International Women's Day

8th & 12th March 2010

Event report – New Delhi

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Event organized by:

in cooperation with Paycheck India Project @ IIM- A, ITUC, UNI, ITF and WageIndicator Foundation

Websites

http://www.paycheck.in http://dfl.wageindicator.org

http://www.unitespro.org
“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform. A woman knows that nothing can come to fruition without light. Let us call upon woman’s voice and woman’s heart to guide us in this age of planetary transformation.”

Diane Mariechild
International Women’s Day is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is a day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. It is an occasion for looking back on past struggles and accomplishments, and more importantly, for looking ahead to the untapped potential and opportunities that await future generations of women.

International Women’s Day first emerged from the activities of labor movements and the turn of the twentieth century in North America and Europe. The first National Women’s Day was observed in the United States on 28 February 1909, when the Socialist Party of America designated this day in honor of the 1908 garment workers’ strike, where the women protested against the working conditions, followed by the Socialist International meeting in Copenhagen in 1910 that established the international character of the observance in a bid to the movement for women’s rights and to build support for achieving universal suffrage for women.

Since the early years, International Women’s Day has assumed a new global dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike. International Women’s Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities.

On this Event - of International Women’s Day: The Commemoration of Womanhood, the ‘Decisions For Life’ Team in Delhi resolved to celebrate the relevance oozing from the observance. With the whole month of March being celebrated as the International Women’s Month, the team thought of reaching out to as many women, through as many avenues as possible.

While espousing a joint tie up with the International Trade Worker’s Federation (ITF) and Northern Railway Men’s Union, the DFL – Delhi team organized, participated, and visited around three women-oriented programs and tried to promulgate the kind of relevance the Project holds in face of the current trends and dispositions.
A brief introduction to all the Co-Organizers:

**ITF**: The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is an international trade union federation of transport workers' unions. It is one of several Global Federation Unions allied with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The ITF represents the interests of transport workers' unions in bodies which take decisions affecting jobs, employment conditions or safety in the transport industry. The ITF has been active in both organizing as well as participating in causes illustrating issues concerning women welfare and HIV/AIDS.

**AIRF/NRMU**: The All India Railway Men’s Federation /National Railways Men’s Union consists of the railway men’s unions working on the different railways. Over the years since it’s genesis in the year 1924, it has worked towards opposing many inequalities meted out to the railway employees.

**HRLN**: The Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) is a collective of lawyers and social activists dedicated to the use of the legal system to advance human rights, struggle against violations, and ensure access to justice for all. A non-profit, non-governmental organisation, HRLN provides pro bono legal services to those with little or no access to the justice system. It participates in the struggle for rights through its various activities including public interest litigation, advocacy, legal awareness programmes, and investigations into violations, publishing 'know your rights' materials, and participating in campaigns, while participating in social movements, human rights organizations.

As aforementioned, the whole month being celebrated as the International Women’s Month and the DFL – Delhi Team extended its celebration of the observance to three separate Events, spanning over a period of one week. The team participated in two events on the March 8 and the third one was planned and organized on the March 12.
Event: International Women’s Day

Day: March 8, 2010

Venue: AIRF; Baroda House, new Delhi - 110055

Timing: 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Participants: 97

The program organized by at AIRF had on its panel esteemed railway dignitaries and ITF representative Ms. Nishi Kapahi. The focus of the event was to encourage women to be more aware of rights due to them. The panelists threw light on the status of women in India and internationally. The DFL team also took advantage of this platform to introduce its objectives to a large and receptive audience. The DFL Team was also given the opportunity to extend invitations to our Forum on Sexual Harassment on 12th March 2010.

To promulgate the Project, an information stall was put up to disseminate information about women and work related issues. In addition, the participants were given out information on the
Project, its essence, vision, and mission, and the promotional material developed for DFL was also distributed.

The DFL team also attended the women empowerment module held by the NRMU at Baroda House. These modules were conducted by Ms. Jaya Aggarwal, Head Coordinator, Women’s Committee, Ms. Tajinder Kaur and their team for their staff. The sessions aimed at educating women employees of their rights and the laws favoring them.

The women were helped to identify and label the difficulties they face in everyday life. The week long sessions were kept interactive so that the participants could freely express their grievances.

Experiences:

- This being the Team’s first experience at a big event added a lot of insight on how an event is organized and handled
- The Team was able to achieve an in-depth insight into the objectives of the program
- It was a great opportunity to interact with the masses and gather popular opinion on the issue in question – Women Empowerment!
- Men and women, both participated in the event
- The distinguished speakers shed light on several vital aspects of women equality and empowerment, which was an educational experience
- Many vital issues faced by women were highlighted and heard at such a huge gathering
- The large congregation gave us the opportunity to promote DFL at a higher level
While keeping our main agenda and the experiences cultivated by the first two events in mind, the idea was to acquaint and guide women through some persistent and all pervasive issues and concerns that would in due course help them realize their true worth and consequent rights – the eventual objective of the Project. After discussions and mutual contemplations, the theme for such an endeavor was decided upon as Sexual Harassment at Workplace.

