



WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women is understood as a situation supported and reinforced by gender norms and values that place women in a subordinate position in relation to men. In other words, it is widely acknowledged that violence against women is fundamentally a result of gender-based inequities, more than the product of any other individual or social factor. Therefore, one would expect violence against women to be more common in societies where gender roles are strictly defined and particularly among couples where men control the wealth and the decision-making process.

At the same time, women's empowerment is understood as the process and the result of defying and changing such gender inequities and unequal distribution of power associated to them. Empowerment, by definition, should give women access and control over necessary resources and power so that they can make informed decision and gain control over their lives. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that empowered women should be in a better position than the less empowered women to avoid or reject violence. In fact, diverse women's empowerment dimension such as freedom of movement, decision making power, formal education, participation in collective struggle or income generation have been hypothesized as element which protect women from domestic violence.

Conclusions: Efforts to help women empower themselves through vocational training, employment opportunities and social groups need to consider the potential unintended consequences for these women, such as an increased risk of domestic violence.

KEYWORDS:

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, GENDER, EMPOWERMENT, FREEDOM, STRUGGLE.

Introduction

The deadly gang rape of a young woman on 16 December 2012 in Delhi followed by several other cases of rape triggered unprecedented public emotions around issues of violence against women in India. Crowds that had never been associated with the women's movement took to the streets; social media buzzed with

expressions of anger by young people, activists and Bollywood stars. India seemed to realize the vulnerability of its women. Violence runs deep into unequal power relations within the family, between communities and at the workplace. Household surveys show that domestic violence is endemic and considered justified by a majority of women and men¹. Two months before the brutal rape of a young woman triggered demonstrations in Delhi, Dalit groups report that 17 lower caste women were raped over the course of a few weeks in Haryana. None of these cases attracted much attention beyond Dalit and women's rights groups, and justice is pending for many of the victims.

This paper examines women's risk of violence by situating it in the context of two conflicting trends. On one hand, decades of mobilization and legal struggles by the women's movement have resulted in a series of legal reforms that recognize women's right to live free of violence at home, the workplace and in public spaces. At the village level, the introduction of a reservation of no less than 33 per cent for women in local assemblies in 1993 allowed more than a million women access to positions of political power². The stakeholders of this process of change have little to do with those of the women's movement — they are often illiterate women operating within an order defined by social norms that have so far prevented them from entering village politics. Such evolutions suggest that government and civil society efforts are loosening the grip of discriminatory traditions and power relations. Other trends analysed in this paper challenge this optimism. Women's participation in the workforce has reduced sharply over the past decades of high economic growth, and an increasing number of them are migrating to get married — far away from their social networks and with an ambiguous rights' situation, they are vulnerable to violence at home. Progressive laws themselves have failed to make a difference for a majority of women. The report looks at some of the challenges that have hampered their implementation — notably the lack of financial allocation by central and state authorities, and the attitudes of those responsible for enforcing the law. One of the paradoxes resulting of these conflicting trends is that women's empowerment has at times resulted in greater risks of violence and harassment. The issue is explored by contrasting configurations where greater empowerment has exposed women to retaliatory violence, with interventions that have successfully mitigated these risks. We seek to overcome the scarcity of data by completing official sources with a large range of evaluation reports from government and civil society interventions. The secondary data is completed by a series of semi-structured interviews with government officials, academics, journalists and activists. Section one analyses trends of violence and broader social and economic evolutions that impact women's exposure to violence. Section two discusses drivers of progressive change: it considers how the women's movement has been a vector of policy transformation, and how women's entry into grassroots politics is impacting their exposure to violence. The last section discusses interventions aimed at extending the outreach of progressive policies and addressing other factors of vulnerability — their positive impact and their limitations. We conclude with a few suggestions for the way forward.

