

STRENGTH WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS MATTERS

SPACES

**THE
GLOBAL DIALOGUE
SERIES**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Working across movements, reaching out to those who agree and do not always agree with us, weaving a web to connect the multitude of voices, experiences, and visions, and finding strength in the points of intersection... this dialogue contributes to the growing global awareness of the centrality of women's human rights to addressing broader issues of social justice.

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STRENGTHENING SPACES

**STRENGTHENING SPACES:
WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS
IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

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**THE GLOBAL DIALOGUE SERIES
WORKING PAPER 2**

WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

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The last 50 years have seen the rise of many social movements – struggles or sustained actions taken by groups of people coming together around identity, issues, or strategies formulated by a partial or developing ideology. Social movements all around the world are fighting against neo-liberal globalisation, war, racism, casteism, religious fanaticism, poverty, patriarchy, and all the forms of economic, ethnic, social, political, cultural, sexual, and gender discriminations and exclusions. Although these movements differ in their visions and the issues they represent, many of them are part of a common global struggle for social justice, citizenship, participatory democracy, and universal human rights. Many of them believe in the right of peoples to decide and determine their own futures. However, there are very few opportunities for social movements to dialogue with one another around common goals, strategies, and the possibilities of alliance building.

Against this backdrop, a landmark dialogue was held among activists representing many different social movements around the world. The two-day international dialogue, *Strengthening Spaces: Women's Human Rights in Social Movements*, took place in Bangkok, Thailand on 31 October and 1 November 2005. It was convened by CREA, an international women's human rights organisation based in the Global South, in collaboration with the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), an international women's human rights organisation. The dialogue was held just after the 10th AWID International Forum, *How Does Change Happen*, in Bangkok from 27-30 October 2005.

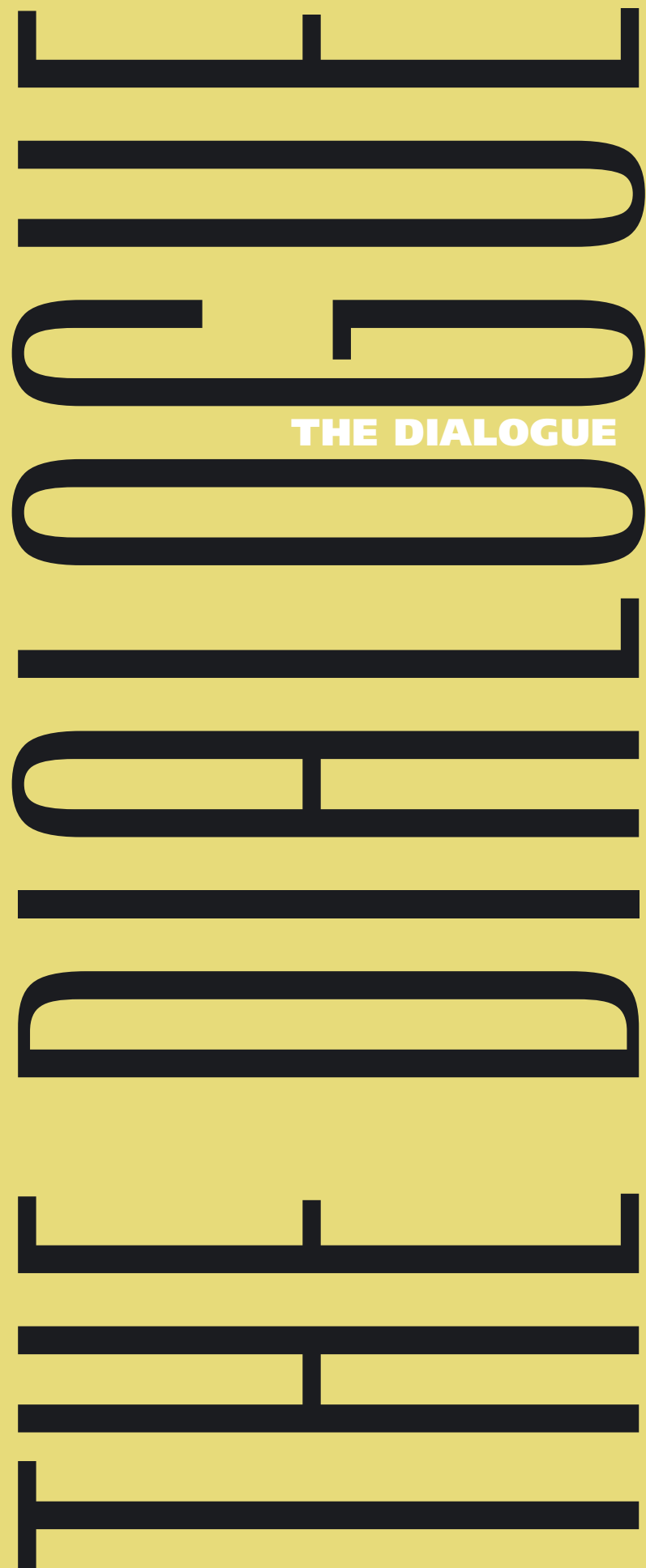
Strengthening Spaces is one of a series of four global dialogues on women's human rights that CREA is currently convening. The series was born out of a range of conversations that have taken place over the last two years among women's rights advocates, policymakers, donors, and organisers from the Global South. Typically such global convenings on women's human rights have been organised by groups based in the more economically developed North. While participants from diverse countries and regions attend these gatherings, the perspectives and strategies of groups working in the Global South do not necessarily take centre stage. CREA is responding to this by convening a series of international dialogues that are pivoted around the participation, voices, and perspectives of organisations based in the Global South.

