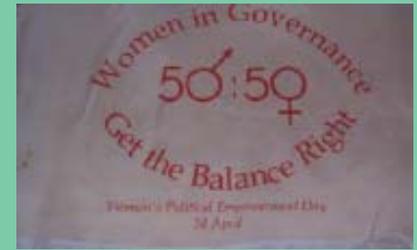




**Institute of Social Sciences**



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# *Eighteenth* Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations

25-26 April 2011

*Theme: Panchayats, Women and Safe Drinking Water*



Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Awardees (2011) Junpo Jugli, Chairperson, Zilla Parishad, Changland, Arunachal Pradesh (5th from Left); Rukamani Devi Salvi, Sarpanch, Vijaypura Panchayat, Rajasthan (6th from Left) with Agatha Sangma, Hon'ble Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India (4th from Left). Also seen L to R: Lourdes Baptista, Chief Executive, WaterAid India; Anne Stenhammer, Regional Programme Director, UNWOMEN; George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences; Patrice Coeur-Bizot, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative; Aslak Brun, Minister-Counsellor, Royal Norwegian Embassy; Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences.



## Panchayats, Women and Safe Drinking Water

The 18th Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations on the theme "Panchayats, Women and Safe Drinking Water" was held on 25, 26 April 2011 at the Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi. This year's celebration was sponsored by UN Women, UNDP and WaterAid, India.

That more than 500 elected women panchayat leaders from 23 states participated in the programme in spite of the ongoing Assembly elections in five states – West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Pudicherry, Assam and Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir and Bihar is a measure of the growing popularity of this annual gathering. The delegates came from Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. They showed keen interest in the discussion and shared their views and experiences with their counterparts in the various sessions. Representatives from civil society organisations, academia, media and government participated in the event with great enthusiasm.

### Inaugural Session

On 25 April 2011, at 10.00 am, the inaugural session began with the songs by the *Gavaniar* cultural group from Bikaner, Rajasthan.

In his welcome address Dr. George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences, said that the Institute took the decision to celebrate April 24 as Women's Political Empowerment Day when the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment became Part IX of the constitution of India with 33 per cent seats reserved for women. Over the years this programme has become "a national event" for elected women panchayat leaders. They use this platform to learn about the various issues they have to deal with and the challenges they face.

The Chief Guest, Hon'ble Minister of State for Rural Development Ms Agatha Sangma, in her inaugural address, said that water management schemes "can be implemented in a better way provided women are given a say. Women efficiently manage water and other basic needs of their families". Ms Sangma strongly recommended that women "be given 50 per cent representation in village sanitation and drinking water committees". She also called upon panchayat women to create a situation in their villages where they actually become more empowered in all respects".



Agatha Sangma



Patrice Coeur-Bizot

Guest of Honour, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident representative, Mr. Patrice Coeur-Bizot said how important this year's theme was which resonates with India's Millennium Development Goal targets. "It is indeed a matter of great pride for India that the country has the largest number of grassroots elected women representatives – nearly 50 per cent. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution of India, which not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women". He also commended India

for ratifying UN Conventions and international covenants like the Convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action". To him, April 24<sup>th</sup> is a day that "marks a turning point for grassroots democracy in India". Mr. Coeur-Bizot assured the delegates that the UN system would remain "committed towards strengthening women's participation in governance".

Ms. Anne Stenhammer, Regional Programme Director, UN Women, gave an inspiring speech saying "Every time you fight for your rights, we salute you. Your struggle is for a more just and equitable democratic order". She complimented the elected women leaders by saying how they "carry on their shoulders the hopes and aspirations of millions of women in India and that the UN works in solidarity" with them. She described them as "change makers".



Anne Stenhammer



Aslak Brun

Mr. Aslak Brun, Minister-Counsellor and Deputy Chief of Mission, Royal Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi, complimented the Institute for choosing the theme of drinking water and expressed happiness that women in India have begun to change the face of rural India. He gave the example of his own country which was one of the poorest in Europe a century ago. "It is thanks to women's empowerment that Norway today occupies a pride of place in the comity of nations", he concluded.

Lourdes Baptista, Chief Executive, Water Aid India greeted the panchayat women and asked them not to get frustrated when they face difficulties and roadblocks.

He explained that "We all know that your life is a difficult journey- full of twists and turns, ups and downs. It can never be smooth. Once you have that kind of mindset and attitude, you can cope with all kinds of hardships".

Quoting Gandhiji, Ash Narain Roy, Director, ISS, said "True democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of very village". He further said, democracy doesn't start in Parliament, but in panchayat. Panchayats may be the third tier of government but it is the first tier of democracy". He also highlighted the various factors that are still weighted against women but they have shown a determination and new zeal to move ahead.



