



NCWO QUARTERLY

Newsletter of the
National Council of Women's Organisations
Majlis Kebangsaan Pertubuhan-Pertubuhan Wanita Malaysia

A quarterly publication to promote the advancement of women and the exchange of ideas
between NGOs and like-minded people

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WOMEN'S SUMMIT 2009

Professor Dr Aruna Gopinath, Director AMMA Foundation

The Women's Summit 2009 held at the Sime Darby Convention Center on 18 August 2009 revolved around the theme "Can Women Turn Adversity Into Opportunity?" in the light of the current recession. The topic was timely addressing the adversities women face in almost every sphere of their lives and particularly at their workplace.

The keynote address entitled, "Tough Times: Re-building with Strength and Integrity" by the Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin addressed the stimulus packages for women and measures adopted to mainstream gender perspectives into the development process. He was positive in stating that the government will formulate relevant policies and review laws affecting women, while ensuring more women will be brought into the government machinery.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil outlined 4 major areas of adversity which Malaysian women face today: the repercussions of the recession; work-life balance; the gender gap and violence. According to Datuk Shahrizat, the female labor force concentration in export industries is the hardest hit. This has resulted in a number of repercussions which mainly affect poor families and their children. Why women are less likely to opt for high profile positions in an organization is basically having to choose to work or stay at home. The onus thus falls on the public and private sectors to make necessary changes in the workplace to help women strike a balance between work and family. Despite girls outperforming boys in schools and universities, women are still under-represented at the highest levels of corporate and political life. There is still an insignificance in women's participation in decision making positions. The Minister also reiterated that violence against women is an ongoing battle and it becomes even more challenging in these difficult times because safety in the country has become a real issue.

Four women leaders as speakers representing the financial, legal and entrepreneurial sectors shared their secrets of success.

Dato Kaziah Abdul Kadir Advisor price water house coopers Taxation services and Investeur Relations Advisor, Eastern Corridor Economic Region Development Council.

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Dato Dr. Nirmala Menon, CEO, ING Insurance; Shireen Muhiudden, MD, Corston-Smith Asset Management; Bobbie Dangerfield, MD, Dell Global Business Center and Christina Chia, Founding Partner, Christina Chia Ng & Partners all believe that by sowing good thoughts one will reap good results. Through networking and positive thinking, women can reach the top. They have to continue to stand up for their rights in order for their voices to be heard.

In the afternoon, Learning Lab sessions on Communication; Business-writing skills and Creativity were held. The sessions stressed the need of communicating effectively; language skills and creativity training. Through these skills, confidence builds and will give women the courage to voice their needs.

A manifesto for health

Ms. Sakunthala Narasiman, Bangalore, India.

Sakuntala Narasimhan, from Bangalore India, is an author and columnist specialising in gender and development. She has a PhD in Sociology and is the author of several books, including *Empowering Women: An alternative Strategy from Rural India* (Sage, 1999); and *Sati – Widow Burning in India* (Penguin/Viking, 1998). This article first appeared in *Grassroots* and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the author and editor.

It's time for promises – generous, sweeping and all-encompassing. Whenever elections are scheduled, politicians of all hues and affiliations come up with promises, of turning life for the common man into a rosy idyll. Looking through my file of political promises over the last fifteen, I have these samples chosen at random from a thick stack of clippings –

“Zero level poverty promised” says a Congress (I) manifesto of November 1994 released in preparation for state assembly elections. Five years was the time period for this promised eradication of poverty. Ten years after that deadline, what we have is another set of promises, reiterating the same ‘goals’ and pledges that betray insensitivity to people’s basic needs and entitlements.

Look at the ground realities – Bangalore, the IT capital of India, has 440 slums, according to official count (which leaves out countless small huddles of homeless migrants). Most of these have no proper water supply, no toilets or other sanitation facilities. Garbage clearance even in the non-slum neighbourhoods is woeful. No one dares to drink tap water, even in this state capital that spends thousands of crores on fancy flyovers. In theory a primary health centre is supposed to function in each area and village, but the reality is that the

PHC in Sasalu village an hour outside Bangalore remains locked when I visit it (despite a National Rural Health Mission ad that boasts of “24 hour service”), the public hand pump at the entrance to the village is rusted, broken and dysfunctional, and the well is choked with weeds and dried up. A PHC in north Bangalore, within the city limits, is ‘open’ only on paper, because the doctor in charge comes in the morning, signs the register, locks up and leaves, so indigent patients are forced to shell out money for treatment at private clinics. If they cannot afford it, they remain sick. No wonder then, that 60 years after independence, we still have the world’s largest horde of malnourished children, high maternal and infant mortality rates, and the world’s largest population of the blind.

