

Empowering Women: Selected Case Studies from Delhi Slums

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ABSTRACT

The position of women has varied in time and place. The Rigvedic period was a period of glory and dignity of women. The Indian Women during that period participated in all walks of life with men: religion, ceremonies, ritual performance and recitation of Vedic mantras. The period of Ramayana and Mahabharata also maintained the respect and glory of Indian womanhood. However, the period of Manusmritis was one of counter balance. During the Mughal rule all retchedness came to Indian womanhood with atrocities, exploitation, and fusion of blood and practice of polygamy. This led to the increase of ban on the freedom and equality of women, deprivation from education and all outwardly interactions. Child marriage, ban on widow marriage, sati, cheating, devdasi, rape, prostitution and abuse of all sorts prevailed.

During the British rule the same practices followed with little improvement. However, certain legal reforms did take place. Some Acts and Ordinances were passed against the practice of sati.

Social reformers like Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwarchand VidyaSagar, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, M.G. Ranade, G.K. Gokhale, etc. became the pioneers to root out the social evils concerning society and the women. The latter were encouraged to get education. Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, Rabindranath Tagore, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Mahatma Gandhi started their experiments of reform in India in general, and in rural settings in particular.

Since independence, a number of programmes, policies, projects and planned approaches under Five Year Plans have been implemented by the Central and State governments. These relate to poverty alleviation, increasing employment opportunities in rural areas, improvement of social, economic and cultural status of women particularly those belonging to the weaker sections of society.

Mahatma Gandhi (1929) declared, "In my opinion when the history of the last decade comes to be written the palm will be given to the women of India. They have brought Swaraj nearer. They have added several inches to their own height and to that of the nation."

The author will discuss the selected case studies of Delhi slums in relation to empowering women.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of empowerment has been variously defined and is often used in the context of women and gender issues. However, empowerment of women does not mean snatching of powers of men in the family or society as propagated and believed by vested interests. Thus, empowerment is misinterpreted to mean more power to one at the cost of another. This wrong

interpretation complicates the issue and generates apprehensions, fear, stress and tension in the minds of male members. They are erroneously led to think that empowerment relates to power mixed with conflicts between gender; and in families (nuclear or joint). Such an ambience nullifies all the approaches and plans of empowerment that get comprehensive less, shattered and defeated. Empowerment enables powerless to become aware of the power dynamics in their life context. It's essential requirements are development of skills and capabilities for gaining some reasonable control over the lives of people without infringing upon the right of others. It also supports empowerment of community normally, in a family and society. Empowerment facilitates initiation of decision making process, freedom to express problem(s), issues and participation in finding solutions (Appadurai, 2004; Rao and Walton, 2004; Alsop and Hinsohn, 2005).

Empowerment is a new term with diverse meanings for various tasks, communities, regions, religion and cultures. Even the researchers and funding agencies have different perspectives about it. However, it is generally agreed that the conceptual framework of empowerment has four basic components (a) institutional climate; (b) social and political structure; (c) individual assets and capabilities; (d) collective assets and capabilities (Narayan, 2006).

People living in slums are poor and have no hope of better tomorrow. The women in their original habitat have been denied opportunities and are neither head of the household or decision makers for (self and family). They are also voiceless and powerless.

In the present studies, five slums of Delhi were chosen to draw meaningful information about the sensitivities and holistic understanding of the concept of women's empowerment. Indicators of empowerment for assessment of social, political, cultural, emotional, economic, and governance were sought through comprehensive interviews and case studies. This methodology was adopted to obtain empirical and qualitative information. Many investigators have used such methods (Petesch 2006, Rao and Wollcock, 2006; Kabeer 2001).

A variety of welfare programmes have been undertaken for improvement of living conditions and to provide better opportunities by many national and international agencies particularly, through funding support from World Bank, UNDP, WHO, UNFPA, UNIFEM, FPAI, etc. The principal areas of these are reflected in welfare work done to improve the ecology of slums, extending facilities for education, health care, family planning, nutrition, and supply of safe drinking water, electricity, prevention of accidental fire and devastating affects of floods during monsoon. Reports of these agencies have given a new realization that the slum people themselves form formidable resource to fight against poverty as they are resilient, have guts and courage. They can comprehend the value of creative imagination, knowledge, experience, commitment and information that is supplicated to them by such welfare agencies.