**Sexual Harassment at Workplace** has been a pervasive and long-standing problem that has been adversely affecting women in their places of work. Although the work place occupies a prominent place in the life of adult citizens, women continue to be discriminated against in the workplace. Women employed in both the organized and unorganized sectors are adversely impacted by the harassment. Thus it becomes of crucial importance to spread awareness amongst women about their rights as an employee and about ways to judge as well as deal with instances of Sexual Harassment at Workplace.
Event: International Women’s Day

Date: March 12, 2010

Venue: NRMU Headquarters, 12th Chelmsford Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi - 110055

Timing: 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM

Participants: 137

In an idyllic collaboration with all the co-organizers, a Forum on Sexual Harassment at Workplace was organized and executed on the event of the concluding ceremony of the NRMU’s Women’s Trade Union Committee on their week long celebration of Women’s Day.
The proposed Agenda for the Program was as the follows:

**AGENDA FOR THE FORUM ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

**11:00 – 12:30: Opening of Seminar**

- Conclusion of the Trade Union Education Program for Women Railway Workers

**12:30 -16:00 - Forum on Sexual Harassment at Workplace –**

- Speaker Adv. Monika Joshi, From Human Rights Law Network
  
  - What is Sexual Harassment: An all encompassing perspective.
  
  - Acquainting the participants with Supreme Court guidelines on Sexual Harassment
  
  - Sexual Harassment based on the Vishaka Judgment and the new Proposed Government of India bill on Sexual Harassment
  
  - Open discussion and case studies

**16:00** Conclusion to the Forum

As stated, the concluding ceremony to the Trade Union Education Program for Women commenced around 11:00 A.M. This section of the colloquium was largely dedicated to what the dignitaries at the dais had to share with the gathering, and the results that the week long educative forum organized by the NRMU had engendered for the employees in an approximation. With so many dignitaries at the dais, the concluding ceremony stretched a little longer than planned and so the program extended to a longer duration thereafter.
The second session, as planned, was dedicated to the discussion on Sexual Harassment, with a legal tinge. A lawyer for seven years, Ms Monica Joshi, the proprietor for the session works with the Human Law Rights Network, and specializes in cases related to Women’s Rights and Child Justice. A detailed insight was provided by Ms. Monica about Sexual Harassment, while focusing on the following aspects primarily:

What is Sexual Harassment: an answer to what was quite a revelation – anything that is not approved by an employee or is thought to be resulting from an inappropriate intention comes under the bracket of being ‘sexually harassed’. This was demonstrated with quite a few practical examples and case studies. The session was particularly interactive, for techniques like role play were liberally utilized. This particular aspect was perceptibly told and found to be related to various social mores and restrictions with regard to the gender role and perception.

This was followed by a detailed discussion first on the role of an individual and second, on the employer or the workplace as a whole in combating Sexual Harassment at Workplace. This included the composition and the distinguished responsibility of the committee on Sexual Harassment: on what comes under the purview of the committee and what falls outside it. The guidelines laid down by the Vishaka Judgment and its implications were briefly discussed.

With this, the lunch break was announced and commenced.
The second session on the Forum was dedicated to the discussion of a few relevant case studies that created ripples through the Indian Judiciary System. With this, the Forum was left open to the discussion on the same to the participants. A lot many concerns emerged and persevered through the discussion, some of which got addressed, and the others left to personal discretion. Women basically reflected upon the practical aspects of dealing with an issue as pervasive and restrained as Sexual Harassment. Some participants even shared experiences where efforts employed to deal with such instances were trampled and done away with! Few participants even disagreed with what the Speaker had to proffer on the legal aspects regarding dealing with Sexual Harassment. Participants even contemplated over the misuse of a committee like that on Sexual Harassment at workplaces by female employees. In short, numerous concerns arose and were duly addressed by the Speaker and fellow participants.

The participants were handed out an Information Booklet developed especially for the forum that included information about the Project, the co-organizers, on what is Sexual Harassment, the
Vishaka Guidelines, guidelines for assemble a Sexual Harassment Committee at Workplace, a Helpline Index constituting few important helpline numbers, and a mention of a few case studies on Sexual Harassment. Besides this, the Project concept notes and contacts were distributed individually to all the participants for future reference. The participants were also felicitated with DFL bookmarks and some stationery.

This was followed by a short session on conclusion and felicitation of the Speakers and other dignitaries present on the dais.

**Experiences:**

- The event was first of its kind, so definitely taught a lot many things to remember and carry forward.

- Despite preparations being done well in advance, invites distributed, and both online as well as offline promotion fostered, there wasn’t an equal or even at least a symmetrical representation from all the eight occupational groups under the purview of the Project.

- The program was organized on a weekday, the employees couldn’t confirm their participation, and the turnout was hence lower than what was expected.

- Although the participant-turnout was large, around 137, but as aforementioned, the representation was lopsided, with mostly employees from the transport sector participating in the Event.

- The large numbers went a bit unmanageable in the middle, and towards the end.