ANNUAL REPORT

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From the Desk of the Chairperson

Dear Members,

Greetings from Women Power Connect!

As you must be aware, an email was sent to WPC members in November 2019 informing you about an important change in the composition of the Governing Body of Women Power Connect.

Over a year had passed since the appointment of Dr. N. Hamsa as President of WPC. Dr. Hamsa had accepted the position of President but made it clear that she was accepting the position temporarily in order to help WPC. In 2019, I appointed Ms. Hasina Kharbhiih as the new President of WPC. Ms. Hasina Kharbhiih is one of the founding members of WPC and has previously helped provide the organization with the resources to move forward with its activities. Presently the Chairperson of Impulse NGO Network, she is acquainted with the WPC team and would be able to lead the organization and help revive it as a strong network.

WPC is working hard on programmes related to prevention of child marriage, prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace, and sensitizing the youth on issues of gender by holding “genderlogues” across colleges in Delhi. In addition, this year, WPC was appointed on the UN Women Steering Committee on Beijing +25 which will look into the progress made by the Indian State on the twelve thematic themes of the Beijing Declaration. WPC organised three legal workshops this year on laws on child marriage (and allied issues) in Rajasthan, Jharkhand and West Bengal. A training module has been prepared on child marriage and the laws in India which is available on the WPC website.

I am confident that Ms. Hasina Kharbhiih and the WPC team will be able to carry the agenda of women’s empowerment forward. I urge each of you to keep engaging with WPC and sharing the work you have done with them. A new blog has been started by WPC (https://womenpowerconnect.wixsite.com/blog) and we can publicize your work by publishing your articles and write ups about your work on the blog. Please do engage with the team and keep us informed about your work on empowering women and girls in India.

Dr. RANJANA KUMARI, CHAIRPERSON, WPC
Dear WPC Members,

As the newly appointed President of Women Power Connect (WPC), I am happy to have joined this network and gained access to all of you. As the current Chairperson of Impulse NGO Network, I work on anti-trafficking and on empowering women entrepreneurs amongst other issues.

Child marriage is an important issue in India where globally, the maximum numbers of child marriages take place. While seemingly gender neutral, it harms girls and women more who are disproportionately affected. Child trafficking, domestic violence, early pregnancies and complications in the health of the young mother, along with lack of opportunity to complete her education, are some of the negative impacts child marriage has on women and girls in India. At the trainings, it was relaised that customary laws have a greater impact on decisions relating to marriage rather than the Constitution of India.

WPC has developed a training module (in Hindi and English) on laws on ending child marriage in India. This is a comprehensive document that covers not just the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, but also looks into the Constitutional provisions, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and special laws for children,
such as POCSO and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. WPC successfully used this module to complete three trainings in West Bengal, Rajasthan and Jharkhand for NGOs.

In addition, WPC held two important genderlogues for the youth in Jamia Milia Islamia and in Lady Irwin College on the issue of sexuality and sexual harassment at the workplace respectively. Our youth and students are the future leaders and it is important that gender sensitization be undertaken with them.

Finally, WPC has been approached by a number of corporate workplaces (such as Samsung Engineering and Smiths Detection Veecon) to undertake training on prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace. POSH trainings are important as they help in ensuring women workers do not drop out as a result of sexual harassment and remain a part of the Indian workforce.

I look forward to engaging with the WPC team and with its members. I request you to write to us at network.wpc@gmail.com for advice on how we should carry the network forward, any ideas you may have for projects, or for seeking advice on any issue pertaining to the scope of our work.

Ms. HASINA KHARBHIH, PRESIDENT, WPC
ABOUT WomenPowerConnect (WPC)

Women Power Connect was born out of an effort to create a national level umbrella organization for women that enables various organizations and groups working for women to connect and gain the coordination that is necessary to bring legislative and policy outcomes.

The organization which began in 2005, today is a national level advocacy body with a strong membership base of individuals and NGOs spread across the country. Aside from advocacy, WPC also undertakes research, trainings, capacity development workshops and offers referral services to survivors of violence against women and girls.
1. PREPARATION OF TRAINING MODULES

A. Preparing a Legal Training Module on Ending Child Marriages in India

In 2019, as a follow up of the national consultation organized in collaboration with Girls Not Brides (GNB) and Oxfam India on ending child marriages, WPC developed a training module on laws governing child marriage in India. As a follow up of the April 2018 national conference, a discussion with legal experts on the key points that were made regarding legal advocacy was held on September 8th 2018. The September consultation, organized by WPC and GNB, brought out certain lacunae both in the texts of the law(s) dealing with child marriages in India and their implementation.