¹ International Institute of Population Sciences (2007), "Key Findings, National Family Health Survey-3, 2005-06", Mumbai

² Society of Tribal Women for Development (2004), 'Impact of Bottom up Planning Under PRIs and Women Participation Therein', Delhi: Planning Commission, Government Of India

1. Violence against Women in an Evolving Context

1.1. Fear in Public Spaces

Violence against women has received considerable attention in recent months after several rape cases spurred widespread emotion. These recent events are the culmination of a longer-term trend: India's cities — and Delhi in particular — have acquired the reputation of being dangerous places for women. A recent survey in Delhi found that 95 per cent of women felt unsafe in public spaces; 56 per cent of men thought that women should avoid taking jobs that require going out at night³. Clearly, this context is not favourable to women's mobility. Systematic research is needed to establish the concrete impact of these perceptions. However, a study of women workforce in information technology and business process outsourcing suggests that it is tangible: the study estimates that productivity in the two sectors had dropped after the rape because women were leaving work early or even resigning; nearly two-third of the female workforce in the survey felt that the atmosphere in Delhi was too threatening to continue working. These fears add to pre-existing constraints on women's mobility. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2005-2006 found that only one in three women were allowed to venture alone to places such as the market, the health centre or outside the community; the percentage was less than 13 among girls from 15 to 19 years of age. After the rape in Delhi, suggestions by senior police officers, politicians and religious leaders that women should not be out at night or with men other than relatives risk further curtailing women's nascent mobility in urban areas. Urban development programmes have for long neglected women's safety. At local level, a number of municipal councils and NGOs have devised interventions to secure cities. In Delhi, Jagori has partnered with the Department of Women and Child Development to conduct safety audits mapping out factors and locations of insecurity. It has recommended a range of interventions to improve safety around school premises, improve lighting of public spaces, and secure public transport by creating special sections for women or training drivers. The Bengaluru-based Blank Noise, which is using performative arts and discussions to raise awareness on sexual harassment, has spread to other cities such as Mumbai, Delhi and Lucknow. There are examples of punctual progress such as the creation of a specific section for women in the Delhi metro. But the failure to integrate such lessons into a coherent strategy at national level means that their scope remains limited. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, India's flagship urban development scheme, for example has been criticized for its failure to address women's concerns. "Urban⁴ planners continue to operate on the assumption that what is good for families is (and should be) good for women": "the assumption that women's place is at home is evident from the fact that the ratio between women's and men's toilets in Delhi is 1:10". Reasons

³ This includes sexual comments or obscene gestures (52 per cent), touching (20 per cent), stalking (10 per cent), and assaulting (0.3 per cent). International Centre for Research on Women (2012), 'Safety of Women and Girls from Sexual Violence in Delhi'

⁴International Institute of Population Sciences (2007), "Key Findings, National Family Health Survey-3, 2005-06", op. cit. p. 506. Variations between the two surveys highlight some of the challenges of gathering reliable data on this sensitive issue: in the second survey the percentage of women who report facing domestic violence is 12 percent above the earlier survey. The adoption of more sensitive surveying methods is the likeliest cause for this increase. L. Visaria (2008), 'Violence against Women in India: Is Empowerment a Protective Factor?' Economic & Political Weekly, pp. 60-66. 29 International Centre for Research on Women (2000): 'Domestic Violence in India: A Summary Report of a Multi-Site Household Survey.'

cited for this shortfall include the failure to include women in the planning process, the lack of capacities at local level to prepare and implement urban development plans, and the scarcity of financial resources.