RESULTS

The case studies and information collated from FGDs formed the basis of analyzing various aspects of empowerment at individual, group, and community level.

Two case studies from each slum district of east (Trilokpuri), west (Jahangirpuri), north (Bawana resettlement colony), south (Khanpur) and central (Khanjawala) district of Delhi were done in order to highlight (i) political empowerment (role of mahila panchayat at grass roots level) (ii)

social empowerment (iii) economic empowerment (iv) women in difficult circumstances, women facing violence (a) rape (b) domestic violence (v) cases of women having alcoholic husband who indulges in other vices e.g. gambling (vi) the concerns of HIV positive women and their relationship with the family members (vii) self help group in (a) social context (b) family life, (c) moral (extra-marital affairs) (d) family budget (e) radiation effects on immediate neighborhood.

Further, the process of empowerment was comprehended by examining through case studies, such features as, (a) access to basic community services (b) to be heard and access to hearing (c) decision making in family (d) economic emancipation (e) freedom of movement and (f) accessibility to social contacts.

A number of NGOs are working in Delhi slums (Annexure-IV) and are helping in providing vital services in the areas of education, health, sanitation and hygiene, vocational training, running awareness programmes e.g. family planning, women's rights, legal and counseling services, etc. These, along with several schemes run by Delhi government directly and with central and international assistance are making visible paradigm shifts in the empowerment of women. These programmes are in consonance with the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women-2001(DWCD). The NGOs working in the five slums of Delhi are specifically related to the case studies narrated as under.

East Delhi-Trilokpuri

Case-1

[Self Help Group: Individual and Group Empowerment, NGO: All India Women Education Fund Association-AIWEFA]

Gulabo, 28 years of age, originally hailed from a village of Motihari district in Bihar. She belongs to the Dalit community which was engaged in making leather goods from animal skin. She was married at the age of 10 and became pregnant at the age of 13 years, giving birth to a girl child. She lived in a joint family where, in addition to her father-in-law and mother-in-law, there were five sisters-in-laws and three brothers-in-laws. The family's financial situation was unstable. The women and girl children faced discrimination and violence in home and lived in an unprotected atmosphere. There was the problem of food, hygiene and sanitation facilities and education.

Gulabo's husband made the decision to migrate to Delhi where he joined some of his friends and acquaintances in a labour force which was working in construction job. He was provided sleeping shelter in the slum. He saved some money regularly for a year and half. This helped him to bring his wife and children to Delhi to live with him.

Gulabo is tall and good looking and seemed to be mentally and physically strong. She became acclimatized to life in slum and began to look for avenues that would enhance her family income. Although she had studied only up to primary level, she began to attend evening classes and also started learning sewing and embroidery work along with women of her age group. Education seemed to have given her confidence, ability and skill to participate in awareness programmes organized by NGOs and the government from time to time. In 2001 when she was interviewed first she appeared to be unsure of herself. The family was growing in number (four children) as well. However, when she was contacted again in 2007, she appeared to be a fairly

transformed person. Her vocational skill of tailoring and embroidery helped her to enhance her wage earning capacity. She maintained proper accounts of her income and expenditure. Her husband valued her cooperation and discussed family matters relating to savings, children's education, clothes and other assets.

Gulabo formed a group of women who had also acquired the skills of tailoring and embroidery. This self help group began to get work from outside the slum also.

Case 2

[Self Help Group: Social context, Family life and Family budget, NGO: Dr.Bhimrao Ambedkar Dalit Avon Shiksha Samiti]

Kulsum Bano, 29 years arrived as a migrant from a village in Balia District of U.P. She left her family and in-laws to travel to Delhi with the dream of leading a relatively more comfortable life with her two sons and three daughters. Her husband had some contacts in the Trilokpuri slum (people who came earlier from the same village). There were hardly any educational or health care facilities when she moved into the crowded jhopad-pattis of the slum. They had to depend on others for guidance and recommendation to get a wage earning job. After living for few years in these dismal surroundings which lacked basic amenities she began to educate herself by attending handicraft classes which gave young women like her the possibility of obtaining employment in the export processing zones. As transport services were at a distance of nearly 1.5 km from her dwelling both she and her husband had to walk in search of work. Most slum people use bicycle to get to and from work and for transporting loads, while the women have no other option but to walk.

