Inspired & Empowered: During the recent local panchayat elections in Odisha state in India, Nayana Patra was a strong contestant for the Sarpanch position in Baruan Gram Panchayat. She actively managed her electoral campaign, with support from UN Women. Photo Credit © Gaganjit Singh Chandok/UN Women

September 2011 - June 2012

Issue 3

UN Women advocates equal rights for women and equitable opportunities. We believe women are real agents of change and our work is based on this fundamental principle.

In the third edition of the e-newsletter, we present some interesting initiatives from across South Asia.

You will meet Bhutan’s first woman Gup and read more about our efforts to inspire a new generation of women leaders in India.

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Justice still out of reach for many women migrants from South Asia

New Delhi, 4 June 2012 – Migration of Women Workers from South Asia to the Gulf is a first of its kind report that offers new insights into the problems associated with the migration of women workers from South Asian countries to the Gulf region. Released by UN Women and the V.V Giri Labour Institute, the report analyses the current situation in five major sending countries of South Asia – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – and six major receiving countries of the Gulf region – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

According to the report, an increasing number of female workers are migrating from South Asia to the Gulf countries as domestic workers. In 2010, about 6.45 million international female migrants originated from South Asia. Within South Asia, Nepal has the largest share of international women migrants (68.2 percent), followed by Sri Lanka (49.8 percent) and India (48.7 percent).

“The face of migration has changed, and the time when men only had the duty to maintain the financial upkeep of the family has long gone. The safety of women migrant workers needs to be more adequately addressed, in terms of policy implementation and government coordination,” said Anne F. Stenhammer, Regional Programme Director, UN Women South Asia Sub Regional Office.

From the departure phase to reintegration, women workers often have to face situations where their fundamental rights are at stake. The kafala or sponsorship system prevalent in the Gulf region to regulate the mode of labour recruitment is dependent on the employer and employee. Thus isolating women workers from any community of attachment.

Lack of information and pre-departure orientation make those women highly vulnerable to exploitation. Labour laws often do not apply to the area of informal domestic work. “It is crucial to gather more data on women workers’ movements to the Gulf countries. With adequate data, UN Women can address the issue of women workers migration with the Government of India, and encourage the government to take action to protect those women,” stressed Ms. Stenhammer.

The report recommends that policy discourse be made more sensitive to the needs of women migrant workers. “There is great merit in having coordinated regional interventions be developed between the sending countries and countries of employment. This is important as such migration has great potential to bring forth the social and political empowerment of women,” explained Dr Sasikumar, lead author, V.V Giri National Institute.

For more case studies: http://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomenasiapacific/sets/72157628415093855/with/7314710504/
New Delhi, 27 April 2012: Ms. Ban Soon-taek, wife of UN Secretary General, met with key women leaders from India to listen to their perspectives on women’s rights. Speaking of their experiences, the leaders highlighted many opportunities, as well as challenges with regard to gender equality.

Related article:  [http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/un-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-wife-meets-women-leaders-from-india/](http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/un-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-wife-meets-women-leaders-from-india/)
Malé/New Delhi, 10 April 2012: The United Nations has welcomed the passing of the Domestic Violence Law to address domestic violence in the Maldives. The successful vote is a testament to the passion, optimism and dedication of the political parties, ministries, non-government organisations and grassroots activists who have worked actively to reach this goal.

UN Women provided detailed inputs on the draft bill along with other UN agencies. “We welcome the passage of the Law. This is a remarkable gain for the women of Maldives. We hope to work together with the government and other UN agencies to raise awareness about the bill and help in its implementation,” said Anne F. Stenhammer, Regional Programme Director, UN Women South Asia.

A national survey on “Women’s Health and Life Experiences” conducted with the support of UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO showed that one in every three Maldivian women (aged 15-49) had reported some form of physical or sexual violence at least once during their lifetime. Information from Family Protection Units indicated a high prevalence of gender-based violence including child abuse, and that survivors know 87 percent of the perpetrators.

Read the article:
UN Women and feminist economists make recommendations for India’s 12th Five-Year Plan

New Delhi, 3 April 2012: India’s Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017), to be released by the end of 2012, will determine development progress in the next five years. UN Women along with a Working Group of Feminist Economists (WGFE) has made substantive recommendations on provisions for women in the Plan.

