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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

AN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO CHALLENGING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

SUBMITTED TO

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AND

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BY

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FOR

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

India stands out among developing nations in its failure to establish norms and implement policy promoting the safety and security of its women. One 2011 survey conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation subsidiary TrustLaw ranked India among the top five most dangerous countries for women, along with Afghanistan, Congo, Pakistan, and Somalia.[1] Another TrustLaw survey, released in 2012, designated India as the worst G20 nation in which to be a woman, below Saudi Arabia.[2] Furthermore, in 2011, the United Nations Development Program's Gender Inequality Index (GII) placed India at 0.617.[3] Comparatively, Bangladesh and Pakistan, with respective values of 0.550 and 0.573, have higher gender equality. India's shortcomings in the three dimensions examined in the GII – reproductive health, empowerment, and women's participation in the labor market – attest to the breadth of challenges faced by the Indian state,

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[1]Sonya Hepinstall,"Factbox: The world's most dangerous countries for women," *Reuters*, June 15, 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/15/us-women-danger-factbox-idUSTRE75E32A20110615.

[2] Katherine Baldwin, "Canada best G20 country to be a woman, India worst,"*Reuters*, June 13, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/13/us-g20-women-idUSBRE85C00420120613.

[3] United Nations Development Programme, Gender Inequality Index, 2011, http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/gii.

nongovernmental organizations, and other civil society actors concerned with gender parity in India. One document published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2012 summarizes, "gender issues are of great concern" with regard to health and development in India.[4]

Maltreatment of women in India has cultural implications going back many generations. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity, the female sex."[5] Still, stories of violence against Indian girls and women abound. Indian journalists and international correspondents frequently publish articles detailing horrific acts of violence and other oppressive realities faced by women in India. One BBC News writer, Nita Bhalla, described her experience of patriarchal violence and the inaction of witnesses:

> When he pulled my hair and kicked me as I lay on the pavement, there was a deafening silence from my neighbors who heard my screams but were reluctant to intervene. I heard it from the group of young men walking past, who stopped a few feet away to watch as he beat me. And I heard it from the auto-rickshaw drivers who were parked at the stand across the road.[6]

Bhalla's story reveals the tolerance with which people can treat gender-based violence in India. The concept of tolerance connects directly to problematic ambiguities in divisions between public and private life in India. This thesis will explore the different ways in

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[4] World Health Organization, "India: Country Cooperation Strategy," 2012.

[5] Helen Pidd, "Why is India so bad for Women?" *The Guardian*, July 23, 2012 http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jul/23/why-india-bad-for-women.

[6] Nita Bhalla, "Becoming an abuse statistic in patriarchal India," BBC News, March 19, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-17398004.

which government programs and internationally funded human rights initiatives have attempted to deconstruct these ambiguities in order to more effectively ensure women's rights and protections in their homes and in their communities.

In familial contexts – and, more broadly, Indian society – "son preference" pervades attitudes towards girls and women, which can and often does produce gender-based violence. Indian academic Bijayalaxmi Nanda of Delhi University reports that through her work with the Campaign Against Pre-birth Elimination of Females (CAPF) – a program she founded in 2002 – she and her colleagues encountered "many poor women who were victims of domestic violence because they were mothers of daughters."[7] India's most recent census report, released in April 2011, reveals a sustained decline in the child-sex ratio, illuminating a widening gap between male children and female children. In globalizing India, greater cultural value is being placed on smaller families. Nanda reported that sex-selective abortion "was more prevalent amongst the urban, prosperous north-Indian population."[8]

According to the Indian government's most recent National Family Health Survey, 37 percent of Indian women "have experienced some form of abuse by their husbands – pushing, slapping and hair-pulling, punching, kicking, choking or burning."[9] Furthermore, according to UNICEF's 2012 report card on adolescents worldwide, 57 percent of Indian boys and 53 percent of Indian girls between the ages of 15 and 19 think

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[7] Bijayalaxmi Nanda, "Academics Campaign on India's Missing Girls," Academics Stand Against Poverty, June 26, 2012, http://academicsstand.org/missing-girls-nanda/.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Bhalla, "Becoming an abuse statistic in patriarchal India."

a husband is justified in hitting his wife.[10] Here it is important to recognize the inability of a singular quantitative figure to represent women's qualitative experience of violence. The psychological harm conveyed in situations of violence can and does serve to perpetuate cultural norms of patriarchal oppression.

Furthermore, women who face harassment and rape are often blamed for their aggressors' actions. According to Sheetal Sharma and Bitopi Dutta, young feminists from Guwahati, "[India] is seeing a rise of moral policing, which blames those women who are not seen as being 'good.' [...] So if they are abused in a pub, for example, it's OK – they have to learn their lesson."[11] Often, women who report a rape are summarily dismissed as prostitutes. Rajpal Yadav, a policeman of more than twenty years explained, "Girls from Darjeeling and Nepal have come here for business purposes. They go with men for money, but if the money isn't enough, it becomes rape."[12] Yaday's testimony underscores the corruption and bigotry faced by victims of sexual crimes, illustrating the challenges faced by organizations lobbying for the effective application of laws intended to protect women.

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[10] "Progress for Children: A report card on adolescents," United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), April 2012.

[11] Pidd, "Why is India so bad for women?"

[12] Lakshmi Chaudhry, "From the Delhi Police: Why Women Deserve to Be Raped," *Firstpost*, April 9, 2012, http://www.firstpost.com/living/from-the-delhi-police-six-reasons-why-women-deserve-to-be-raped-269957.html.

