

21st Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations.

Theme: Panchayats Women and Right to Food.

24-25 April 2014

Venue: Abdul Nazir Saab Hall, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), organized the 21st Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations on 24-25 April 2014 on the theme: *Panchayats, Women and Right to Food*. More than 150 elected women panchayat leaders From 15 States - Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi (NCR), Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal- participated in the celebrations.



Award winning women Panchayat leaders: Shyama Bai, Manju Joshi, (centre) along with (L to R) Sapna Sharma, Santosh Singh, George Mathew, Louis Georges Arsenault, Rebecca Tavares, Ash Narain Roy and Bidyut Mohanty.

The inaugural session began with invocation: a song of hope and aspirations by women panchayat leaders from Rajasthan.

Welcoming the elected women representatives, Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences, said that women produce more than half of all the food that is grown. They gather wood, fetch water, bring fodder and yet their work goes unrecognized.

In his introductory remarks, Chairperson of the Institute, George Mathew observed that women in panchayats face a lot of inter-caste violence. But nonetheless they are marching ahead.

Guest of Honour, Rebecca Tavares, Representative, UN Women Multi-Country Office (India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka), congratulated the elected women panchayat leaders for not only being the numerically largest in the world (15 lakhs), but also for their role as “change agents”. She drew attention of women panchayat leaders towards India being home to the largest number of hungry and malnourished people. Panchayati Raj Institutions and their representatives have the potential to address these problems by better vigilance and monitoring mechanisms.

Louis George Arsenault, Country Representative of UNICEF, in his inaugural address commended provisions of the National Food Security Act, including the provision for subsidized food and nutritional security to the people and specific entitlements for women and poorest of the poor. However, he described as “revolutionary” and “a way forward”, the new definition being given under this Act to the head of the household – the eldest woman, who is not less than 18 years of age for getting the ration card. He further said that UNICEF supports the Government’s efforts to address high rates of malnutrition in India through the Right to Food

Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award

In 1999, the Institute of Social Sciences instituted the Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Award to recognize the struggles, aspirations and achievements of women panchayat leaders. The award includes a citation, plaque and a cheque.



Shyama Bai receiving award from Louis Georges Arsenault



Manju Joshi receiving award from Rebecca Tavares

Two women panchayat leaders: Manju Joshi, Sarpanch Sirka East Gram panchayat, Ramgarh District, Jharkhand and Shyama Bai sarpanch, Posta gram panchayat, Sidhi District, Madhya Pradesh were honoured for their excellent all-round work in their panchayats and for their extraordinary leadership.

Manju Joshi made her panchayat open defecation free, ensuring transparency and honesty, meticulously using the available funds, benefitting lactating mothers, improving pastures and planting of trees and in supporting village women to be financially independent.

Shyama Bai ensured participation of women ward members in panchayat meetings, improved the supply of drinking water, better sanitation and working towards reducing migration from her panchayat and overcame tremendous adversities to make a mark as a Sarpanch.

Bidyut Mohanty, Head, Women's Studies observed that the level of under-nutrition is very high among the children and also a large number of women are malnourished. The Right to food offers an opportunities for the panchayats to end the hunger and under-nutrition and malnourishment.

The plenary, working groups, special sessions spread over two days, focused on various aspects of right to food, challenges facing food security,

role of panchayats, mid day meal scheme, anganwadis, Public Distribution Scheme etc.

Nikhil Dey, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghathan (MKSS), Rajasthan, an activist in the forefront of the Right of Food campaign discussed various clauses of the National Food Security Act- 2013. He pointed out that the National Food Security Act has abolished the distinction between the BPL and APL beneficiaries. He also advised the women leaders to take the advantage of Right to Information Act and get information regarding the amount of foodgrains coming under public Distribution Centres, Mid Day Meal and Angwanwadis.



Nikhil Dey



Rita Sarin

The inputs from eminent speakers: Santosh Mehrotra, Director General, Institute of Applied Manpower Research (IAMR), New Delhi; Rita Sarin, Vice President and Country Director, The Hunger Project; Sejal Dand, National Advisor to commissioner appointed by Supreme Court for Right to Food Case; Anand Chakarvati, SK Dey Chair Professor, Institute of Social Sciences; Joy Elamon, CEO Inter-cooperation; KB Saxena, visiting professor, Council for Social Development, New Delhi; Sonali Mukherjee, researcher, ISS; Bharat Dogra, senior journalist; Swati Narayan, Independent Social Policy Specialist; Sangita Dhal, Associate Professor, Kalindi College; Kamal Nayan Kabra, Malcome Adishesiah Chair Professor, ISS; Babita Verma, Associate Professor, Lakshmi Bai College; and Vijayalakshmi Nanda, Associate Professor, Miranda House; were appreciated by the women panchayat leaders.