The four dialogues are:

- *Building Alliances Globally to End Violence against Women*
- *Strengthening Spaces: Women's Human Rights in Social Movements*
- *Listening to Each Other: a Multigenerational Feminist Dialogue*
- *Between the Sheets and on the Streets: Sexuality and Human Rights*

The first of these global dialogues, *Building Alliances Globally to End Violence against Women*, was held at the Bellagio Conference Centre in Italy in 2004.¹ This dialogue brought together women from around the world to explore and expand their understandings of violence against women and to discuss strategies and interventions that effectively address their issues in diverse conditions and situations.

¹ The working paper documenting this global dialogue is available through CREA's website www.creaworld.org/publications.



THE DIALOGUE

Strengthening Spaces: Women's Human Rights in Social Movements, the second dialogue in the series, focused on the intersections between social movements and women's human rights, exploring how different social movements understand and address women's human rights, and how women's rights advocates have built alliances with other movements.

Attended by thirty-eight participants from more than twenty countries and a multitude of diverse movements, this two-day dialogue aimed to:

- Explore and discuss how different social movements understand and address the women's human rights agenda, the challenges they face, and the progress they have made in working on these issues.
- Identify the different intersections, interactions, common spaces, and challenges that movements encounter when collaborating on issues of women's human rights.
- Develop concrete strategies to strengthen the links between movements in order to advance women's human rights more collectively.

The intention of this dialogue was for movements to begin a conversation about the work they do or don't do with each other. What are the conceptual spaces that enable connections with each other's movements? What are the disconnects? Where do the tensions, the conflicts, and the ambiguities of conceptual connections reside? These were some of the questions that

were explored through wide-ranging conversations. The goal was to arrive at insights and understanding through dialogue rather than through presentations.

"We want to have a fairly open conversation with no misunderstandings about why we do and do not want to work together – with the confidence that around this table we have the possibility to have that conversation respectfully," said Sunila Abeysekera, INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre, Sri Lanka. "We need to really understand which are the spaces where we can work together and which are the spaces where we cannot. There is no compulsion to work together – there is only a need to understand why."

WOMEN'S RIGHTS WITHIN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

How do different social movements understand and take up the women's rights agenda? What are the challenges they face and what is the progress they have made in working on these issues? This set of issues formed the starting point of the inter-movement dialogue.

The complexity of the work done by social movements was reflected in the meeting, as several participants explained how they do not see themselves as part of only one social movement, but working from within several ones. For example, one activist from the Philippines described herself as part of the young people's movement, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) movement, and the feminist

movement, while a Latin American advocate explained that she works in a non-indigenous women's organisation and is part of the mixed indigenous people's movement and the feminist movement. "I was once asked which way I want to go: with the Roma movement or with the women's movement," said Enisa Eminova, Roma Centre of Skopje, Macedonia, "but how can you make me decide if I am more Roma or more woman?"

Some movements have historically been allies of the women's rights movement. Many lesbian women are grounded within strong feminist ideologies, have a history of activism around gender, sexuality, and rights, and consider themselves part of both the LGBTI movement and the women's rights movement. However, many lesbian women prefer to work within the Queer rights movement, since they feel their issues are marginalised within broader women's rights movements.

Other movements take up the women's rights agenda since women are part of these movements. For instance, the indigenous rights movement in Africa works with marginalised communities - nomadic pastoralists, Bushmen, and tribes like the Tuareg. While these communities are themselves marginalised, women in these communities are doubly marginalised. They lack education, are married off at young ages, face domestic violence and abuse, and are subject to harmful cultural practices such as genital mutilation. Indigenous women in Africa are invisibilised both within the indigenous rights movement and within the women's rights movement. "They have rights but they don't know those rights," said Lucy Mulenkei, African Indigenous Women's Organisation, Kenya, "and therefore we work with them."

Similarly, the labour movement takes up women's issues as part of its mandate to its female membership. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) has organised 65 million women around the world and has created the Charter of Rights of Working Women.² The Charter emphasizes the need for working women to enjoy social and economic rights as well as sexual and reproductive rights – the right to equal pay, the right to organise, the right to freedom from discrimination, the right to maternity protection. "There is no hierarchy between these rights," said Leontine Bijleveld, Women's Department, Netherlands Trade Union Confederation. "Women's rights and workers' rights should be spoken in the same breath."

Organisations such as the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS) in India, which works with migrant labourers, integrates women's rights within their work as part of their ongoing work, because many migrant workers are women. The MKSS' campaign for minimum wages triggered off a larger movement around the right to information, as the fear that contractors were siphoning off wages led to demands for inspection of government information records. "This campaign is not just a tool to fight corruption," said MKSS' Preeti Sampat. "It is also a tool for participatory decision-making, which is what democracy claims to be. If we need to make the government accountable to us, we need to know. As they question, challenge, demand, struggle, and sit on the roadside demanding rights, the veil has been lifting higher – both literally and metaphorically," said Sampat. "It all has to go hand in hand."

Women's rights also become part of other movements' agendas partly as a result of pressure and advocacy from women's rights groups. For instance, the international human rights community has traditionally taken up issues of civil and political violence, but has not taken up violence against women per se. In 2004 Amnesty International launched a campaign to stop violence against women that aims to challenge impunity and get state and non-state actors to recognise the continuum of violence against women in times of peace and conflict, in the family, the community, and by the state. The worldwide campaign also focuses on violence against refugee, displaced, and migrant women, and aims to strengthen the understanding of violence as a health issue and reduce discrimination against women in the criminal justice system.