In July 2012, one 16-year-old female student was "slapped, dragged, groped, and stripped on a Guwahati street," according to The Hindustan Times.[13] Samar Halarnkar, reporting on the issue, explains, "This is a story of dangerous decline in Indians and India itself, of not just failing morality but disintegrating public governance when it comes to women."[14] Halarnkar asserts dual failures of those involved:

> The girl fails every test of the hypocrisy that governs public logic: she goes to a bar; she gets into an argument with some men, possibly shaming a man trying to film her; she walks out alone. The mob outside passes every test of public immorality: on the shamed man's urging, men – seemingly normal men with jobs and no criminal records – drag the girl by her hair onto the street; many watch no one intervenes, except for an older man; 20 men join the assault. A journalist at the scene, perhaps the same man who bickered with her, instead of calling the police, calls in a camera crew.[15]

Halarnkar's assessment of the situation demonstrates the severity and the complexity of the issues at hand – violence against women and the blame they often face for simply being present in moments in which violence arises. One must recognize Halarnkar's nuanced perspective, which rendered him capable of highlighting "the hypocrisy that governs public logic." However, it is simultaneously imperative to note that a conclusion linking a girl's audacity to be in a certain place at a certain time indicates an intellectual preoccupation with antiquated norms that hold women to different standards of public behavior than men. Fundamentally, Halarnkar's analysis (though enlightened in some aspects) reflects his own gendered, cultural biases. The general terms Halarnkar uses to

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[13] Samar Halarnkar, "The death of Kali," *The Hindustan Times*, July 18, 2012, http://www.hindustantimes.com/editorial-views-on/Samar/The-death-of-Kali/Article1-891399.aspx.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

describe the situation reflects the omnipresence of such brutal violence and astonishing apathy, as does Nita Bhalla's account included above.

Physical violence is clearly not the sole manifestation of patriarchal oppression faced by women in India. Indian women's lack of sociopolitical agency is reflected in the contentious debate surrounding the expansion of reservation for women in Indian governments, in the gendered disparity of India's labor force, in the struggle for women's land rights, and in the ongoing challenges faced by development advocates and other actors invested in empowering women in India.

Although India continues to face serious political and cultural challenges regarding the safety, security, and civic equality of its women, NGOs and other actors are involved in ongoing programs to change the subordinate reality confronted by women in India. The 2012 World Development Report summarizes, "Increasing women's individual and collective agency produces better outcomes, institutions, and policy choices."[16] Under pressure from NGOs, so-called Self Help Groups (SHGs), academics and researchers, and numerous other civil society participants, Indian governments have legislated efforts to improve the status of women in India. Nevertheless, it is clear that policymakers have – in many cases – failed to create the right incentives to ensure the proper application of laws that pertain to women's rights and protections. As opinion columnist and international development officer Siddharth Chatterjee summarizes, "The biggest question remains…How can a national conversation on this subject be leveraged

[16] World Bank, World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development, 2012.

into national action?"[17] The Delhi gang rape incident of December 2012 instigated an international discussion on violence against women, and spurred the Indian parliament to augment national anti-rape laws in March 2013. However, the challenge remains in the application of such laws, which were designed to address basic issues of violence as women experience them. Furthermore, the long-term difficulty lies in institutionalizing norms that promote the human dignity and equality of all Indian people. This thesis will explore ways in which Indian governments and civil society entities have approached the complex objective of women's empowerment, particularly in light of the obstacles faced by development professionals working in different parts of India.

Gender equality has risen to prominence in international development agencies and in their strategies to promote balanced, sustainable economic growth throughout the world. In fact, the 2012 World Development Report, published by the World Bank, centers on the ubiquitous theme and necessity of gender equality. The World Bank also cited the lack of gender equality in India as a challenge to economic development in its outlined Country Partnership Strategy for 2013-2016. With the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals approaching, Oxfam and other development agencies in India are creating a post-2015 framework for progress centered on human rights and the empowerment of socially excluded groups, specifically including women.

Because violence against women is systemic in nature, and because it is a social malaise that transcends culture, development professionals should frame issues of gender violence in terms of basic human rights. There are numerous avenues international

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[17] Siddharth Chatterjee, "Are women not part of our being?" *The Hindu*, September 15, 2012, http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/are-women-not-part-of-our-being/article3901569.ece.

donors can take to contribute to efforts to empower women in India. This thesis will examine international human rights organizations that have used social media and other new forms of technology to influence social change in India by demonstrating the systemic nature of violence against women. These organizations have revolutionized grassroots activism by constructing networks of human rights advocates and agencies, facilitating the expansion of an international conversation that is essential to social development worldwide. Because violence against women is an international social issue, transnational solidarity is critical to overcoming skewed perspectives that can downplay the effects of systemic inequalities. Furthermore, journalists that write for prominent news publications – such as The Guardian and The New York Times – play an important role in propagating information on critical issues of social development in India. By sharing grave stories of systemic inequality magnified by abject poverty, correspondents bring these issues to the attention of international actors that have the resources necessary to support programs intended to combat oppressive cultural norms.

Each type of support explored in this thesis has relative strengths and weaknesses, particularly given the diverse aspects of culture that define different communities throughout India. Cultural elements such as language, common history, and shared perspective – based on relatively similar life experiences – have a critical influence on a community's political activity, which is why it is important to consider various cases that illuminate the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of international support in development efforts throughout India.