1.2. Violent Homes

Women's exposure to violence is highest at home. Scarce available data points at endemic violence and high tolerance to it. The NFHS, which is the only large-scale attempt to gather information on the issue, indicates that an average 39 per cent of women between 15 and 49 years of age reported having experienced violence in their marriage⁵. Other studies find similar or higher rates.⁶ These figures are embedded in deeper social inequalities: norms that establish male dominance in the family and society are reflected by the gender gap across social indicators. The child sex ratio, one of the lowest worldwide at 914 girls per 1000 boys, is an indication of just how unfavourable these norms are to women. In education, literacy rates among women are just below 54 per cent according to census data; they are at 75 per cent for men. The NFHS clarifies the relation between this inequality and the risk of violence for women: women who had never gone to school were thrice as likely to face violence at home as those who had completed a full cycle of basic education. In light of this, the recent policy focus on guaranteeing access to basic education for all under the Right to Education 2006, however, weakened by the lack of resources and an unaccountable school administration, may accelerate the change brought about by the modest but constant increase in female literacy rates. Economically, women in the lowest wealth quintile are more than twice as likely to report facing domestic violence as women in the highest wealth quintile. More detailed analyses highlight that not just income but also quality and stability of employment matter: as a household moves from the situation of casual worker, to stable informal and formal employment, incidence of violence reduces. Beyond these general trends, the correlation between income and freedom from violence is not simple. Incidence of violence is higher among working women than among those who have never been employed-it is highest among women who earn and make decisions alone about the use of their income. The fact that women from lower economic classes in casual employment such as agriculture (69 per cent of the female workforce), manufacturing (10.8 per cent) and construction (5.1 per cent) constitute a majority of the female workforce partially explains these findings. However, higher risks of violence among women who make decisions about the use of their income also point at conflicting power negotiations within the household. Clearly, income alone is not enough to overcome deeply unequal power relations within the family and society; interactions between income generating activities, power relations within the household and violence need to be considered when assessing processes of economic empowerment. Geographically, variations in the dimensions above translate in important

⁵ International Institute of Population Sciences (2007), "Key Findings, National Family Health Survey-3, 2005-06", op. cit. p. 506. Variations between the two surveys highlight some of the challenges of gathering reliable data on this sensitive issue: in the second survey the percentage of women who report facing domestic violence is 12 percent above the earlier survey. The adoption of more sensitive surveying methods is the likeliest cause for this increase. L. Visaria (2008), 'Violence against Women in India: Is Empowerment a Protective Factor?' Economic & Political Weekly, pp. 60-66. 29 International Centre for Research on Women (2000): 'Domestic Violence in India: A Summary Report of a Multi-Site Household Survey'.

⁶ International Centre for Research on Women (2000): 'Domestic Violence in India: A Summary Report of a Multi-Site Household Survey'.

variations between regions. Overall, the incidence of domestic violence is significantly higher in rural areas than in cities, and higher in slums than in other urban areas. Domestic violence is highest in northern states: in Bihar, where female literacy rates are lowest in India, land ownership among women dismal, and hierarchies along caste and gender lines stark, the number of women who report facing violence is a staggering 59 per cent; Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh follow with figures ranging between 40 and 50 per cent. Tamil Nadu is the only southern state that figures among this league. In contrast, the percentage is less than 20 in states like Kerala and Karnataka, and only 6 in Himachal Pradesh. Early exposure to violence within the household also plays a role: women who have seen their mother face violence are three times more likely to experience violence themselves, just like men who were exposed to violence in their childhood are more likely to become perpetrators. Given the scale of the problem in India, the issue arguably goes beyond individual internalization, and ties into high overall tolerance to violence against women. Various studies indicate that anywhere between half and two-third of men and women feel that a husband is justified in beating his wife if she refuses to have sex, does not cook properly, is unfaithful or disrespectful towards her in-laws. Acceptance of domestic violence is slightly higher among women than among men in all studies. This acceptance may explain the surprising fact that surveys where men are asked to report cases of violence committed by them indicate much higher rates than those asking women to report violence faced by them: women may not report incidents they consider justified. Perceptions that domestic violence is a private matter and that family bondages need to be protected from intrusions by the law are widespread among policy makers and officers responsible for enforcing the law. Legal reforms aimed at prioritizing women's individual rights within the family faced tremendous resistance, as is exemplified by this 1984 Delhi High Court statement: bringing "constitutional law into the privacy of home and the married life" is like "introducing a bull in a China shop". Till today, an overwhelming majority of policemen think that domestic violence is a private affair and that women should consider the wellbeing of the family before filing a complaint. These attitudes, along with other economic and social factors, limit women's access to protection. The number of women who make the step of seeking help is low to start with: the NFHS finds that fewer than one in four women who reported facing domestic violence seek help; a majority of those who do approach family members rather than the police or other formal channels. Cases known to the police often do not get reported — the Lawyers Collective's survey suggests that at least two out of three cases could go unreported. Of the 106,527 cases that made it to Indian courts last year, only 15 per cent resulted in a conviction; 10 per cent resulted in an acquittal; 87 per cent remained pending. Demonstrations following the recent rape cases in Delhi have made one step towards considering crimes against women as violations of basic rights. But the debate has not extended to domestic violence. The fact that the recent law for example does not consider marital rape a criminal offence appears to be the latest expression of this reluctance to challenge spousal ties. This omission goes against recommendations by the committee responsible for recommending reforms aimed at improving women's security after the December rape. "Marital rape shouldn't be made into a criminal offence," said Sumitra Mahajan from the Bhartiya Janata Party in words that resonate with those of the Delhi High Court more than 30 years ago. "It will destroy Indian families. Things like these should be sorted out within the family or by counselling.