Other non-traditional allies are now taking on the women's rights agenda out of recognition that contemporary realities have tragic consequences for women's lives. The Peace Council, an international interfaith group of religious leaders working together for peace held a meeting with leaders of international women's rights organisations in 2004 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The religious leaders declared that without a commitment to women's human rights, religions are failing the world. The resulting *Chiang Mai Declaration on Religion and Women: an Agenda for Change* recognised that religion has made women invisible, excluded them from decision-making, and that religion has been silent when patriarchal systems have legitimated violence, abuse, and exploitation of women by men.

“There are 300,000 women monks in Thailand,” said Ouyporn Khuankaew, International Women’s Partnership for Peace and Justice (IWP), Thailand, explaining why her faith-based organisation is taking up women’s rights. “That is the same amount as women in prostitution.” The partnership works with refugee women in Burma, HIV-positive women in Thailand, and nuns in Ladakh. “Many of these women are very religious,” said Khuankaew. “Being a feminist Buddhist, I find you have to redefine the practice and make it practicable for women.” The partnership uses such religious concepts as karma as well as such Gandhian-based concepts as non-violence in its work with diverse constituencies. “In Asia, we are still collective,” said Khuankaew. “We need to bring collective methods to women. What can we do collectively and non-violently?”

2 The Charter is available from the ICFTU website: <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991217050&Language=EN>

WOMEN'S CHARTER

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES

Since movements typically represent specific constituencies, issues, and identities, it is often quite challenging for them to work together, even towards a common goal. For instance, several participants talked about the right to work, but from different angles. A trade unionist spoke of the rights of women workers within the context of International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions; a human rights defender spoke of the need to frame the 'comfort' women issue as a labour violation; others talked about positioning women in prostitution as workers; and women from Latin America talked about the lack of labour rights for illegal immigrants.

There were both commonalities and dissonances in these discussions. "Everybody is talking about women as workers," said Abeysekera, "but from different points of view in terms of existence, social perception as workers, and protection. What is it that makes it hard for us to say, for instance, that we *maquiladoras* are workers, and women in prostitution are workers? We work in factories, you work in sex, but we are workers. We are sisters. Is there a possibility to say this or is there not?"

The struggle for women's rights in the Roma community illustrates another set of challenges in doing inter-movement work. The Roma rights movement started off in the early 1990s in the post-communist societies of Eastern Europe. By the mid-90s, the international human rights arm of the movement was operational. But it took another two to three years to put issues of Roma women into the Roma rights movement. The first generation of Roma women's issues to be taken up included

discrimination in employment, health care, and housing. Other issues that Roma women face – domestic violence, trafficking, prostitution, child marriage, and coercive sterilisation – could only be taken up later, as second-generation issues. "The conflict between gender and ethnicity was very prominent," said Dimitrina Petrova, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Hungary. "We were being asked: where is the loyalty of Roma women? To Roma liberation? To the ethnic identity-based Roma movement, which is of course a male point of view? Or is it more important for Roma women to seek alliances across the ethnic identity line with other women's groups?"

Activists working in solidarity with ethnic minority groups in Bangladesh face similar challenges. The indigenous tribal population in the Chittagong Hill tracts are desperately defending their right to survive as Bangladeshis with full citizenship in a milieu of increasing Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. In this situation, it is difficult to broach issues of women's rights. Young women in these communities have organised and are raising human rights issues related to military occupation. While they are able to foreground some women's rights issues such as state violence against women, there is no space for them to talk about other issues. "Even leading activists who have had relationships outside of the community have been excommunicated," said Sara Hossein, *Ain o Saalish Kendra*, Bangladesh. "There is no space to raise questions of discrimination against women in these communities. Sometimes, it is not even possible to meet women in these communities."

Movements often tend to see themselves as working around one specific issue or set of issues, leading to conceptual and on the ground disconnects with other issues. “The world of work seems to be left out by human rights NGOs,” said Leontine Bijleveld, Netherlands Trade Union Confederation. She noted that the campaign to end violence against women launched by Amnesty International in 2004 did not explicitly include sexual harassment, which is a form of violence against women. Sexual harassment is also considered a violation of ILO Convention 111 on grounds of discrimination. “It would have been much easier to mobilise women in trade unions if this was included. Women in ICFTU need support from women’s groups and mainstream human rights groups in putting pressure on those unions who are resisting taking this to the ILO Standards Committee,” said Bijleveld. “This is the intersection we could easily forge because there is no difference in the content and importance of the issue.”

The tendency to compartmentalise issues is seen in many other instances. Education is a cross-cutting issue, but its articulation in women’s human rights is very weak. In Yucatán, Mexico women’s groups do not raise issues such as contamination of water, although this affects many poor women; while labour rights groups do not take on issues such as work-related abortion. Groups in Yucatán have developed the concept of human labour rights to bridge this gap. “We separate human labour rights from labour rights, and include abortion, violence, etc.,” said Socorro Chable, *Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos Laborales* (CEPRODEHL), Mexico. “When we talk about the abortion a woman undergoes because of the work she does, this is a human labour rights issue.”

Similarly, mainstream human rights organisations still do not take up many women’s rights issues. Groups working on constitutional reform and democratisation do not take up issues of women’s political participation. “This is a major dilemma,” said Ireen Dubel, Hivos, Netherlands. Land and inheritance rights are other cross-cutting issues, as women’s right to inherit equally is challenged by male leaders of many movements, including indigenous peoples’ movements. Additionally, reproductive rights continue to be the domain of women’s organisations. “It has to do with the hierarchies of understanding what’s really important and not important for us,” said Sunila Abeysekara, INFORM.

