

## **Dialogue on Safe Delhi Campaign 5<sup>TH</sup> December 2005 India International Centre**

As part of our continuing work on Violence against women , Jagori seeks to launch a campaign to address the issue of safety for women and girls in Delhi. We only need to pick up the newspaper or step out into a public space to know that this city is unfriendly and unsafe for women and girls. The main thrust of this campaign is to assert that violence against women is not just a "women's issue". There are many different sets of actors who have a role to play and have a stake in creating a safer Delhi. Therefore, this campaign focuses on involving and creating partnerships among women's organisations, NGOs, citizen's groups and community organisations, development sector, educational institutions, the Delhi Police and law enforcement agencies, the Delhi administration, media and elected representatives.

As a first step in this campaign, Jagori organized a Dialogue in order to enable different stakeholders to share views on their perceptions of safety for women in the city and discuss possible interventions and strategies. The Dialogue was attended by representatives from the police, residents groups, NGO's, urban planners among others. Jagori shared its work on conducting safety audits in different parts of the city as a method to involve people in understanding and addressing issues of safety.

A community safety audit is a process whereby a group of people (usually women or any other vulnerable group) walks through a space , particularly after dark, and observes it in order to assess what makes it unsafe and what changes could make it safer. The audit focuses both on the infrastructure (lights, signage, pavements etc) and the perception of women who use the space. The Jagori team conducted 22 safety audits over the past 5 months in residential areas, markets, university, railway station, metro stations. What has emerged from these audits is that safety has to be addressed from the different perspectives. First is the lack of or poorly designed and planned infrastructure such as badly lit roads, broken and dirty pavements, location of shops and residences, overgrown trees and dark areas etc. Second is the support structure for women who face harassment and violence such as the role of police, law enforcement bodies and responsible authorities. And thirdly is the culture of male dominated public spaces, lack of public support for women who face sexual harassment and the burden of safety being seen as women's own problem. All of them need varied kinds of strategies and interventions and need to be done in partnership with different groups.

Making Delhi a safer place for women, girls and all other vulnerable groups will require the involvement and commitment of many different sets of people. The Dialogue is a beginning of the collaborative efforts needed to make people in Delhi responsive to their own responsibility in creating a safer and more caring city where all people can live, work and move around freely.

**Dr. Shiv Kumar** (UNICEF, member of National Advisory Council) shared the findings of the public perception survey for the Delhi Human Development Report, which surveyed 14,000 people in Delhi. Safety emerged as an important concern of the people as 50% women considered themselves unsafe in the city; 90% women commuters felt unsafe in public transport; and 45% women felt unsafe in their workplace. The report recommends

the importance of improving infrastructure like street lights, toilets etc. and sensitising certain groups of people like the bus drivers, conductors, young men etc. Public safety has been recognised as one of the major goals of the Delhi HDR.

The process of socialisation was identified as being central to the attitude of men towards women in public spaces. **Dr. Sagar Preet Hooda** (ADCP NW Delhi) was of the view that the limitation of the police is that they perceive violence against women from the legal point of view. Law enforcement agencies can merely punish but cannot address attitudes. Therefore, it is necessary to launch a campaign where we target education institutions, families, communities etc. He spoke about the innovative scheme launched by the police, Parivartan, where women constables are going out on the beat and directly interacting with women in their residential areas. Through this they aim to change the perception that the police will not help women facing different kinds of violence.

**Mr. V. C. Tandon** ( President Resident Welfare Association Joint Front) also agreed that police alone cannot solve the problem but they have to be more sensitive and helpful when people approach them if they want people to have more faith in them. He pointed out that the RWAJF has constituted a seven-member Women's Task Force to ensure women are better represented in the RWA's and they are able to put forward their perspective. **Ms. Geeta Bhargava** (Convener of the Task Force), reiterated that women are the ones who carry the burden of societal problems and they need to have a stronger voice in addressing them. The Task Force wants to hold a convention to get more women to get involved in RWA's.

Issues of safety have to be addressed by urban planners and designers as well.

**Professor Ashok Lall** (TVB School of Habitat Studies and member Delhi Urban Arts Commission) pointed out that the design of the city has geographical distinctions between commercial and residential areas leaving certain spaces completely deserted at certain points of time. Also residential areas have been walled off making it impossible for people to interact with each other. The aim should also be to increase lighting at pedestrian spaces and to design roads and pavements in such a way to decrease incidents of accident.