Specifically, lack of implementation of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA), inadequate knowledge about the law, inadequate budget allocated for the implementation of the Act, minimal to no use of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, in tackling cases of child marriage and the mandatory reporting clause in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 has led to a situation where NGOs find it very difficult to work on teenage sexuality or cases in which consensual sexual activity involving a minor has taken place. While the Independent Thought vs. Union of India(2017) judgment was a step forward in
addressing marital rape (where the wife is under 18 years of age), it also led to denial of agency to young people to enter into consensual sexual relations.

All legal experts at the consultation agreed upon the need for capacity building workshops for networks on a regular basis. Consequently, WPC in collaboration with GNB decided to conduct legal training workshops on ending child marriages in the states of West Bengal, Rajasthan and Jharkhand with local level NGOs/CSOs.

This training workshop had two objectives:

1. To develop an understanding of national laws and state level policies on ending child marriages in the states of Rajasthan, Jharkhand and West Bengal,
2. To deliberate upon legal advocacy issues on child marriage and related laws, schemes, and policies.

The training module was developed by Lawyers and experts in the field of child marriage, specifically, Ms. Jaya Sagadhe (Professor of Law, ILS College, Pune), Dr. Swagata Raha (Professor of Law, National Law School of India University, Bangalore), Dr. Shatha Sinha (Former Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights), Ms. Rama Vedula (AJWS), Ms. Reshma Kumari (Lawyer, Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives), Mr. Vikram Srivastav (Advocate and Founder of Independent Thought), and Ms. Indira Pancholi (HAQ Centre for Child Rights and Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti). Ms. Shipra Jha and Ms. Divya Mukand from Girls Not Brides and Ms. Gayatri Sharma from Women Power Connect also contributed to the development of this training module.

It also includes ice-breaking interactions, group work, brainstorming sessions etc. ensuring the training does not become monotonous and engages the participants fully.


B. Preparing training modules for Genderlogues on Sexuality and Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

In 2019, WPC developed two modules on conducting trainings / genderlogues on the themes of (a) sexuality and (b) sexual harassment at the workplace. These are basic training module for understanding sexuality and sexual harassment at the workplace designed for undergraduate college students. These Modules were developed in consultation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Mr. Manak Matiyani (Y.P Foundation) and Ms. Vandana Madan (Janki Devi Memorial College). The aims and objectives of the training are:

(1) Understanding sex, gender and sexuality;

(2) Understanding the terms LGBTIQ, and how sexuality is an essential part and parcel of lived experiences.

(3) A critical assessment of law and sexuality in India

(5) Understanding what is meant by consent to sexual activity;

(6) Understanding the key provisions of the Sexual Harassment (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013;

(7) A critical assessment of the use of the law and what are the gaps in its implementation (focusing on how to improve the legal process, rather than complainants using social media platforms or other means to complain.

The module consists of ice-breaking exercises, group work, discussions, debates and screening of short films on the subjects of Sexuality and Sexual Harassment at the Workplace.
Please contact the WPC team at network.wpc@gmail.com if you want a copy of either of the training modules.
2. PROGRAMMES ORGANIZED BY WPC

A. LEGAL TRAINING WORKSHOPS

(i) RANCHI (Jharkhand)

The legal training in Ranchi (held on 1st to 3rd August 2019) began with a round of introductions where participants spoke in detail about their work on ending child marriage. A striking observation that could be drawn from their experiences was the weak influence of the law over people as compared to regional customs.

Srijan Foundation shared that tribal cultural practices in Jharkhand allow boys and girls to live together without getting married. This custom is known as Dhukupratha and is a form of a socially approved live in relationship. Hence, relationships between children are linked to traditional practices in Jharkhand. Cases of young persons eloping as they are in love with each other are also common in Jharkhand. AALI deals with such cases by providing counselling to the couple.

Child marriage is a growing problem in Jharkhand due to economic reasons and reasons related to sexual violence against women as well. Parents marry girls early in order to
avoid paying dowry and also in order to ensure the girl is not sexually experienced, nor has faced sexual violence before her marriage. Participants mentioned that domestic violence is linked to child marriages and girls who marry early are highly vulnerable to domestic violence. Lok Nayak Kendra mentioned they work with parents and try to change their attitude and mindsets on early marriage through dialogue.

Changing mindsets is important, along with sensitization of the stakeholders and strengthening of their capacity. Participants mentioned that while using the law to prevent or annul a child marriage is not difficult, getting stakeholders to change their attitudes and perform their assigned duties is much more difficult.