Which is why the People’s Health Movement (PHM) a global network of health activists, has issued a manifesto demanding that all political parties should promise to focus on people’s right to basic healthcare, as part of their political agenda during the run-up to the 2009 elections. The PHM manifesto, released on 6 April, points out that if India is “poised to take its place as a leader in the community of nations” as claimed by our ruling elite, we need to first work on basic health as a pre-requisite for socio-economic progress – what use is progress in terms of higher incomes and foreign exchange reserves, if the socio-economic parameters trap millions of poor citizens in poor health? If we build fancy high-tech hospitals with state-of-the-art sophistication to woo foreign tourists and earn dollars through “medical tourism”, but cannot ensure safe drinking water to our own citizens, would that be progress in socio-economic terms?

India signed the Alma Ata Declaration thirty years ago, which promised “Health for All” by 2000. A decade later, we are in fact curtailing health services in government hospitals, in the name of privatisation, and “Health for All” is nowhere in sight as an attainable goal.

The PHM manifesto challenges all political parties to take effective measures to “tackle malnutrition” as a priority. Malnutrition stunts children and reduces their potential contribution as future citizens of India. Malnutrition among women leads to poor child health, high maternal mortality, and debilitating costs on the economy in terms of lost productivity. Much of malnutrition is caused by unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation, and these need to be tackled before we allocate resources to fancy, prestige projects like bigger airports or bullet trains (the super-fast Japanese trains that caught our railway minister’s imagination after his recent visit to Japan) “Ensure 100 percent availability of safe water in each village and 100 present access to sanitation (including in public places like markets, railway stations, bus stands)” the PHM manifesto urges.

The People’s Health Movement also demands an increase in the national health budget from the current 1 per cent of GDP to at least 3 percent immediately (rising to 5 per cent in ten years).

However, promises are easy, implementation invariably lax. Less than six months ago the Karnataka chief minister announced a new Arogya Suraksha Yojana offering free medical insurance

and health cover to 80 lakh BPL (Below the Poverty Line) families in the state. The reality is that many thousands of poor families do not even have the documents necessary to qualify as BPL (because the officials in charge of issuing these documents demand bribes that the poor cannot afford). Ask the roadside cobbler sitting along a busy metropolitan intersection, whose three children are forever sick because he does not earn enough to seek medical care for their ailments. Ask the cleaning maid sweeping inside an air-conditioned bank every morning, whose husband is paralysed and bedridden but lacks access to the facilities he is entitled to under existing laws, because (again) he needs documents to prove that he is “incapacitated” and these come only at a price, after repeated visits to the relevant offices that mean the woman has to take time off from work, something she cannot afford.

On January 26, 2008 the Karnataka State government took a Republic Day pledge promising basic health facilities to all. A Suvarna Arogya Chaitanya scheme for check-ups for all school children was also announced. Ask the roadside vegetable vendor’s daughter whether she had a check-up, and the answer is a predictable no. Nice sounding names do not a nation’s health make. “Funds provided for essential drugs” an ad from the National Rural Health Mission declared, on March 9, 2009. A random check of PHCs however found medicines were “out of stock” so patients had to buy them from private stores. If promises could cure our nation’s health problems, we would be the world’s healthiest. Alas, promises don’t cure. Actions do. That, then, is the crux.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Women’s Summit - NCWO had a meeting to discuss the recommendations of the Summit with the relevant bodies for follow up action.

Program Funding - Affiliates are encouraged to apply for funding with the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development under the following focus areas:

- a) Gender Sensitization
- b) Economic Empowerment
- c) Health

You can contact NCWO for further information.

Natural Disaster Aid-In view of the recent calamities that have afflicted countries in the ASEAN regions, NCWO is making a call to all affiliates and individuals to donate either in cash or in kind (specifically: blankets, toiletries and personal care items for women) to NCWO. You can send in the donations either by 31 october or 15 November.

Editorial

The period of the Industrial Revolution was when great technical and economic advancements took place in the West in the late 19th century. As a result it brought affluence to a great majority of the population and there was hope that the whole world would become a world without poverty. The idea spread that this could be achieved by large investments in industrialization and that emphasis on large scale production would greatly benefit the people and improve their lifestyles.

Much was achieved in the countries that we now call developed. But in the developing countries it is a different story. Here we are experiencing a world in which one quarter of the people live in relative affluence, many in relative poverty, and many more in absolute poverty, underfed, illiterate, without access to public health facilities, and very large numbers not able to enjoy safe drinking water.