“It is critical to effectively include women, their role and voice in the design of the Plan. The beginning of designing a Plan, should start with the aam aurat (common woman),” says Devaki Jain, Member of the Working Group of Feminist Economists.

Mandated by the Planning Commission of India, the Group is composed of leading academics and policy researchers from across the country, and includes leading economists such as Devaki Jain, Jayati Ghosh, Bina Agarwal as well as Yamini Mishra from UN Women.

The Twelfth Plan aims at achieving “faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth” but that can only be achieved by taking the poorest and most marginalised into consideration. The Working Group used its analysis to highlight that output growth cannot, in itself, generate the required employment, especially for women. “Livelihoods are the single most important variable for ensuring inclusive growth, and a critical issue of gender concern given the low rates of female work participation in India,” says Mridul Eapen, a member of the Group.

The economists argued that employment measures need to be reinforced within the work of the Planning Commission, particularly by enabling small producers to become more competitive, encouraging quality employment in social sectors and preventing displacement, loss of livelihoods and environmental degradation in the name of rapid growth.

As Jayati Ghosh, Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University stresses, “The poor quality of regular work being generated in both urban and rural areas poses a threat to women’s employment. Public and private sectors such as health and education rely too much on low paid women working as para-teachers, anganwadi workers and helpers, ASHAs.”

In view of the decline in employment, the Group questioned the accuracy of the instruments used to measure women’s share in employment, and suggested that special attention should be paid to women’s quality of employment.

“Along with some members of the Group, UN Women has also reviewed some of the flagship programmes and schemes of the Government of India such as the Integrated Child Development Services, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, as well as policies and schemes in the manufacturing sector and higher education,” said Yamini Mishra, Head, Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit, UN Women South Asia.

UN Women has been a leading supporter of efforts to ensure that national planning and budgeting processes have a gender perspective.

Nepal campaigns to end amnesties against violations


The main message was to urge policy makers to stop granting blanket amnesties to perpetrators of serious violations of human rights, including rape and sexual violence. Under the motto “Truth, Justice and Reparation”, the petition demanded the rejection of the 35 days limitation on rape cases, the enforcement of courts’ judgments as well as the implementation of Nepal’s National Action Plan (NAP) on United Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, adopted in February 2011. It also suggested issuing of identity cards for women victims of conflicts.

As a member of the Gender and Transitional Justice Network, UN Women is fully committed to efforts to ensure that every woman lives free from violence.

The petition was signed by over 500 people demonstrating solidarity for peace, justice, and women’s rights.

This year’s international theme, “Empower Rural Women - End Hunger and Poverty” also echoes through UN Women’s work in Nepal.

Read the article: [http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/nepal-campaigns-to-end-amnesties-against-violations/](http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/nepal-campaigns-to-end-amnesties-against-violations/)
A million signatures light up Pakistan

Sung by Khawar Jawad & Nouman Javaid, and sponsored by the United Nations, ‘Socha Kabhi Naa’ reached out to thousands of people urging them to take action to prevent violence against women and girls.

Islamabad, 10 December 2011: On 25 November, Pakistani TV viewers across 17 channels woke up to the tunes of ‘Socha Kabhi Naa’. Unlike other music videos, this one was different. Sung by popular singers Khawar Jawad and Nouman Javaid, it motivated thousands of people to take action and prevent violence against women and girls.

The video was a part of the ‘One Million Signatures’ campaign organised by UN Women, the Ministry of Human Rights, Ending Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG), an alliance of women’s organisations, and other UN partners. “Significant efforts have been made in the past to control violence against women in Pakistan, but a lot still needs to be done,” said United Nations Resident Coordinator, Timo Pakkala.

This was a one of a kind campaign for Pakistan that called for the elimination of all forms of violence against women, with people signing “take action” cards and highlighting their commitment to the cause.

“The main objective behind the campaign is to create awareness about pending legislations like the Domestic Violence Bill, the Acid Crime and Prevention Bill 2009, and issues related to women and girls in crisis. We want to strengthen grass-root level action on violence against women and girls through the alliance, and demonstrate solidarity with survivors,” said Fahmida Iqbal, Programme Officer, UN Women Pakistan.

