lost their lives in the violence. As a region that is home to 272 ethnic groups and over 32 insurgent groups operating with heavy militarization along with the imposition of the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (1958), six decades of armed violence has had huge humanitarian impact. The six decade long violence affected women and children in Northeast India in varied ways. In Manipur due to the ongoing violence and conflict, around 300 widows are made every year.

Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, Ms Rashmi Singh and Smt Padmaja Mehta (l-r) inaugurating the event

On 24 Feb 2014, Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, Control Arms Foundation of India in collaboration and support from National Resource Center for Women, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, Ministry of Women and Child, Government of India successfully organized an event under the theme Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women in Difficult Circumstances in the State of Manipur from 9 am to 5 pm at The Classic Regency, The Classic Hotel, Imphal, Manipur.

The session commenced with an introductory speech by Ms. Binalakshmi Nepram, Founder of Manipur Women Gun Survivor Network and Secretary General of Control Arms Foundation of India welcoming all the participants. A heartwarming welcome song was presented by women survivors (all of them widows) from Churachandpur District of Manipur.
Ms Binalakshmi Nepram spoke on the empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women in Difficult Circumstances in the State of Manipur. She said according to the report of the National Family Health Survey (2005-2006), Manipur stands 3rd place with a record of 43.9%, in the rate of domestic violence. Her speech stressed on the fact that women in Manipur were facing violence and trauma due to the ongoing difficult situation in the state. She added that more than 20,000 people have been killed in the last five decades in Manipur due to arm related conflicts. She further added that most of the people killed in Manipur are young men between 19 and 42 years of age and as a result, an average of 300 widows is created every year in Manipur.

She addressed the need to help empower vulnerable and marginalized women by using convergence model for relief and rehabilitation of women survivors living in difficult circumstances in Northeast India, particularly Manipur stating that most of such women were not very much aware of the different beneficial schemes for them due to the huge gap in implementation of schemes. She also addressed the importance of economic and psychological empowerment of women for self-sustainability, emotional support. She also mentioned the importance of providing awareness for HIV AIDS to stop spreading of such deadly diseases due to ignorance.

She also spoke on ‘Ahimsa Messengers’ for promoting peaceful and healthy environment in the state.

Ms. Padmaja Mehta, Sr. Economic Advisor, Ministry of Women and Child, Government of India, National Mission for Empowerment of Women gave a presentation on the topic 12th Plan Priorities in context to women from vulnerable and marginalized groups. She said “Poverty is high since 1950 but after development it has reduced but hasn’t properly brought upliftment in the state. Vulnerable groups were considered in the 12th Plan and as a result SCs, STs, OBCs, differently able people, people living with HIV, single women, widows and many others benefitted.” She appealed to civil society organizations to help and give awareness about the scheme to many others. She also added “Manipur is located in a border area and trafficking in the North- East is rampant so the NGOs and police personnel should protect them. People should benefit from schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and other educational schemes. There should be 33% reservation of women in Panchayat.” She added, “The approach of the Twelfth five year plan is to strengthen the ability of urban local bodies to finance the maintenance and building of infrastructure to avoid ‘one size fits all’ solutions; decentralize decision making and ensure participation of all stakeholders including the local communities so that schemes are suitably calibrated to meet local requirements and aspirations.”
She added, “Poor governance leads to corruption, both petty and large, both of which corrode the moral fabric of the society. Large scale corruption occurs either because of mishandling of government contracts, or because discretionary decision making in some areas is used to the advantage of some. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of the system in the eyes of the public and reduces potential for achieving efficiency through competition. Civil society has a crucial role to play in strengthening of local institutions and in bringing innovation into government programs. Government must strongly encourage partnerships with civil society including not only NGOs, but also academic institutions, professional associations and universities. The precise institutional arrangements could vary, depending on the requirement and context, but the need for such partnership needs to be emphasized in the design of programs. They could be either in sourcing or out-sourcing types of relationships, so that the synergy of the State and civil society can truly be harnessed. Both types of relationships have been tried out with success in the past.”