Many characteristics of developed societies are not present in the developing countries. Here the industrial revolution did not result in a new attitude towards governance that would bring change for the better. We did not rise up to the challenge of developing the scientific attitude right from the beginning. The effects of science in everyday life should actually encourage the development of the scientific spirit. This attitude did not take place in the developing countries as a way of understanding natural events. Studies on the problem are few and far between.

Good planning with a long term vision for successful change, seriously thought out, implemented, monitored and regulated efficiently by the government is sadly lacking.

Corruption, bad leadership, and bad government, one that does not adhere to the values of religion, superficial knowledge in science and technology, a bad work ethic, and over-dependence on foreign goods are among the many reasons why industrialisation did not benefit the poor and the needy.

However we see the desire now in Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, our new prime minister, to make changes to improve the condition in our country. He has listed a number of problems which he wishes to put right. He has mentioned that he wants to work with a line of leaders who are endowed with the traits of loyalty, integrity, ability and dedication to duty.

He is wary though, of politicians who are too preoccupied with getting positions in the party. Our prime minister goes on to say, that he wants leaders who would take risks to change the situation and conditions in our country who would dare to criticise and are willing to accept criticism. He hopes that people in the party and politicians as well will strive to change their negative behaviour and replace it with behaviour which is deserving of praise.

There is a need to change, the prime minister said, from thinking only of our self interest to giving more priority to the interests of society.

He spoke frankly about changing our lazy ways and replacing these with hard work by putting, care and effort into whatever we do. Most importantly, he stressed the danger of money politics and that if it is not checked our country would be led by corrupt leaders.

For change to take place and for the country to function efficiently NGOs, concerned citizens and people in general would have to, as dominant groups, play a crucial role in helping the government to effect change, in pushing for a modern developed knowledge society.

It is the common ordinary citizen who suffers from social problems and bad management. All of us, particularly women should do our duty and see that this does not happen.

Datin Zaharah Alatas.



NCWO affiliate representatives at a networking session on 6 June 2009 at the NCWO office

Connecting

The Youth Commission had a session with youth leaders from several affiliates on 6 June 2009. It proved to be a great sharing session on various programmes that the affiliates are themselves running. We discovered that there were many resources and initiatives that could be shared with this form of networking. The Youth Commission aims to facilitate this process where we bring together the various affiliates and form collaborative networking groups. We decided to have quarterly meetings and share news / ideas amongst the group via email. In the meantime, the Youth Commission will also schedule a session with another group of affiliate youth leaders who were not able to attend this first session.

Educating

The Youth Commission in collaboration with the Damansara Jaya Residents Association will be holding a YOUTH Health Workshop in November 2009 for youth between the age of 13-15. The workshop takes an interactive hands-on approach, which will inspire participants to explore who they are and to identify their personal goals and to be aware of their body/health. This workshop will take participants on a journey towards self discovery by enhancing self awareness, identity formation, self theory, physical contact, health awareness and goal setting. It also looks at how our health plays a vital link in our daily life.

If your organization is interested in holding the YOUTH Health Workshop in collaboration with the Youth Commission, please contact Sonia Ong (017-3103212).

Inspiring

The Youth Commission is planning to hold an evening with mentors before the end of the year where we will invite outstanding women (young & old) to share their stories reflecting the challenges they faced and their road to success. We will be approaching friends/affiliates of NCWO to host these evenings. Lessons learned from these sessions will we feel impact the lives of young women to work towards a more purposeful life.

If you would like to offer your home to host this session, please contact Sonia Ong (017-3103212).

NCWO Youth Commission

Empowering the Next Generation

Chairperson: Sonia Ong (017-3103212)

Co-Chairperson: Fiona Sinna (012-2949195)

Advisor: Omna Ong (012-2077947)

ICT - Project W-X

By Puan Malreddy Thana

The workshop and seminar was organized by Domain Registry (MYNIC) for Women Entrepreneurs from 31st July-2nd August at Pusat Pengajian dan Linguistic UKM Bangi.

Project W-X (ICT) is an e-business platform strictly for women entrepreneurs and women-led SMEs to enhance their capabilities and skills in ICT while providing them with a platform to conduct business online. This e-business enablement programme will help women-owned business organizations make their products and services accessible to a larger market and expand their customer reach.

The world over, women entrepreneurs constitute an increasing emerging force as partners in economic development and growth. As part of an initiative under the Malaysian government's 2nd Economic Stimulus package to assist women owned SMEs in facing the economic crisis, this project aims to build business capacity for the future by leveraging technological developments and the Internet.