1.3. Insecure Workplaces

About one in three women in India are working — an overwhelming majority of them as casual labourers on agricultural fields or construction sites, as domestic workers or in a multiplicity of roles in small and medium size enterprises. Women's representation reduces as they move up the ladder of power. On average, in the 100 top companies listed in the Mumbai stock exchange, women constituted 7 per cent of all board members and only 5 per cent of the senior leadership.⁷ This is one of the lowest representations in the world, just above the Gulf States and a few East Asian countries. Such relations at the workplace exemplify the imbalance of power that gender studies have linked to greater risks of sexual harassment. A survey of 400 women working in various formal and informal sectors finds that 17 per cent of respondents had faced sexual harassment at work. Construction labourers and domestic workers were perceived as particularly insecure. Thin the family or by counselling”.

A number of broader trends define the context of women's work conditions. Data uncertainties cloud assessments of women's real workforce participation, available estimates point at a sharp reduction over the past 20 years⁸. In rural areas, where women's work participation has historically been higher primarily on account of their engagement in agriculture, it dropped from 33.1 per cent in 1993, to 25.3 in 2011- 12. In cities women's work participation has dropped further from a low 16.2 per cent to 15.5 per cent. Enrolment in education explains some of this reduction, but estimates suggest that it accounts for only a limited part of it. The withdrawal of unpaid workers — typically agricultural labour on a male relative's field, husbandry, or help in the family enterprise — also fails to explain the reduction. Half of the positions left by women were paid. This evolution undermines the modest economic autonomy granted to them by their traditional occupations. It erodes the value of their traditional skills, and their limited powers within the household. One positive trend amid this problematic picture is an improvement in quality of employment in urban areas. The percentage of the female workforce that falls under the category of regular workers, defined by the National Sample Survey in contrast to self-employed, casual or daily workers, has increased from 28 per cent to 38 per cent over the past 20 years, primarily on account of women's involvement in education and as salaried domestic workers. However, this positive evolution does not reverse the overall downward trend. Lower work participation among more educated women is an additional reflection of a context that prevents women from translating their human capital into economic autonomy. Discrimination in wages, irregular payments and ambiguous service conditions, combine with conservative mindsets within families to drive women out of the workforce. Today, young girls dream not just of becoming teachers as was the case a generation earlier, but pilots or chefs. For girls in India, there are new perspectives, but society does not allow pursuing them. Girls accept that they have to go for arranged marriages; there is no change on such fundamental issues. Kalpana Sharma, independent journalist, 29 May 2013. Such trends have to be understood in light of an overall scarcity in productive employment. As traditional livelihoods are being eroded, notably in rural areas, where agriculture does not provide a living for all, emerging sectors fail to generate enough employment to

⁷ Partners in Change (2013), 'Women in Business Leadership: a Study of the Top 100 Companies on the Bombay Stock Exchange', Working Paper, Delhi: Oxfam India (forthcoming).

