

## Concept Note

**(2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011 program In Delhi)**

This is the centenary year of Women's Day. The first large scale mobilization of women workforce that took place on 19<sup>th</sup> March of 1911 in the streets of many European countries is considered a landmark event in the history of large scale mobilization of women workers and their rights movement. Since last hundred years many large scale demonstration and procession has taken place in many parts of the world to raise voices and to press demand on various issues pertaining to women's development and empowerment including human and citizenship rights of women.

In India the National Government since independence has taken various important steps through developing new policies and enacting legislations in order to empower women and to establish their citizenship rights. Women in India gained voting rights long before many other European Countries. We have legislations to prevent discriminatory payment practices against women labor. There is a law to prevent domestic violence. To ensure women's participation both in the local government as well as in the parliament a Bill is likely to be tabled in the parliament soon.

However still in many places in our country women's basic human rights are denied and their access to life and livelihood options are severally restricted. Women's are discriminated against because of their caste and or occupation. Stigma and discrimination attached to a number of low paid, less dignified occupations where women are mostly engaged in has not seen any significant change in their life since independence.

Indian Government even though have brought forward several pro-women legislations and policies to improve the socio-economic condition and quality of life of women in the country, the unorganized labour sector with special reference to women work force remained neglected. The compromised socio political status of women labour force and their maladies are often ignored by the Indian policy makers as a result of which many such development programs failed to make any perceptible change in their life and livelihood options. The large chunks of women who are engaged in low paid semi



skilled or unskilled job have not seen any appreciable improvement in their quality of life and in many cases it has been worsened further.

Many of these women who are engaged in occupations like Domestic work, construction work, fishing and as well and in cash crop production units presently leading a miserable life. Till date none of them has been brought under the preview of any social safety system, neither any legislation has been enacted to safe guard their labour rights.

The Beneficiaries of the labour laws and many other development programs developed and implemented by Govt. are primarily labours engaged in organized sector who are predominantly male and who constitute less than 8% of the total workforce in our country. Thus legislation made to protect the labour rights, occupational health and safety including various social and old age benefits etc are made available only for a minuscule percentage of women workforce, leaving larger women workforces out of this safety net.

National Government till date did not come up with any comprehensive legislation or policy for these categories of workforce who are engaged in these aforementioned occupations as well as the large chunk of self employed women. On the other hand these are the women who are the bread winer of the family in one hand on the other hand they carry out all household cores in addition to child bearing and rearing. Their Interest and Issues are hardly been recognized and registered in the minds of policy makers and rulers of the country.

After 63 years since Independence the National Government has recently passed a bill in the parliament named **“Unorganized workers Social Security Act 2008”**. However the said legislation did not incorporate the basic labour rights of workers engaged in unorganized sector specifically working hours, contractual agreement, weekend break remuneration, paid leave, job security, health and occupational safety related issues etc which are important labour issues. Workers working in a factory at the point of Retirement receive Provident fund, Gratuity, Pension as old age security benefit whereas the present act made a provision of meager entitlement to labours from unorganized sector to a maximum sum of Rupees 400 per month and Health Insurance coverage for Indoor Treatment



with a Maximum limit of Rupees 30,000. Needless to say this is nothing but a lip service provided to these women workforce by the government.

Based on last 18 years experience in organizing and supporting marginalized communities like Sex workers, domestic workers and construction workers in West Bengal and in neighbouring states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. DMSC has recognized the necessity of collectivization of various marginalized communities with an objective to help raise voices of women engaged in unorganized labour sector through various means and mechanism including capacity and network building.

It is our realization that unless and until workforce in this unorganized sector (as well as self employed workers) starts articulating their Issues and demands, the policy makers of our country would not take notice of them even though they constitute one of the largest 'vote bank' of our country. Keeping this in mind, we plan to organize two days program which includes consultation with different social actions groups and policy makers to highlight their issues. We take this opportunity to Invite you for this Consultation process and look forward your participation to develop a **National level platform** to address the pressing needs and rights of unorganized women labour force in our country.