Lourdes Baptista

### Outstanding Women Panchayat Leader Award

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

This year two women panchayat leaders were honored for their outstanding performance as elected leaders of panchayats - Smt. Rukmani Devi Savi (Sarpanch, Vijaypura Panchayat, Rajsamand, Rajasthan), and Smt. Junpo Jugli (District Panchayat President, Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh) - by Hon'ble Minister Agatha Sangma, Mr. Patrice Coeur-Bizot and Ms. Anne Stenhammer.

An AV film showing “**Outstanding Women Panchayat Leaders Awards 1999-2010**” preceded the Award giving ceremony.

### **Film Show - Aarohan**

This film depicts the many problems and roadblocks that women panchayat leaders are facing while dealing with vested interests, sceptics and opponents of women’s rights and empowerment of PRIs. The film showcases a success story of a panchayat leader whose relentless efforts and dedicated work bring all round prosperity to the village. Dr. Abhilasha Kumari, media analyst, anchored the show and discussed the issues raised in the film.

### **Plenaries**

In the two plenary sessions the elected women representatives and experts deliberated upon water management challenges and capacities of panchayat women to manage safe drinking water and health impacts of poor water quality on women and other vulnerable groups. Both the sessions saw animated discussion and enthusiastic participation by women panchayat leaders.

Plenary session 1 was chaired by Smt. Rita Sarin, Vice President and Country director, The Hunger Project, India, while plenary 2 was chaired by Indira Khurana, Director, Policy and Partnerships, WaterAid, India.



Indira Khurana

The presence and participation of active women leaders and well-known experts and resource persons such as Joy Elamon, Moderator, Decentralisation Community, Solution Exchange, UNDP; Manju Joshi, Codirector Cecoedecan, Rajasthan; Chhavi Rajawat, Sarpanch, Soda Village, Rajasthan; Krishan Swarup Gorakhpuria, former member, Fatehabad Zilla Parishad, Haryana; Sarita Balooni, Project coordinator, Jagori, New Delhi; Jaskiron Kaur, and Dr. Parveen Qureshi, Project Officer, Narsinghpur, Madhya Pradesh raised the level of discussions.



Rita Sarin

### **Special Addresses**

There were two Special sessions during the two day event. Professor Wu Quing from Rural Women’s Training School, Beijing, China, gave a lecture on “**Preparing Women to be Global Citizens**”. Professor K.C.Sivaramkrishnan, Senior Fellow, ISS and Chairman, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi chaired the session. Prof. Wu Quing congratulated panchayat women entering the decision making process at the grassroots. While she was happy that the impact of women’s participation was growing, she stated that they have a long way to go. “The way is not only long, but also very treacherous”, she said. She stressed the need for women “to come together, shoulder to shoulder and stand up for their rights”. She also referred to the slogan coined during the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 that said “Women’s rights are human rights”. Prof. Wu inspired the delegates by narrating her own life story and her relentless campaign to democratise local government in China.



Wu Quing

Ms. Caitlin Wiesen, Country Director, UNDP India, referred to her meetings with women representatives of Rajasthan and UP who have overcome many hurdles to make a mark. She described 24 April as a milestone in India's grassroots democracy. "You are the symbols of new emerging India. Each one of you are the change agent", she said. Ms Wiesen is of firm belief that women panchayat members must be given a say in water management and rain water harvesting. She lauded the experiments of water panchayats in Rajasthan and Karnataka where women have done a pioneering work. She also commended the UNDP assisted project in Agul district of Odisha where a pilot project has found how women play an effective role of a watchdog in terms of ensuring clean drinking water.



Caitlin Wiesen

### Cultural Evening

Ms. Caitlin Wiesen's address was followed by a lively performance by the two groups of folk singers - Gavaniar from Bikaner, Rajasthan and Ms. Richa Chaubey and her group from Vaishali, Bihar. The delegates clapped and sang with them.



### Open Sessions

There were two open sessions. The probing questions raised by women panchayat members added substance to the discussions. Many women delegates put forth searching suggestions related to sanitation and cleanliness and, above all, the need to protect ponds and rivers in their areas to save the planet. What was most significant was that women panchayat leaders had so much concrete suggestions to offer.

**Open session 1** was chaired by noted journalist Bharat Dogra from New Delhi, while Ms. Sushma Kapoor, Deputy Regional Programme Director, UNWOMEN, India, chaired **open session II**. Sushma Kapoor, in her speech stated that water is life and therefore water is our fundamental right. And in the homes of millions of people, where there is no tap water, they must raise this issue not as a personal problem but as their fundamental right. Women and children face acute health problems due to poor water quality. All over the world almost five crore children die due to water born diseases. Therefore, elected women representatives have to play a crucial role in solving the problem of safe drinking water.