⁸ International Labour Organisation (2013), 'Global Employment Trends 2012: Recovering from a Second Jobs

compensate for the erosion or simply match the number of young people who arrive on the job market every year. This scarcity further emphasizes the disadvantage resulting from social norms that limit women's access to education, constrain their mobility and make their workplaces insecure. Some companies are attempting to attract and retain female employees by offering special cabs or emergency helplines to ensure security while commuting between workplace and home, flexible work policies, liberal maternity leaves, as well as diversity committees and training for men and women. At the policy level, a Supreme Court judgment in 1997 outlined legal guidelines that define sexual harassment at workplace and provide for the constitution of complaint committees that are responsible for gathering evidence on the case and recommend actions to the Human Resource department. However, the influence of the guidelines has been limited beyond a few gender sensitive sectors and companies.

1.4. Discrimination Based on Caste, Religion and Tribe

Dynamics of discrimination based on caste, religion and tribe continue to have deep bearing on women's safety. A survey of 500 Dalit women in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu finds that one in four women have been raped and one in two have faced sexual harassment or assault. Perpetrators were generally from dominant caste groups or from the police. An overwhelming majority of incidents did not get registered to the police or covered in the media. The figures are startlingly high and cannot be compared to levels of exposure for all women given the absence of state level victimization surveys on violence against women. The findings therefore need to be considered with precaution. Nevertheless, they are a strong indication of these women's acute exposure to violence. Dalit women are more vulnerable at work. Deprived of assets for historic reasons, they work in greater numbers and are over represented in vulnerable profiles, such as casual agricultural workers or labourers on construction sites and brick factories. Dalit rights groups report widespread cases of harassment by contractors. The context of job scarcity and the erosion of traditional livelihoods have given contractors a power to trade against sexual favours access to employment or public paid work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act — a law providing for 100 working days at minimum wage that can be shared within every rural household and mandates that at least 33 per cent of its beneficiary be women.⁹ Government sponsored work is a privileged space for the negotiation of changing inter-caste relations. Dalits have, to some extent, been able to seize opportunities created by poverty reduction programmes. In the absence of strong safeguards, this progressive empowerment has often exposed Dalit women to retaliatory sexual violence by dominant castes: gang rapes of lower caste girls by dominant caste men, sexual assault on women to silence assertions of an entire family or community remain frequent. Adivasi women face similar issues of culturally sanctioned sexual violence. The conflicts in the Tribal dominated areas of central India, as well as their displacement for major development projects such as mines and dams are additional factors of vulnerability. As they lose their traditional economic role linked to agriculture or natural resources, their dependence on male members of the family increases.¹⁰ Furthermore, studies of informal settlements around mines highlight the social issues that come with this transition:

⁹ Interview with Asha Kowtal, NCDHR, and Rajni Tilak, Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Andolan, 28 May 2013

¹⁰ M. Barathi (2012) 'Tribal Women's Perspective on the Land Acquisition Bill, Economic & Political Weekly, XLVII(20).