Read more: http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/a-million-signatures-%E2%80%A6/
Dhaka, 4 June 2012: Najma Demra went to Abu Dhabi in 2004 as a domestic help and ended up being forced to work as a home-based commercial sex worker. Pakhi Begum went to Dubai to work as a maid but a local agent cheated her and ‘sold’ her to an agent in Dubai. She had no salary, proper food or rest. After a few months, she fell ill and was sent back to Bangladesh without a single penny.

Protecting the rights of the woman migrant
Najma and Pakhi are just a few of the several thousands of women who have been lured with the promise of a better future. Bangladeshi women contribute as actively to the country’s economy as its men. They send billions of dollars in remittances every year. Government sources say that they earned USD 11 billion and USD 11.1 billion in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Their earnings are roughly 13 per cent of GDP. In 2011 alone the number of women migrant workers was 5.4 percent – almost 30,579 women workers.

Despite this, women’s participation in Bangladesh’s economy is clouded with issues of irregular migration, vulnerable employment, discrimination and lack of proper re-integration programmes. Some even have to go through sexual harassment in addition to other problems. Shamsun paid 40,000 Bangladeshi Taka to work in an office abroad. To her dismay, she found herself working as a domestic help, and was abused by her employers regularly. A relative of the family, Hamid, also made sexual advances. Although she fulfilled her contract by working for 2 years and 3 months, she was paid for only one year.

To ensure that more women do not go through the same fate, UN Women in Bangladesh has been working with the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs since 2005. In 2009-10, UN Women assisted the Bangladesh Government to establish its first resource centre so that aspiring women migrants could obtain correct information about migration easily. Along with the government and civil society, UN Women has chalked out rehabilitation programmes for women returnees.

UN Women follows three strategies to support women migrant workers through the migration cycle. First, women who plan to migrate are provided with comprehensive information, resources and training. Second, labour attaches of embassies and government officials in receiving countries are sensitized to the needs of immigrating women. Third, rehabilitation programmes are conducted for women who return to Bangladesh in tandem with the government and women’s rights activists. UN Women along with the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) have implemented five such projects to help women make informed decisions.

In addition, a 26 episode programme in local dialects, focused on the safest ways to migrate for work, was produced and broadcast by UN Women on the national radio in Bangladesh. It received an overwhelming response and many aspiring women migrants called in with queries.

Safe-guarding the future & rebuilding lives
With the support of UN Women and its civil society partners like OKUP, BOMSA and other NGOs, these women are working to rebuild their lives. Najma has started life afresh in a garments factory and is working towards the future with renewed hope and vigour. Today, Pakhi works as a tailor’s assistant and has joined hands with an NGO and UN Women partner OKUP for working with exploited migrant women. She counsels other women on how to migrate safely.

For more case studies: http://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomenasiapacific/sets/7215762841503855/with/7314710504/

Related article: http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/un-women-in-bangladesh-empowers-the-woman-migrant/
Expanding jobs for rural women in India

Andhra Pradesh/Uttar Pradesh, April 2012: Humsana from Sri Ramnagar village in Andhra Pradesh picks tamarind leaves from the forest for a living. Dalit women like her are largely unaware of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), passed in 2005, which guarantees 100 days of paid employment to rural households per year.

Their ignorance is due to their exclusion from society. Dalits have traditionally been regarded as "untouchables." Scheduled Castes make up 16.23 percent of the Indian population, 80 percent of whom live in rural areas, and more than one-third live below the poverty line.

As a remedial measure, a two-year UN Women programme was started in 2009 in eight districts of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Andhra Pradesh (AP) to increase Dalit women’s access to guaranteed wage employment under the MNREGA.

Five-fold increase
A recent evaluation commissioned by UN Women showed a five-fold increase in the number of Dalit women accessing work under MNREGA in the 102 selected villages between 2009 and 2011. The numbers increased from 2,811 Dalit women in 2009 to 14,174 in 2011 due to the intervention. The programme also increased women’s control over earnings and decision-making.

The USD 492,000 programme was part of UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) and implemented jointly by Gender at Work, Dalit Sthree Sakhi (DSS) and Mitra Service Society. In Uttar Pradesh, four local organisations, Lok Samiti, Parmarth Seva Sansthan, Sahajani Shiksha Kendra and Yanangana, played key roles in unionising Dalit women and creating women’s collectives.

