



## Editor's Column

A national meeting of Health Secretaries of State governments on 'Gender and Health' was recently organised by the National Commission for Women in association with the Department of Family Welfare, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India, in New Delhi.

Welcoming the participants, Member Anusuiya Uike explained the objectives of the meet and said that giving priority to gender and health was one of the concerns of NCW. The national meet was the culmination of the first hand information gathered during public hearings held in different parts of the country on gender and health.

In his keynote address, P.K. Hota, Secretary dept. of family welfare, said that the common minimum programme of the Central Govt. had given priority to health for rural poor, distribution of drugs at affordable prices, etc. He said that more than gender equity, it was important to ensure that the health system worked for more women.

In her introductory remarks, Dr. Poornima Advani, Chairperson NCW said that this was the first ever all-India Meet of Health Secretaries to check out gender friendly policies. She asked the State health secretaries to finalise the State policies only after consulting the State Commissions for Women. She said that high maternal mortality rate, lack of reproductive health services for women, the population policy and 'missing girls' were important areas of gender and health and needed well-thought out strategies to deal with them. She drew attention to the inability to provide toilets, drinking water, sanitation, etc. to the marginalised population comprising tribals, construction workers, bamboo



*Chairperson Dr. Poornima Advani addressing the Meet of Health Secretaries. Sitting on the dias (from left) are Ms Anusuiya Uike, Dr. A. Ramadoss, Shri P.K. Hota*

workers, etc.

Dr. A Ramadoss, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare in his inaugural address said that the present Govt. has given priority to addressing

### Focus

### Gender & Health

inequality in social services like rural health care, education, maternal health, rural development, etc. Referring to the family planning programme, he felt that there was a need for greater involvement of men. He categorically stated that the two-child norm would not be thrust on the people as it violated the fundamental rights of the people. He expressed concern about violence against women and was of the view that there was need for strict legislation and implementation of various Acts, like the PCPNDT Act to address declining sex-ratio, Referring to the National Health policy, he said that RCH Phase II would be in place by April

2005 and 2000 community health centers would be operational with one trained village level attendant in each village.

In the technical session, Ms. Renu Khanna spoke on access to quality services available to women, Dr. Vibhuti Patel on Missing Girl Child and Dr. Abhijit Das on Gender Violence, Public Health implications of National Health and Population Policy respectively. After detailed deliberations the following resolution was adopted:

- Health care providers have to ensure privacy and dignity of women clients irrespective of class, caste or religion.
- Strict implementation of the service guidelines and protocols for tubectomy, vasectomy, oral contraceptives and IUD. Antenatal and post natal care for reduction of maternal mortality and ensuring safe motherhood.
- Informed choice, voluntary acceptance, options and accessibility

must form the cornerstone of contraceptive service delivery.

- Health care system must address violence against women as a public health concern. Providers should be equipped to address the issue through pre as well as in-service training programmers.

- Programme planners and managers must ensure that women health providers are able to perform their duties in safe and secure environment.

- Citizen's charter of services should be prepared, incorporating gender and violence issues. Grievance redressal mechanisms must be instituted at all levels to address violation of the charter.

- Programmed managers and providers must ensure implementation of the PCPNDT Act to prevent sex selection and provision of timely assistance in medico-legal cases.

- Since women's health is determined by their socio-economic and political reality, there is an urgent need to ensure inter-sectoral coordination in addressing their health concerns.

- Self-help groups and Panchayati Raj institutions as constituents associated with different ministries and departments such as WCD, RD, Panchayati Raj, Home, Health and FW, need to effectively work together.

- In creating awareness on implications of gender on health, gender sensitization of policy makers, programme managers and providers is imperative in enhancing their understanding and responsiveness to women's concerns.

- Gender sensitive indicators are critical to monitoring and bridging gender gaps in health service provision. Gender disaggregated data collection is fundamental to gender sensitive formulation and implementation of health policies and programmers.

- Gender equitable social and health development plans must be developed especially for the backward districts to ensure access and utilisation of health services, overall improvement of health indicators and empowerment of women.



*State Health Secretaries attending the meeting*

### **NCW's State Visit to Manipur**

The Commission went on a State visit to Manipur from 19-21st September, 2004. The NCW team consisted of the Chairperson, Member Nafisa Hussain and co-ordinator Nandini Thockchom. It held an interactive session with, NGOs, women activists, lawyers and elected representatives. Following issues were raised by the NGOs.

- Repeal of legislation like the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) that gives impunity from punishment and prevents legal proceedings against the armed forces.

- Institution of the State Women's Commission to address all problems and atrocities being faced by women.

- There are very few women in the prison and only 13 are arrested under the NSA. No woman for the moment is serving life imprisonment.

### **Commission recommended:**

- (1) A separate women's cell in jail and speedy trial of women convicts.
- (2) The number of women into the police force should be increased to 33%.
- (3) Awareness among people about the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan should be created and
- (4) The family courts should have female judges and

counselors.

