

Report of a  
meeting in Goa, India  
October 28-31, 2004

# Crossing Boundaries

Women and Economic,  
Social and Cultural Rights



**pwescr**  
Programme on Women's Economic,  
Social and Cultural Rights

PWESCR works to promote women's human rights, especially in the context of economic, social and cultural rights, by bringing a gender framework to policy, law and practice at local, national, regional and international levels, through ever-evolving strategies and activities in both conceptual and practical realms.

**Goals:**

- To establish links and foster collaborations in order to enhance learning, as well as develop shared strategies to advocate problem-solving alternatives at all levels in the context of gender.
- To build leadership and capacity of groups, organizations, activists and other actors in the field of human rights and economic justice in the context of promoting women's ESCR.

**Principles:**

- All human rights are universal, indivisible, and interdependent. Civil and political rights are mutually interdependent on economic, social and cultural rights
- Women's economic and social empowerment are fundamental to the full realisation of women's human rights.
- Gender analysis is crucial to advance all ESCR.
- Human rights mechanisms are an organizing, mobilizing and empowering tool in addition to an international legal framework;
- An intersectional analysis ensures that women from marginalized communities are not left behind.

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# PREFACE

While major international human rights groups focused until recently almost exclusively on civil and political rights, women's groups around the world have always worked holistically and recognized the realities of women's lives which lies in the indivisibility of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. While issues related to economic, social and cultural rights were ignored by major international human rights groups, women placed advancement of women in those spheres at the core of their work. Yet, there's a tendency to think of "women's issues" and "women's leadership" within subsets of issues such as, violence against women, sexual and reproductive rights, and political. In fact, women have pioneered work in economic, social and cultural rights and have much to contribute to the theory and practice of the emerging ESCR Movement.

Traditional advocates of civil and political rights have now broadened their mandates to include economic, social and cultural rights. Advocates of the Global South are now emerging as leaders in a global movement advancing ESC rights and the traditional advocates are playing "catch up". Some of us believe that the relevance of human rights, to the real challenges faced by individuals, communities and societies depends upon whether advocates draw upon the rich experience of women's groups to develop a gender analysis at the core of theory and practice. As the social

realities for everyone depends significantly upon the consequences flowing from gender, human rights theory and practice must take gender into account, or, it fails to engage the real world and every person in it. At this critical stage of the emerging ESCR Movement, there must be a bridge to the experiences, perspectives and leadership of women's groups in understanding gender. The Ford Foundation heard that message from activists in the emerging ESCR Movement and from women's groups. It responded with an invitation to nineteen activists to engage in deep conversation.

That the invited participants would make space for this extraordinary conversation underscores its relevance to activists grappling with the real challenges of advancing social justice with and on behalf of women and their recognition of the potential for a robust human rights framework to be relevant and useful. The conversation grappled with that potential. Whether the human rights frame of economic, social and cultural rights will realize that potential remains a work in progress aided, we highlight, by the thoughtful recommendations harvested from this conversation.

It is impossible to capture the full flavor and rich nuances of these four days of immersion in intense, deep and wide-ranging exploration. Is the human rights framework dynamic and open? At a

time when the role of the State is changing, (as institutions such as the World Trade Organization move into ascendancy), how are we to develop and strengthen democracy to respond to women's economic, social and cultural rights? What relationships, strategies, and modes of engagement need to emerge? What does it mean to say that "human beings and not cultures have rights" as we struggle with the complexities of women's efforts to claim, shape and change their cultures? As religion became the centre of the conversation, the room vibrated with energy. The conflation of religion and culture in an expansion of fundamentalist Christian, Hindu and Islamic movements warranted deep and extended exchanges. Finally, the conversation recognized the current fragmentation of human rights movements as a profound challenge. The conclusion was that the only successful response will be a multi-faceted and integrated strategy with a goal of strengthening linkages with women's groups and other fields, institutions and groups including non-State actors.

The Ford Foundation was moved to host the Goa conversation through a collaborative learning

effort conceptualized and led by Priti Darooka, Program Associate, among three Program Officers — Manuel Montes (International Economic Policy), Barbara Phillips (Women's Rights and Gender Equity), and Larry Cox (International Human Rights). The work has informed the foundation's existing programmes and contributed to thinking about how to be more effective in grant making. We hope this report will make the Goa conversation useful to other funders who also engaged in this work. We appreciate that the Goa conversation was not the first attempt by activists to explore gender and economic, social and cultural rights. We hope this report makes a contribution by sharing the Goa conversation with the field as the ESCR Movement and women's movements continue to evolve.

Finally, we hope the Goa conversation presents a useful model for funders and activists working together in partnership to address some of the challenges to achieving social justice.

**Barbara Y. Phillips**

*Civil Rights Lawyer*

*Former Program Officer for Women's Rights and Gender Equity*

*Ford Foundation*

# INTRODUCTION

When I joined the Ford Foundation in 2002, the field of human rights had already started to shift towards Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR). New frameworks and concepts around ESCR were emerging. It was becoming increasingly clear that civil and political rights (CPR), by themselves, were insufficient to protect all human rights. Although everyone agreed that economic and social justice have always been women's issues (women had organized around them for years), yet feminism and gender analysis were not central to these 'dominant' new developments. The emergence of a new paradigm brought 'big players' and forced women, the old protagonists, to the sidelines of this work.

It was exciting for me to be part of the Foundation's efforts through various portfolios, to support ESCR related work at all levels. There was a real concern at the Ford Foundation, regarding the emergence of this new framework, which continued to perpetuate the same gender-neutral approach to equality. Although everyone, including donors, practitioners and key players, were critical about not leaving women on the margins of these new developments, yet little was being done to change this, beyond the 'add one' approach to gender. Despite its commitment to gender equality, the Foundation also lacked information which was critical for informed engagement with the ESCR field from a gender perspective. The Ford Foundation along with

other donors really needed to rethink about its commitment to advance women's human rights, especially in terms of ESCR.

This meeting was inspired in many ways by these observations and by conversations with many leaders in the field who kept expressing the need to build and strengthen the field of women and ESCR.

The meeting featured diverse group of women's advocates and had three purposes:

- To obtain an in-depth understanding of the current ESCR framework that will put into context the scope of the current work, identify key issues and opportunities, and draw out possible new agendas.
- To highlight existing trends and tensions with a view to identify the nature and scope of intervention needed in the field of women and ESCR.
- To obtain recommendations to strengthen the international ESCR movement by making gender integral to substance and process. These recommendations would in turn inform the philanthropic community on how to be more effective in supporting women's ESCR field.