Further, cities are being created as purified settlements of different functional zones where each zone is isolated from the other. This issue was raised by **Ms. Sudeshna Chatterjee** (urban designer SPA). She cited the example of the workplace which is completely disconnected from residences, service providers being pushed out of 'residential' areas, tight demarcations (green belts etc) between slums and concrete homes. Modern cities strategically plan for the rich and often exclude the poor. These strategies accentuate the differences between the legitimate users of the city and the illegitimate, where the latter are conveniently made invisible.

On similar lines, **Dunu Roy** (Hazards Centre , Sanjha Manch) pointed out that ignoring the poor and dispossessed members of the city does not happen by accident, but rather by design. The effect of this is to provide for one class and exclude the other which does not belong to a 'world class city' though it is these people whose services are essential to city dwellers. Another example of the inherent inequality and violence of creating a "modern city" is the displacement of 30,000 families from the bank of the river Yamuna leaving 25 hectares of land vacant. On the other side of the river a temple has been constructed on 60 hectares of land. The people who have been displaced have been

moved to one corner of the city and are in many cases unable to earn a livelihood and have to adjust to a unfamiliar environment.

'Outsiders' such as labourers, courier personnel, and door to door salesmen are sometimes seen as being responsible for crime against not only women, but men as well. Countering this view, **Jaya Srivastava** underlined the fact that usually violence is blamed on the lower classes, but we know that in a large number of cases the perpetrators are known to their victims. Shifting the onus of the crime on to the "other" leads to further divisions within society. In fact the city will be made safer if it is more inclusive.

Issues of women's safety also arise in women dominated professions such as nursing. **Nandini Subbaiah** (Deputy Secy general, Trained Nurses Association of India) said that most of the hospitals cannot provide accommodation to all the nurses. This problem, along with the problem of low pay, forces them to get cheap accommodations, which are in themselves unsafe. Moreover, working hours are often erratic and no transport is provided to them by the hospitals. The nature of work is often very hostile as nurse-patient ratio is unequal and the wards are accessible to all exposing them to all kinds of people at all times of the day. Also there is lack of facility, as nurses do not even get space and privacy to change their uniforms. Often basic facilities like toilets are not available to them. She emphasized on the fact that nurses do not have any security and are often on the receiving end of the patient's anger.

From the perspective of the administration, **Dr. Onkar Sharma**, Welfare Commissioner from the Labour Commission talked about safety at the workplace and elucidated their role in implementing committees against sexual harassment at the workplace. Officers from the department regularly inspect different workplaces to assess indicators of security and threat. They have advocated for transport facilities for women working till late in the night, security guards accompanying women etc. They have also made attempts to spread awareness on the law against sexual harassment and have organised consultations with employers on how to handle complaints.

Disabled people and particularly women are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence in public spaces. **Ms. Shalini Khanna** (National Association for the Blind) highlighted that usually when we talk of any development, the disabled are always an afterthought. Most of the public constructions are disabled-unfriendly making them very vulnerable on the roads. Flyovers and roads are not built with the disabled in mind and public transportation is usually inaccessible. Since most public services are inaccessible to the visually challenged, the result is a restriction of their mobility or an immense fear in accessing it. **Dr. Renu Adlakha**, (independent researcher) further added that disabled women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and harassment. One does not see too many disabled people and almost no women in public spaces because of the fear of being violated and attacked.

The Dialogue endorsed the idea that working towards a safe city will require a range of strategies and involvement of different groups of people. We see this as a beginning towards enlisting the support of many more people in this campaign to make it broad based. In addition to those who were present at the dialogue, partnerships need to be built with different arms of the administration, with educational institutions, industry, media, agencies working with other vulnerable groups and others.

## **Possible strategies and interventions**

- Wider implementation of sexual harassment committees in workplaces
- Safety audits in workplaces
- More women police and a more gender sensitive police force which is perceived by people as sensitive to their needs
- Incorporation of the issue of safety for women and other vulnerable groups in urban planning and design
- Working with DTC and other transport authorities to address sexual harassment
- More safety audits in different areas with involvement of local communities
- Greater involvement and partnerships with RWA's to take up issues of women's safety
- Advocacy with authorities
- Create partnerships with other vulnerable groups in society such as elderly, children, disabled, migrants
- Work with media to have wider visibility for the issues