The slum settlement is made of wood or iron scraps bricks/stones with thatched roofs and dirty floors. Cow dung is occasionally used on the floor. Electricity is usually pilfered and water is available either through MCD taps or via hand pump. Pit latrines are created or members of the slum families have to use open spaces. Pigs roam around the dwelling units spreading filth and thus become a source of infections. Kulsum and her family prays within the premises as the nearest mosque is not accessible - being placed at a distance of 10-15 km.

Kulsum and her husband pooled their wages to acquire some possessions for themselves and their children e.g. clothes, foot wear, utensils, some silver ornaments, etc.

Health care provisions were initially poor. However, over the years (2001-2007) there has been perceptible change due to NGO and MCD intervention. The general health of women and children was poor with malnutrition being the major problem. Parasitic infection frequent Malaria is endemic and dengue is common.

Kulsum Bano's income generation is predominantly home based. She sells her handicrafts and the money that she gets is used for supplementing her husband's income to buy the essentials for the family. She has not been able to limit her family size because of lack of awareness about contraceptives. She is scared of sterilization (tubectomy) and thinks that this will have impact on the durability of her marital relationship.

Kulsum prefers to interact with women from U.P. and Bihar belonging to her caste and religion. She also narrated some instances of domestic violence reluctantly.

Kulsum reported that after getting trained in handicraft work and acquiring marketing skills, there has been an increase in her self confidence and self esteem. She has also been able to overcome the element of shyness and embarrassment. She now likes to interact with NGO workers, patiently listen to what they suggest about improvement in her slum. She wants to get involved in their programmes. She feels that there has been an enhancement in her mobility, freedom of expression and self confidence. Her life is not heavily restricted as before (in her village) or when she first arrived in Trilokpuri. She now has more access to information through television programmes and from interactions with NGO functionaries, government officials and her peers in slums.

Kulsum has now joined the self help group (SHG) which consists of other women. SHG meetings have helped her to become more perceptive and vocal. She now wants to make this group of women, who are skilled in handicraft work to market their products collectively. According to her this will also assist them in becoming economically empowered. She feels that all the members of her group have developed critical consciousness and have begun to be aware of their reality as women and what their needs were.

From a grossly introvert personality she has become extrovert and has begun to appreciate her worth. She thinks that she now has the confidence for fighting it out to achieve the goals of her life. This has been possible not only through the discussions in SHG but also with help of NGO and government.

Kulsum believes that her family life has become better. She and her husband now understand each other well. They share their views on money matters and other family issues. Education of her children is a top priority and she and her husband aspire to see that they get the best education and vocational training. Her children also understand how education can change their life. They know the merits of good health and hygiene.

Kulsum's self help group has also organized a small scale credit union where each woman regularly saves Rs. 50/- per month. The joint savings are used in various ways. In addition they have monthly meetings to give feed back to each other so that corrective actions can be taken.

Kulsum and her group are aware of the empowerment programmes and wish to get involved in them. They also know about women's rights and the organizations that can provide various types of counseling services to them. She now lives with new hope for herself and for her community. She understands the importance of good education, health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation and having a small family. She does not want any further addition to her family and is willing to use contraceptives, including tubectomy. She believes that despite the initial disadvantage of living in the capital of India, her resilience and determination to avail the opportunities have paid off. Her husband is supportive and co-operates in all her endeavors.

West Delhi: Jahangirpuri

Case-3

[Economic empowerment, NGO: PRAYAS]

Gurjeet, 31 years old belongs to a poor farm labour family from a village in Batala. She lived in this village till she was 25 years old amongst very poor women like her and has seen the lives of rich women from farmer's families. She had to work for them. As the farmer families possessed modern machines and had much greater amount of money available, Gurjeet could agonizingly

feel that in her 25 years of life in this setting, she could not earn sufficient money. She has education up to 10th class. Her husband Jaspal is also literate. Both felt that literacy alone cannot bring social respect to them and their family which had six children (four girls and two boys). They decided to migrate to Delhi where many of the people from their village had gone to seek fulfillment for their desire to change their standard and quality of living. They were able to get 10 sq. mt. of place in Jahangirpuri slum and managed to construct a semi-pucca dwelling unit. However, the area lacked satisfactory basic civil amenities. They also faced the problem of having to live peacefully with other slum people of different caste, religion and region.