We thought the experiences and ideas discussed in this meeting would be of interest to a wide range of audiences, so we decided to publish this report.

Personally, this was a very important exploration for me, as I was transitioning out of the Foundation to start a new initiative focused on women's ESCR called Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR). Besides, my direct involvement with this exploration, the idea to start PWESCR, for the most part, came from working on this project. PWESCR is structured and conceptualized on the

Goa meeting and several conversations regarding women and ESCR with people. PWESCR is honoured to be asked by the Ford Foundation to produce this report.

**Priti Darooka**

*Coordinator*

*PWESCR (Programme on Women's Economic,  
Social and Cultural Rights)*

## CROSSING BOUNDARIES

# THE EXPLORATION

In October 2004, the Ford Foundation brought together 19 women from all over the world,<sup>1</sup> to Goa, India for two and a half days, to have a “conversation” about weaving gender into the work on economic social and cultural rights. The aims of the dialogue were:

- to explore existing trends and tensions related to integrating a gender analysis into economic, social and cultural rights;
- to identify the nature and scopes of interventions needed to strengthen a gender analysis in economic, social and cultural rights;
- to obtain recommendations to strengthen the international economic, social and cultural rights movement by making gender integral to substance and process; and

“I once read a book titled ‘The Guest’ which was a book about gatherings and communities and how each person brings her own insight, wisdom and history to the gathering, which when combined with the elements of an open heart and mind, such that the individual discussions are brought to another plane, a gift was created. This is what happened in this conversation – a gift was created. Thank you for making that happen, it is very precious and rare.” *(Eleanor Conda, Philippines)*

- to provide an opportunity for people working in the fields of economic and social justice, including economic and social development, and human rights, to network.

For the Ford Foundation, it was an opportunity to think about how to be more effective in grant making and to inform the Foundation’s existing programs. For the participants it was an opportunity to talk, share, challenge and explore the concepts upon which women’s economic social and cultural rights are based; to build bridges across disciplinary divides; to analyse the underlying causes for the ongoing violations; and to think creatively about the strategies to overcome the obstacles. For Priti Darooka, who first imagined the ‘conversation’ and brought it

into reality, it was a starting point for a new initiative called Programme on Women’s Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), Delhi, India to be implemented in 2005. The discussion was rich and diverse, drawing in different perspectives and taking people forwards in new directions.

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<sup>1</sup> A list of participants on page 31.

This report is a representation of the dialogue. This captures the critical themes and issues that informed the dialogue, highlighting the conceptual clarifications that emerged from the exploration of tensions and the ideas and recommendations identified for moving forwards. While there have been many reports, articles and books written on the issues discussed, the value of the discussion and this report that captures it, lies in the analytical insights that were gained through the process of talking, through which different minds, from different disciplines, working in different parts of the world were able to combine their insights.

In this way, the ‘conversation’ and the report, together, are both the process and the product. The report is also intended to be a resource tool to inform the ongoing work of women, and the work of the donor community, in advancing women’s economic social and cultural rights.

### Why is there a need for such a dialogue?

Women’s groups from around the world recognise that there are significant barriers to the achievement of women’s economic social cultural rights. These include barriers such as the disconnect between women’s groups and other groups working on economic, social and cultural rights and the conflicts between cultural rights and women’s rights. As a result, the need

It was really the women’s movement, which was in the forefront of the fight to make all rights recognised as indivisible. However, there remain tensions between economic, social and cultural rights groups and women’s rights groups ...and we need to explore how to strengthen the integration of the two concerns, without losing the particularities, in an effort to further advance economic, social and cultural rights.”

*(Larry Cox, USA)*

has emerged for a dialogue among women’s groups on how to overcome these obstacles to the realisation of women’s economic social and cultural rights.

To prepare for such a dialogue there was a process, which involved site visits, emails, phone chats, and literature reviews to identify what are some of the important issues that would be important to advance through this dialogue. Priti Darooka visited and interviewed women’s human rights groups from Latin America, Africa, Asia and other parts of the world, including, mainstream human rights organisations (e.g. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch), regional networks like CLADEM, and Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development, national organisations, grassroots organisations, economists and groups that did not use a human rights framework but are working on economic justice issues (e.g. informal workers, migrant workers and land rights groups).

The five main concerns about gender in the context of economic, social and cultural rights that came out of the interviews were:

- Women have always organised around basic economic survival issues – so why are these issues so invisible, even though they are so key to women’s realities? Why have women’s issues been boxed into areas of violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights as the dominant discourse in human rights, and women’s economic rights been excluded?;
- A lot of work is happening around women’s economic, social and cultural rights but there is not a collective agenda or vision – so there is a feeling there is a lack of a common movement, a lack

of leadership at the global level and consequently, problems with resources being shared;

- Human rights has become an elite area as it has been pushed into a very legalistic framework. It has become a technocrat movement, which has served to exclude a lot of women's movement players. The elitism has also led to a focus on policy reform as the main area of engagement (i.e. focus on covenant and law reforms) rather than on gender equality, the feminist vision and how the movement is built. It has depoliticised the work of women's human rights activists. How then do we move beyond due process? How do we look at human rights beyond the violation approach, particularly in the context of economic, social and cultural rights? How do we repoliticise the work and build a movement?
- The 'over-professionalisation' and the 'NGOfication' has compartmentalised the work of women's human rights. Linkages has been recognized as a concern at a lot of different levels – between treaty bodies; between groups working with treaty bodies; between rhetoric and reality (because of the focus on policy reform and the gap in implementation, i.e. how to make it relevant to women on the ground); between different disciplines (separate/ elite groups of women's rights advocates are not linked with other movements or disciplines e.g. economists);
- How are successes surfacing and being shared – how do we develop spaces and forums where the experiences can be exchanged and capacities strengthened?

There was also an underlying concern about assessing the extent to which gender mainstreaming has led to institutionalising gender differences, rather than advancing gender equality and what has been the impact of this on women's activism and political voice.

These outcomes were presented as a platform from which the dialogue took off.

### Critical issues for gender in the context of economic, social and cultural rights

Three overall questions that participants sought to answer in the course of the dialogue were:

1. What are the advantages of bringing a gender analysis to economic and social justice work?
2. What is the status of integrating gender in the emerging economic, social and cultural rights framework and practices (including research, conceptual frameworks, grassroots activism and advocacy)? Where is the progress being made? What are the challenges?
3. What interventions are needed to move the work forward?