### **The NGOs suggested that:**

- (1) Condition of women in jails, sanitation facilities etc. should be improved.
- (2) Certain checks to be conducted for the teachers' attendance in the schools. Adequate number of teachers should be appointed.
- (3) Corrupt practices in the appointment of teachers should be checked.
- (4) Health curriculum to be introduced for girls.
- (5) Affordable rural technology should be provided to women belonging to the weaker sections.
- (6) Grameen banks should be expanded.
- (7) Family courts should be established in all districts.
- (8) Customary laws to be modified and the process of codification should start.
- (9) A gender sensitive policy, specially, for tribal widows, having only daughters should be created.
- (10) There should be reservation for women in government jobs.
- (11) Centers should be opened to give care and support to women living with HIV/AIDS.
- (12) Forums to be established for the wives of alcoholics to share their problems.
- (13) Deterrence like fines and small term confinements should be imposed on alcoholic husbands, who abuse their wives.
- (14) Gynecologists, should be available in remote areas.

## Workshop on Voluntary Activism

A National Workshop on Women Empowerment through Voluntary Activism was organized at Thane, in Maharashtra, with the support of the National Commission for Women. Over 65 participants from 50 voluntary organizations participated in this workshop. Smt. Mridula Sinha, President, C.S.W.B. inaugurating the workshop appealed to the participants to undertake projects as per local requirements and needs and take up research projects on various gender-related issues. The objectives of the workshop were: (i) To initiate a meaningful interaction between those voluntary organizations, who have been getting Government funding and those who never thought of seeking them (ii) To make the "unexposed" voluntary organizations aware of the formal world of voluntarism which gathers considerable strength through government support (iii) To bring about a deep understanding about the challenges before the voluntary organizations working on women's issues.

The subjects discussed in the sessions were: (1) Philosophy of Voluntary Activism: The Indian Perspective (2) Women Empowerment: The Indian Scenario (3) Govt. Funding for Women Welfare Oriented Projects and Schemes and (4) Project Proposal Writing.

Successful initiatives like SEWA, Ahmedabad, SNEHALAYA, Ahmednagar, Himalayan Association for Development and Research Initiatives (HADARI) Dehradun, Zunka Bhakar Kendra, Jalgaon presented their success stories.

### Public Hearing

A public hearing sponsored by NCW on the problems of home nurses was organized by the Rajagiri College of Social Science, Kalamassery. 85 home nurses and representatives of various nursing institutions from Ernakulam district, Kerala, participated in the hearing.

The following issues were raised by the participants:

- The home nurses are denied regular wages, provident fund and pensions.

- Home nurses are treated as servants and are forced to do household duties in addition to nursing. The job

### Members' Visits

- Member Baby Rani Maurya visited Faridabad alongwith Chairperson, NCW, to inquire into a case of alleged gangrape and murder of a minor girl in Bhati-Mines, Faridabd.

During 4-8 November, Ms. Maurya visited Sikkim. On 5th November, she attended the State level NGOs meeting organized by the Sikkim State Commission for Women. Later, she held a meeting with the Chief Secretary and other Secretaries, organized by the Deptt. of Social Welfare, Govt. of Sikkim. She also attended a public hearing of kardamom workers at Kabi Tingda, organized by the Sikkim State Commission for Women.

Ms. Maurya visited Hathras, Agra, and attended a public hearing on dalit women organized by Rashtriya Nari Jagriti Sansthan.

- Dr. Sudha Malaiya, alongwith Member Nafisa Hussain investigated into the rape of blind girl by a bus driver in New Delhi.

The Member also visited Bhopal to investigate into rape and murder of a four-year old girl. with Member Anusuiya Uike.

- Member Nirmala Sitharaman was on a State Visit to Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. She held meetings with the Chief Secretaries and other Secretaries on gender profile of both the States. She also attended meetings of State Level NGOs organized by the Deptt of Social Welfare of the States. Later, she had a meeting with the NGOs at Guwahati.

- Ms. Anusuiya Uike, Member, NCW alongwith Member Nafisa Hussain, investigated into the gang rape of a woman at Bareilly (Uttar Pradesh) on 16th October, 2004.

The Member attended a Public Hearing organized by Aditya Sanstha at Nangloi, Delhi on the problems of women engaged in the sale of garlands.

The Member visited Indore and investigated into the complaint of Sarika Gupta on sexual harassment at work place at the Indian Institute of Management. She also investigated into the complaint of Seema Aggarwal on atrocities by the police. Later, she inspected the Women Jail, Ujjain and Women Protection Home, Sevadham, at Indore.

The Member along with Shri S.K. Garg, Under Secretary, visited Patna to have a meeting with Secretaries of Departments of the State Government on 2nd November, 2004 and later attended a Public Hearing organised by Aditya Sanstha at Patna on the problems of women engaged in sale of garlands, and attended a Public Hearing organized on Atrocities on Women.