The tendency towards creating a hierarchy of rights is another major challenge for inter-movement work. The human rights movement has traditionally privileged civil and political rights over social and cultural rights, and all movements tend to view some rights as more important than others. Sexual rights and reproductive rights are often viewed as less important than the right to health, education, livelihood, etc. and pitted against issues such as poverty. “Many people think we are speaking for superfluous rights and issues,” said Alejandra Sardá, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), Argentina. “For many social movements, there are first-class rights and second-class rights. We are considered to be working on second-class rights.”

Women’s rights are often placed relatively low down on the rights agenda of many social movements involved in broader struggles. After the mixed peasant struggle in Chile, many organisations either got co-opted by the government or felt that there was nothing left to do once democracy had been achieved. “But women’s work is never done,” said Mafalda Galdames, *Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas* (ANAMURI), Chile. “There is always too much to do.” In Chile, a Catholic country where all types of abortion including those done for a therapeutic purpose are illegal, ANAMURI is working to decriminalise abortion, advocating for sexual and reproductive rights, and campaigning for food sovereignty.

“When we try to raise issues of sexual rights we are asked, ‘what about caste, class, religion?’” said Abeysekara. “As if poor women are not lesbian; as if poor people don’t have sexual identities.” This tendency towards building a hierarchy is not just about *which* rights are important, but also about *whose* rights are important. Sex workers routinely face denials of several rights – the right to vote, the right to health, the right to freedom from violence, the right to organise, and so on. They face total exclusion from all citizenship rights, but no movement other than the sex workers’ rights movement has been willing to ally with them in the struggle for their rights.

One participant strongly felt that a hierarchy of rights is needed, and that some rights are more important than others. “I think the right to life is more important than many other rights,” said Petrova. “The human rights regime is based on a hierarchy of values. Unless you have a hierarchy of rights, you have no

value system. But there should be no hierarchy in *who* – no discrimination. The inherent indivisibility of dignity needs to be maintained,” said Petrova. “There must be equal dignity for all. I say yes to hierarchy of rights, no to discrimination.”

Sharing power is among the key challenges in working across movements. Although 65 million working women worldwide are organised into trade unions, the voice of women in trade unions is not strong enough, because there is inadequate representation of women at the levels of decision-making. Many women, such as housewives and grassroots women, are either not organised or are inadequately organised. “We need to look at the issue of power,” said Alejandra Scampini, *Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres de América Latina y el Caribe* (REPEM), Uruguay. “How much power does one organisation have over another? Who represents us and who speaks for our rights?”

Another set of challenges relates to attitudes, biases, stereotypes, and prejudices. “We’re all rights advocates,” said Rodelyn Marte, Network of Asia Pacific Youth (NAPY), Philippines. “But let’s face it – a lot of us are homophobic, a lot of us are racist, a lot of us have different prejudices. Unless we come to terms with this, we will not be able to work together.” Movements are often dismissive of young people who are seen not as human beings who can make their own decisions, but as problems to be controlled. As a consequence, rights violations of young people are often not recognised as such. In Mexico, when a young woman was arbitrarily arrested and raped in detention, groups focused on her arrest, but not on her rape. “How do we understand the right to live free of violence as young women?” asked Elizabeth Rios, *Elige*, Mexico.

Different movements tend to understand and conceptualize rights differently, leading to a series of contested conversations within and across movements. Two of the most contested conversations in the feminist movement today relate to transgender people and sex workers. Many transgender individuals see themselves as women, but “feminism sees itself as belonging only to women who have been born with a vagina,” said Alejandra Sardá, IGLHRC. “We have been struggling with this for years.” Similarly, classic feminist thinking considers prostitution as a system of coercion, violence, and sexual exploitation. All over the world, the women’s movement has

fought to abolish prostitution, which is itself seen as a human rights violation. Sex workers, who feel the women’s movement excludes their claims as women and does not focus on rights violations within sex work, are increasingly challenging this conceptualisation.

Underpinning many of these challenges is the politics of identity. Several political struggles and social movements of the 20th century are built on the liberation of a specific constituency marginalised within its larger context. While the notion of identity has become indispensable to contemporary political discourse, it has troubling implications for political inclusiveness and possibilities for solidarity and resistance. “Identity-based groups around gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc. have become so entrenched,” said Petrova. Many older women’s groups are loath to take on issues of sexuality, disability, etc. for fear that it would take away the spotlight from gender. “There is so much fragmentation – not only in the movement, but also in the legal protections.”

In many countries, anti-discrimination law offers protection against some forms of discrimination but not others. “It is extremely difficult for an elderly, handicapped, minority woman to find the right pigeonhole to bring her case,” said Petrova. Many participants felt that while identities are useful in foregrounding certain constituencies and issues, identity politics can prove counter-productive. “Identity politics can set us up in different boxes and produce a very fragmented view of discrimination,” said Gita Sahgal, Women against Fundamentalisms (WAF), England. “This neither helps us legally, nor in social movement terms.”

Participants also felt that social movements can only work together once there is a collective demand for equal rights on all grounds. “There has been a stage of fragmentation, which was very necessary and useful,” said Petrova. “But we now need a movement against the hierarchies of equality and a movement to bring the strands of equality together. For me personally, this is the future.”

COLLECTIVE TALKS WITH ONE ANOTHER? HOW DO WE WORK TOGETHER?

HOW DO WE WORK WITH ONE ANOTHER?

What are the different intersections, interactions, common spaces, and challenges that movements participating in this dialogue encounter when collaborating on issues of women's human rights? This set of issues formed the foundation of this inter-movement dialogue.

I. INTERSECTIONALITY

In a trigger presentation, Sunila Abeysekera of INFORM, Sri Lanka, contextualized the growing use and relevance of the intersectional framework. This section reproduces her presentation verbatim.