These three questions formed the pillars of the conversation that ensued. The exchange wove through the intricacies of the tensions and challenges faced by academics, lawyers, economists and activists working from different disciplines, to promote women's economic social and cultural rights.

In the course of the discussion the participants reaffirmed the human rights framework as one within which women can engage in positive ways to advance women's economic social and cultural rights. While noting the limitations of working within the United Nations system, the threats posed by parallel international organising systems such as the World Trade Organisation, and the overall eradication of human rights from States' agendas. Participants also reaffirmed the need for focusing on creating diverse but unified human rights movements, inclusive of women's movements, to overcome the current fragmentation of human rights movements, and examining how an intersectional approach can be useful for this.

Within this context, three least addressed areas of women's economic social and cultural rights were discussed in detail:

- *Democracy and participation* – in light of the changing nature of democratic spaces, particularly due to globalisation, examining options for infusing democratic spaces with gender equality and developing alternative fora for inculcating women's participation to ensure that women have a role in democratic processes that are impacting on the realisation of women's economic, social and cultural rights;
- *Women's cultural rights* – within contest between cultural rights and women's rights, locating women's agency to shape and develop cultures that are non-discriminatory;
- *Religion* – developing methodologies for engaging with religious institutions and leaders in dialogues that address the discriminatory and fundamentalist aspects of religions, while retaining the spiritual value of religions.

The conversation concluded with examples of effective enforcement and implementation strategies and an examination of other strategies necessary to advance women's economic social and cultural rights.

### Recommendations

While there was no intent to identify agreed recommendations from the dialogue, the following actions for donors and practitioners were highlighted as being important for supporting NGOs and social movements to sustain processes for attaining women's economic, social and cultural rights:

#### *Recommendations for Donors*

- Map who is doing what, when and where;
- Provide funding for specific women's issues, particularly women's economic, social and cultural rights and strengthen gender concerns in programs;

- Provide a sustainable resource based for women's groups by increasing targeted funding to women's groups working on human rights;
- Make resources available to enable women's movements to implement and consolidate the women's human rights platforms developed at United Nations World Conferences, as a pre-requisite for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- Facilitate and support the spaces and work of NGOs, social movements and affected peoples that will:
  - Further the conceptual clarity, the knowledge and skills, and the inter-disciplinary interactions on women's human rights;
  - Facilitate linkages between groups and movements to overcome the current compartmentalization;
  - Continue the discussion of women's cultural rights and how culture impacts on women's capacity to exercise economic, social and cultural rights; and
  - Strengthen and support women's groups to research and address the impacts of non-state actors (trans-national corporations, international financial institutions, criminal networks etc.) on women's capacities to exercise economic, social and cultural rights.

#### *Recommendations for Practitioners*

- Critique and develop the definitional aspects of economic, social and cultural rights using feminist analyses;
- Integrate the human rights framework with other frameworks such as violence against women, health, sexuality, economics, development and poverty alleviation;
- Identify progressive religious texts and interpretations and work with progressive religious leaders that share a commitment to human rights values;
- Strengthen the human rights movement, with a focus on all rights; and promote mutual sharing and learning between civil and political

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- rights movements and economic, social and cultural rights movements;
- Advocate for all components of the United Nations system to understand and implement a human rights approach;
  - Strengthen the UN treaty system's focus on effective implementation of human rights standards (e.g. introduce innovative means to hold States accountable; generate general comments with a strong gender focus);
  - Extend the reach of the human rights approach
- beyond the State, the UN, and other such institutions, to inform and strengthen movements. (e.g. using an intersectional approach to bridge gaps between movements);
- Translate the human rights framework to resonate with social movements and peoples' movement, to enable them to activate their interests through a human rights framework both within the United Nations as well as on the ground;

# LOCATING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS WITHIN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

"We need a better clarification of the critique of the rights approach, which has so many positives in terms of having symbolic connotations, inspiring freedom fighters, and advancing the idea of entitlements. When we talk about a rights approach, we have to walk between reform and utopia, and work out what the aspiration is. When dealing with the human rights framework, the conversation should be what we aspire for the framework to be, what is the vision, as informed by our multi-disciplinary knowledge." *(Celina Romany, Puerto Rico)*

**T**o start a discussion on women's economic social cultural rights, it was important to clarify the common conceptual framework within which the discussion takes place. Given the historical marginalisation of economic, social and cultural rights and women's rights within the existing human rights framework, a key question was whether there is a need to elucidate a distinct women's economic, social and cultural rights framework, or whether the existing human rights framework provides sufficient scope to interrogate women's economic, social and cultural rights within it?

Answering this question leads to a further consideration of the advantages and limitations the human rights framework provides for women;

"There is only one human rights framework – which is either impoverished because it neglects economic, social and cultural rights, gender etc, or a strong framework that incorporates these elements."

*(Larry Cox, USA)*

and what are some of the current internal challenges (e.g. weakness of United Nations mechanisms; fragmentation of the human rights movement) and external challenges (e.g. marginalisation of the human rights framework in international politics) that women face when engaging with the human rights framework.

A human rights framework provides legitimacy and a global character to women's struggles. The covenants and other aspects of the human rights framework are an important springboard for moving from a defensive to an offensive framing of issues. Human rights also provide a basis for uniting issue based struggles – which can assist to overcome the current plague of fragmentation of struggles/movements. In this sense, human rights provide a foundation for building common ground and creating international solidarity.

To take advantage of these benefits of a human rights framework, it is essential to start with a framework that fully incorporates economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights, as well as embracing gender and race. However, as economic, social and cultural rights are not treated on an equal basis as civil and political rights within the framework it may be necessary to emphasise economic, social and cultural rights for strategic purposes.

**There needs to be more work on critiquing and developing the definitional aspects of economic, social and cultural rights using feminist analyses.**

The human rights framework is a dynamic, open framework, in which the tensions in society play an active role in continuing to define and re-define the framework. However, it is important to ensure that the rights bearers, the people whose rights are violated, remain at the core of efforts to define human rights. For instance, recognising women as rights bearers has led to the redefinition of rights to reflect women's experiences, thereby recognising violations of human rights, such as violence against women, which were previously absent. Some governments have tried to shift the debate to frame rights in terms of State's rights (for example, referring to a State's right to development in contrast with people's rights). However, human rights are inalienable and as such, it is important for people as rights bearers to retain a central position in the human rights framework. This also challenges the idea that the human rights movement is elitist or technocratic and instead resonates with the stronger articulation of grassroots experiences within the economic, social and cultural rights movement. In this regard, it is important to ensure the human rights framework resonates with social movements and large masses of people, who can activate their interests through a human rights framework both within the United Nations as well as on the ground.