Ms Binalakshmi Nepram, Ms Rashmi Singh, Smt Padmaja Mehta, Ms Surender A Shishak, Dr Usha Kh, Mrs Lourembam Nganbi (l-r)

Ms. Rashmi Singh, Executive Director, Ministry of Women and Child, Government of India, National Mission for Empowerment of Women gave a presentation on the frame work on empowerment of women under the theme “Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”. She stated that the ability to bring changes lies in the empowerment of women. According to her, empowerment of women can be defined as the expansion in their ability to make strategic life choices: to take social, political & economic decisions; to secure access to opportunities and resources; for increased self-confidence and a better status. She added “Women work hard but don’t get so much money. Women work more in comparison to men but they are paid less. It is time to bring women to the level of men.”

She mentioned many government perspectives for empowering women, at constitutional provisions and international commitments. She pointed out the challenges for legal and policy frame works and services delivery, inter departmental co-ordination and access barriers.

Pic: Ms Rashmi Singh
She also strongly put some strategies like translation of Government’s policy commitments on gender equity into budgetary allocations, integrating gender concerns across sectors/ schemes/ programs, gender cells within all departments, creating facilitating mechanisms for improved access to different schemes and programs and empowering women as agents of change.

She further added, “Women should be made aware of their rights. The National Policy for Empowerment, 2001 has provisions on protection of women in the country. Many laws against domestic violence exist. Common platform is needed for the NGOs and people should work collectively,” She added that sharing information with the public is needed for giving benefits to women and society.

**Mr. Armstrong Pame, Joint Secretary, Tribal Affairs, Government of Manipur** said “Women are very powerful in the state and they are in the fore front when any crime happens in any parts of Manipur. Psychological empowerment of women is necessary. There are a lot of projects and frameworks in the country but there is no proper implementation.” He said that there were lots of beneficial schemes for vulnerable and marginalized women for the state but stated that it was even difficult even as an IAS officer to made reached them to the most vulnerable and marginalized beneficiary.

He appealed NGOs and civil societies to make people aware of things women don’t know by providing advocacy and awareness campaigns.

**Dr Ibetombi, Chairperson, Manipur State Commission for Women, Government of Manipur** said that poverty was limitless in the country and social workers were actively involved in any of the issues.

She added, “People should be aware of the schemes of the center and state. Many organizations are trying to do so many things but a big communication gap exists in the state”.

**Ms Surender A Shishak, Deputy Director of Social Welfare Department, Government of Manipur** mentioned various activities of social welfare department of Manipur for women. She said, “Protection of women from domestic violence had been started functioning from 2007. Independent protection officers to work on women victims of domestic violence is under process and there are already other officers at district level to help such women victims. Another important program for financial assistance to rape victim is under the restorative scheme by State Social Welfare Manipur. Till now 18 raped victims have given the assistance and some are under process. Women are also given the financial assistance from the state for poor and needy women and some under process.” She spoke about Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act 1956 and added that under that act, a committee at district and state level were form to look after the victims.
She added, “Vocational training for tailoring and embroidery are given to traffic women victims at Takyel run by the Social welfare of Manipur; a sum of 200 rupees is also given as a stipend and machines are provided at subsidized rate after 6 months of training to 120 women every year.” She also mentioned that certain central schemes for empowerment of women financially and enhancing health programs were given to women time to time. She further added, “Ujjawala shelter home provide shelters to those trafficking victims of women, girls and children. There are 18 Swadhar homes where women in difficult circumstances stay and engaged in different work and earn their livelihood. Manipur women cooperation is also given many training on tailoring, cutting, embroidery, computer training etc. to women from 18 to 40 age group.” She ensures to provide financial help to vulnerable and marginalized women in the state and organizations working on women empowerment.

Meira Paibi leader Mrs Lourembam Nganbi from Bishnupur, Manipur stated that she had worked for the welfare of women folk of Manipur since 1974 both in the valleys and hilly areas of the state. She said that Manipur was a conflict area where women were the most effected. She also mentioned her frequent staying in jail during the agitations and protest done against inhuman practices prevailing in the state and Armed Forces Special Powers Act. She mentioned the historic women protest in naked done in front of the Kangla Gate against the rape and killing of Late Thangjam Manorama by Assam Rifle in Manipur in 2004. She asked, “Why this extreme step is required to be conduct when a women feel shy even when a minute loose of clothes,” stating that such strong protests was done to stop numerous killing and rape of innocent civilians in the state. She conveyed that women should be strong and should take part in decision making at local, state, national and international level. She added, “We should also build our confidence so that we can be part of all the decision makings and in politics.”