Gurjeet in her dwelling joined a self help group to put her savings. This SHG was functioning just for economic purposes. They had regular group meetings to start motivating other slum women to join them. After initial reluctance and apprehensions they were convinced by a NGO group called PRAYAS working in their area. It provided information to them about how to set up an enterprise. Gurjeet started a general merchandise and vegetable shop in her house so that other slum families could meet their daily requirements. Her sales increased which further motivated her to use the money earned for keeping more variety of things in her shop. Supported by her SHG, Gurjeet started taking interest in politics and encouraged other slum women to take initiatives in critically analyzing the situation. She could understand the vote bank politics of various parties whose field workers and leaders visited their area from time to time but more frequently during election time.

Being educated and having varied experience of life in her village and now in the slum Gurjeet started taking part in activities of one of the political parties. She faced opposition from those who controlled allotment of resources. Despite many hurdles in her path she was determined and motivated to assert her rights. She was supported in this by her husband Jaspal and other family members. She decided to contest the election to represent her slum and, won. This catalyzed her to use her position to fight for the rights of slum people, remove bureaucratic road blocks and use funds earmarked for her slum area to provide legal ownership of plots, water, electricity, sanitation & hygiene facilities, open school for children and to establish primary health center (PHC) to provide free medical services and counseling of various kinds including family planning.

Gurjeet's courage and ability to get things done has earned much respect from fellow co-habitants. She has direct access to political leaders and government officials. She is devoted to handling the problems of her habitat. She is engaged in activities of this NGO and government to provide political and economic empowerment to women. She believes that this will pave the way for social and emotional empowerment as well.

Case 4

[Woman in Difficult Circumstances, NGO: Women and Rural Urban Development Association-WARUDA and PRAYAS]

Gyarsi, 24 years old, belongs to a snake catcher Kalbelia family of Mewar region in Rajasthan. The tribe is basically nomadic, moving from place to place. The family though being nuclear does have a number of children. The men in the family are addicted to alcohol and narcotics such as opium and hashish. They are expert in catching venomous snakes and usually carry cobra, vipers and Kraits in bamboo baskets. They display these in public places and attract tourists

(foreigners as well) who like to photograph them. The women folk do all the domestic work that entails cleaning, washing, cooking, child rearing, etc. Polygamy is common. The family size is large. Education is an unknown entity and children learn the art of snake catching very early. Nutritional standards are poor and because of deprivation children suffer from malnutrition. Traditional prenatal, natal and post-natal care is preferred and pregnant women seldom visit the hospital. Early marriage (child) & pregnancy is rampant.

Gyarsi moved with her husband and six children to Delhi. According to her, she had her first child when she was only 14. She is unaware of any modern methods of family planning. She and her family being illiterate and nomadic have hardly any access to programmes of the government or NGOs. Delhi's Jahangirpuri has become her present abode as a group of 10 families of her community have moved there. Her husband leaves the hutment early with the snakes to earn a living by attracting crowds in busy areas of Delhi. Over a period of time they have been able to identify places where they can earn more. The women do not accompany them nor do the girl children. Their time is spent in household chores.

Gyarsi said that her husband comes late in the night along with his friends. She is subjected to physical beating nearly every day and so are the other women of her tribe. Male is the sole bread winner and therefore, heads the household. Gyarsi has a very difficult life. Words like social, economic, political and emotional empowerment are foreign to her. Except for her tribe, she does not interact with others in the slum. They shun members of her community.

Gyarsi's family is used to lack of basic amenities. They are not shy in taking bath at the hand pump. They are forced to defecate/urinate in the lanes and by lanes of the slum.

Economic resources of the family are uncertain and they live on a day-to-day basis. Living in the capital for the last 2-3 years has brought about some changes in her psyche. She came to know that some NGOs and government officials want to help them but she does not know what to ask for and whom to approach.

The girls in the family are treated with a hostile attitude of discrimination. Sibling rivalry is common.

It was revealed by her that she is actually very much unsettled by the life style of Delhi and the stories that she hears from her peers.

When asked if she has any priorities in her life or whether she would like to change her life style, she said that it was her desire to see her children go to school, learn some trade and get gainful employment. She felt that wherever they go they are treated as thieves, criminals. Their men are the first target of police whenever some burglary or violence occurs. They constantly live in an atmosphere of intimidation, fear, stress and conflict. Drinking by women is fairly common in their tribe and therefore it is not considered a bad habit.