“ In the feminist movement, the discussion around intersectionality started in the 1970s with the emergence of the women's movement in many different places in the world. Often, these movements were rooted in particular groups of women – upper class women, women who belonged to a majority community, women who were privileged because of their class, their ethnicity, their race or their religion, depending on which part of the world they came from.

One of the earliest political discussions of intersectionality came from Angela Davis, who, in her book 'Women, Race and Class', talked about the absence of black women in the American women's movement.³ She firmly put on the agenda the fact that unless poor women and black women were included, the U.S. women's movement would be a failure as a movement. In the countries of South Asia where many of us come from, there has been a similar discussion about

how easy it is for women's movements and other social movements to be led by people who come from privileged social, economic, and political positions in our societies. If you speak English or not, if you live in a city or not, if you can access email or not – what a difference it makes to your ability to participate in these movements and discussions.

In 2002, another black woman from the U.S., Kimberlé Crenshaw, wrote a paper for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2002.⁴ She built on the work of others and tried to explain what she called a nexus of oppression and discrimination. For the last ten to fifteen years, all of us had been mired in identity-based organising and mobilising because we saw the political usefulness of that. She pointed out that the identity-based format of organising had, on the one hand, led to separation and fragmentation within the movement. And on the other hand, it had created islands of activism that suffered from not being able to relate to one another.

Kimberlé Crenshaw was talking about personal identity and building on the work of other feminists who talk about multiple identities, about the understanding that 'in my body reside many different identities.' For instance, I am a woman, a lesbian, a single mother. In my own country, I belong to a majority community and ethnic group. When I leave my country, I'm a nothing if I'm in the United States or in Western Europe.

Part of what the intersectional analysis allows us to do is to look at our many identities in one body and understand the politics of how we, at any one moment, occupy the body, and the politics of how that shapes our possibilities to be empowered or to be disempowered. There are two pieces of identity being discussed – the identity I assume for myself, which I can shift; and the identity you assume for me, which I often have to confront and contend with, because it is not the identity I would choose for myself. The intersectionality debate talks about how I could choose to position myself in any way at any point of time.

For instance, in Sri Lanka I work with women of different ethnic and religious groups. Sometimes when we are at a

meeting like this, we are all equal. If we are in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo, where we are required to show our identity cards at numerous checkpoints, I am almost always sure to walk through, because I belong to the majority community, as my identity card clearly states. My colleagues who don't belong to the majority community are always kept back and asked extra questions.

That's just the reality of it, and I don't have a choice. I cannot say I am not part of the majority community. They have no choice to disclaim the identity of the minority community. It shifts immediately, out of our control. In that situation, I have more power. And sometimes, I can use my power as a member of the majority community and walk them through. And then I become so Sinhalese and so buddy-buddy with the soldiers. It's sickening, but you do it because you want to get the other women through. When you can choose for yourself what you want your identity to be again, you understand your political realities, and you can negotiate these.

Intersectionality is useful in understanding that oppression and discrimination is experienced differently by an individual, depending on her location, which is sometimes self-defined, and sometimes defined by others. It shifts. You are never 100% oppressed. You are never 100% discriminated against. There are moments when the oppression and discrimination can be really bad. And there are moments when it's a little better. Intersectional analysis is useful in understanding the shifting nature of oppression and discrimination. It gets us away from that desire to be the most oppressed and the most discriminated against – and see that as the most valid way to claim a right.

The intersectional analysis also allows us to analyze collective oppression and discrimination and decide at which moment we will engage with which partners and allies in which action. It allows for the fact that there are no permanent alliances and no permanent partnerships in politics. It allows us to understand that given a particular understanding of oppression and discrimination, we as lesbians can work with groups that are doing HIV work, women's rights work, indigenous people's rights work, etc. But it also allows us to say that at another moment, this alliance means nothing. And we can move away and not feel hurt, not feel betrayed, not

feel that my friends have let me down. Because you always enter into alliances and partnerships understanding that it is based on your political analysis of that moment. And that long-term political alliances can only be built on a shared political understanding that goes beyond our understanding of oppression and discrimination – and is built on a positive vision of what we do want.”

DISCUSSION ON INTERSECTIONALITY

Following Abeysekera’s presentation, a stimulating discussion sprung up around intersectionality, both as a concept and in terms of its practical utility. “It helps us understand that one is never the most discriminated against,” said Geetanjali Misra, CREA, India. “There is no hierarchy of oppression or discrimination.” For instance, using an intersectional analysis, one would not position rape as the worst form of oppression a woman can face. “If you are a woman, *dalit*, worker, sex worker,” said Gita Sahgal, WAF, “it does not mean you are discriminated against each of these separately. But you are all of these together, and you face discrimination in a particular way because of that.”

Many participants said that intersectionality is useful in *understanding* various forms of oppression, but *implementing* an intersectional analysis is more challenging. “How can we build this intersectionality into our work without drawing up a shopping list?” asked Alejandra Sardá, IGLHRC. Another participant wondered how it is possible to give up the shopping list when the reality of multiple oppressions is still in place. “What can we actually offer?” asked Mónica Alemán, MADRE, USA. “Maybe I can’t start a programme on Roma women, but what can I offer?”

Others pointed out that not all identities depend on context. “If you are an indigenous woman, you will stay indigenous forever,” said Alemán. However, what it means politically to be an indigenous woman can shift with time. Virginia Vargas, *Centro Flora Tristan*, Peru, said, “My primary identity is that of a feminist. This is how I position myself when I can.” In the 1990s, progressive movements in Peru faced tension between those who saw themselves as *democratic citizens* and those who defined themselves as *feminists*. “Then we would say, ‘What is not good for democracy is not good for women,’” continued

Vargas. With an historical shift, the slogan changed to: what is not good for women is not good for democracy. “Identities are not immutable,” said Vargas. “They can adapt. It depends on the political moment in which we are living.”