Humsana becomes a leader
When Humsana heard Aruna, a staff member of DSS, she decided to be involved in increasing awareness about the rights of Dalit women and MNREGA. "I realised the relevance of what Aruna had been saying as it concerned my everyday life. I feel like a leader, even amongst men," she explains.

She became a volunteer after completing training and awareness raising workshops on gender. Humsana now raises awareness about MNREGA among other women and represents almost 150 families at the Mandal level. Her leadership skills have helped to secure pensions for elderly women and convince officials. "Even the men linger around me in the hope of securing work. My work has helped me gain self-confidence and respect from the community," she says.
A demonstration condemning unemployment led by Dalit women, with the support of the local organization, Lok Samiti. Photo Credit © Lok Samiti

Increasing awareness

In Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh, one of the partners – Lok Samiti formed unions to become a political force that can demand work. Between 2009 and 2011, there was a 95 percent increase in the membership of Dalit women in unions and collectives in the programme target areas enabling them to demand work and serve as a pressure group.

In Chitrakoot district of Uttar Pradesh, Vanangana, an NGO, has helped women to form women-only work sites and create village assets in what was once a male domain.

More bank accounts for Dalit women

Earlier men in the household controlled the common bank account. This has changed with the creation of over 3,500 bank accounts under the names of Dalit women now.

Control over earnings has helped women to take household decisions linked to expenses such as buying food, clothes, and schooling. In some places the money is used also for participation in saving schemes.

Through its work, UN Women encourages these change-makers to challenge social stigma at every step in life.

Read the article: [http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/expanding-jobs-for-rural-women-in-india/](http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/expanding-jobs-for-rural-women-in-india/)
Bhutan’s first woman Gup leads the way for a new generation of women leaders

Namgay Peldon was elected as the Gup of Tashiding Gewog in Dagana Dzongkhag. Currently Bhutanese women have 14 percent representation in Parliament and 7 percent at the local government level. Photo Credit ©Gurpreet Singh/UN Women

Thimpu/New Delhi, 17 April 2012: When 28-year-old Namgay Peldon was elected as the Gup of Tashiding Gewog in Bhutan’s Dagana district, she made history of sorts by becoming the first woman Gup (block leader) in Bhutan after the nation first went to polls in 2008. Gewogs are official administrative units in Bhutan, each headed by a Gup.

Gup Peldon receives support of the villagers

Gup Namgay Peldon attributes her win to the overwhelming support she received from the people in her village. For over ten years, Gup Peldon worked as a non-formal education instructor, which helped her establish a close rapport with the villagers. “As an instructor, I interacted very frequently with people. I was always in touch, and helped them draft applications and letters. I also participated in community gatherings and meetings. So when I expressed my interest to stand for elections, people were also very supportive of my idea,” she explains.

Research supported by UN Women shows that though majority of women are keen on joining politics, they are often held back by social perceptions. Photo Credit ©Gurpreet Singh/UN Women

Inspiring Bhutanese women to surmount challenges

Her victory is an inspiration for all Bhutanese women to venture out and participate in the political and administrative affairs of the state. Research, supported by UN Women, shows that a majority (57 percent) are interested on joining politics but are held back by their responsibilities as mothers and housewives. Being a parent prevents 63 percent of women from joining politics. Men and women believe that women should be in charge of child rearing and housework, and both equally agree that women are passive and weak.

Has Gup Peldon faced similar challenges since she has a 3-year-old child? “While there are many challenges, they are manageable. Of course, I have to shoulder certain responsibilities but domestic chores are only for mornings and evenings. During the day I have time for my office. Travelling is a challenge but it is manageable. My parents and husband are very supportive.”

activities that a male Gup would perform. She takes full responsibility for all her actions,” says a Gewog Administrative Officer who works with the Gup.

Currently, Gup Peldon is focused on getting farm and feeder roads constructed and ensuring water supply and sanitation.

A network for women leaders

The Royal Government of Bhutan, with support from UN Women and the United Nations, strengthens the skills of leaders like Namgay through much needed training programmes. At the first ever event of its kind in Paro held from 16-17th March, Ms. Peldon and 72 women including tshogpas (village representatives), mangmis (deputy block leader) and three women Members of Parliament came together to create a Women’s Leadership Network.