Ms. Uike took part in a Regional Seminar organized by the Women University, Guwahati, Assam, regarding participation of North Eastern women in political field.

The Member had a meeting with NGOs at Nagaland, Kohima and had a meeting with Principal Secretary and other Secretaries of the State Govt. Later, she attended a Handicraft Mela.

responsibilities of the home nurses are not yet defined properly.

- They are subjected to inhuman treatment by the patients as well as the family members and are not provided with fresh food; they are generally given the leftovers.

- Some home nurses are lured with high wages to work abroad. However, many of them are badly treated and exploited, which they have to bear silently.

- Prevalence of emotional and sexual abuse from the patients as well

as their relatives. Employers often brand the home nurses as thieves.

- There should be welfare schemes like medical insurance, PF, gratuity and loans, etc.

- A number of illegal agencies are involved in the employment of home nurses.

- Lack of appropriate laws regarding home nursing.

- Lack of accountability and responsibility by the recruiting agencies for the safety and security of home nurses.



## Visit to Daman & Diu

The Commission recently went on a State visit to Daman and Diu to review the status of women and analyse their situational concerns. It is the first visit of the Commission to the U.T. of Daman & Diu.

The Commission held a meeting with NGOs, women activists, women representatives, women officers, etc. at Daman. The Chairperson of the NCW and Member Nafisa Hussain, Collector, Daman and Secretary (Social Welfare) of Daman & Diu were present in the meeting.

The following issues were raised by NGOs during the meeting:

(a) Alcoholism (b) Corruption in getting employment in Government Departments (c) Malnutrition in women, specially, belonging to migrant labour population (d) Dilapidated conditions of school buildings and the low standard of education imparted therein. (e) Unequal wages and lack of jobs for local women; reservation for disabled women. (f) Problem of dowry (g) Trafficking (h) Lack of cottage industries (i) NGOs should be given funds (j) Local officers should be appointed to look after DRDA.

A meeting with the representatives of Anchor Industry, Cello Industry, Action Shoes and Vice President, Daman Industries Association, was also organized. Many industrialists attended the meeting.

### Major Decisions Taken By The Commission

● Commission decided to engage a lawyer for taking up the matter before the Supreme Court regarding Govt. agencies being the distributors of alcohol.

● Commission endorsed the Private Member's Bill regarding Ban on Witchcraft Bill, 2004 introduced by Smt. Karuna Shukla, M.P. The NCW is organizing workshops/ public

hearings on the issue and recommendations will be sent as additional inputs.

● The Commission has decided to hold regional conferences on the problems of widows of farmers, who committed suicide due to continuous failure of crops in the State of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

● The Commission will hold a pre-budget consultation with the State Commissions for Women, selected NGOs, Women Studies Centres etc.

During the month of September, 2004, 570 complaints were registered in the complaints Cell under various heads such as Dowry, Dowry death, Sexual Harassment at workplace, police apathy, etc.

### NCW To Take Up Eviction Issue

Moved by the plight of more than 50 homeless women evicted by NDMC from a temporary shelter, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has decided to take up the issue with Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit.

Taking cognisance of a complaint by the NGO Actionaid that ran the shelter for homeless women and children, NCW Chairperson visited the shelter and met the affected women.

### NCW Notice To Kyunki Saas...

Acting on a complaint regarding depiction of marital rape in the daily soap, *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi*, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has served a showcause notice on its producer Ekta Kapoor and summoned her for a meeting. TV channel Star Plus, which telecasts the serial, has also been sent a showcause notice. Kapoor will be appearing before the Commission on 1st December.

### IMPORTANT DECISIONS A housewife's contribution equals to Rs 3,000 :HC

The Delhi High Court has ruled that irrespective of the status of a family, the contribution of a housewife towards the household must be treated to be Rs 3,000 per month at the 'minimum' (for an age group of 34 to 59 years), for the purpose of computing compensation in case of her accidental death.

"The role of the housewife in running a house is not that of tendering services as a slave. Her contribution to keeping the family together, providing household services besides matrimonial duties cannot be treated lightly," Mr Justice R S Sodhi said while extending the law laid down by the Supreme Court to a compensation claim under the Motor Vehicle Act.

He said this while deciding the case of a woman, who died in an accident with a Delhi Transport Corporation bus. The woman's husband had come in with an appeal against the order of the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal that had awarded Rs 54,000 as compensation. The 35-year-old woman used to work in different houses as a petty worker and earned Rs 300 per month. The DTC had argued that as the wages earned by the woman was known, the concept of minimum wages could not be resorted to. The judge not only overruled this but also awarded a higher compensation than what was sought by the petitioner.

For further information visit our website at :

[www.nationalcommissionforwomen.org](http://www.nationalcommissionforwomen.org)

or Email us at :

[member\\_secretary@ncw-india.org](mailto:member_secretary@ncw-india.org)