It is also critical to continuously interrogate the human rights framework and ensure that other frameworks such as violence against women, health, gender and sexuality inform human rights. For example, there needs to be more work on critiquing and developing the definitional aspects of economic, social and cultural rights using feminist analyses.

There are concerns about the shift in focus away from women's rights towards gender mainstreaming, which is failing to address the structural disadvantages women face. This makes it important to legitimise women's rights and recognise that the feminist framework is relevant and important to the human rights framework. It is also important to ensure there is a mutual sharing and learning between civil and political rights movements and economic, social and cultural rights movements. The human rights framework can in turn strategically inform other frameworks of economics, development and poverty alleviation.

### **Challenges for women working within a human rights framework**

The challenges for women to work within a human rights framework range from the limitations of the United Nations system, as well as the threats posed by parallel international organising systems such as the World Trade Organization, to the challenges of working within an overarching international context which is marginalising the entire human rights agenda.

While the human rights framework is often equated with the United Nations, there are substantial weaknesses in the United Nations system for realising human rights, and particularly women's economic, social and cultural rights.

Firstly, entire agencies within the United Nations are not using the human rights framework.<sup>2</sup> It is necessary for all components of the United Nations system to understand and implement a human rights approach.

Secondly, the treaty system needs substantial strengthening to ensure the effective implementation of human rights standards. The conventions and treaties and the substantive equality framework provided by CEDAW are useful tools for mainstreaming gender into economic, social and cultural rights because they form part of a comprehensive human rights framework. However, the treaty system is a starting point, not an end point; it is a tool, not the vision. Strengthening the treaty processes should be part of a larger project of strengthening the United Nations, rather than drawing a dichotomy between treaty and other processes.

However, the treaty system is a starting point not an end point; it is a tool, not the vision.

The strengthening could include introducing innovative means to hold States accountable, strengthening economic, social and cultural rights mechanisms, and generating general comments with a strong gender focus. Similarly, a stronger United Nations could also provide the basis for challenging international trade systems currently threatening human rights, thereby enabling challenges to be situated within the United Nations system, rather than outside of it.

Remaining within the United Nations centred approach can be limiting for achieving change, particularly in light of the hegemony of the trade agreements which are being advanced without any corresponding accountability. There is a battle ensuing between economic,

social and cultural rights and international trade regulations such as those augmented by the World Trade Organization. The battle has manifested in terms of parallel systems of international organising, parallel mechanisms of enforcement being developed and debates on whether international trade agreements can be made in compliance with pre-existing human rights agreements. In the context of globalisation, NGOs are placed between the two approaches. To what extent are NGOs and human rights groups informing the policy spaces in either approach?

To overcome this impasse and to incorporate gender into economic, social and cultural rights will require women's groups developing a stronger understanding of the World Trade Organization arrangements and their impacts on women's rights. Further, a human rights approach has to move beyond the covenants to include all the economic and social aspects that impact women's lives. While the covenants still provide the main source of standards, in addition the framework could also include national constitutions and other sources, which may provide stronger standards.

Critical reflection also needs to be made on the usage of the language of rights. One of the risks of using human rights language is its complexity and mystification, which alienates and prevents many women from accessing the human rights framework. To address this risk of language it is important to continue to promote popular education which translates economic, social and cultural rights into accessible language, as a means of popularising the human rights framework and building women's capacity to engage with human rights.

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<sup>2</sup> To address this problem the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has created a special *Global Sub-Programme for Human Rights Strengthening* for the United Nations Development Programme called "HURIS". This program was introduced five years ago to make resident representatives understand how to work in a human rights framework.

A second risk to human rights language is the possible cooption of human rights language by institutions like the World Bank (for example, rights language is being usurped by the World Bank's in its 'rights based approach' to development), which can lead to the misuse and undermining of human rights language. To counter this, it is important to talk about economic, social and cultural rights in a more nuanced way and to be continually vigilant about

This is compounded by the fact that globally, women's groups working on human rights receive only 7% of the funds given to the four major human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

differences between self-perceptions and external perceptions of rights based work.

Finally, strengthening the human rights framework also requires a consideration of the wider context, where the human rights framework is currently being diminished, ignored and marginalised. For instance, the USA government has domestically and internationally marginalized human rights by failing to respect economic, social and cultural rights domestically, by demeaning human rights internationally, by falsely framing Iraq as a battle about human rights and denigrating the United Nations and portraying it as a corrupt, ineffective institution. In light of the current erosion of human rights from States' agendas, it becomes a struggle to hold the line even on recognised rights

such as civil and political rights, particularly in the context of the 'War on Terror'. Women's rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, are even further marginalised within this hostile climate.

The erosion of respect for human rights occurring within this wider context is making it difficult to sustain the gains made on women's human rights. For example, in Zimbabwe, while substantial law

reform for women was achieved, only five years later, many of those rights have been lost and Zimbabwean women now have to start again. Such erosions restrict women's movements' to focusing on maintaining the

grounds achieved, rather than moving beyond to claim new grounds. This is compounded by the fact that globally, women's groups working on human rights receive only 7% of the funds given to the four major human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. This is not a sustainable resource base for the work of women's groups.

The need to advance sustainability reaffirms the need to create a strong and comprehensive human rights movement that embraces an integral definition of human rights; and supports and promotes spaces for people working on common issues to exchange information and experience and work together.

# LOCATING WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS WITHIN HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

"The word that comes to mind is versatility – recognising and being humble enough to respect that a lot of work is happening on the ground and that our work has resonance with what work. In practical terms this means that the challenge is not strengthening the movement or having a bigger human rights movement, but asking how we can share what we have in ways that resonates and makes sense with people working in communities." *(Eleanor Conda, Philippines)*

**T**raditional human rights perspectives are focused on building obligations towards the State and strategies for pressuring the States. To this end there has been a focus on creating institutions (i.e. the United Nations system, rapporteurs, treaty committees and national institutions), rather than on building movements. However, institutions can only have an effect if they are supported by social movements that can pressure states in a range of ways (e.g. litigation, advocacy, media etc.). Participants further explored the need for strengthening movements, the nature of human rights movements and their limitations and how women's movements are located within them.

