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Private Circulation Only

Grantee speak...

The role of an indigenous women's fund as I see it...

I got involved in the 'development work' almost 20 years back. I was a young adivasi woman living in a village in what was then the southern belt of Bihar and which has subsequently become Jharkhand. Since I was articulate and possessed the qualities of a leader – passion to improve my life and the lives of my village sisters and brothers, belief that this is possible and the drive to take on challenges head on, I worked in a development NGO for some years. While this experience helped me tremendously in becoming a 'social activist,' I found the lack of something insofar as my community women were concerned though the focus of the organization was 'adivasi women's development.' There were quite a few young adivasi women like me who felt this gap the theory and the practical implementation of programmes as well as outcome. In the course of our personal discussions with each other we realized that the decision makers not being adivasi was creating a communication as well as a comprehension gap. As women and adivasi, with limited levels of education, hailing from remote villages in a socially, economically and technologically backward region we were silent, slow and found it easier to flow with the tide than against it. Besides which we were not in any senior decision making position. At the same time there was a growing feeling of dissatisfaction and so we dissociated ourselves from

the organization and formed our own organization – Ayo Aidari Trust. The name itself means 'rights for the adivasi women.' So, we had formed our own organization, of adivasi women, by adivasi women and for adivasi women. This was in 1998. We were full of enthusiasm and went about the villages in Dumka district of Jharkhand, talking to our community men and women, helping the formation of savings and credit groups among the women. The total absence of any kind of basic amenities, the disturbing health status, the ignorance not only of the women but also the men, the exploitation of our community, the poverty level, left us paralysed. We had set out to get our women their rights but where do we start and how do we go about it – women's rights are not a capsule but encompass all the other issues – we were baffled but not defeated. We found some wellwishers who helped with mobilizing resources for our work. Our work moved forward, we gained the trust of the whole community in every village we worked, maintained reports in Hindi, accounts statements to the best of our knowledge. It was in 2003 that we came into contact with Nirnaya. I remember even now that when we attended a workshop organized by Nirnaya, we were four women who attended it and Indiraji had slotted one to one discussions with each group on the last day. She said that the project proposal submitted by us (in English)

The memory of a dear one is forever. Set up a Tribute Fund!

Increasing the number of zeros following the 1...

There is one important lesson among many that I learnt from the north based women's funds and the American foundations in particular. It is not having to take personally, a negative response or total lack of response when fundraising. I was able to cultivate that ability to distance myself from a rejection and also not strike the 'customer' off my list of potential donors.

In the beginning it would hurt me personally if people heard me out for over an hour, asked innumerable questions and then said but, you see I can't help you now... I couldn't help but compare the opulence of the person / organization / company I visited and size of donation we were requesting and wonder what is wrong? Am I looking bad or good or sound unconvincing... The names would be struck off my list and I can never forget my heart starting to thump whenever I had to visit somebody and ask for donations.

The organization has completed ten years, and we had many fundraising staff each of who has left a mark in terms of fundraising. Every cold call or personal visit they have made have somewhere touched upon the minds and hearts of potential donors.

The fact that we have a fairly well maintained website and regular newsletters which update readers on what is going on, where, has helped tremendously.

Today it is easier for us to get a bank to sponsor our newsletter publication or co sponsor a vocational training course for young rural women. People who see the physical need at the grassroots level and more particularly the change even small amounts of financial support make are immediately motivated to 'do something' – on a small scale to start with but nevertheless, to start somewhere.

This keeps our confidence levels high that for every need there is always a desire to help. It has been my recent experience in Bihar when a successful lawyer in Patna city expressed her desire to do something on a very small scale in her village and then went on to talk about another village which has been ravaged by floods and the community women are in a totally helpless position. These are small steps but changemaking nevertheless.

– Indira Jena

was very professional and could we please explain it. We started talking hesitantly and she said that there a total disconnect between what we were saying and what was in the proposal. She asked us to write down in Hindi what we proposed to do and what we expected the cost to be and give it in before we left.