CHAPTER 2

Advocacy in Women's Rights and Protections

Mahatma Gandhi advocated the increased presence and involvement of women in struggles for independence and equality in India. Gandhi believed that gender equality was key to social harmony in India, which in turn is essential to balanced, sustainable political and economic development. Gandhi decried many aspects of female oppression, including child marriage, social and religious barriers to widow remarriage, the purdah system, and the dowry system. While these practices have been legally outlawed, stories of these particular kinds of domestic violence continue to emerge from India's rural communities, particularly in the North. In addition, sex-selective abortion remains central to the discussion on the cultural undervaluing of female life in India. Indian feminist scholar Bijayalaxmi Nanda notes that there has been a proliferation of ultrasound clinics during the last twenty years, arguing that the declining sex ratio can be attributed to "a complex nexus of patriarchal ideas, misuse of medical technology, and the greed of unscrupulous medical practitioners."[1] Finally, disparities in child malnutrition in certain areas illuminate the challenges faced by development professionals concerned with promoting the human rights of girls and women in India.

[1] Bijayalaxmi Nanda, "Academics Campaign on India's Missing Girls."

Government Efforts

Over the past four decades, Indian governments have approached women's empowerment in many ways. Given the overwhelming examples of authorities' failures – willful and inadvertent – to ensure the safety and security of Indian women, international organizations and domestic civil society actors have played a central role in advocating women's rights and protections for the past four decades.

Various laws and programs have been intended to address the pervasive gender inequality in India. Since the 1970s, human rights activists in India have voiced discontent with India's dominant patriarchal ideologies, have advocated social change, and have effected policy change pertaining to domestic violence and sex-selective abortion. However, the ongoing challenge lies in the effective implementation of laws intended to promote the life and dignity of India's female population.

Indian governments have attempted to combat this problem in many ways. For example, the 2012 World Development Report notes that the southern state Tamil Nadu "introduced 188 all-women police units to cover both rural and urban areas and to focus on crimes against women." Accordingly, "These units increased women's comfort in approaching the police, including making reports of domestic abuse." Furthermore, the Ministry of Women and Child Development oversees Swadhar, "A scheme for women in difficult circumstances." Amended in 2002, the Swadhar program is accessible by women in various situations of distress, including domestic violence, human trafficking, and mental illness. The scheme is designed by the government to be implemented by ancillary organizations, such as "the Social Welfare/Women and Child Welfare Department of State Government, Women's Development Corporations, Urban Local

Bodies, reputed Public/Private Trust or Voluntary Organizations who are willing to take up the responsibility of rehabilitating such women."[2] Given the massive bureaucracy implicit in this scheme, it is clear that the effectiveness of Swadhar subsidiaries depends largely on the resources available to them, in addition to the managerial integrity of those overseeing the initiative.

Another example of government efforts to combat systemic undervaluing of female life is Apni Beti Apna Dhan, which began in the Northern state of Haryana in 1994. Apni Beti Apna Dhan, which translates to "our daughters, our wealth," is a conditional cash transfer program designed to combat the distorted sex ratio and child marriage by incentivizing families to raise healthy daughters and to keep them in school. Fifteen days after mothers give birth to girls, they receive five hundred rupees to support post-natal care. The government also invests in a long-term savings bond in the girl's name, which becomes available to her upon her eighteenth birthday, as long as she has been educated and remains unmarried.

Because the first cohort of girls covered by this scheme turned eighteen in 2012, the International Center for Research on Women is currently engaged in interview-based efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the Apni Beti Apna Dhan program. Ongoing research has revealed that the program had a positive impact in terms of girls receiving vaccinations and staying in school, but the interviews will reveal whether the scheme was able to minimize the occurrence of child marriage.

Apni Beti Apna Dhan is just one example of Indian state governments' efforts to enhance the value of girls' lives through conditional cash transfers. In 2010, the

[2] Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, "Swadhar: A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances," last amended September 25, 2002.

International Institute for Population Sciences – based in Mumbai – prepared a report on fifteen of these programs for the Indian government's Planning Commission in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund. The report's key findings underscored a lack of institutional coordination, monitoring, and support in implementation, making it difficult to gauge whether these programs have actually impacted parents' and communities' behavior in terms of valuing daughters' lives. The success of these programs is largely contingent upon coordination between the health and education departments and local government bodies. Such collaboration is challenging in light of the unwieldy bureaucratic design of these institutions. The report argues that Panchayat Raj institutions (PRIs) are in the best position "to identify the beneficiaries, monitor the progress of implementation and ensure the transfer of funds to the rightful beneficiaries." Furthermore, the report concludes that "though some of the schemes are presently involving PRIs and NGOs to a limited extent, there is a need to formulate clear guidelines for their direct involvement and active participation."[3] Under the Panchayat Raj system of governance – formally established in 1993 with the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act – villages are meant to be self-governing in their efforts to promote social and economic development.

Indian governments have attempted to directly address the imbalance of female participation in the public sphere by instituting quotas that reserve a specific number of seats for women in governing bodies. Passed in 1993, the Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Constitutional Amendment Acts mandate the reservation of one-third of the seats on local governments be reserved for women. The passage of these acts was highly

[3] T.V. Sekher, "Special Financial Incentive Schemes for the Girl Child in India: A Review of Selected Schemes," International Institute for Population Sciences, 2010, 61.

controversial. The challenges faced by advocates of women's reservations reveal the tenacity of entrenched cultural biases against female participation in public life. It is also imperative to note that putting women in positions of power does not necessarily mean that they will make women's rights a legislative priority. However, the 2012 World Development Report notes that increased representation of women in local legislative bodies has led to increased provision of public goods, such as water and sanitation.[4] In the southern state Karnataka, increased female political participation "has made women more visible and efficient, and decreased levels of corruption."[5] However, the participation of women does not ensure institutional prioritization of issues of women's rights and it does not necessarily imply a higher level of government accountability.