prostitution and alcohol consumption are widespread. Similarly, in Kashmir and the northeaster states, decades of conflict and the massive presence of armed forces protected from civil legislations by the Armed Forces Special Power Act, have dramatically undermined women's safety. In a survey of 500 people across two districts of Kashmir, Doctors without Borders found that more than 1 in 10 respondents (is there a definite number, more than 1 can mean anything) had faced sexual abuses — a figure that is high compared to other conflict affected regions across the world. Beyond this, India has seen recurrent episodes of abuses against women during periods of communal violence: reports by civil society organizations indicate that rapes and other types of violence against women, most of them Muslim, were widespread during the 1992 communal violence in Mumbai and the 2002 riots in Gujarat. Under-reporting, police complicity, and the denial of justice apply. While such tensions have since receded, many fears that their causes have not been addressed. Perpetrators have not been prosecuted; segregation has increased, often driving apart lower class social groups such as Dalits, or Other Backward Classes. The persistence of deeper causes of tensions such as pressure on land in cities associated to the tenure insecurity of many Muslim dwellers in urban settlements, high inequalities in a context of economic slow-down make for an uncertain situation. This situation has resulted in a heightened feeling of insecurity among the community, which in turn risks further constraining the mobility of Muslim women. The riots in 1992 and 2002 have changed the scenario for Muslim women. Direct contacts between Dalits, Muslims and Other Backward Classes have stopped after the riots. The mobility of Muslim girls has been restricted and burkhas or even bodyguards have spread. Jameela Nishat, Shaheen Resource Centre for Women, 29 May 2013. Women from socially excluded groups also face higher incidence of domestic violence. They were 46 per cent among Scheduled Castes and 44 per cent for Scheduled Tribes respectively, against 30 per cent for other groups. These figures reflect the effect of factors such as low income and low levels of literacy. However, beyond these factors, qualitative studies and Dalit groups point at the cumulated impact of caste and gender hierarchies.

Caste, religion and gender biases in India's law enforcement system mean that women from excluded groups rarely get redress, despite legal safeguards that provide severe punishments for violence against Adivasi and Dalit women. India's police forces are notorious for their gender and caste biases, as is exemplified by frequent cases of harassment and rape of lower caste and class women in police custody. The justice system itself fails to provide due process. Nearly 80 per cent of cases under the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act are pending and rates of acquittal are high.¹¹ Just before the December rape, 17 cases of rapes against Dalit women in Haryana failed to attract attention. Dalit groups had to go all the way up to the United Progressive Alliance's Gandhi family to get some reparation for one of the victims. What kind of system is that, where you need to go all the way up to a high-level politician to get justice? Asha Kotwal, National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, 13 May 2013. To summarize, the picture outlined above highlights the clash between opposite trends. On one hand, it shows how women's greater access to education is starting to attenuate the starkest gender inequalities. On the other hand, it outlines several trends that further increase women's vulnerability and add to existing dynamics of discrimination, along differences of gender,

¹¹ Government of India (2011), 'The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989, For the Year 2010', Delhi: Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment

caste, religion and tribe. Women's exposure to violence is at the centre of these two trends — a result of these deeper evolutions, and a factor that could slow-down women's empowerment by limiting their mobility.

What is the meaning of Women Empowerment?

Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. **Women Empowerment** refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,
- have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace,
- to make their own choices and decisions,
- have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,
- have equal social status in the society,
- have equal rights for social and economic justice,
- determine financial and economic choices,
- get equal opportunity for education,
- get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias,
- get safe and comfortable working environment.

Why Women Empowerment is Important?

1. Under-employed and unemployed: Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces.

2. Equally competent and intelligent: Women are equally competent. Nowadays, women are even ahead of men in many socio-economic activities.

3. Talented: Women are as talented as men. Previously, women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted. But nowadays, they are also allowed to go for higher studies and it encourages women to show their talents which will not only benefit her individually but to the whole world at large. Today, many women are occupying the top position of multinational companies.

4. Overall development of society: The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. The money that women earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also helps develop the society.

5. Economic Benefits: Women Empowerment also leads to more economic benefits not to the individuals but to the society as well. Unlike earlier days when they stayed at home only and do only kitchen stuffs, nowadays, they roam outside and also earns money like the male members of the society. Women empowerment helps women to stand on their own legs, become independent and also to earn for their family which grows country's economy.

6. Reduction in domestic violence: Women Empowerment leads to decrease in domestic violence. Uneducated women are at higher risk for domestic violence than an educated woman.