This is a lesson I learnt which will always remain with me – that unless we are also familiar with the language into which what we want to say is being translated there is a lot of scope for missing out the essence of what we are saying. Even now I send in my reports in Hindi but I am happy that the facts along with a certain texture of feelings, thoughts expressed, are not lost.

This has been possible because of an indigenous women's fund which finds the voices, the manner of expression as crucial indicators of any objective / outcome / output measurement.

The understanding of how local political and social issues affect us and our work is very important and Nirnaya has always kept this concern in mind.

It has been possible for us retain our holistic perspective of social justice and women's rights as linked to several other socioeconomic, political and cultural issues.

This has made it possible for us to sustain the small successes in social justice since the past four years.

A steady building up of capacities in documentation, reporting, project planning and implementation is done very actively by Nirnaya.

We recognize and acknowledge our differences and tensions arising out of them and today we are able to laugh together.

Above all, recognizing that we need to learn in order to do, and making that space for us is vital - which is why today I am bent upon learning to handle the computer, I am doing peer reviews and I am as concerned that the best possible use be made of the Nirnaya resources because we share the same vision and mission.

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Urban Slum Development Project

The two urban slum development projects that have shown significant progress are the two primary girls schools in Hubli and Secunderabad. While the school in Secunderabad falls under the educational trust specifically formed for advancing girls education among low income families the Hubli girls school is wholly Nirnaya's project supported by a German based foundation, Stiftung, Natur Mensch Kultur. Vikasini Girl Child Education Trust gets funding from Filia German





Women's Fund and Global Fund For Children, USA. Since the legalities like income tax exemption etc. have yet to happen all donations both within the country



and outside, specifically meant for Vikasini Girls School, Secunderabad are made to Nirnaya. Some donations are in kind and service. All in all the schools have established a credibility and moving forward.

The sports day featured the regular sports events. Mrs. Anita Sharma, a state sports coach associated herself as always in making arrangements for availability of the sports grounds for both the event as well as the practice sessions. Dr. V. Soujanya VGCET board member threw open the event with the shot-put.

The rangoli contest held in January once again reiterated the innate talent of the girls in the age old traditional art of India which is something that is even now practised at the dawn of every single day when the front yard of the house is sprinkled with water and adorned with designs in rice flour.



The annual day this year had a structured programme wherein the curricular abilities and excellence from LKG to Class 5, were showcased, interspersed with songs and dances. It was all along the students' show with two of them taking on the role of MCs. Ms. Anita Sharma was the chief guest and Mr. V. Venkateswarlu the guest of honor and together they did the honours of giving away the prizes.

Campaign of substance♦♦♦

The 88 Day Campaign Against Violence Against Women was originally started by Her Fund, Hong Kong and serves the dual purpose of raising funds while focusing on the universal campaign against violence and for women's human rights. Hearing of this for the first time at the first Asian Network of women's Funds in Ulaan Bator in 2005, the other Asian women's funds also decided to launch a similar campaign in their respective countries. The year 2005 saw almost all the members of the international network of women's funds carry out the campaign which spans the period from 10th December to 7th March. Nirnaya conducted the launch in 2005 – 06 in Hyderabad while its grantees carried out the same campaign in their respective areas. After a break of one year the campaign was launched in Orissa in 2008 – 09. The campaign launch is usually



with the participation of persons active and prominent in the social change scenario and the closure involves the participation of those who have been really and truly involved in the launch on a daily basis for 88 days. The campaign was that for 88 days starting 10th December which is World Human Rights Day right up to the penultimate day of International Women's Day a person will put in the same denomination of money daily, into a small clay money pot. These money pots are collected on 7th March and there is a campaign closing ceremony where a few of the pots are symbolically broken and the persons who break their pots share with the gathering as to what was his or her thought or feeling when putting the coin into the pot. The purpose of making it a daily practice for 88 days is that hopefully the person's thought will linger, perhaps for a fleeting moment on the campaign issue. It so happens that for some women

who have experienced or are facing violence frequently, this simple act instills and increases the confidence to speak out about it at the end of the campaign. Breaking the silence is an important step and the campaign endeavours to do this.