Bringing women together in conversation with one another is an important method for building solidarity networks and establishing relationships between Indian women. The Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society focuses on bolstering the dignity of women. Established in 1988, the program is committed to affirmative action pertaining to women's education. It focuses on the empowerment and education of women in rural areas, particularly those of marginalized social and economic backgrounds. As of 2010, the program was operational in ten states. The program's primary strategy is "to mobilize women into village level collectives called 'Sanghams'. These sanghams form the nodal point for all discussion, planning, implementation and evaluation."[6] These collectives

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[4] World Bank, World Development Report, xx.

[5] Neema Kudva, "Engineering Elections: The Experiences of Women in 'Panchati Raj' in Karnataka, India," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16 (2003): 458.

[6] Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society, "About Us," http://apmss.org/about.php#strategy.

have gained popularity as the government has encouraged the formation of self-help groups – localized communities of women focused on decision-making, problem-solving, and advocacy issues.

Domestic Civil Society

The 1975 UN Global Women's Conference in Mexico City formally marked the beginning of transnational efforts to empower girls and ensure the safety and security of women worldwide. At the same time, advocacy in women's rights and protections became a serious priority in India. In 1975, the national Committee on the Status of Women in India published a report titled "Toward Equality," which unequivocally demonstrated a need to address the declining sex-ratio. This was the first time, according to Bijayalaxmi Nanda, "That the issue of the declining sex ratio as an indicator of the status of women was brought into public discourse."[7] In 1978, the Indian health minister banned sex determination tests in government-run hospitals. Since then, Indian governments have enacted a number of laws banning the misuse of prenatal medical technologies. However, as the beginning of this chapter notes, the practice of sex-selective abortion remains a serious problem in India's rural and urban communities.

The women's rights movement in India adopted violence against women as a central focus of advocacy in response to a series of incendiary events in the 1970s and the 1980s. Development professionals, historians, and other researchers have cited these events as central to inciting collective action that has challenged cultural attitudes and

[7] Bijayalaxmi Nanda, "Gender Violence and Legal Frameworks in India: The Story of Sex Selection," in *Understanding Social Inequality: Concerns of Human Rights, Gender and Environment*, (New Delhi: MacMillan India, 2010).

legal norms that perpetuate problematic systems of inequality. In 1979, two hundred women mobilized to march in the streets in response to the murder of Tarvinder Kaur, whose new husband his family burned her to death for bringing an insufficient dowry. On March 8, 1980 – International Women's Day – 1,500 women demonstrated in protest of the Supreme Court's acquittal of two Maharashtra policemen accused of raping a sixteen-year-old girl.

The 1982 gang rape of Bhanwari Devi in Rajasthan garnered national attention largely because her rapists attacked her for her work as an advocate against child marriage. Women's groups galvanized in response to the atrocious treatment afforded to Devi by medical professionals, police, and her community at large. Professor Martha Nussbaum explains, "Because the men were influential community leaders, police refused to register the case until it was too late to perform the necessary medical examination; a lower court in Jaipur acquitted all the accused."[8] Five women's groups, led by an organization called Vishaka, filed a public interest suit against the State of Rajasthan with the Indian Supreme Court, which culminated in the definition of the "Vishaka Guidelines against sexual harassment" in the workplace. While this is considered a victory in terms of recognizing the human rights of women in India, the framing of such guidelines has proven overwhelmingly insufficient in protecting the dignity of women in public life.

In 1987, eighteen-year-old Roop Kanwar burned herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre in accordance with the cultural practice of *sati*, or widow-burning. Witnesses claimed that she participated in the tradition voluntarily, but it later came out that those

[8] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Sex, Laws, and Inequality: What India Can Teach the United States," *Daedalus* 131:1 (2002): 95.

statements were false. Her death yielded a public outcry against the antiquated practice, particularly from members of urban communities. In response, the state of Rajasthan passed the Sati Prevention Act, which was later adopted at the national level.

International Organizations

The networks formed by international civil society actors concerned with gender parity have origins that trace back to the 1970s, when addressing aspects of discrimination against women became a critical policy issue throughout the world. In 1975, the United Nations held its first Global Women's Conference in Mexico City, heralding the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women. International women's rights movements gained strength as they struggled for legal protections and for recognition of social inequalities generated and sustained by a male-dominated public sphere. Since 1975, the UN has convened three conferences on the status of women worldwide to sustain the dialogue that was opened in Mexico City. These conferences have played an important role in bringing women's rights advocates together to collaborate in promoting gender equality at the international level. For example, the North East Network, a women's advocacy organization based in India's northeastern state Guwahati formed in 1995 in anticipation of the most recent UN women's conference in Beijing. Motivated by the opportunity to voice the grievances of Indian women unsatisfied by the government's effort to prevent cultural violence against women, the North East Network and many other organizations connected before the conference. International donors – mostly from Scandinavian countries – played an

important role in coordinating national discussions prior to the Beijing conference.[9] These organizations strengthened the women's rights community in India, despite the distance between regions and disparities in the issues faced by different groups in different areas of India.