This amazing story of Gyarsi's life that depicts restlessness, hopelessness and inability to perceive the hopeful signs because of illiteracy raises questions. Despite these depressing situations there are several positive and hopeful signs. Women and girls of this tribe practice their traditional songs and dances which have become very popular. Gyarsi and her daughter do get offers to perform the Kalbelia dance. They do so at times and get money. But this is taken away by their husband or they spend this in drinking.

At times it became difficult to communicate with her. She displayed a negligent view on health and hygiene, sanitation, quality of food and health care services. Issues of caste, religion, region, politics, and society did not evoke any curiosity in the mind of Gyarsi. To an outsider, she appeared to be a woman living in the most difficult circumstances but for her, life was to be lived on a day to day basis, in which long term planning or aspirations had little scope or value. The life style seemed to be based on the premise “live as well as you can today, don’t worry for tomorrow”.

North Delhi: Bawana Resettlement Colony

Case-5

[Woman victim of rape and Domestic Violence, NGO: Navjyoti and Gender Resource Centre, Government of Delhi]

Rajni is a 28 years old, petite woman. She hails from a village near Sirsa (Haryana). Her family worked as farm labour. At the age of 13, she also started earning her wages by working in the fields. Once during harvest time, she was raped in the field by a group of men. She was so traumatized and stressed that she did not reveal this to any of her family members. However after sometime she discerned that she had become pregnant. It was only then that the family became aware of her tragedy. She was taken to a nearby village, where a trained mid-wife aborted the developing fetus. She was brought home and maltreated by her parents and brothers. She was not allowed to go out and could not meet any one. House hold chores were thrust on her. She cleaned the house, washed the clothes, cooked food, milked the cow and was provided left over food after every one had eaten. The situation became unbearable for her. One day she ran away from home and reached Delhi. Her looks attracted young men. Rajni had studied up to class VII in her village. Her trauma had taught her many things in life. She also possessed basic intelligence and was resilient enough.

Soon she found herself a man who was living in Bawana resettlement slum. She began to live with him and had four girl children. She also came in contact with other women and began to adapt and adjust to the mixed culture and sensitivities of the slum colony. Her ignorance of metro life gradually got replaced by information that inculcated awareness in her. This acquired knowledge and experience gave her the wisdom and strength to cope with the difficult realities of slum life. Her spouse, though of domineering nature did not deny her freedom of movement. He listened to her and often discussed family matters. She was cautious about her four girls and wanted to ensure that they were not subjected to a situation which she had faced in her village. She accepted the work of a maid in a nearby colony and started earning regularly. This money was used for building small assets and for providing better clothing and food to her children. Her husband was also supportive in this. The children started going to school.

Rajni became aware of NGOs and government BPL schemes. She attempted to get financial assistance for education of her daughter. She attended the evening literacy classes where she met other women. Soon they formed a self help group (SHG). They met regularly to discuss their family problems and also ways and means to ensure their financial and social security in the slum. The slum had youth who indulged in crimes and were violent. Rajni and her daughters were occasionally threatened by them. Sometimes, they faced physical violence and abuses that were hurled at them.

Since Rajni and her husband had steady income and managed their household properly other neighbours began to show respect and occasionally consulted them about their problem.

Rajni's basic instinct and support of her husband who had no vices despite being surrounded by such an atmosphere has become an example. She had been able to erase the horrid trauma of gang rape, pregnancy and abortion from her mind gradually. Presently she has no contact with her folk in her village. They never tried to look for her. She does get nostalgic about her early childhood with her siblings and parents at times.

Rajni hopes that her girls will acquire higher education. She constantly tries to find information about resources and mechanisms that can help in this. She is also very conscious about her health and that of her family. She visits the nearby PHC or clinic whenever needed. She does not want any more children and has undergone tubectomy with the consent of her husband.

Case-6

[Domestic Violence due to alcoholic and Drug Addict husband, NGO: Navjyoti]

Ramkali, 35 years, belongs to a village near Pratapgarh (Uttarakhand). She and her husband Jagtap worked in the agricultural fields of the local Jagirdar (landlord). They were exploited by the supervisor who looked after the crops on behalf of his master. Jagtap and Ramkali had five daughters and a son. They belonged to a joint family. Jagtap had to support his ailing father, mother, three brothers and two sisters who were younger to him. The siblings got occasional wage earning jobs as labourers. Their financial conditions worsened. It was then that Jagtap decided to move to Delhi where he had some migrant friends. Here he lived in Bawana slum in a shack shared by other bachelor friends. They developed the habit of drinking and occasionally took drugs.