Speaking of the network, Ms Peldon said she “greatly appreciated this initiative, such kind of forums help us
Initially, during her campaign there were doubts about how she would balance her personal and professional responsibilities, but those have quickly been assuaged. The residents of Namgay’s district now appreciate the contribution made by their new leader. “Though she is a woman, I have not seen any difference between her work and the work of a male Gup. She is handling all the network amongst one another, allow us to gain greater confidence and be more committed to serving our nation. There are still few women leaders in Bhutan today, at the national and local levels, so the establishment of the Bhutan – Network of Elected Women will help elected women leaders and aspiring women leaders to come forward”.

A moment of solidarity: 73 elected women leaders came together to attend the first ever Women in Politics consultation in Paro, Bhutan on 16-17 March 2012. Photo Credit © UNDP Bhutan

For some, it was the first time they had met each other only to discover that they had faced similar issues during their elections. Contesting against more popular male candidates, family objections, division of the voting community were some concerns that were brought to light by the women.

Gup Peldon also participated in a training of trainers supported by UN Women in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 25-30th March 2012. Now, she is amongst a cohort of trainers expected to roll out a similar training in Bhutan for district level officials and all elected leaders at the community level.

UN Women empowers elected representatives
UN Women is working closely with the Royal Government of Bhutan to strengthen governance systems by increasing the capacity of elected women and men. One such way is to empower them with knowledge and fiscal transfers to exercise their leadership and practice good governance in their constituencies.

“Our advocacy efforts include three components: a documentary film; a series of regional workshops aimed at high school girls who are the next generation of leaders; as well as a website forum to activate discussions,” explains Angela Ison, UN Women Gender Specialist.

The film, “Nangi Aums to Go-thrips” (housewives to leaders) examines how, in an empowered nation, such as Bhutan, where over 50 percent of its population is female, women still remain gravely under-represented.

If she had three wishes for her Gewog, what would Gup Peldon wish for? “First, I would wish for a hospital as the present one is very far from the Gewog. Second, I would like to improve access to the Gewog Centre and third, I would like to improve water supply for both irrigation and drinking purposes,” she says.

For Gup Peldon, participation is the key. “We have equal and just opportunities in Bhutan so everyone should come forward. One may win or lose but it is important that one participate. If one comes forward, there is no law that can deny any women,” she says. Her win is another step in Bhutan’s democratic transition.

Read the article: http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/namgay-peldon-bhutan%E2%80%99s-first-woman-gup-2/
Pro-women laws take hold in Pakistan

UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet meets with Fiza Batool Gillani, Goodwill Ambassador on Women’s Empowerment and Head of the Pakistan Delegation to CSW during the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Photo Credit © UN Women

Islamabad, 26 March 2012: Women in Pakistan have faced formidable challenges in their efforts to achieve gender equality and address gender-based violence in their country due to particular problems posed by certain customary norms and practices.

However, breakthroughs in pro-women legislation in the past years have shown that both the efforts of Pakistan’s government and the advocacy of groups working toward women’s empowerment in the country are taking effect. On 8th March, i.e. the International Women’s Day, the President of Pakistan signed the National Commission on the Status of Women Bill 2012 into law, which has given the Commission new financial and administrative autonomy, and better scope to investigate women’s rights violations.

A year earlier, the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Bill became part of national law, explicitly recognising practices like acid violence, forced marriage, so-called ‘honour killings’ as criminal acts, and affording protection and legal action for victims.

The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention (Amendment) Bill was passed in the Senate on December 2011. For the first time, it gives guidance on how the State should punish offenders and support victims of this violent gender-based crime. Women are also now better protected from sexual harassment in the workplace and from domestic violence, since laws on these issues were passed in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

To ensure that the laws on sexual harassment are built structurally into the system, a code of conduct is being monitored by a watch committee formed by the National Commission on the Status of Women in 2010, which is made up of representatives from the government, civil society and UN Women.

Supporting law-makers and changing mindsets

Throughout these legislative processes, UN Women has worked with local NGOs to research issues, facilitate consultations among experts and civil society and draft legislations. These have involved dialogues, round-tables, trainings and seminars on issues and obligations relating to gender equality, and have engaged those who work within the national machinery, such as parliamentarians, and those who lobby on it from the outside.