Thereafter, the participants were divided into three groups and each group held a brainstorming on advocacy initiatives that NGOs / CSOs could take up in Jharkhand on the issue of child marriage.

(ii) JAIPUR (Rajasthan)
A detailed round of introductions was held with the participants in order to understand the nature of the work they do on child marriage. Interestingly, similar to Jharkhand, “witch-hunting” is a problem in Rajasthan as well, where women who are identified as “witches” are tortured or killed particularly in rural areas. While not directly connected with child marriage, witch-hunting shows that patriarchal control is strong in both States and a low premium is placed on women’s lives.

Participants pointed out that Nata Pratha is a common practice still in Rajasthan. “Nata” is a custom where a man and woman can live together as husband and wife despite not being formally married. This practice originated in order to ensure women who were abandoned or widowed by their first husband could enter into another relationship (usually with bride price). Reports indicate that when child marriages do not last or are annulled, women enter (usually out of social pressure) into nata relationships. This ensures that women do not remain single and are always in a sexual relationship and performing reproductive labour. Further, the sex ratio in Rajasthan is skewed and as men find it difficult to find brides, child marriages and bride trafficking are both common.
Child marriages in Rajasthan usually take place during the Akshaya Tirathya or Akha Teej which are considered auspicious dates for marriage. The practice of Atta Satta (that is, exchanging a daughter for a daughter in law) is a more recent trend related to the shortage of brides in Rajasthan. While the girl child may be married very early, the “gauna” ceremony (sending her to the marital house) is performed only after she becomes physically mature and attains puberty.

Even if a girl / woman becomes a widow, there is a common practice in Rajasthan known as “choodipehenna” where the girl / woman is married to her brother in law. This custom ensures she does not take away her share in the property and it is retained within the family. However, in practice, the brother in law often does not want to marry her and can exercise his right to choose (particularly if he is young in age). Many of the participants were of the opinion that this arrangement is good for the women as they are able to live a life beyond their husband. However, the issue of choice and consent is crucial: if she had a choice to marry anyone else then her brother in law might not be her first choice. Patriarchy and control over property needs to be deconstructed for this.
On 28th – 29th November 2019, Women Power Connect (WPC) with support from Girls Not Brides coordinated a two-day training workshop on child marriage and the law in Kolkata, West Bengal. Drawing from the experience of holding similar workshops in Ranchi and Jaipur, the workshop was highly interactive with sufficient sessions allocated for group work and rich discussions. WPC collaborated with CINI for local support in arranging the workshop, and with Ms. Harshamanjari Nanda (Consultant) on conducting the training.

The workshop began with a round of introductions of the participants, during which one of the participants from their experience at the field level pointed out that Village Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs) are a weak link in empowerment of adolescents as they do not support the activities of local NGOs, and are unaware of their mandate.

The participant from Jabala pointed out that in rural areas with a high Muslim population, the community is unwilling to listen to what the law says as the force of religion is much stronger. The Indian Constitution allows for Panchayats (village councils) to make decisions on local level issues including women’s empowerment, education and issues related to children. Hence, the NGOs have option ranging from the Panchayats to approaches the Supreme Court in cases of child marriage, depending upon the facts and
circumstances of the case and nature of relief sought. In West Bengal, Panchayats function as per the law and no extra judicial power is exercised by caste groups (as is the case in Rajasthan). However, participants pointed out that “youth clubs” have grown in villages, which are groups of young boys who sometimes turn rowdy. The village Mukhiya (head) tends to be more powerful than the Panchayat.

This was followed by a session on POCSO. A participant from Kolkata pointed out that cases of girls under 18 years of age eloping /maintaining sexual relations with boys are common. In his experience with one case, the police refused to register an FIR against the boy as the police said the relationship was consensual and there was no need for the police to get involved. This case highlighted the lack of awareness amongst police officials in Kolkata regarding the law.
B. GENDERLOGUES

Background:

Last year, WPC in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung held a conference on “Engaging with youth on political feminism” with students and teachers from several colleges in Delhi in order to understand what the youth wants in relation to gender and feminism. At the conference, students and faculty shared that there is considerable depression faced by students and issues relating to identity (such as, sexuality, body image) were important issues.

IN 2019, following this consultation, WPC in collaboration with FES, Ms. Pramada Menon (Queer Rights Activist), Ms. Vandana Madan (Associate Professor, Janki Devi Memorial College, and Mr. ManakMatiyani (The YP Foundation) developed two training modules on – (1) Sexuality; and (2) Sexual Harassment.