At the campaign launch the speakers stressed on the fact that violence against women is not something distant and detached but something that all of us as men and women have, of a small or large magnitude perpetuated or experienced and that is where we ought to start from – ourselves. Blinding ourselves to the reality is harmful to society was the clear message that was sent across by the speakers.

The campaign closure was contemplative, determined, celebratory and symbolic. Contemplative because the reflections focused on the solution to an issue that is taking on structural dimensions; the determination to end violence was that much stronger;; it was a



celebration of around 500 grassroots and other women activists coming together; the first pot was broken by two children and a senior activist.

While this happened in India, Mama Cash the Netherlands based women's fund conducted the campaign by inviting its donors, grantees, board and other friends and wellwishers to host lunches and dinners as a result of which continued discussions took place and significant volume of funds were raised.

All the money raised goes to supporting work on freeing women from gender violence. A shared vision, common mission, region specific strategies and information sharing strengthen the efforts to end violence.

Rural Development Project

Dumka, Jharkhand

The work in Dumka district of Jharkhand continues to be a standing example of how small money can help stir the ripples of change and if one follows the developments closely one can see the ripples changing into waves. What started off as savings and credit groups and changed into more formal SHGs has grown stronger. The groups take prompt action on the non delivery of programmes or services meant for them. They fearlessly confront the panchayat leader who has always wielded a lot of power and they have the backing of the entire village community. Political participation needs to start from here in order to grow strong and be sustainable. The fact that all this has been possible by a group of young and committed adivasi women is significant. They have proved that it may be a slow start but picks up momentum at some point. The fact that this group is firmly rooted to the ground reality, has clearly chalked out its plan and is not enamoured by high level visibility gives it greater chance of success.

Shamshallapur, Medak

We, in Nirnaya, did not think that there would be a skill training centre set up in Shamshallapur, Medak, in Andhra Pradesh. But that has happened and progressing well. When Canara Bank enquired if Nirnaya would be interested in a small grant from it to run a skill training programme the idea of checking out Shamshallapur came up. To our surprise there were more than 20 girls who were school dropouts (Vth Class pass or fail) who were biding their time to be married off. The centre started off in January and while

the day sessions are for tailoring, the evenings are for improving written and spoken Telugu and Kannada. Kudos to Ramesh, Nirnaya fellow who goes all out to develop his village.

Gomahar, Bihar

The baseline survey of Gomahar village in Nalanda district, Bihar seemed to indicate the priority of issues



as first steps towards making it a model village with basic amenities, healthy population, increased levels of education and skills and increased livelihood, all of which would not stop further migration but also make the village attractive enough for some of the



“If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse gift will find a fitting place.”

—Margaret Mead



migrants to return. The keenness and commitment which started with Dr. Chitra Kumar (a non resident Indian) soon spread to the rest of her family. The A & C Kumar Family Foundation has made a significant

investment in this venture in partnership with Nirnaya. The construction of a training cum production centre is about to be completed, handpumps for water supply have been installed, primary education is being carried on, tailoring classes are being held and the most recent was the free health camp conducted by the Mahavir Cancer Sansthan. The three sisters Chitra, Pratima and Nilu were also present, actively involving themselves in the camp. A team of 35 medical doctors rendered their untiring services from 12 noon to 4 p.m. on March 29th. Around 5000 people from Gomahar and nearby villages came walking all the way, The seriousness of the issue of health status of the rural poor came into sharp focus and makes it clear that there has to be the political will on the part of the State to address the issues that fall within its realm rather than leave it to individuals and organisations to take care of them.

"...a tremendous amount of dedicated work and commitment faces the Indian woman of today.

The task of rekindling the Indian culture, rebuilding the Indian nation, is placed in her arms..."

Mary Ann Lavallee,
Saulteaux-Cree and social justice activist;
quoted in 1975.



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