Sushma Kapoor

Other speakers included: Nitya Jacob, Resource Person and Moderator, Water Community, Solution Exchange, UNICEF; Asha Devi, Zilla Panchayat Member Fagi, Rajasthan; Salahuddin Saiphy, the Program Leader, Water Management, IRRAD, Sehgal Foundation, Mewat, Haryana; Sadhna Gupta, Programme Coordinator, Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Sewa Sansthan, (ABSSS) Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh; Rakhi Suryapraksh, Founder Director, The Sunshine Millennium, Chennai, Tamil Nadu; and Varsha Maheta, Project Leader, Mahila Swaraj Abhiyan, Gujarat.



From Left: Mohini Giri and Syeda Hameed

### Valedictory

Dr. Mohini Giri, Director, Guild of Service, New Delhi, chaired the Valedictory Session and Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member Planning Commission, Government Of India, gave the valedictory address. Dr. Hameed appealed to the women panchayat members to be more vigilant. About the planning process she told the delegates that there can't be a single and uniform formula of development to be

implemented all over the country. Panchayats must make area specific plans and take them to the logical end. She gave the clarion call to all the panchayat leaders to emerge as strong leaders and show the world what women can do for the betterment of the society.

All said, the Women's Political Empowerment Day Celebrations this year saw far deeper discussion on the critical issue of drinking water. Greater participation in the various sessions and greater awareness among the panchayat leaders convey an unmistakable message that women leaders are fast learners. Wisdom does not necessarily lie with experts alone; people with better grasp of rural India have begun to realise that they are the masters of their own destiny.

## महिलाओं को मिले बागडोर- अगाथा

जल प्रबंधन योजनाएं :  
राजस्थान की रुकमणी  
साल्वी को विशिष्ट  
महिला प्रतिनिधि पुरस्कार

नई दिल्ली : केन्द्रीय ग्रामीण विकास राज्यमंत्री अगाथा संगमा ने कहा कि यदि महिलाओं को जल प्रबंधन योजनाओं की बागडोर सौंपी जाए तो वे योजनाएं अधिक टिकाऊ साबित होंगी। उन्होंने ग्राम जल व स्वच्छता समितियों में महिलाओं को 50 प्रतिशत भागीदारी देने पर जोर दिया। अगाथा ने वर्ष 2010 के लिए अरुणाचल में चांगलौंग जिला परिषद की अध्यक्ष जुनपो जुगली और राजस्थान में राजसमंद जिले की विजयपुरा ग्राम पंचायत की सरपंच रुकमणी देवी साल्वी को विशिष्ट महिला प्रतिनिधि का पुरस्कार देकर सम्मानित किया।

इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ सोशल साइंसेज द्वारा राजधानी में आयोजित अट्टारहवें महिला राजनीतिक सशक्तिकरण



दिल्ली में सोमवार को राजसमंद जिले की विजयपुरा ग्राम पंचायत की सरपंच रुकमणी देवी साल्वी को विशिष्ट महिला पंचायत प्रतिनिधि का पुरस्कार देकर सम्मानित करती केन्द्रीय ग्रामीण विकास राज्यमंत्री अगाथा संगमा।

दिवस समारोह को संबोधित करते हुए मुख्य अतिथि अगाथा ने कहा कि जल प्रबंधन में महिलाएं प्रभावशाली भूमिका अदा कर सकती हैं क्योंकि घर-परिवार में जल संबंधी जरूरतों की वे ही देखभाल करती हैं। उन्होंने जोर देकर कहा कि महिलाएं बदलाव की

असरदार एजेंट होती हैं, जिसके लिए उन्हें समुचित अवसर देने होंगे। ग्राम जल एवं स्वच्छता समितियों की नीति निर्धारण प्रक्रिया में महिलाओं को 50 प्रतिशत प्रतिनिधित्व दिया जाए ताकि जल प्रबंधन की योजनाओं पर अमल में तेजी लाई जा सके। उन्होंने कहा कि

पंचायती राज व्यवस्था से ही देश में सुशासन संभव है। इसके लिए इसमें महिलाओं की भागीदारी बढ़ानी बेहद जरूरी है। इंस्टीट्यूट ऑफ सोशल साइंसेज के चेयरमैन डॉ. जार्ज मैथ्यू ने सभी अतिथियों और महिला पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों का स्वागत किया।

Rajasthan Patrika, Alwar, Tuesday, 26 April 2011

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