After settling down in the slum for a few years, he got Ramkali and her six children who had also grown up. The sudden increase in family forced Jagtap to acquire some jhopad-patti to live. He obtained some money to pay for it by selling his wife's ornaments. His daily drinking habits did not change despite protests by Ramkali. This subsequently led to daily quarrels between them and resulted in Jagtap beating Ramkali. They lived in a surrounding where screaming, shouting and beating was a constant feature. The women and children felt helpless as they did not know what to do. They lived in an atmosphere of intimidation, fear, stress and conflict. In his drunken state Jagtap frequently forced Ramkali into sexual submission and beat her if she resisted. The girls in the family often witnessed this horrid situation and drew several mis-conceptions.

Ramkali had no freedom, mobility, her voice was not heard. As she did not earn any wage, she was denied any role in spending money. Children suffered from malnutrition, inadequate clothing and had no access to school. Whenever they fell sick they were taken to a primary health centre or to the government hospital. They had to depend on the medicines given to them.

NGOs working in this slum got to know about the bitter and tragic story of Ramkali and her children. There were many such cases in the slum which required counseling, rehabilitation, and assistance of various kinds. She was made aware of the critical importance of education, vocational training and skill acquisition, health and hygiene, small family and her legal rights. Ramkali was motivated to assemble other slum women and form a self help group (SHG). She and others were encouraged to attend literacy classes and learn wage earning skills. In the meanwhile she was also provided the job as a maid; this gave her a steady income every month. She

began to learn cooking various types of dishes. This gave her access to some loan from the Mahila Kosh.

She started cooking food on a Thela (carriage) that was set up near a construction project of a sky rise apartment. The laborers working there enjoyed her delicious meals and thronged in large numbers for breakfast, lunch and evening tea. Initially, her daughters assisted her in this endeavor but she was keen on getting them and her only son educated. They were admitted in a nearby government school where they were the beneficiary of free school uniform, books and stationery and mid day meal. Ramkali's success inspired other harassed women who were also the subject of violence and other forms of atrocities by their husbands. They began to assert themselves with support from other SHG members. The alcoholic and drug addict husbands came under much pressure to give up their vices and refrain from any violent act.

Ramkali now has been able to overcome her financial problems. The SHG has helped other women also. From individual empowerment the situation has transformed itself to group empowerment having a positive impact on the slum community. The group has also gained social recognition. The education of their children is giving them hope of a better tomorrow.

South Delhi (Khanpur)

Case 7

[Life of a HIV positive woman, NGOs: AVERT and Naz (India) Foundation Trust]

Vasundhra, aged 37, lives with her husband and has two daughters. Facing dire financial stress she decided to supplement her family's income by working in a flour mill. There she was assigned the duty of weighing and packaging wheat flour which was basically unbranded and did not meet quality control criteria nor had any certificate from the concerned department. The owner (widower) of the establishment prescribed erratic working hours for her. Sometimes she worked late in the night. He began to make sexual advances towards her and offered financial allurements as well. After initial protests, she gave in and submitted to his lust as and when he wanted. She began to earn more money than her husband. Her returning late at night caused suspicion in the mind of her husband. But she satisfied him by saying that she had to work overtime to earn more. Since both husband and wife were working, the daughters and sons had total freedom, mobility and access to activities of other slum and street children. Her two daughters aged 16 and 17 spent more time going out with other boys than on their education.

Vasundhra could not control or discipline her daughters, because she was herself following an indefensible path of moral turpitude. She could not become a role model for her children nor could inculcate the ethical values, sense of morality, trust, honesty and integrity in them. The husband on returning from work found that either the wife was not at home or the daughters were gone. Whenever they returned late, he questioned them relentlessly leading to shouting and screaming. Vasundhra threatened her husband that she would leave him along with the daughters. The husband refrained from precipitating the matter for fear of social stigma and emotional stress.

Her frequent sexual relations with the owner of the flour mill began to show effect. She started complaining of weakness, loss of weight, frequent diarrhea, nausea and irritation. She was taken to a government hospital for diagnosis and treatment. Tests showed that she was HIV- positive. This caused a great upheaval in her family. She was confined to a small area.