The key objectives for Project W-X include:

1. To empower women-owned SMEs to take advantage of the technological developments and join the global economy and market spawned by the Internet towards increasing business potential hence revenue.
2. To help women-owned business organizations make their products and services accessible to a larger market and expand their customer reach.

3. To enable women-owned SMEs to contribute in achieving the aspirations of the national economic strategy as envisaged under the second economic stimulus package initiated by the YAB Prime Minister, Dato Seri Najib Tun Razak.
4. To finance the development of a viable e-commerce platform strictly for women entrepreneurs.
5. To enhance the women's capabilities and skills in ICT so as to participate in the e-marketplace more effectively.

.my DOMAIN REGISTRY [formerly known as MYNIC] is an agency under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) and is regulated by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) takes the role of project sponsor, financier and driver for this project and was worked cooperatively with a number of partners including Pusat Kajian E-Komuniti, Ekom (UKM), Multimedia Development Corporation (MDeC), National Council of Women Organizations (NCWO), Radical Box and supported by SIRIM, SMIDEC, and Jabatan Pembangunan Wanita (JPW).



...MOU exchange on Project W-X Mynic Director, Pn. Shariya Haniz Zulkifti (left), Timbalan Ketua Setiausaha Kementerian Sains, Teknologi dan Inovasi, Datin Madinah Binti Mohamad, Deputy President NCWO, Pn. Faridah Khalid (Right)

THE NCWO/MICROSOFT UNLIMITED POTENTIAL (UP) PROGRAM

From the year 2006, NCWO has been receiving grants in the form of software and cash from Microsoft through its Unlimited Potential (UP) Program to help bridge the digital divide in Malaysia. Since then, the NCWO has helped train women with the help of its partners throughout Malaysia in technology-related skills.

Our projects bring Information Technology (IT) to people who would otherwise remain untouched by technology, and ignorant of its benefits. Many of the target groups for this project consist of people who did not get the opportunity to receive IT education. The main objective of this project is to equip women, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, with ICT skills to improve their quality of life and improve their employability. This includes single mothers, older women, marginalized youth in rural and urban areas as well as indigenous women.

The NCWO works through its partners at the various centres to work this project. Our partners are located at the following states in Malaysia:

SABAH : The project started in 2006 in cooperation with PEWASA. The ICT centre is located at the PEWASA headquarters in Kota Kinabalu and the other centre is located in Sandakan.

KELANTAN : The ICT centre in Kelantan is in cooperation with PEWATAN and the centre is located in Jeli which is close to the border of Thailand. The centre was set up in 2008 and reaches out to women including rural women from the farming communities.

TRENGGANU : Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam works together with NCWO in running this ICT centre which is located in Kuala Trengganu. This centre was set up in 2008 and focuses on women from the fishing communities.

PAHANG : The centre in Kuantan which opened in 2008 is run by the NCWO Zon Pantai Timur. The centre has trained mostly young women, school leavers and the urban poor.

PERLIS : The centre is located in Kangar and is run in cooperation with the Women's Institute (W.I. Perlis). This project started in 2008 and the focus here is for the rural women.

KEDAH : This centre is run from a Tamil School in Sungai Petani. The focus is on the estate people and small home business entrepreneurs.

SARAWAK : The most recent centre which is located in Sri Aman and run with the cooperation of W.I. Sri Aman.

So far we have trained a total number of 750 people, thanks to the cooperation of all the centre coordinators who have taken the effort in this success. The photograph shows the recent launch which was held in Sungei Petani where 45 women were provided ICT skills, at SJK(T) PALANISAMY KUMARAN ICT CENTER.

*By Sandra Simon
Project Coordinator*



Trainees receiving certificate from Dato' Ramani Gurusamy.

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Q & A and INVITATION TO WRITE

1. Questions & Answers :

Do send in your questions regarding women and health which should be brief and clear and we shall do our best to answer them.

2. Write In :

We would like our readers to write their comments on any current issue or those raised by NCWO Quarterly.

We would very much appreciate news and events and activities your organisation is involved in. You may write in Bahasa Malaysia as well.

Do send your articles and rejoinders of not more than 500 words to be included in the next quarterly **(October-December 2009) latest by 7th December 2009.**

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What is NCWO ?

The National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) Malaysia was formed in 1963.
It is a non-political, non-religious consultative and advisory body for women's organisations affiliated to it.
The council promotes the development and advancement of women.
Its purpose is to eliminate the major disadvantages, inequalities and discrimination affecting women.

NCWO VISION

A just society free from discrimination in which women at all levels enjoy equality through the promotion of their human rights. NCWO continues to be the leading advocate of women's human rights in the sustainable development and advancement of society.