One participant said that having worked to build an identity, e.g. woman, it is difficult to let go of that identity and connect with other identities. “It’s not a question of forgetting previous identities,” said Marina Bernal, *Artemisa, Grupo Interdisciplinario en Sexualidad Genero, Juventud y Derechos*, Mexico, “but of not fossilising, of being flexible and fluid to understand what other movements are working on.” For instance, sex workers are pushing the women’s rights and human rights movements to accept them as being equally eligible to make the same rights claims as other women and human beings – without letting go of their identities as sex workers.

Viewing identities as fixed rather than fluid can be limiting. In the 1980s, women’s groups in Latin America saw transgender people as essentially male. “We saw them as being born with a penis, and the penis produces power,” said Vargas. “We saw them as having no experience of being in a woman’s body.” In 2005, transgender people were invited to the Latin American Feminist *Encuentro* for the first time, representing a fundamental shift in how they are viewed. “Now, we understand identity in a more fluid way. If we don’t have intersectionality, we can start oppressing others and become obstacles in the path to a collective struggle.”

Gita Sahgal, WAF, offered another example of activism based on an intersectional analysis. In the 1970s, Southall Black Sisters set up shelters for women experiencing domestic violence in the immigrant South Asian community in England. “There was a different class and racial positioning,” said Sahgal. “If a South Asian woman goes to the police to complain against the husband, he might get deported. Or she might.”

A few participants hesitated to use the term intersectionality. “There are too many marriages of convenience,” said Meena Seshu, *Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha* (SANGRAM), India. “Uneasy alliances and strange bedfellows also exist in this space.” Others noted that, without using the term intersectionality, their work is already rooted in the principle and understanding of diversity and multiple oppressions. “No one will understand me

if I use the term intersectionality or identity,” said Leontyne Bijleveld, Netherlands Trade Union Confederation, “but if I explain that a harassment-free workplace is not only freedom from sexual harassment, but also non-racist, non-gay bashing, they’ll get it.”

II. INTER-MOVEMENT SPACES

Several participants alluded to frameworks and methodologies that are built around inter-movement paradigms. The World Social Forum (WSF) was highlighted as one such methodology. The Forum is “...an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society centred on the human person.”

The first Forum in 2001 saw the participation of approximately 20,000 people representing over 500 national and international organisations from more than 100 countries. The second Forum was attended by 55,000 people from 131 countries – a number that has swelled to 155,000 people from 135 countries in the 2005 Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil.⁵

Feminist dialogues have been held before each Forum to discuss alliances that could be built before participating in this inter-movement event. This strategy facilitates the process of introducing various women’s rights issues into spaces which may not be considering them. For instance, the *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* dialogue before WSF 2005 in Brazil inserted feminist concerns into the ‘Another World Is Possible’ discussion. “In the Marcosur dialogues, we talked about rights, democracy, citizenship, violence, diversity, sexual citizenship, fundamentalism, etc.,” said Virginia Vargas, *Centro Flora Tristan*. “We have established dialogues with *campesinas*, transsexuals, lesbians.”

III. NETWORKS

Participants also highlighted the role of networks in furthering inter-movement dialogue and creating possibilities of working across movements. Alejandra Scampini talked of the work of REPEM in Uruguay. A free association of networks consisting of 140 NGOs, academics, and women’s rights activists, REPEM is the Latin American representative of the network Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). It has played a leading role in the *Initiative Feminista Cartagena*, the *Articulación Feminista Marcosur*, and in the campaign around the drafting and promotion of the Inter-American Convention on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights. “We see ourselves as a methodology obliged to work with other movements,” said Scampini.

Several participants belonged to the *Maquila Solidarity Network*, a labour and women’s rights advocacy organisation promoting solidarity with grassroots groups in Mexico, Central America, and Asia. The Network is promoting improved working conditions and living wages for labourers in *maquiladoras* and export processing zones. The network has to ally with many constituencies to protect these workers, who do not even have the right to go to the toilet during work hours, from reluctant trade unions to those working on sexual and reproductive rights. “These women are not just working women, but also indigenous women, women undergoing domestic violence, etc.,” said Socorro Chable, CEPRODEHL. “Much of the organizing done in these sweatshops is not done in the context of the feminist movement.”

IV. THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

For the last few decades, the concept of human rights has been used as an umbrella concept by many movements working towards social justice. Does the concept of human rights provide a useful framework for inter-movement work? Is the human rights framework sufficient to enable access to rights for all? This question was hotly debated by the participants.

A few participants felt that the existing human rights framework is not adequate to secure social justice for all. A participant outlined how cases of anti-LGBTI violence in Argentina could

not be adequately addressed within the framework of human rights. In cases where gay men were murdered, families were reluctant to claim their bodies or fight court cases. Transsexuals who had faced violence did not have proper identification documents. Traditional ways of documenting violations do not account for the immense social stigma attached to these issues or the inability of many people to furnish legal documents that are essential to filing complaints. “We did not meet the criteria of human rights standards,” said Sardá. “It is difficult if we take the human rights framework as the only framework. We should complement this framework with a mobile, flexible dialogue around principles.”

Others felt that the human rights framework needs to be seen as a dynamic one that grows with new challenges. Dimitrina Petrova, ERRC, described how the Roma rights movement was constructed as part of the human rights movement, rather than as part of the essentialist movement built around the Roma ethnic identity, which was dominated by a non-rights approach. When a Roma king’s son was to get married at the age of twelve, Roma rights groups felt they should defend the Roma rather than expose the Roma, while groups like the ERRC felt it was important to speak out about human rights violations everywhere. “There was a tension between ethnic particularism and human rights universalism,” she said. “We are creating links and bridges between the Roma and the human rights movements and mutually mainstreaming both. Women’s rights are also being mainstreamed into the Roma rights movement, so the classical Roma rights movement does not exist anymore.” Petrova felt that the way forward was to *develop* the human rights framework, rather than to *supplement* it with a dialogic framework.