Ms Lalam Mate, President, All Tribal Women's Organization, Chandel, Manipur highlighted that different beneficial schemes meant for the welfare of poor and needy people could not reached them. She stated, “The reasons for not reaching the awareness of the different schemes and facilities for women is because they are poor and could not attain the programs as they had to work, otherwise they will starve for a day. Many needy women are not getting the help and instead many non-needy and wealthy women enjoyed the facilities meant for the
needy.” She said that she had went to S.D.O Chandel at Kakching, Manipur to discuss about the women beneficiaries and found out that many women in the list who were not supposed to get the benefit were selected and given the assistance and needy and vulnerable women were left behind. She said, “Like this, there are many hindrances in benefiting the women.” She added, “Our organization also faces a big problem to mobilize the women due to lack of financial support. Till now we haven't get any financial support.” She also mentioned about the big hindrance of customary law. She said, “Many times after we work on case of rape and finding out all the facts and at the end due to customary law, the case ends by providing some money and meat to the victim which is again a great pain for us.” But on her answers Ms Surrendra A Shishak ensures to give financial support to their organization which really make her happy and motivation for her further work.

Ms Ringyui Chon, Credit Manager, Ukhrul District Women’s Institute of Micro-Credit, Manipur talked a brief about the organization stating that they provide micro credit to poor and vulnerable women through various self-help groups in the district. She talked about the difficulties faced in the district due to the non-available of sufficient bank in the district stating that there was only a single bank existing in the entire district. She said, “We came with the vision of becoming the non-banking financial institute someday, but now we are just small service provider, women are proprietor stake holders, and our women are vulnerable, illiterate. We haven’t get any fund from the government but have struggle to get from some project and now we have started to get some revolving fund and some women beneficiaries have been trained to make soaps, bakery, cooking, food processing etc. and even accountancy to maintain the records from the project.”

She added that though their organization was to provide micro credit, they worked beyond that. She said, “We give some credit to women so that they can become entrepreneur as they are economically very poor and the property inherits only by the male section of the society. Our tribal society is completely a patriarchal society. Our women always face problems in every sector economically, socially and in decision making at home, society, and everywhere. As women don't have any room, we encourage our women to become-self entrepreneur at one side and provide awareness on HIV and health.” She added, “Many of the women are also the victims of trafficking and drugs as the district is near the border of the Myanmar. Many men involved in drug trafficking and even got addicted and acquire HIV AIDS and the women become the victims. Many places are cultivated with poppy; police came and destroyed it, even though many remain cultivated as it grows on different areas of the region. It’s difficult to stop them cultivating as they get their livelihood from that, they continue farming even though they know the bad impact of that.” She said that women in the self-help groups started involving other good livelihood options like weaving, piggery that in turn helped in reducing practicing drug trafficking and poppy cultivation as livelihood option. She added, “Big problem they face is awareness of schemes is not reaching to the women, the system in the villages is very poor in all aspects that need to be rectified.”

Ms Ruth Singson, Founder President, Widows Welfare Association, Churachandpur, Manipur stated that she was working with vulnerable and marginalize women especially widows that were helpless, defenseless and poorest to the poor especially in the North and South of Manipur. She emphasized that they were almost untouched by the government and the society, neglected, downtrodden and disrespected due to their husband’s involvement in domestic violence, ethnic fights, drugs/alcoholics, HIV/AIDS. She added that they have been trying their best to find out wherever they were to empower, give them food and shelter, counseling through seminars on various subjects such as weaving, tailoring, flower making, mushroom cultivation etc. She added, “Government schemes to help the people never reached to them as they don’t have voice in our society. Even I myself present our difficulties to the government but, the government doesn’t give any attention. We never get
what we ought to get. Year after year, we have been looking for someone who can come forward in order to change their living standards.” She expressed her heartfelt gratitude to Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network and Control Arms of India as they start helping, the most difficult women in the district since last year.

**Dr Usha Kh., Joint Director, Family Welfare Department, Manipur** emphasized the importance of self-healthiness for empowering self and others. She shared many health programs both for valley and hilly areas. She mentioned different health programs for children and adolescence girls like health programs for children age between 10-18 years, maturational hygiene, and programs for adolescence girls who are not going to the school and health programs for children 0-18 years and deficiency diseases programs like deficiency of nutrients, importance of micro nutrients and disability diseases etc. She said that they also had the programs to detect the diseases with the organization called ASHA and helped them to provide all requirements helps at the respective departments at different stages.