Increasingly, communities are not engaging with the human rights framework because it requires making demands of the State they know the State will not meet or respond to in a timely manner. This problem is becoming more pronounced as States are becoming increasingly unresponsive. For example, 100 women from a women's shelter for the homeless were evicted by the Delhi Municipality in India in October 2004. The

Prime Minister provided assurances that they would not be evicted, but they were nonetheless violently evicted. The State, despite being a democratic State, with a free press, has been completely unresponsive - the State doesn't care as long as it is in power.

Therefore it is important to not limit the human rights approach to engagement with the State, the UN, and other such institutions, but to also create and strengthen peoples' movements. In particular, noting the current fragmentation of movements specific focus was given to how an intersectional approach could assist to bridge the movements.

Different movements came together at the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) inaugural conference in Chiangmai, 2003. The ESCR-Net is a useful space for sharing information and experiences, and for connecting groups working on economic social and cultural rights. But, in terms of building movements, there is a continuing need to make these connections tangible and specific – the focus

not being to develop a specific economic, social and cultural rights movement but a strong human rights movement that focuses on all rights.

There is a need for this strategic clarity because among the movements there is a substantial level of compartmentalisation, with groups working on economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights and women's rights independently of each other. This has created divisions among NGOs and social movements and has diluted the larger human rights movement, in spite of the reaffirmation of the indivisibility of rights at the Vienna Conference on Human Rights (1993).

It has also manifested as a lack of support from groups across issues. For example: In the eviction of women from the homeless shelter in Delhi in 2004, there was an absence of women's groups advocating alongside the housing rights groups. There was a similar lack of support from human rights groups on the anti-sodomy law campaign in India, in response to which a coalition called 'Voices against 377' was formed. In Palestine the focus on political rights among most human rights organisations can limit the

"I would like to challenge people to think about intersectionality as the upliftment of social movements."

*(Ethel Longscott, USA)*

possibilities for groups working on women and gender to engage – with the result that the criminal law was amended to include provisions on abortion, without substantial discussion with women's groups.

This compartmentalisation particularly impacts on women's movements that may be isolated from human rights and other movements.

However, there are substantial obstacles that arise in the corresponding need for developing linkages, which raise important questions for women about the practice of linkages:

- How can we create a common platform that overcomes the competing claims of individual issues and identity based groups?
- How do we affirm ESC rights without strengthening the false dichotomy with civil and political rights?
- How do we link with private actors with whom we don't share common agendas (e.g. the Vatican, international financial institutions and trans-national corporations)? What tools do we need to keep grounded in our negotiations?
- How do international NGOs link with local groups in ways that are relevant and empowering for local groups?
- Where there is a lack of support for gender issues in traditional ESC rights and human rights groups, how can we promote gender in common spaces where women's claims are not addressed as secondary issues?
- How can we have a framework that acknowledges different identities without fixing them (e.g. under the banner of sexual orientation rights, the identities of gays and lesbians can become fixed). Fixing individual's identities, or by stressing only one element of identity you fix only one condition which makes it difficult to enjoy all human rights.

The concept of intersectionality can be useful to challenge the fragmentation of movements, when used to understand the common frameworks of marginalisation and discrimination experienced by different groups.

Intersectionality recognises that every person exists in a frame of multiple identities, determined by a range of factors such as class, caste, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age etc. and that it is necessary to examine them to address the substantively distinct violations, that arise from the interaction of discriminations based around multiples

identities.<sup>3</sup> Thus, intersectionality makes visible the diversity of women and recognises women's differing and shifting positions in terms of access and power. However, the mechanisms for practically applying an intersectionality approach in different contexts need to be further developed.

In advancing an integrated approach to human rights, more progress has been made conceptually (e.g. intersectionality) than in practice. To transform the conceptual to practice, there needs to be stronger linkages developed that cut across the compartmentalisation of movements. Linkages

need to be made between women's groups and: traditional human rights organisations, radical economists, women's sections in larger organisations working on women's issues and with groups with specific technical expertise (e.g. architects, scientists, economists, statisticians etc.). Linkages are also needed between groups working on economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights, between different issue/identify based groups (e.g. indigenous peoples, Dalit people, people with disabilities, lesbians etc.) as well as a range of non- State actors, international bodies and the media.

"Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections (and consequent discriminations) contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege (and the realisation of rights)... It starts from the premise that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power.... It takes account of historical, social and political contexts and also recognises unique individual experiences resulting from the coming together of different types of identity."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> APWLD, ISIS International-Manila, INFORM and Centre for Refugee Research, "The Intersectionality of Racial, Gender, Class and other forms of Discrimination," in *Gender and Racism Issues Papers*, Thailand 2001.

<sup>4</sup> AWID, "Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice", *Women's Rights and Economic Change*, No. 9, August 2004.

# DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION

In light of the indivisibility of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, and given that democratic participation is a foundational element necessary for realising women's economic social and cultural rights, the participants felt it was important to consider how women can contribute to expanding the voices of participation and democracy along the lines of gender, race etc. to address women's economic, social and cultural rights. Within this discussion participants examined the changing nature of democratic spaces, their decline, and the associated marginalisation of people and NGOs within them; while also examining how to infuse democratic movements and institutions with gender equality principles, to make women's economic, social and cultural rights meaningful.

"The difference between reform and utopia is a space that provides us the chance to rethink our aspirations. We are aware of the lack of democratic space, but we can still talk about our aspirations and visions."

*(Celina Romany, Puerto Rico)*

"We also need to work on democracy at a global level. If we work on democracies only at the national level only, how can we promote trans-national democracy?" *(Dima Nashashibi, Palestine)*

The current debates on democracy reflect the state of flux democratic systems are in. Diverging influences on the State are changing the traditional role of the State. Today, States face conflicting obligations (i.e. economic development and trade vs human rights) and are having to meet the multiple challenges of federalism, decentralisation, privatisation, communalism and globalisation. Within this context the relationship between NGOs and States is also changing, as are the overall democratic processes for participation.

These days the key actors influencing the democratic spaces include the World Trade Organisation, trans-national corporations, international financial institutions, donor agencies, individual billionaires, para military and armed groups, international cooperation agencies, and the State (executive, judiciary, and legislature).<sup>5</sup> Human rights and gender equality tend not to be a priority for such players. With the result that NGOs' and peoples' voices are becoming increasingly marginalised in democratic spaces.