Many participants felt that the human rights framework is not exhausted as yet – it has the potential to absorb new influences and address new claims. Human rights emerged at the end of World War II in a culturally specific context, and have changed over the years. Issues such as violence against women were only included in this framework in the 1990s – as a result of changing power dynamics.

Others felt that the human rights framework reflects a western view of the world – and that there are other realities. “This is not necessarily better or richer than other paradigms of reality,” said

Alejandra Sardá, IGLHRC. “Non-human life forms have no rights in Christian theological frameworks.” Ouyporn Khuankaew, IWP, said that the word ‘right’ is still new in Buddhist culture and hard to understand. “We have started using the word ‘non-harming,’ not just to humans, but also to plants and animals. We have to use the language that people understand.”

This struggle to balance rights is also seen, in a different sense, in the work of indigenous communities that work to uphold collective rights. They often find themselves being pushed to focus more on individual rights related to gender and sexuality. In Sri Lanka, an indigenous community affirmed its right to marry off girls at puberty by getting a Supreme Court order in its favour. This created a conflict between child rights and the rights of the community. Collective rights need to be based on the understanding that there are individual rights, otherwise problems can arise. “A right cannot be founded on a violation of another right,” said Gita Sahgal, WAF. “We must refuse that totally.”

Another participant pointed out that, despite its limitations, the human rights framework at least offers a common understanding and is built around a core set of shared values. “If we only use that framework at this moment, it could be a mistake,” said Katherine Acey, Astraea Foundation, USA. “But I don’t believe we have a common understanding for another framework.”

“What does it mean when we say *the* human rights framework?” asked Sunila Abeysekera, INFORM. “Are we talking about the framework only as all the UN treaties, the special mechanisms, the UN High Commission for Human Rights? Or are we talking about rights as the different groups we come from use rights – as language with which we can claim our spaces, our voice, our right to participate, to be represented, and to represent ourselves in conversations? People use rights-based approaches and perspectives without only meaning the UN and international human rights law framework.”

Many advocates feel disempowered by the formal, legal human rights framework, while others have struggled for years to make this framework more inclusive. Participants agreed that it is critical to understand how the formal and informal frameworks of rights do and do not come together, without privileging one over the other. While the formal human rights framework

does not always acknowledge the existence or rights claims of marginalised communities such as LGBTI people and sex workers, the concept of human rights itself provides some protection and space for these communities. “If we don’t feel comfortable with the human rights framework, let’s drop the term framework,” said Geetanjali Misra, CREA. “But does this mean we don’t believe in human rights? In work on justice? In dignity and respect for all?”

- 3 Davis, Angela. (1982). *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Random House, Inc.
- 4 Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. (2000). *Background Paper on Gender and Race Discrimination*. Presented at the Expert Working Group Meeting on Gender and Race Discrimination hosted by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women held November 21-24, 2000, Zagreb, Croatia. Paper available at: http://www.wicej.addr.com/wcar_docs/crenshaw.html. Note: this paper and the discussions held at the working group meeting helped facilitate the inclusion of gender in the WCAR Conference Declaration.
- 5 http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias_01.php?cd_news=1709&cd_language=2

WISDOMS

**DISCUSSION:
WAYS FORWARD**

DISCUSSION: WAYS FORWARD

The challenges for addressing issues of women's human rights within social movements were many and varied. There exists a need for movements to be mindful of each other and ensure that the messages being put out by one movement does not detract from the messages being put out by another movement. "Our underlying philosophies and ideologies can harm the messages and campaigns of other movements," said Geetanjali Misra, CREA. "How does one movement violate the principles of another movement? We can fight for our rights as long as we're not pushing others down or displacing others in our struggle."

Several participants raised the role of donors in both supporting and harming movements. In certain countries, donors are setting up international NGOs that act as nodal points and as intermediaries between donors and local NGOs – this affects movements and blurs boundaries between donors and NGOs. In many countries, there is a tendency towards corporatisation of NGOs. "There are tensions when an international organisation tries to work with local organisations," said Marina Bernal, *Artemisa*. "They are not equal entities. We cannot negate these differences." Can donors create movements? For instance, the sex workers' rights movement received a big impetus from HIV prevention initiatives funded by donors. "This money led to the collectivisation of women," said Meena Seshu, SANGRAM.

Another challenge lies in the fact that alliances between different movements are often episodic, rather than ongoing. Movements are not monolithic or homogenous (although they are often talked about as if they are), and there are power differentials between and within movements. Some have more resources,

such as trade unions that are funded by membership fees from their vast membership base, which gives them more autonomy on how they use their resources. "What should be the principles to construct clear terms of engagements between our own movements?" asked Virginia Vargas, *Centro Flora Tristan*. "What should be the basis for partnerships with other movements?"

For instance some movements, which seem like natural allies cannot partner with others because of fundamentally differing ideologies. The women's rights and sex workers' rights movements differ on their understandings of prostitution, with tensions around issues of choice and victimhood, even though these need not be mutually-exclusive positions. Sexual rights groups feel that positioning sex work as work detracts from issues of pleasure and sexuality.