She also mentioned about the programs for free health treatment for serious diseases like heart diseases stating that through such program they were given the help to get treatment. She said, “Adolescence period of a women is the most vulnerable period of life so we should be careful and provide very sensitive knowledge about their health, sexual and how to defend from sexual exploitation.”

**Ms Hanjabam Shubhra Devi, Managing Director, Meira Foods** addressed her story of struggle for getting a good job in the state. She talked about the successful set up of the entrepreneurial venture of ‘Meira Foods’ Brand. The brand produces 45 items including pickles, candies and other commonly used kitchen commodities providing employment and marketing assistance to many women in the state.

She said that they supported women self-help groups as well as individual women in marketing of home based food products made by them. Her message is to become every woman as the industrial production, she also ensures to support every woman in food processing and marketing to support them financially strong.
A short play was performed by the women survivors/ widows of Imphal District depicting the apathy and insensitiveness of administrations regarding handling of cases of capturing of young man by law enforcement agencies and resultant disappearances of their sole bread earners. And showing collective movement of women group to protest and demand justice.

Also a short film titled, “We Shall Find Our Peace” was screened at the event that depicts the hardships and sufferings happening due to the ongoing conflict situation in the state and eagerness of the population to promote peaceful environment in the region.

**Recommendations to take way forward**

1. To ensure public and private partnership to reduce the existing gaps in implementation of different beneficial schemes meant for the vulnerable and marginalized women in the state. All stakeholders namely civil society; NGO’s working for women empowerment; women leaders; vulnerable and marginalized women in difficult circumstances such as women victim of violence, widows, differently abled, women affected by domestic violence etc; National Resource Center for Women, National Mission for Empowerment of Women, Ministry of Women and Child, Government of India; Manipur State Commission for Women; Social Welfare Department of Manipur; Deputy Commissioners and related state government departments and various other to collectively work together so that a convergence of the various beneficial schemes is made available to the most vulnerable and marginalized women in difficult circumstances in the state.

2. To increase advocacy and awareness campaigns to help build capacity and knowledge of the vulnerable and marginalized women in difficult circumstances in the state.

3. To help vulnerable women in promoting and marketing of various products made by them as an option for livelihood and provide market linkages

4. To ensure solar energy is provided to enable women to do productive work as Manipur has hardly any electricity

5. Manipur State Commission for Women, Social Welfare Department of Manipur and other concerned authorities to fully cooperate with vulnerable and marginalized women for effective implementation of the schemes meant for them.

6. To make Manipur project a model project by creating a convergence model for effective delivery and implementation of programs intended for welfare and development of vulnerable and marginalized women in difficult circumstances in the state of Manipur. This model would include introduction of convergence cum facilitation center as women support centers. Such centers will act as focal point on ground through which the services to grassroots women would be facilitated.

   Such centers will offer:
   
   - Information on all the government schemes/services/programs for women
   - Facilitate the availability and access to government schemes/services/programs across health, education and livelihood sectors
   - Capacity building training and awareness rising on livelihood skill training, drug abuse, ahimsa etc.
   - Organize women into collectives to access various resources
   - Coordinate the outreach of services of various departments

The event was ended successfully with valuable inputs and suggestions from esteemed stakeholders. More than hundred people attended the event consisting of women leaders and women survivors from Churachandpur, Imphal, Bishnupur, Chandel and Ukhrul Districts; media persons, students, professionals and well-wishers. Women Survivors of Churachandpur District welcomed the participants with a hand warming welcome song and women survivors of Imphal East District perform a heart touching play on women empowerment.
Closure and group photo

Pic: Group Photo

Media Coverage:

1. Women’s role in Manipuri society hailed, Source: Imphal Free Press, 24 Feb 2014

A consultative meet on Empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized women in difficult circumstances in the state of Manipur was held on Monday at the Classic Hotel. Padmaja Mehta and Rashmi Singh, sr. economic advisor and executive director respectively in the Ministry of Women and Child and National Mission for Empowerment of Women; Read more: Link: http://www.ifp.co.in/nws-19790-women-s-role-in-manipuri-society-hailed/

2. Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalized Women in Difficult Circumstances in Manipur, Source: Epao.net, 23 Feb 2014

Northeast India, comprising the eight states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura is facing the onslaught of multiple armed conflicts since the late 1940s. Read more:

For more information, please contact:

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