Santosh Mehrotra



Sejal Dand

Vibrant cultural evening with folk songs, traditional bhajans and contemporary dances marked the evening of the conference on 24 April.



Peter E. Kenmore addressing the women leaders

George Mathew, Chairman, ISS chaired the Valedictory Session and Peter E. Kenmore, Representative, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) gave the valedictory address. Peter Kenmore explained the significance of the global campaign called 'Zero Hunger Challenge', which encompasses five major aspects: First, the effective functioning of grievance systems and the role

of the Central parliament in the implementation process. Second, proper nutrition, health and sanitation for children. Third, establishment of separate committees for food, preservation of natural resources, fisheries etc. Fourth, the active role of women in such institutions and fifth, achieving 100 per cent increase in income and productivity of marginal farmers. Peter Kenmore discouraged food wastage which is a common practice and encouraged food self sufficiency within the producing state itself.

The two-day conference concluded with the national anthem.



**A view of the audience at the Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations
Waving the Flags**



The 2014 Celebrations were sponsored by **UNICEF** and **Action Aid**.



डॉ. जॉर्ज मैथ्यू, लुईस अर्सेनॉल्ट, पुरस्कार विजेता श्यामा बाई व मंजू देवी, रेबेका तावारेस और डॉ. आश नारायण राय।

खाद्य अधिकार की सराहना

नई दिल्ली : यूनिसेफ के कंट्री रिप्रेजेंटेटिव लुईस जॉर्जेस अर्सेनॉल्ट ने राष्ट्रीय खाद्य सुरक्षा अधिनियम में लोगों को सम्बन्धी वाले खाद्यान्न एवं पोषण उपलब्ध कराने और अति गरीब लोगों को विशिष्ट हक की सराहना की। उन्होंने इस अधिनियम के तहत राशन कार्ड के लिए परिवार की सबसे अधिक उम्र की महिला को मुखिया मानने के कदम को क्रांतिकारी बताया और कहा कि इससे भारत में महिला सशक्तीकरण को बल मिलेगा। इस्टीमेटेड ऑफ सोशल साइसेज (आईएसएस) द्वारा राजधानी में आयोजित दो दिवसीय 21वें महिला राजनीतिक सशक्तीकरण समारोह का उद्घाटन करते हुए अर्सेनॉल्ट ने ये बातें कहीं। उन्होंने कहा कि सरकार खाद्य सुरक्षा अधिनियम के जरिए देश में भूखमरी और कुपोषण

पर काबू पाने के लिए जो प्रयास कर रही है, उसमें यूनिसेफ प्रमुख साझेदार है। इस अवसर पर मध्यप्रदेश के सीधो जिले के ग्राम पोस्ता की सरपंच श्यामा बाई और झारखंड के रामगढ़ जिले के ग्राम सिरका की सरपंच मंजू देवी को विशिष्ट महिला पंचायत प्रतिनिधि पुरस्कार देकर सम्मानित किया गया। इस कार्यक्रम में देश के 20 राज्यों की लगभग 150 महिला पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों ने भाग लिया। यूएन वूमन की रिप्रेजेंटेटिव रेबेका तावारेस ने कहा कि महिला पंचायत प्रतिनिधि देश में परिवर्तन लाने में अग्रणी भूमिका निभा सकती हैं। इससे पूर्व आईएसएस के चेयरमैन डॉ. जॉर्ज मैथ्यू ने परिचयात्मक भाषण और डायरेक्टर डॉ. आश नारायण राय ने स्वागत भाषण दिया।

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डॉ. जॉर्ज मैथ्यू, लुईस अर्सेनॉल्ट, श्यामा बाई व मंजू देवी (पुरस्कार विजेता), रेबेका तावारेस और डॉ. आश नारायण राय।

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कार्यक्रम में देश के 20 राज्यों की लगभग 150 महिला पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों ने भाग लिया। इस अवसर पर यूएन वूमन की रिप्रेजेंटेटिव रेबेका तावारेस भी उपस्थित रही। इससे पूर्व आईएसएस के चेयरमैन डॉ. जॉर्ज मैथ्यू और निदेशक डॉ. आश नारायण राय ने स्वागत भाषण दिया।



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