This marginalisation of people in democracies is culminating in

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<sup>5</sup> It was also noted that criminal networks (i.e. particularly those commonly operating in trafficking in weapons, drugs and people) can negatively limit the scope of women's free participation in democratic spaces).

widespread public discontent with democracies. For example, in parts of Latin America (i.e. in Brazil, Peru, Argentina), despite the democratic struggles which were led against dictatorships in the 1980s, recent research shows that more than 50% of the population are disenchanted with democracy because it is seen to have led to increasing poverty. One third of the population lives in extreme poverty, making Latin America the most unequal region in the world. One of the reasons for this is that the focus within democratic spaces on civil and political rights has at times been at the expense of people's economic, social and cultural rights. The extreme inequity can undermine the integral framework of human rights. As a result, some groups in Columbia are now looking to develop alternative concepts such as a 'social rule of law'<sup>6</sup>. In Aceh, Indonesia,

...it is important to define women's citizenship in terms of their participation, independent of others.

women activists feel that the people have become so disenfranchised within the 'democracy' that democracy has become part of the language of the oppressive State. They prefer to use the language of 'equality'.

The decline in democratic spaces has become more evident in the context of the 'War on Terror'. For example, the resulting anti-terrorism legislation that has been introduced in many countries serves to limit the participation in political protest activities. Further, the large numbers of people who participated in anti-war rallies around the world, whose calls went unheeded by governments, highlighted the declining influence peoples' movements, NGOs and local communities are having on democratic spaces.

To counter this, NGOs need to consider how to effectively engage with these actors and to identify

alternative means for influencing both political and economic democratic spaces, in order to promote women's human rights.

In these changing environments, it is critical as well to understand how to infuse the concept and movements of democracy with gender equality principles, and to make women's economic, social and cultural rights meaningful. Democracy implies an expansive construction. But to ensure democracy is inclusive of women's rights, an expanded concept of democracy is needed to take into account the diversity of women, their different identities and cultures, in accordance with an intersectionality approach. In this way it is necessary to redefine democracy from women's perspectives and demand transparency, accountability and equal political participation in the formulation of public policies.

In redefining democracy to be inclusive of women, it is critical to highlight the community aspects of democracy and how they give voice and enable participation, compared with the republican form of democracy, which falls short of the electorate's demands. Democracy needs to move beyond tolerance to solidarity. Redistribution, diversity, and social justice are equally important characteristics to incorporate into the redefinition of democracy.

Democracy also requires an expanded notion of citizenship that includes membership of both public and private spaces. Many women's rights are defined in patriarchal terms, where women's enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights may be subject to being either married to a man or being a daughter of a man (e.g. housing). So it is important to define women's citizenship in terms of their participation, independent of others.

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<sup>6</sup> This concept gained some support in the Kyoto discussions where activists wanted use a term that would give meaning to democracy and civic participation.

Citizenship also needs to be articulated in the practical context of having a voice and participation. There continue to be categories of women who are commonly denied citizenship rights. For example, in India, sex workers are denied access to indicators of citizenship such as ration cards and passports, thus denying them their right to citizenship. In the Dominican Republic children born to Haitian mothers are not given citizenship, so are born stateless. The increase in immigration flows under globalisation and has led to an increase in associated exclusions, particularly for groups such as women

migrant workers and trafficked women. An effective democracy requires a multi-voiced body politic that allows for a multiplicity of voices.

Some positive examples of how a democratic environment can support economic, social and cultural rights include: the participation of NGOs in Brazil's budget development; and the Right to Information Campaign in India where grassroots groups used the Freedom of Information laws to support participatory processes and community development.

# WOMEN'S CULTURAL RIGHTS

"Culture is usually a space where men speak on the behalf of women. For example, India's reservations to CEDAW on family, marriage and culture, were made by men in the name of the claims of minority groups. Hindu men see it as a cut in their privileges, rather than as a right of Muslim women. However, by failing to see it as a women's rights issue, they are using Muslim women to beat Muslim men. When the Hindu right wing talks about it, they use it to impose something over the minority cultures; when they want to appease minority groups – it is always done in the name of minority men. To give an ironic example, in spite of bigamy being prohibited for Hindu men and allowed for Muslim men in India, in practice, bigamy has always been higher for Hindu men than for Muslim men." (*Manisha Gupte, India*)

Cultural rights are a relatively under-explored, yet frequently misinterpreted area of economic, social and cultural rights. There is a *culture of silence* on cultural rights. Culture becomes the 'private sphere', which cannot be touched, or seen, but can only be respected. Particularly in relation to women, "culture becomes the little place, the closet, where governments put everything they don't want to discuss." (*Manisha Gupte, India*).

Many States, particularly in Asia and Africa, have closeted cultural rights in this manner under the guise of "cultural relativism", arguing that the protection of human rights needs to be considered in the context of the differing cultural approaches present in these regions. This has on many occasions manifested as governments acting to

preserve cultural practices, including those that violate women's rights (e.g. inheritance customs and practices), at the cost of women's rights.

Discriminatory cultural practices are the main obstacle to women having equal rights in economic, social and cultural rights. This has emerged as a critical issue in regional consultations with women on issues of adequate housing, land and inheritance. For example, in the context of larger struggles for indigenous rights, Dalit rights or the Palestinian cause, discriminatory practices that violate women's rights to housing and land are commonly silenced. In countering this, it is important to ensure that women's human rights are accepted as non-negotiable standards.

“‘Women’s rights are human rights; and women’s human rights are non-negotiable’ – it is a good slogan but women are not a homogenous group. Women have different interests and experiences and when especially in the area of cultural rights, we want to make women’s rights non-negotiable we need to be aware of women’s diverse identities.” *(Likhapha Mbatha, South Africa)*

“Firstly, we need to be aware of the cultural changes we need to promote the full enjoyment of rights, and secondly we need talk about cultural rights. It is important to make this distinction. In cultural rights, we are talking about the right to have cultural change. Once we are clearer about this, we can look at how we can move forward.” *(Lydia Alpizar, Mexico)*

“We also need to acknowledge women’s agency in transforming a changing culture – women are the repository of that culture (our bodies and our behaviours) so it is very important for the women’s movement to see how women understand culture and therefore advocate for women’s rights to culture.” *(Lydia Alpizar, Mexico)*

We need to look at individual cultures and specific cultural practices. Not all cultures or cultural practices are oppressive or negative and need to be eradicated. There are also positive cultures which need to be protected and promoted.” *(Likhapha Mbatha, South Africa)*

To incorporate an intersectional approach, and recognise women’s cultural diversities, the challenge in breaking through the barriers and silence lies in discussing how women’s groups understand cultural rights and how to advocate for women’s cultural rights.