The UN conferences centered upon "gender equality" but it is critical to recognize that, within the context of a discussion of human rights, equality refers most basically to opportunity, dignity, and unbiased protection under the law. In order to elevate the status of women and eradicate domestic violence, advocates must undermine the cultural biases that lead people to turn a blind eye in situations of violence. Perpetrators of domestic violence and other gender-based crimes must be held accountable for their actions, but first, women must feel safe and comfortable reporting such offenses. Impacting the intelligence function of the policy process is crucial to catalyzing sustainable cultural change.

Given the numerous examples of Indian authorities' consistent failure to protect women, it is clear that international organizations and domestic civil society actors face many challenges in effectively implementing sustainable social change with respect to issues of systemic gender-based violence in India. Though the previous section of this chapter outlines ways in which Indian governments have approached policy issues pertaining to the safety and security of women, it is clear that extra-governmental efforts are essential to constructing new norms that uphold and enhance the dignity and equality of all Indian citizens.

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[9] Nandini Deo and Duncan McDuie-ra, *Politics of Collective Advocacy in India: Tools and Traps* (Sterling: Kumarian Press, 2011), 33.

In December 2010, the Indian government introduced the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment Bill, which, according to Oxfam India, "Sought to legislate restrictions and introduce stronger penalties for harassment and crimes."[10] As of February 29, 2012, the Bill was pending with the Parliamentary Standing Committee. As with other examples of legislation designed to enhance and preserve the value of female life in India, this law fails to address the underlying biases that undermine the proper enforcement of women's protections. According to Oxfam, "The act, in essence, seeks to create a safe, secure, and enabling workplace environment free from all forms of sexual harassment. But the formulation lacked the necessary robust mechanisms to address the problem, largely due to the lack of input and guidance from civil society."[11] In order to bolster the law's capacity to be applied effectively, Oxfam India is collaborating with the Lawyers Collective, a leading public interest firm dedicated primarily to women's rights and battling domestic violence. Oxfam and the Lawyers Collective hosted three regional consultations – in the North, West, and East – to discuss ways to update the Vishaka Guidelines to be more applicable in situations of workplace harassment as it is actually experienced.

India has seen a surge in anti-violence advocacy in the past several years in correlation with increased, more insightful coverage of incidents of gender-based violence. In 2005, the Indian government passed the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act primarily to empower women to seek justice against violent family members. This represents a critical step in overriding the traditional eminence of

[10] "Oxfam India works to strengthen Workplace Sexual Harassment Bill," February 29, 2012, http://blogs.oxfam.org/en/blog/12-02-29-oxfam-india-works-strengthen-workplace-sexual-harassment-bill.
[11] "Oxfam India works to strengthen Workplace Sexual Harassment Bill."

men within the private, domestic sphere. In turn, women's rights activists have focused on spreading awareness of this law so that women may become advocates of their own safety. Additionally, international human rights organizations like Breakthrough have played an important role in facilitating research, outreach, and training efforts designed to address biases that beget violence against women at their core. Dealing with problematic norms and attitudes that sustain systemic inequalities at the most basic level – rather than addressing symptoms of these underlying issues – is essential to constructing sound, sustainable, and progressive policy that complements Indian development more broadly.

In the 1970s, advocacy in women's rights and protections increased at the domestic level in India and became central to the conversations taking place under the auspices of international institutions concerned with the development of the world's former colonies. Nandini Deo and Duncan McDuie-ra summarize, "The adoption of violence against women as a central issue by Indian feminists in the 1980s at the same time they formed new NGOs and stepped up their transnational activism has had a huge impact on the movement domestically."[12] In India, domestic and international organizations' ability to instigate or foster sustainable social change can vary to a significant degree according to the political norms and social history of the area in which they operate. Region is a key determinant of the kinds of programs that have had an advantage over other kinds of social development initiatives over the course of India's growth since independence in 1947. Chapter 3 will provide a brief history of the Indian voluntary sector, paying particular attention to the limitations faced by development professionals in India's rural communities.

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[12] Deo and McDuie-ra, *Politics of Collective Advocacy*.

CHAPTER 3

The Indian Voluntary Sector

The civil society environment in which NGOs operate in India is relatively volatile compared to other developing nations. The instability of the nonprofit sector in India can be attributed largely to the unwieldy bureaucratic structures that govern the Indian social sector. Indian governments' post-colonial wariness of foreign influence is manifest in the different kinds of restrictions faced by foreign donors. Such regulations vary in purpose and severity according to the level of government by which they are administered, and the nature of these directives often reflects a confluence of salient regional, political, and developmental factors. Given the complex nature of Indian society, the intersections of these factors are often intensely divisive. Therefore, Indian legislators and authoritative bodies have struggled to implement policy that effectively mitigates the clash between traditional practices and balanced progress. Indian authorities – and the journalistic and academic voices who strive to keep them honest – are further inhibited by their own cultural biases, which limit their capacity to effectively eradicate widespread attitudes that breed systemic violence against women.

Indicators of social inequality – including literacy rates, malnutrition, child mortality, and industrialization – substantiate the challenges faced by development professionals in India's rural communities. Furthermore, the historically variable nature

of public attention paid to issues of human development demonstrates the need for international collaboration in addressing the origins of problematic cultural attitudes that breed social inequalities that sustain poverty and inhibit balanced national growth. This chapter will explore the evolution of the Indian voluntary sector in order to examine cases that illustrate some of the tenacious norms that can prevent international organizations from being most impactful in combating violence against women. By examining the formation and respective contributions of certain civil society programs and institutions in different areas of India since independence, this chapter will illuminate some of the different challenges faced by development agencies in low-income communities in different parts of India. When addressing issues of fundamental cultural change with respect to women's basic human rights, it is urgent to focus on areas marked by extreme poverty.

