



International Women’s Day 2009

More than 350 women from the PREM-Plan Koraput project area came together at Bharat Mata Hostel in Paralakhemundi on 7th and 8th March to celebrate International Women’s Day.

All seven sectors were represented at the weekend which raised awareness on issues of gender equality and female empowerment. The women, many of whom had travelled from remote villages, shared their experience and their commitment to tackling a wide range of issues that continue to confront girls and women in rural India, such as equal access to education for girls, domestic violence, early marriage, child trafficking and labour, dowry violence, rehabilitation for destitute women, right to property and female foeticide.

Ms Geeta Devi of PREM, who organised the event, was impressed and inspired by the level of motivation and awareness demonstrated by the participants. ‘The women here come from remote communities, they have to work extremely hard every day to earn a basic living and support their families,’ she said. ‘They face overwhelming obstacles and challenges in their lives but they show amazing strength and determination to improve the situation not just for themselves but for women and girls throughout India and beyond.’ Miss Devi added ‘The theme of the weekend and the rally is the protection of girls and their rights, as they are the women of tomorrow. The time for women to come together and demand change is now.’



One of the participants proudly wearing the IWD scarf

The weekend was inaugurated with a discussion, lead by Miss Devi, on the status of women in Indian society and the many issues that Indian women continue to confront. Representatives of pre-school centres, SHGs and mother’s and youth groups from every sector were then invited to share their experience and work of the last 12 months in their communities. The first day was then concluded with the presentation of the Memorandum for the District Collector and the formation of a committee to submit the memorandum the following day.



International Women’s Day was greeted with the high temperatures of an early summer day in Gajapati. However, despite the heat, the women were in fine voice and high spirits for the rally in Paralakhemundi and by

8am all were assembled in front of the historic palace in the centre of town with loud speakers, 26 banners and much energy.

As the colourful, good-natured rally proceeded through the busy town centre the women called for an end to discrimination and exploitation. In the true spirit of international female solidarity the rally was joined by staff members from Paralakhemundi-based NGO, Centre for Community Development (CCD) and three international development volunteers currently working with both CCD and PREM.

The rally begins from the centre of Paralakhemundi

On arriving at the District Collector's Office, Miss Devi lead the committee in submitting the Memorandum to the District Collector who thanked PREM for organising the event and all the women taking part, pledged his support in tackling the issues detailed and accepted the commemorative scarf worn by all participants of the rally.

On returning to Bharat Mata the women wasted no time in formulating and sector action plans to tackle one of the issues detailed in the Memorandum their own communities. Over the next 12 months they have pledged to work on a variety of initiatives including hostel facilities to enable girls to attend school, reducing economic migration through implementation of NREGA and reducing liquor consumption, one of the major causes of domestic violence.



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Ms Geeta Devi leads the participants in the rally

The women will come together again on International Women's Day 2010 to share the outcomes of these initiatives and given the level of commitment demonstrated by all participants we believe they will have much to celebrate.

Memorandum to the District Collector, Gajapati District, Orissa

Esteemed Collector,

We, the representatives of the Women's Federations of Mohana, Rayagada, Adava, Gumma, Gilakuta, Parimala and Nuagada blocks, on International Women's Day 2009, bring to you attention the following issues which create obstacles to the development of girls and women and to upholding their rights. In working to resolve these issues we have devised the following list of demands and ask for your support in their implementation.

1. Establish residential facilities in every panchayat to enable girls to attend school full time
2. Establish rehabilitation centres for neglected, abandoned and deserted women in every panchayat and Block
3. Stop trafficking of girls and punish mediators who are manipulating girls into employment and early marriage
4. Give women rights over property
5. Special measures for the to protect working women and women labourers from sexual harassment
6. Proper implementation of NREGA to stop migration of girls and women
7. Rehabilitation facilities for elderly women, orphans, widows and disabled women
8. Protect women and girls from violence through providing shelters, counselling centres and other services at Block and panchayat level
9. Stop the practise of child labour

Yours sincerely,