Everyone in her family started keeping distance from her. Her clothes, utensils were also separated from those of others. No one even wanted to touch her or come near her. She had lost her wages, earning ability as she was unable to attend to work.

An NGO working in the area came to know of Vasundhra's HIV positive status. The husband had no financial resources to get her proper treatment. The field worker of the NGO visited her twice every fortnight. She is provided with food and medicine by the NGO. The field worker has organized HIV/AIDS awareness programme in the slum. The husband and daughters were counseled that they will not have HIV infection if they touched her or ate their meals with her. Other slum women were also encouraged to talk to her, give some mental relief and emotional support.

Vasundhra is really fighting a losing battle. She now realizes that she has been a victim of sexual exploitation by a HIV positive man. He gave her money but also infected her. Her daughters have now become aware of this grave tragedy and have become careful. Their father also takes greater interest in the welfare of daughters. The economic situation of the family is becoming more and more unstable. Socially and emotionally they feel neglected.

Case-8

[How SHGs have facilitated group of women, NGO: Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme-CASP]

Rano, 46 belonging to a small village near Bithoor (Kanpur, U.P.) lived in a joint family. Her husband is a skilled cobbler. He did not earn enough to support his family comprising his wife and three daughters. To overcome this, he decided to migrate to Delhi where some of his rural friends had gone and settled in Khanpur slum (South Delhi). Rano and his three daughters joined him in 2000. In the meantime, he had started earning some money by making leather goods and also repairing/making foot wear. Rano found a job as a house maid but was not happy with the job. The daughters were sent to the government school which provided them free education, uniform, books and mid-day meal.

CASP working in Khanpur organized an educational and vocational guidance/awareness programme. Rano was encouraged to join it. She decided to join adult education classes in the evening. The NGO also provided her with information about how to start a pig-farm, poultry and mushroom cultivation. Many other women were motivated by field workers. These women came together as a group (several of them were doing jobs in construction area, factory). They were also keen to overcome the financial crisis. Like Rano, they had to obtain loans from local money lenders who charged very high rate of interest. They were constantly intimidated by them. This made their life even more difficult. These women in SHG soon learnt about how they could avoid taking loans from the money lender. They saved small sums of money every month regularly and availed the opportunity of low interest charges by the group, to repay the debt.

The women of the SHG began to receive training in poultry and in mushroom cultivation. These income generation activities were taken up. They were also provided with several pairs of 'layer hens' and cockerels. In six months of sustained hard work, the hatchling grew and their number went up to 250. Some eggs were retained everyday for hatching purposes, while others began to be sold in the market. It was decided by the women in SHG that they would recycle the money in increasing the number of layer hens, and sell the extra number of cockerels in the market for

customers. Their extra time and also of children was pooled to grow edible mushroom and sell it to stores. The SHG activities which were started in 2000 are beginning to give results. The additional income is shared by the SHG members equitably. It has helped in meeting the expenses of their children in schools, and is providing them better nutrition and health care. Their spouses are also supportive as it lessens their financial burden and responsibilities. Rano looks cheerful. Her daughters appeared to be healthy and seemed keener to get education. They seldom fall sick. The field workers of the NGO also give counseling to the children of SHG women. The SHG women have also acquired social recognition due to this financial empowerment. Their attitude, motivation and mindset have become more perceptive. In 2001 when they were first contacted they appeared to be tentative but in 2007 when they were approached again, basic transformation could be easily seen. They were now more open, confident and communicated without fear. The encouraging part was they had aspirations for their children and clarity about what they wanted and how they would overcome the obstacles in achieving it.

Central Delhi (Khanjawala)

Case-9 [Radiation effect on neighborhood, NGO: Society for Promotion of Women and Child Welfare-SPOWAC]

Marium, 51, a Dalit Christian came to Delhi with her husband and one daughter in 1999. They belong to a small village hamlet in east Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh. Her husband was engaged as a skilled labor in the construction company which was doing the construction work of Delhi Metro Rail. Marium had lot of difficulty in the new surroundings as she was not accustomed to life in a metro which gave her cultural and moral shock nearly every day. She also faced the problem of communication as she spoke only Telugu. Between 1999 and 2007 when contacted last, she had given birth to four more children, had one miscarriage and abortion. Marium is religious and fairly extrovert personality. She learnt to speak Hindi, attended church and interacted with other Telugu speaking women and others freely. She has a perceptive mind set. She understands the importance of education and how acquisition of skills can bring about paradigm shift in her family's life.