7. Reduction in corruption: Women Empowerment is also advantageous in case of corruption. Women empowerment helps women to get educated and know their rights and duties and hence can stop corruption.

8. Reduce Poverty: Women Empowerment also reduces poverty. Sometimes, the money earned by the male member of the family is not sufficient to meet the demands of the family. The added earnings of women help the family to come out of poverty trap.

9. National Development: Women are increasingly participating in the national development process. They are making the nation proud by their outstanding performances almost every sphere including medical science, social service, engineering, etc.

10. Irreplaceable in some sectors: Women are considered irreplaceable for certain jobs.

Conclusion:

The discussion above has highlighted several major evolutions affecting women's empowerment and exposure to violence. At the policy level, mobilizations and legal struggles have contributed to institutionalizing their rights to live and work without facing violence. At the village level, the massive entry of women into local politics is progressively challenging social norms that have prevented them from getting involved so far. Interventions by the governments and NGOs are targeting factors of women's vulnerability across the country. These successes have deep bearing on women's exposure to violence. But the picture of acute vulnerability outlined in this report suggests that these processes of change struggle to overcome conservative social structures and obstacles of implementation. Despite a strong corpus of laws, women's exposure to violence remains high. Surveys show that tolerance towards violence against women is high within families and among officials responsible for enforcing women's rights. Poor implementation of progressive policies aimed at preventing violence against women, providing relief and justice to survivors further hamper the record in enforcing women's rights. In the absence of strong safeguards and given the high levels of cultural tolerance to violence, women's empowerment has paradoxically exposed them to greater risks of violence. The discussion above suggests a few entry points to overcome such challenges: • **Systematically link women's empowerment with measures to address violence against women.** Not only

will such linkages protect women from eventual backlashes, they will also help reach out too many more women than those covered by interventions directly focused on violence. Programmes such as the Mahila Samakhya, the Indira Kranthi Patham in Andhra Pradesh, Kudhumbashree in Kerala or interventions by NGOs provide examples of how the two dimensions can successfully be linked. They should be replicated across the country. More broadly, concerns for women's safety should be mainstreamed into all development programmes.

- **Focus on enforcing progressive laws.** Allocate adequate resources and set up tight systems of monitoring. Promote models to address challenges of implementation, such as CEHAT's forensic protocol, various models of integrated support centres to survivors, or the Lawyers Collective training. Create a coherent framework across all levels, for the women's reservation bill notably where a progressive law at district and below level is undermined by the failure to pass a similar law at state and central level.
- **Institutionalize and strengthen support to drivers of change at the community level.** In particular, the models discussed in this report suggest the following two entry points. First, institutionalize linkages between community-based approaches to address violence against women and formal bodies such as the Panchayats, the police, protection officers appointed under the PWDVA and complaint committees on sexual harassment at the workplace. Second, explore ways of improving the uptake of progressive campaign messages by community networks and institutions such as schools and the police. This institutional support will combine the enabling structures set up by the PWDVA or the SHWW with the networks' ability to reach out too many more women than those who can benefit from the formal system of law enforcement.
- **Invest in robust systems of data collection and monitoring.** The central government should set up robust systems to track trends of violence against women and monitor the implementation and impact of its interventions. Evaluations of interventions by NGOs and the corporate sector should be systematized and made public. Setting up this knowledge infrastructure will require resources and expertise. It calls for the support of academics and donors. Implementing the measures above and delivering the promises of India's progressive laws will require resources and the political will to enforce these laws despite foreseeable clashes with conservative mindsets and social structures. Never in the past has the context been so favourable: the concern for issues of violence against women has broadened among decision makers and the population at large, and the policy framework is more conducive than ever. But norms and mindsets have proven their resilience to change. Only a concerted, long term effort by government agencies, civil society, the corporate sector and donor agencies will have a chance to revert the trend that sees women retreating from unsecure workplaces and public spaces into violent homes.