These platforms have developed advocacy strategies and held dialogues with parties holding reservations to foster greater understanding on the need for change. UN Women experts have worked to help ensure that draft legislation is in line with best practices and international standards, to train those involved, and to monitor it. Such laws will be better followed if mindsets and stereotypes are changed to better reflect equality and non-discrimination. UN Women actively engages women in empowerment-related work across the country, such as encouraging leadership among marginalised women and campaigning to improve the response of the criminal justice system to gender-based violence.

These breakthroughs in law and the advocacy surrounding them have shown that there is commitment to securing women’s empowerment in Pakistan at every level. With further monitoring, support and empowering of women’s networks, these triumphs will hopefully translate into real and concrete change for women in Pakistan.

Read the article: http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/pro-women-laws-take-hold-in-pakistan/
Homemakers become change-makers in India: Elected women representatives improve delivery of services in their villages

India, 27 Feb 2012: At a meeting of around 40 elected women representatives in Rajasthan, there is a dynamic leader who stands out in this large assembly of women.

Sunita Rajawat, a Ward Panch (member of the village council) from Vanasthali Gram Panchayat (village council) in Tonk district, is not afraid to participate freely.

"Initially my identity was that of a woman confined to the realm of my household, but I have now stepped out of that threshold and have found a new platform where I can speak out my mind, express my views and do something worthwhile," says Sunita. These words speak volumes about Sunita’s leadership skills that have emerged with her newfound role.

At Panchayat meetings where women members were initially discouraged by men to sit on the front row or to address issues openly, Sunita has carved a place for herself and other representatives. She has motivated many women in her village to participate in local politics and express their views without inhibitions.

Many women like Sunita are now coming together as part of a UN Women programme to promote women’s political leadership and governance in partnership with Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

UN Women’s Programme

India now has more than a million women who have been elected to office at the grassroots level. But challenges restrict women from running for office and exercising their rights as elected leaders. By working with over half a million elected women representatives in five states of India, the programme focuses on the potential of gram sabhas (public village meetings) to promote gender equality.

With funding from the Royal Government of Norway, UN Women and its partners have trained 67,000 elected women representatives across five states to ensure that they have equal influence over political decision-making.

Mahila Jagruk Manches (women’s awareness platforms) bring together elected women representatives and women citizens to discuss their problems and find solutions. These Manches or awareness platforms have lifted the spirits of the women and brought strength in numbers. Collective action has helped the leaders exercise their leadership effectively.

Rajkala Devi, the first-ever woman Sarpanch (elected village head) of Hingwahera Gram Panchayat (village council) in Alwar district of Rajasthan, values her Mahila Jagruk Manch.

During meetings, women regularly update Rajkala with the needs of the villagers and help her prioritise work. They also find solutions to alcoholism – a pressing local problem. “Though I am learning to articulate our needs to the district level functionaries, I am very sure of my priorities. I want to focus on roads, pensions, benefits for poor families and education,” says Rajkala Devi.

315 Mahila Jagruk Manches have now been established with elected women leaders like Indrani, Rajkala and Sunita from 635 gram panchayats in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan.

Almost 5,000 elected women representatives and over 17,000 women citizens have discussed public schemes and found ways to address domestic violence during meetings.

In partnership with the State Governments in 5 states, 100 Gram Sabhas are being held in each district. During these sabhas villagers discuss development and gender issues in the presence of trained motivators and government officials.

One such motivator is Lova Kumari from Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh. “Women’s participation has increased since we began to encourage them to attend
These trainings help elected women representatives in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan to acquire the knowledge and skills to perform their functions confidently and become more vocal in panchayats. "We learnt that we should read documents carefully before signing them and that we could petition higher authorities if we weren't being heard," says Ghissi Devi, Sarpanch, Vanasthali Gram Panchayat, Tonk district.

UN Women, UNDP and UNICEF are developing training modules with the Government to ensure that women leaders are better trained across 13 states in India. This is in partnership with State Institutes of Rural Development.

Electoral Campaigns and Collective Action
Another strategy of the programme is to work actively before panchayat (local self-governance units) elections. Campaigns in Bihar and Odisha in 2011 helped women candidates file nominations and manage electoral campaigns. This led to a rise in women's share in panchayat leadership from 42 percent to 50 percent.