NGO field workers from Family Planning Association attracted Marium's attention. She began to attend their programmes and learn about contraception, pre-natal, natal and post-natal care. She trained herself as a mid-wife and began helping other pregnant women in the slum. The NGO group used her as a trainer to train others. This had a radiating effect on others. Marium and several other women, who were treated by her, formed a Self-Help Group (SHG). They engaged themselves in spreading awareness about family life, the importance of inculcating the moral values in children (more importantly so to daughters). They also discussed and spread the message of how to use the money earned by them and their husbands properly. For this, they budgeted their money for paying rent, for electricity, water, food, clothing, education of children, healthcare. Some money was also saved regularly to purchase some assets and basic needs.

Marium and her SHG group has become a role model for others. They are being talked about by families living in the sprawling slum. Marium has undergone tubectomy and so have other women in her SHG (who already have two or more children). This message of small family as the basis of prolonged happiness is radiating into the slums. Women now see Marium and her SHG as the epicenter of information and knowledge. They have ready access to them. They

come in the 'Saturday Club' meeting organized by Marium where they discuss issues/problems faced by them. Sometimes field workers are invited to hear and give their counsel.

Marium is worried about her daughters and so are the other slum women. They want them to be educated, learn the art of self-defense and adhere to moral and cultural values for a better family life.

Case-10

[Community empowerment through SHG, NGO: INDCARE]

Kiran ben, belongs to a village near Idar (Gujarat). She belongs to a Kathodia tribe. Many of her tribe members have migrated and settled in South Rajasthan. She had no formal education but has an alert and receptive mind. She came to Delhi in 2000 with her husband and son. Her husband is employed in a factory and earns enough to feed his family which has now grown from two children in 2001 to four in 2007 when she was contacted again. The semi pucca house does not belong to them. They pay rent for their accommodation which is claimed to belong to some outsider. Their habitat has problems of water supply, sanitation, hygiene and access to road does not exist. Electricity supply is erratic. The schools are at some distance and children face many difficulties. Health problems remain largely attended as the nearest PHC is far. The doctor is seldom available. Financial stress is a chronic problem for all dwellers owing to large family size, poor wages. The women who come from distant places feel isolated socially, culturally and suffer from psychic problems of various kinds. The spouses of these women have to spend most of their time in earning money.

Kiran ben speaks Gujarati and her dialect is very different from other Gujarati speaking women whose husband have migrated to Delhi for working in factory, construction job, Delhi Metro Rail etc. However, due to intervention of field workers of a number of NGOs they have become aware of various welfare programmes of MCD and other agencies. They have begun to understand that participation in a SHG leads to empowerment and that this empowerment leads to sustainability of individual, group and community. They appreciate that a number of extrinsic and intrinsic factors affects women's capacity for organization and political mobilization. Field workers of NGOs also emphasize that the scope for empowerment strategies is highly place specific at all levels.

The SHG created by Kiran ben and her fellow slum dwellers meets regularly to discuss various problems of their life that revolve around finances, social and political issues, education and health, family size and nutrition and how to improve their quality of life. The issues also relate to not only empowerment of individual, but also of their SHG and community. They want social and political recognition and seemed organized to attract the attention of government officials, social activists, field workers of political parties and NOGs.

Kiran ben has in the last 5-6 years worked hard in her SHG and has been instrumental in giving it the form, substance and respectability it deserves. Their community has grown in strength and they are listened to by others with seriousness. The children (girls inclusive) are taught about moral values, culture and respect for the elders. They are constantly encouraged to do well in their school. Although, the youth of slum is usually found indulging in some form of vices, Kiran ben's community frowns and dislikes such activities.

The community seemed to be doing well financially. Kiran ben works as a washer woman and irons clothes. She gets these from nearby colonies. From 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. she uses a thela (carriage) and parks near a colony of well to do persons. This gives her regular income. The other members of her SHG work as vendors for vegetables, fruits, and some supply tea to workers.

It was encouraging to note how SHG has changed the life of Kiran ben and other women. Not only has it improved their living standards but has also increased the collective bargaining power of her group and community.

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