At the time the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was drafted, the specific gender or race was not taken into consideration. Under this liberal approach, actions determined by one’s gender and race are seen as actions made without a free choice. In order to incorporate gender within human rights, it is necessary to shift from (what?) to the idea of a ‘human being’ that has a culture and can still have agency to challenge and context.

As human beings women have the right to participate in culture, women have the right to have their culture respected, and women have the right to shape and change their culture. Through

recognising and promoting women’s agency within discussions of cultural rights, the question of women’s rights and cultural rights needs to be located, without losing the diversity of cultures.

It is also important to understand the dynamics of cultural change. An important impetus for changing cultures these days arises from the increased information exchange and population flows under globalisation, which is creating opportunities for more inter-mingling of cultures. By analysing past and contemporary forms of culture, women’s rights arguments can be placed within these changing contexts. In South Africa, women’s groups have capitalised on the fact that cultures are already changing of their own volition by drawing attention to cultural changes that are already taking place and their positive and negative effects on women’s rights. This assists in advocating for changes to discriminatory cultural practices, and promoting positive cultural practices.

# RELIGION

“Even though some of us may be ‘non-believers’, we need to creatively engage with people who have religious or spiritual beliefs. While there are no obvious compartments to people’s religiosity, we need to strategise, based on who can be our allies and who cannot”.

(Manisha Gupte, India)

The impact of religion on women’s economic social and cultural rights was also seen as a comparatively under-explored area. Religions are followed by and influence thousands and millions of women. But what does it mean to work on women’s economic social and cultural rights in the context of religion?

Some positive initiatives in engaging with religion from a human rights perspective that have taken place include:

- Progressive religious leaders and feminists at a conference organised by the Peace Council and the *Center for Health and Social Policy* in Chiangmai, Thailand in 2004. The participants developed the *The Chiang Mai Declaration - Religion and Women: An Agenda for Change*, which is a practical guide for generating community discussion on religion and women’s rights. The declaration addresses some difficult issues such as supporting women’s rights to abortion and recognising violence against women with a non-heterosexual orientation.<sup>7</sup>

- Religious Consultation On Reproductive Health organised a consultation in preparation for International Conference on Population and Development. The consultation brought together religious voices out of which 4-5 books were produced on issues such as: population and environment; feminist religious perspectives on sexuality; ten world religion’s views on abortion; and the normative category of sexuality.
- Saving the Soul of America is an American organisation that uses a combination of education and protest strategies to promote religion and human rights.
- Women’s groups worked with faith-based organisations after the events of 11 September 2001 and organised a march for compassion from California to Sacramento, which focused on advocating for economic, social and cultural rights.

Among women’s rights advocates, a common consensus point on women’s rights and religion can be drawn from the understanding that

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<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://www.peacecouncil.org/ChiangMai.html> (accessed 14 June 2005)

First, there are those that do not believe in (or practise) a particular religion, but are spiritual or who have a 'faith'. The *sants* and *sufis* (Hindu and Muslim mendicants, respectively) of India represent this tradition of mutual respect and learning. Second, there are those who observe a particular religion without actively 'othering' those who do not belong to that religion. Third, there are people who strictly observe rituals, superstitions and religious dogma, often without questioning their meaning or relevance. This group, to my mind, is more likely to be influenced by religious (or cult) leaders, evangelists or fanatics. Once we follow something without reason (such as believing in the rumour that idols of Lord Ganesh were drinking milk on a particular day), we are likely to believe anything that is dished out to us with authority. And finally, there are the modern-day fundamentalists, who clearly use religion for political ends. They spread hate about the 'others' and exhort 'their own' people to kill or to die in the name of religion. While they use all the advantages of modernisation, they use the language of tradition and culture to keep people (especially women) under control. We need to distinguish between these various layers in order to alienate the fundamentalists and extremists from the common person who lives down the street." (Manisha Gupte, India)

religions are influenced by patriarchal structures that produce discriminatory practices against women, most commonly in relation to women's family, sexual and reproductive rights. There is also often a consensus on promoting the principle of a secular State. Beyond these points, the divergences in religions and religious practices, and the intensely personal importance placed on religion, lead to religion being one of the most controversial areas of women's human rights.

When private religious practice is transferred to the public arena how is it possible to retain a human rights analysis? How can people have an equal space within which they can talk about their religious practices? These questions have become even more pertinent as in recent times, as culture is increasingly being correlated with religion, which is feeding into an expansion of fundamentalist Christian, Hindu and Islamic movements as well as the corresponding backlashes such as 'Islamaphobia.' Most concerning, these fundamentalist movements are often promoting discriminatory practices against women.

The question women rights advocates need to consider is how target the fundamentalist aspects, without ignoring the spiritual and religious aspects of religion.

"While we were campaigning against the attack on Muslims in our area of work (this happened within four weeks of 9-11, by using rumours of airplanes destroying schools, Hindu temples and water sources in our drought-prone region), we also used posters to indicate that the fundamentalists were the biggest threat to their own community, in the long run. One of the posters said 'Hindus beware of Hindutva', thereby warning the community against those who politicise religion in order to cultivate and spread the politics of hate and terror." (Manisha Gupte, India)

To engage substantively with the issues - knowing that many grassroots members of religious movements are women - feminist need to develop strategic dialogues that address the discriminatory impacts of religion, while recognising the positive and distinct values of spirituality attained from

religion. One methodology for this could be to examine religion from a cross-religious perspective, across countries and across cultures, as a means of identifying the commonalities and differences that create patterns of discriminatory dogmas that are common across religions. For example, honour

“One of the greatest challenges to women’s rights issues in Africa is the influx of Christian evangelism. We live in an age of enough information to make a distinction between the Jesus of faith and the Jesus of history. But how is it that we are not using the facts we have at our disposal, produced by feminist theological historians (i.e. about how the Catholic Church suppressed information on Jesus’ ministry and the role of women within it) to challenge the evangelical ideas. Why do we not have the equivalent of groups such as ‘Women Living Under Muslim Laws’ working in the area of Christianity?” *(Bisi Adeleye Fayemi, Guyana)*

killings occur in the context of different religions such as Islamic religions in the Middle East and Asia as well as in Christian religions in Latin America.