In India, the dynamics of the nonprofit sector reflect the gaps between the rich and poor members of Indian society. Furthermore, the mission statements, projects, and advantages of nonprofits in the North and South reveal the different challenges faced by donors and professionals dedicated to human development in India. Human rights organizations focus on a particular set of issues in rural settings that are distinct from the problems faced by development professionals in India's urban slums. Similarly, strategies to promote women's empowerment in India's more developed southern states vary from those employed by women's rights advocates in northern tribal regions. However, recent incidents – and the international debate they sparked – indicate that violence against women transcends class, community, and culture. In order to support the successful implementation of policy that effectively protects and empowers Indian women, civil

society must play an integral role in constructing and enforcing norms that elevate ideals of equality, nonviolence, and the intrinsic value of human life. These ideals were central to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, and to the Indian independence movement.

India's voluntary sector gained strength during the independence movement. According to Jaipur-based economist Nitya Nanda, "The *ashrams* formed by Gandhi can be considered as the first generation of modern NGOs in India."[1] During this time, activists and workers of the Indian National Congress (INC) – still one of the country's dominant political parties – conducted "rural development activities" as part of, or in concurrence with the independence movement. While these initiatives established an important framework for organized community action in rural areas, it is imperative to note the distinction between the INC and the Indian voluntary sector. The INC is a political party, while the Indian voluntary sector encompasses the individuals, institutions, and nongovernmental organizations that contribute to Indian social development irrespective of political affiliation.

The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was established by the Indian government in 1953 "with the object of promoting social welfare activities and implementing welfare programs for women, children, and the handicapped through voluntary organizations."[2] During the post-independence period in India, the Indian state supported and cooperated with NGOs, believing that the voluntary sector was better equipped to address issues of social development. At the time, these development NGOs

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[1] Nitya Nanda, "The emerging role of NGOs in rural development of India," *Social Change* 30 (2000): 37.

[2] "Central Social Welfare Board," Annual Report, National Informatics Centre, 2003-2004, 49.

focused on financing organizations that centered on "income generating activities among the poor." They also played an active role in training government officials involved in development projects.[3]

Currently, the Planning Commission of the Indian government hosts an NGO partnership system through which voluntary organizations (VOs) and NGOs are invited to register. This online system is meant to link organizations with the government ministries, departments, and other bodies that are most relevant to the organizations' area of work and expertise. This is supposed to streamline the process of requesting and acquiring government funding for work that pertains to, or falls under any of the government's "schemes" to promote human development. Through the bureaucratic portal, one can view a directory of "schemes by target group." The target group categories are: children, community, family, individual, women, others. Many of these programs overlap target groups, demonstrating the interconnectedness between women's empowerment and other aspects of social development.

To this day, nongovernmental organizations play an important role in preparing locally elected representatives to be most effective in implementing state programs intended to help the poor. Professor Neema Kudva explains, "In contrast to government-initiated training programs, NGO-initiated training goes beyond dissemination of information to focus on skill and confidence building, role clarification, and gender

[3] Nitya Nanda, "The emerging role of NGOs in rural development of India," 38.

awareness."[4] Given the challenges Indian governments face in managing human and other important resources, this type of NGO support is critical to maximizing local governments' capacity to address the needs of the communities they represent.

The International Voluntary Sector and its Role in the Indian Context

After independence, the Indian government had permitted the Asia Foundation to establish an office in India to assist NGOs more directly. However, in 1967, the U.S. media revealed that the Asia Foundation received covert funding from the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Asia Foundation's presence in India necessarily ceased. The Indian government subsequently placed intense controls on foreign donations directed to nongovernmental organizations. The severity of such regulations illuminates Indian officials' broader concern regarding foreign influence in developing communities.

In 1976, the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) was passed in order to monitor NGOs receiving international funding. The FCRA was amended in 1985 so that organizations accepting foreign funding are required to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Act was also adjusted to empower the Indian government to ban an NGO from receiving foreign funding if the state considered the organization's activities "non-neutral," which can be identified in part as a response to the rise of increasingly radical political and social movements throughout India. From a policy perspective, "non-neutral" is incredibly problematic language to ascribe to an organization's political activity, given the politics inherently involved in providing resources and services to

[4] Kudva, "Engineering Elections: The Experiences of Women in 'Panchati Raj' in Karnataka, India," 458.

disadvantaged communities living in abject poverty. Local and national leaders want to ensure that international development agencies do not undermine their authority by promoting foreign values in India's disadvantaged communities. Fundamentally, the qualification "non-neutral" gives the government leave to define any organization's activities as objectionable.

In situations where Indian authorities perceive that international actors or human rights activists are undermining the government's influence or control over rural communities, the FCRW can be invoked or amended to suit the desired outcomes of Indian officials. Following similar logic, the Constitution (Eighteenth Amendment) Bill of 1993 "suggests that Parliament may ban any association or body of individuals by law, if they promote, or attempt to promote, disharmony or feeling of enmity, hatred, or ill-will between citizens of India on grounds of religion by words, written material, or by signs or by visible representations."[5] This is particularly problematic in India's southern states, where a large proportion of international funding for nonprofit activity comes from religious organizations.[6] Finally, the amended FCRA eliminated the tax exemption that NGOs previously received for "their income generating activities."[7]

Economist Nitya Nanda notes that India is now seeing increased competition among NGOs, given that government resources are limited, especially in light of the

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[5] Helmut K. Anheier and Lester M. Salamon, *The Nonprofit sector in the Developing World: A Comparative Analysis* (New York: Manchester UP, 1998): 267.