On what basis can movements ally with one another? "Movements need to constantly challenge their frameworks and move beyond their comfort zones if their work is to remain relevant," said Rodelyn Marte, NAPY. In many cases assumptions must be re-examined before common ground can be discovered. Therefore contact between different movements is critical. For instance, transgender people were seen as very threatening to lesbian spaces and to the women's movement, but now issues of gender identity are increasingly being integrated into these movements. "Contact with other movements makes us rethink categories like 'woman,'" said Marina Bernal, *Artemisa*, "We need contact not just to link, but also to understand our weakest links. That's how a movement continues to grow." In this regard, a participant from the queer movement outlined

how LGBTI groups in Argentina initially approached the human rights movement from the understanding that 'All of us are human and identical – what makes us different is inequality.' But that thinking has now given way to the understanding that 'we're not identical. We're different – in our needs and visions of the world.' For instance, many transgender people live in tribes, rather than families, and do not want to be identified as men or women. But this difference should not constitute the basis for discrimination.

Indeed non-discrimination and working across identities were recurrent themes in the conversation with both concepts presenting challenges as well as potential solutions. One participant described how an attempt to include young people in a rural indigenous women's organisation was opposed by those who wanted to keep it a 'women's movement.' "We should work across identities," said Mafalda Galdames, ANAMURI.

What does it mean to talk about difference and diversity when we are also trying to say yes to non-discrimination?" asked Sunila Abeysekera, INFORM. "There may be various differences, but there must be equal dignity," said Dimitrina Petrova, ERRC. "There's a conversation that politically and conceptually shapes our engagement with each other." Ouyporn Khuankaew, IWP, described how peasants, who are part of the land rights movement in Thailand, forced the officials to come to their village to meet with them and spoke to them only in the local language they themselves felt comfortable with. "They framed their exclusion and victim-hood in a very powerful way," she said. "It's about using the space of victim-hood as a strategic tool and about where your values of dignity come from."

Several participants alluded to the importance of ensuring that other movements are able to integrate women's rights into their initiatives. "How do we transform the questions they're posing?" asked Gita Sahgal, WAF. "There is a set of challenges we face when we enter another social movement which is controlled by men," said Abeysekera. "As a worst case, they just want to say that women are present, but don't want to listen to us. As a best case, it is paternalistic, and our issues are included as favours – not as issues in themselves.

- Authoritarian practices and behaviour within organisations and movements.
- Patriarchal modes of functioning within diverse social justice movements, including a tendency within women's groups to assert power in a manner identical to the male use of power.
- Power struggles. A lot of time is wasted struggling for control, instead of exploring common ground.
- Constructs and prejudices. For instance, the notion that young people are irresponsible and cannot take responsible decisions.
- Ideological divides. For instance, mainstream human rights groups still do not always see violence against women as a human rights violation. Some organisations get around this by working only with those with a shared vision.
- Assumptions. If one comes from x movement, it is assumed that one will only work on x issue, and behave in x manner.
- Identity politics, which can sometimes cause clashes. When the mass murder of indigenous women was raised as an issue in Canada, it did not receive mass support from the women's movement.
- Loyalty. The idea that one has to be loyal to one's movement can impede genuine cross-movement exploration.
- Tendency to work reactively rather than pro-actively in inter-movement spaces.
- Endorsement value. Being there just for the appearance or to swell numbers. Do advocates regard indigenous women as more 'exotic' and 'primitive' and thus want to showcase them at international conferences? A feminist task force looks good from the outside, but does it have substantive input? Human rights groups often use the stories and testimonies of survivors, without involving them in planning and other substantial processes.

- Differing resources of capacity, analysis, money. Who is going to be the provider of resources is a politically loaded issue. Those who have resources often set agendas.
- Agenda-setting. Whose agenda takes precedence at which moment? Who's using whom? How can one shift the Global Call to Action against Poverty dialogue, for instance, from talking about 'eradication of poverty' to talking about 'redistribution of wealth.'
- Ownership and space-claiming issues. Thinking of inter-movement work as an autonomous space is one way of addressing this. Is this a closed space or an open space? Does one have to push oneself in or be invited? Who can claim the space? Is there a degree of autonomy?

STRATEGIES TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR WORLD

STRATEGIES TO WORK TOGETHER

Building on the concerns raised in the previous session, discussions in the final session centered on finding ways to move forward. Participants recognized that calling on other movements to embrace the struggle against the subordination of women and the full promotion and protection of women's rights is not enough to advance the struggle. There is a need to work together and to understand that inter-movement work is part of a give and take relationship, and working together requires trust. There is a need for willingness to compromise and build trust, while maintaining one's own values and beliefs.

STRATEGIES

Participants proposed a range of strategies to strengthen inter-movement work.

- Learn to say both *yes* and *no*.
- Incorporate structural power-sharing mechanisms such as rotating secretariats, making joint decisions, and dividing work among different members.
- Put on the table issues of power when alliance-building.
- Use key individuals as entry points into other movements and spaces.
- Use individuals who have a certain appearance that is more familiar to a movement as a first contact.
- Provide information and space to dialogue around each movements' issues.
- Trust the process and give time to it.
- Strengthen friendships, since friends will give support less conditionally.
- Learn from those who have forged alliances in the past.
- Identify and build on each others' strengths.
- Identify key messages and non-confrontational issues to work together on.
- Maintain a strategic silence rather than disagreeing with another movement.
- Use language carefully.
- Network with key organisations from other movements.
- Do an 'inside-outside' analysis to understand why it is important to be part of this space.
- Understand the politics of a space and continuously revise strategic demands.
- Understand the limitations of an alliance.
- Think of inter-movement work as an *autonomous* space.
- Transform the hierarchy rather than trying to move up within it.
- Identify key allies within key decision-making structures.
- Evaluate the strengths of each movement participating in a specific initiative.
- Try having exposure to other movements to learn of their functioning.

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