Another methodology is to identify progressive texts and teachings within religions. In many religions, some verses speak of equality, while other verses speak of discrimination –the issues often revolve around which verse is chosen and how they are interpreted. For example, Sisters in Islam is a group in Malaysia that tries to work on women’s rights issues within Islam. As women claiming their own religions, while recognising women’s rights, women

need to be able to influence the religious interpretations.

There is a need to engage with interfaith movements, particularly with progressive religious leaders. When conceptualising religion sometimes the presumption is that the religion is a monolithic entity - overlooking the people within the institution, particularly those who share human rights values, are working from within to transform the institution. Failing to link with them may leave them isolated and unconnected, as opposed to working with them as allies within the institutions.

However, sometimes, working within the religion can prevent one from overcoming the challenges, or one can be co-opted. Therefore, there is a need to work in conjunction from

both within the religion institutions as well from outside. The women’s movements’ initiatives at the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Conference showed that women are able to challenge religious discourses on women’s issues from the outside, by advocating strong, concrete positions.

The passion in this discussion on religion came not so much from the issue of religion, as from the opportunity to examine the obstacle religion can pose to women’s human rights and how to address it – an opportunity that is not often available.

# ENFORCEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Some examples of effective strategies for ensuring enforcement and implementation of women's human rights, through developing accountability, justiciability, constitutionalisation and State obligations include:

- South Africa: the requirement for a minimum core obligation has been successfully used as a strategy of enforcement for the right to housing, by including it in the constitution.
- Brazil: The right to petition or bring rights claims or violations to courts was successfully used in the HIV/AIDS campaign to access affordable medicines. The positive judgement created a supportive environment for passing a law on the right to health.
- Brazil: Civil society has appointed national thematic rapporteurs to report on the Covenant rights.
- Brazil: women's groups engaged the support and involvement of the Supreme Court of Brazil to obtain credibility for their training program for judges. The Inter-American Court or the European Court could similarly be used

to create a dialogue among judges at the national and international level.

- South Africa: An improvement in the quality of training and information, which bench groups, developed lead to significant improvement in judgements.
- Palestine and Jordan: women's groups undertook research on how judges deal with sexual cases in court. The results were then shared and discussed in a workshop with Supreme Court judges, which was a useful process. Consequently, women's groups have been invited to work on a committee for abortion (which is currently illegal) and to identify individual cases of rape requiring abortion.
- Mexico: AWID has worked with civil and political rights organisations on torture cases in order to address economic, social and cultural rights.
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) identified several indicators to supplement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which effectively build in women's economic, social and cultural

rights<sup>8</sup>, into a set of goals that otherwise have reduced the rights framework to a point so generic and simplistic that it fails to capture the rights.

"There are a lot of possibilities for ... implementing economic, social and cultural rights, they are just waiting for our imagination to put them onto the table." *(Susana Chiarotti, Argentina)*

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.eclac.cl>

- United Nations Commission on Human Rights: Is currently developing human rights guidelines on poverty reduction, in which many committees and rapporteurs have been involved. The guidelines include overriding principles, specific rights, and indicators for States to use to assess poverty from a human rights lens. It is currently being field tested in countries.
  - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and special rapporteurs have held workshops (i.e. training) for judges in South Asia on economic, social and cultural rights. While gender was part of the workshop, its integration could be strengthened. The Division of Advancement of Women also organise similar trainings.
  - International Women's Judges Association: They are collating examples of litigation on women's rights. As judges may not always accept training from NGOs, resources such as this, prepared by judges, are a useful resource for judicial training. The International Association of Women Judges also has a judges-training-judges program (i.e. training a group of judges who then provide training to other judges in their region).
  - Affirmative action measures are a critical measure for enforcement, as they allow for positive measures to be introduced to ensure that the existing unequal access to resources is directly addressed (e.g. dedicated access to credit, land, education etc. for women and girls).
  - Additional mechanisms for providing remedies are also needed (e.g. supporting the campaign for an optional protocol to the Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights).
  - Building women's capacity to exercise economic, social and cultural rights within the context of existing women's rights frameworks (e.g. developing concrete tools for strategically relating economic social and cultural rights to the violence against women framework).
  - Incorporating the work of radical, feminist economists on taxation, policies and budgets and poverty and trade.
  - Use economic social and cultural rights to employ a broad understanding of poverty (i.e. poverty is not just about income levels, as defined by the World Bank) and to ensure poverty elimination strategies are consistent with women's economic, social and cultural rights.
  - To promote women's economic social and cultural rights within parallel frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals.
- In addition, the following strategies were identified as necessary for strengthening the enforcement and implementation of women's economic, social and cultural rights:

# CONCLUSION

"This conversation ... has been so rich because people brought into this room their experiences, vision and compassion." *(Barbara Phillips, USA)*

This 'conversation' has opened a little window into a very sophisticated discussion and critically addressed two main challenges of economic, social and cultural rights: firstly, highlighting the cultural and gender dimensions

of economic, social and cultural rights; and secondly the issue of linkages - building bridges, being open and learning from each other and applying an interdisciplinary approach (with economists, architects, sociologists and lawyers all

"I am looking at this conversation as a means for prioritising the focus of the new initiative I am developing on economic, social and cultural rights, Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR). Maybe in a future conversation around cultural rights and religion we can continue to collaborate with people, and coordinate with others to get conceptual clarity on how to intervene and develop a framework around cultural rights. One other role the project can play is to be a clearing house (possibly through a website) to collect information, resources, ongoing research, to keep people connected, and to develop resources in a collaborative way. We have to take human rights and establish links with those not using human rights to collaborate on a common vision and implement it through partnerships, e.g., south-south dialogue. We need to continue to have spaces where we can build on this work." *(Priti Darooka, India)*

thinking about the same dreams and having the same concerns) - building bridges across the divide between civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights, between the women's movement and the human rights movement, within the south-south context and between legal strategies and the political strategies. Such meetings are a necessity, for advancing our concepts and applications between theory and practice.

There is a lot of promise in this exchange, but it need not be an isolated conversation. The responsibility is on everyone to take this forward.

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The following is a list of those who participated in the Goa Conversation in October, 2004. Organisational affiliations are listed for identification purposes only and cannot be used to infer endorsement of the thoughts and ideas discussed at the meeting or in this report. In addition, organisational affiliations may have since changed since the meeting.

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