[6] Rita Jalali, "International Funding of NGOs in India: Bringing the State Back In," *Voluntas* 19:2 (2008): 171.

[7] Nitya Nanda, "The emerging role of NGOs in rural development of India," 39.

extensive bureaucratic regulations placed on the voluntary sector. He explains, "The expansion of the state and its institutions brought an array of inefficiencies. Bureaucracy, corruption and policies and programs [are] sometimes hijacked by institutional, political and even kinship interests rather than serving the poor."[8] This competition for resources and funds is highly evident in the burgeoning microfinance industry, which is a critical component to international efforts to promote sustainable human development. Chapter four of this thesis will explore some of the challenges to development that manifest in the context of predatory, highly competitive markets that can be perceived to effectively exploit the world's poor.

Distrust of foreign donors by members of rural communities was epitomized by the 2010 microfinance crisis in Andhra Pradesh. On November 17, 2010, *The New York Times* reported that nearly all borrowers in Andhra Pradesh had stopped repaying their loans, and that local politicians encouraged them to do so, arguing that microfinance institutions (MFIs) sought to exploit the poor.[9] In the midst of the panic, legislators passed a stringent measure on how MFIs could lend money to borrowers and collect payments. Officials simultaneously encouraged borrowers to default on their loans, meaning that "repayments on nearly $2 billion in loans in the state [had] virtually ceased."[10]

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[8] Nitya Nanda, "The emerging role of NGOs in rural development of India," 40.

[9] Lydia Polgreen and Vikas Bajaj, "India Microcredit Faces Collapse from Defaults," *The New York Times*, November 17, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/18/world/asia/18micro.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

[10] *Ibid.*

Reuters blogger Felix Salmon noted "a direct causal relationship between the IPO of SKS Microfinance, which garnered $117 million for another Silicon Valley billionaire, Vinod Khosla, and the collapse of the microfinance industry in SKS's base state of Andhra Pradesh."[11] This curious correlation demonstrates the convoluted nature of commercial microlending. As the microlending industry has grown, there are more lenders than borrows. Given that most borrowers lacked financial management skills, many took out loans to pay off other loans, ultimately reaching insurmountable levels of debt. In sum, over two hundred borrows in Andhra Pradesh committed suicide at the end of 2010. The tragic sequence of events in Andhra Pradesh fundamentally illustrated the competitive nature of the microcredit industry, particularly given the manipulative approach used by local leaders and banks.

Nitya Nanda concludes, "Networking among NGOs should also be promoted to reduce service duplication as well as to allow NGOs to share resources and knowledge which will make them collectively more effective."[12] This is one area in which international donors, NGOs, and researchers can be particularly helpful. International groups tend to be better positioned – in terms of resources and perspective – to aggregate organizations by their focus areas and past projects in order to evaluate comparative and competitive advantage of different programs in different regions. Nanda adds, "State funding of NGOs are (sic) usually project-based and do not cover overhead costs providing them little scope for institution building." Accordingly, international

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[11] Felix Salmon, "The Lessons of Andhra Pradesh," *Reuters*, November 18, 2010, http://blogs.reuters.com/felix-salmon/2010/11/18/the-lessons-of-andhra-pradesh/.
[12] Nitya Nanda, "The emerging role of NGOs in rural development of India," 43.

development agencies and other stakeholders may be most effective in channeling funds toward this type of institutional support.

International donors and organizations can influence women's safety and security in India in several ways. Indicators of a successful organization in this context begin with the organization's ability to expand and consequently leverage its network in order for its message to reach the most people. An organization's network is also relevant to its ability to garner the funds it needs to carry out its mission. Furthermore, expanding an organization's network promotes grassroots ownership of the problem at hand and, in best-case scenarios, incites collective movement toward building solutions to these issues of social development. Finally, the strength and breadth of an organization's network can impact the organization's legitimacy and therefore its effectiveness in accomplishing its goals. The following three chapters will highlight some of the different programs that domestic and international NGOs have implemented to combat domestic violence and elevate the status of women in India.