This genderlogue consisted of three main sessions:

(1) A session on sex and gender and sexuality;

(2) A debate competition;

(3) A session on law and sexuality in India.
Mr. Manak Matiyani, Executive Director of the YP Foundation, began the session by asking students to write down their expectations from the training on a piece of paper. After conducting the sessions as per the training module, Manak moved on with a discussion on “what will people say?” with regard to certain types of sexual relations.

Ms. Amrita Nanada, Advocate, pointed out that in her work she has come across numerous cases of exploitation of LGBTQIA people by criminals who target such vulnerable people on Tinder, Facebook and other websites by pretending to be interested in forming a relationship with them. Thereafter, they blackmail such individuals by threatening to expose their sexuality to their families.

All sessions were conducted smoothly as per the training module.
(ii) SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE- LADY IRWIN COLLEGE

Women Power Connect in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung held a Genderlogue / Training programme on 4th November 2019, at the Department of Development Communication and Extension, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi on Prevention of Sexual Harassment and the law in India.

The session started with a welcome address from Dr. Rupa Upadhyay (Head of Department, Lady Irwin College) who welcomed the students, faculty and guests, and also, introduced the Internal Committee members at Lady Irwin College to the students.

Ms. Jyoti Rawal, FES, introduced Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and what are genderlogues to the participants. She highlighted the importance of the topic by stressing that the students are the future workforce of the country and it is important that they be aware of the mechanisms in place to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace.
Ms. Gayatri Sharma (Programme Director, WPC) conducted a short training on the Act. She began by speaking about the shrinking participation rate of women in the workforce and the contribution of sexual harassment.
C. TRAININGS ON THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) ACT, 2013

On 13th May and 14th August 2019 the programme director of WPC, Ms. Gayatri Sharma conducted trainings on the SHW Act, 2013 for the employees of Smiths Detection Veecon. WPC conducted a training for Samsung employees on 3rd and 4th December 2019. A third such training took place at the WPC office on 17th January 2020 for Samsung Engineering Internal Committee members.

The main focus of these trainings was on developing an understanding of gender, managing diversity and inclusiveness in a multicultural workforce and generating legal awareness.
3. PROGRAMMES ATTENDED

A. STATE CONSULTATION ON STRENGTHENING LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN DELHI

Held on 19th September, 2019 at The Indian Law Institute (ILI), this consultation dealt with important issues around law on child marriage and its implication. It was organized by Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) and Indian Law Institute (ILI).

B. SOUTH ASIA AND COMMONWEALTH CYBER SECURITY DIALOGUE

This meeting, held on 20th September, 2019 at the Nations House, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi was aimed at comprehending the role of internet in misguiding people, finding solutions to tackle the problem, safeguarding children online and identifying the role of women in cyber security. It was organized by the Commonwealth Security Group, India Future Foundation.

C. CHANGING THE GAME: SPORTS FOR GENDER EQUITY AND ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE
This programme was co-partnered and organized by Pro Sport Development (PSD) and Girls not Brides from 5th-6th November, 2019 at Lemontree Premier, Aerocity, New Delhi, India. Attended by several organizations from India and their partners across the globe, the programme under the themes ‘Learn, Share and Connect,’ aimed to make use of sports as a social change maker to impart gender equity and prevent early, child and forced marriages.

**D. WOMEN IN TOURISM: UNPACKING THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LIVELIHOOD PROSPECTS**

On 8th November 2019, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) in association with Heinrich Boll Stiftung India cordially welcomed WPC to participate in their XXXI Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum at Magnolia Hall, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi. The programme was convened to achieve gender neutral skill development and identify challenges faced by women as entrepreneurs.
E. SAFETY FOR SHE: BUILDING EQUITABLE URBAN SPACES

On November 26, 2019 at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, CSR in collaboration with its partners - Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), The Asia Foundation (TAF) and SAFETYPIN projected an action plan to re-introspect on how social and infrastructural developments have helped women so far. Various local and national level organisations and individuals working for women safety in urban spaces were invited and among them was WPC, as both a participants and a speaker.
F. HIGH TEA PROGRAMME OF YWCA

WPC was invited to the High Tea Programme on 27th November, 2019 by our partner, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) of India at their centre, 10-Sansad Marg, New Delhi to introduce their National General Secretary-Ms. Joyce Pereira, who became a part of the YWCA family in October, 2019.

G. AMPLIFYING ADOLESCENT CONCERN IN RELATION TO EARLY MARRIAGE, MARGINALIZATION AND THE LAW

A coalition meeting was called by Partners for law in Development (PLD) on December 14, 2019 at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi to generate ideas, share complexities among different organizations working on child or early marriage and to create understanding concerning the Government’s role.