One energetic campaigner is 45-year-old Indrani Chaurasia, a social worker, who dreams of making her village an 'ideal one'. As an elected Ward Member of Samaspur Gram Panchayat from Muzaffarpur in Bihar, Indrani's active association with women Self Help Groups and Mahila Pratinidhi Sangathan (organisation of women's representatives) has increased her capacity and skills to take action, especially during these elections.

The Odisha Panchayat elections in February 2012 also saw the active involvement of women as voters, contestants as well as facilitators. "Star campaigners" are exceptionally active women in social and political spheres, who support other women contestants to surpass the orthodoxy of male dominated society.

Read the article:
http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/south-asia-regional-office-sc/
When men say ‘NO’ using the power of social media

A unique social media campaign in India reaches out to more than 5 million web users with one message: speak up and do something to prevent violence against women.

To rally more than 5 million web users, you need five simple ingredients - a video blog, a website, a blog, a team of 22 spirited young people and one message urging everyone to “stand up, and speak out about violence against women.”

Over a period of one year, the ‘Must Bol’ social media campaign, led by ‘Commutiny’ and supported by UN Women encouraged young men to examine violence in their lives and question prevalent social norms.

Twenty-two young people from Delhi led the campaign using online and offline activities to engage young people to prevent violence.

A dedicated website (www.mustbol.in) that started in March 2011, offers 3 key interactive platforms: a video blog with 30,000 unique visitors; a shout-box (www.fearlessbol.in) for young people to ask questions and a team blog for posting campaign experiences.

“Women need to admit the violence meted out towards them, and fight back,” says Kuber Sharma, a co-ordinator. “We believe that a man should be able to proudly say that he is a homemaker. Societal pressures on men often force them to be an earning and independent entity,” he adds.

The MUST BOL page on Facebook, ‘LET’S TALK’, has over 10,000 members and one million visitors. A fun, friendly and positive way to speak about gender based violence, it has hosted many contests.

Manish Sharma, a theatre actor, is one of the campaigners and feels strongly for gender equality. “I consider it the duty of each human being to respect the dignity of every individual and their gender, where people are not afraid of each other and don’t regret what nature has made them,” he says.

In March 2011, Must Bol hosted an online Photography Contest and invited young people to articulate their interpretation of ‘Masculinities’.

Over 10 days, 44 photographers submitted 170 photographs, of which 140 were posted on ‘Let’s Talk’.

Read the article: http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/when-men-say-no/

For more information please visit:
mustbol.in/campaign
www.facebook.com/DelhiYouth
www.causes.com/causes/572516
twitter.com/#!/MustBol
The share of unpaid activities for females was 51 percent as compared to only 33 percent for males in all the states of India.

The Red Line of the Delhi Metro Uses Cartoons to Change Attitudes on Gender Equality

Cartoons can make a difference and Delhi metro commuters attest to that fact. Between September and December 2011, commuters travelling between 21 metro stations along the Red Line of the Delhi Metro saw 12 cartoons by leading cartoonists such as Sudhir Tailang, Neelabh Banerjee and Jayanto Banerjee. The National Commission for Women (NCW) and UN Women supported the campaign to create greater awareness about women’s empowerment in India.

Placed strategically along the 26 km crowded Delhi Line, the cartoons provide visual relief to commuters, while also informing them about basic issues. “Seeing the cartoon, I was inspired to reflect upon my own actions at home. I will ensure that I will do a thorough background check of the man who wants to marry my sister,” said Rajesh, who commutes everyday to Tis Hazari Metro Station. On seeing the cartoon on domestic violence, Rajesh felt that every family should ensure that the women of the family feel extremely safe and secure.

“Almost 17 lakh people use the Delhi Metro every day. So these informative cartoons attract attention and serve as public service messages, rooted as they are, in the daily experiences of women across India. They will help people reflect about things that they don’t reflect upon or take for granted,” said Anne F Stenhammer, Regional Programme Director, UN Women South Asia.

See all 12 cartoons at: http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/assets/UN-Women-Desk-Calendar-2011.pdf
Read the article: http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2012/cartoons-for-change/