

Elected Women Representatives of Panchayat needs protection from domestic violence

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Few kilometers from Jorhat Town, along the 37th National highway, Kaliapani Block is situated. Location wise the block has easy access to the modern amenities. Good road communication, above average literacy, better economic status by virtue of proximity to the Jorhat market, ever improving health services and many more advantages has manifested this Block Panchayat as a fortunate one.

Five years back, in the year 2004, elected women representatives of this block came together to form Block Elected Women Representative Forum (BEWRF) like 24 other blocks of the districts of Jorhat, Golaghat and Lakhimpur. The EWRs of Kaliapani block christened their BEWRF as 'Udayan Panchayats Mahila Mancha' and formed different subcommittees under this forum to deal with various issues that might help strengthen women leadership in their block. 'Mahila Suraksha Sammity' is one such subcommittee which watches over the issues of domestic violence to the EWRs. Given the situation of domestic violence in the Kaliapani Block area, this BEWRF approached NEST and suggested to hold one BEWRF meeting where the EWRs and other women members of the Block could be informed about the legal provisions this country is having, in terms of protecting the women from this social odd.

On 30th July 2009 a workshop was organized in Kutikuchiya Middle English school premises of Kaliapani Block in Jorhat District to discuss the issues of domestic violence, and SGSY schemes. The venue is selected in an area 5 Km. interior of the National Highway, where the issues of domestic violence are reported frequently.

In spite of Assam Bandh called by Manab Adhikar Surakha Samittee (MASS), 70 odd women participated in the workshop. The women from other villages came walking many kilometers in absence of public transport. Along with elected women representatives, village headmen, teachers, reporters, youth club members anganwadi workers, SHG representatives, Mahila Samittee members and ASHA workers were also present in the workshop. Many other women waited for hours in the road side for a transport in vain and went back home with their misfortune.

Lipika Bhuyan, Secretary of Kalipani BEWRF, welcomed the participants and reaffirmed the objectives of the workshop. Ms. Rumi Bora, President of Kaliapani BEWRF presided the session. Rekhamoni Hazarika introduced NEST and The Hunger Project once again to the participants and hark back the objectives of the BEWRF and urged the participants to adhere with the principles of the forum on the process of the deliberations in the workshop.

After the introductory session, all the participants of the workshop introduced themselves along with their expectations from the workshop. The technical session kicked off after the tea break.

Ms. Dibya Saikia Baruah, Advocate, Jorhat Court and a specialist on the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (PADV) started her deliberations by sharing few case studies of domestic violence and examined if such cases are available in the localities where from the participants are. When most of the participants agreed that such cases are very common in their neighborhoods, other few came forward to acknowledge that they themselves are victim of such cases.

It triggered greater involvement of the participants and the participants could find themselves on the issues brought out by Dibya. After discussing the salient features of Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (PADV), she also discussed Hindu Marriage Law and various provisions of protection for women in this law.

Dibya shared how the Indian legal system protects Political Rights, Economical Rights, Psychical Rights, Mental Rights and Sexual Rights of women. She also enlightened the participants what measures one could take in case of violation of these rights.

She informed the house about the IPC 354 which protects women from misbehavior, IPC 376 in rape cases, IPC 498 in case of dowry, IPC 125 for maintenance of old parents and IPC 406 for criminal breach of trust etc.

It was an unprecedented outlet for many participants to express their sufferings in the domestic violence. Ms. Jyoti Saikia could not resist herself without sharing her sufferings in the domestic violence to the audience. On the other hand Ms Jaluki Saikia, a 60 years old lady did not know that her sufferings could be scuffled out legally. She is a mother of 3 boys and 2 girls. She took care of all the children in absence of her husband and got all her children married. After that she is leading a forlorn life where none of her children look after her at this old age. Enlightened with the proceedings of the workshop, she wants to fight the legal battle now for her rights.

The second part of the technical session was facilitated by Mr. Rebat Baruah, Chairman of Kaliapani Anchalik Panchayats. He informed the participants about the SGSY scheme. He emphasized on the importance of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and how SHGs could avail the benefit of the SGSY schemes.

The schemes like Bayanjyoti, Dharmajyoti, One Time Grant, Randhan Jyoti, Jiban Jyoti etc. under SGSY were discussed in details. It was a great opportunity for the women ward members and the GP presidents to interact with the AP president. They questioned why couple of applications for SGSY was rejected.

Rebat Barua gave various criteria for rejection of SHGs. One of the most common reasons for such rejection was pointed as a woman becoming member of more than one SHG and applies for SGSY schemes. He informed the house how a grading of SHGs are being prepared and how the selection procedure emphasizes on holding of regular meetings of a particular SHG.

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