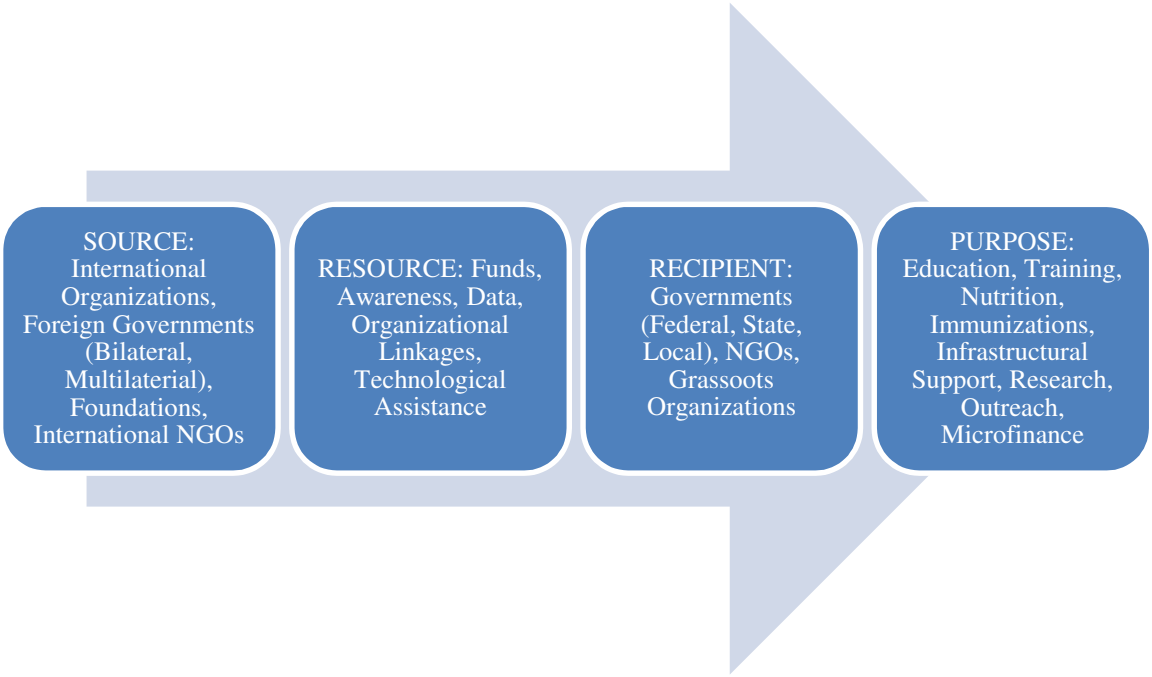
CHAPTER 4

Finance

There are numerous ways that members of the international development community – public and private – can invest in women's empowerment in India. Sources of international aid include foreign governments, inter-governmental international organizations, foundations, and international nonprofits. Foreign governments can fund international organizations – such as UN Women – that focus on development through research, policy analysis, and the establishment of localized programs involving domestic agencies. Foreign governments and these international organizations can also provide bilateral or multilateral aid directly to the Indian government at the national, state, and local levels. Furthermore, foreign governments, international organizations, and other donors can channel funds to domestic NGOs to support their work in the broadest sense, or they can provide funding for specific programs designed to promote the safety and security of women in specific, targeted ways.

Because governments, development agencies, and human rights activists approach women's rights and protections from several angles at different levels of the policymaking process, there is no definitive recipe for channeling international funds in the most effective way. The graphic below outlines the dimensions of international finance with respect to Indian social development. This chapter will consider a few of the

ways in which international donors can strategically channel funds in order to promote the empowerment of women in India.



Donating to NGOs

First, international donors can impact women's empowerment in India by donating directly to organizations that have a legacy of supporting sustainable community development at the grassroots level. These organizations can be international or domestic, and can focus broadly on development or on specific aspects of growth such as those outlined in the UN's Millennium Declaration. The Global Fund for Women is an excellent example of an international organization that promotes women's rights "by increasing the resources for and investing in women-led organizations and women's collective leadership for change."[1] By focusing on high-impact, rights-based, sustainable grassroots efforts to improve the status of women in developing countries, the Global

[1] "Mission and History," Global Fund for Women, 2012, http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/who-we-are/our-mission.

Fund for Women spotlights effective models for social change. Founded in 1987, the Global Fund for Women has granted over $100 million to over 4,400 women's groups in 172 countries around the world.

Similarly, the Global Fund for Children identifies global grassroots organizations dedicated to giving vulnerable children the opportunity to thrive in their communities. By investing in local groups that have demonstrated "local leadership, community and youth involvement, creativity, and sustainability," the Global Fund for Children enhances the groups' capacities to advance the human rights of children.[2] Since 1997, the Global Fund for Children has provided $25.6 million to over 500 grassroots organizations in 78 countries.

Providing funds to international NGOs dedicated to eradicating "vicious cycle" inequalities that rise from and sustain poverty can have interactive effects. For example, 10x10's *Girl Rising* documentary demonstrates that raising awareness about social development can increase funding, allowing for the cycle of fundraising and information propagation to continue. *Girl Rising* spotlights nine girls in nine different countries, weaving together parallel narratives in order to demonstrate the profound impact of ensuring girls' right to education in developing nations. Directed by Academy Award nominee and narrated by nine A-list celebrities including Meryl Streep and Liam Neeson, *Girl Rising* underscores the value of transnational solidarity efforts in promoting the human rights of women in all parts of the world.

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[2] "Our Approach," The Global Fund for Children, 2012, https://www.globalfundforchildren.org/what-we-do/our-approach/.

Research and Outreach

One specific way international organizations can channel funds toward critical social change with respect to women's security in India is to provide backing for large-scale surveys of rural or otherwise disadvantaged communities. With the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals looming, it stands clear that incisive data collection is a crucial preliminary step towards cultivating sustainable policy solutions to violence against women in India. International organizations have the resources to build and sustain broad, transnational networks of women's rights advocates and other social actors dedicated to advancing critical development in low-income areas of the world. Chapter 5 will explore the integral value of such networks in greater detail, and section six will explain why up-to-date information is important to the process of gauging potential policy solutions to critical issues of poverty and human rights in India.

Current data on the state of human development (specifically with respect to the various indicators of poverty used by the UN to evaluate comparative levels of development across regions) is especially important to policymakers and donors interested in impacting efforts to eliminate violence against women in India. There are many factors to be accounted for in considering opportunities to impact women's safety and security in India, largely because women's empowerment is such a complex political, social, and economic objective. Also, the state of a community's social development can be particularly volatile in places where there is a scarcity of basic resources combined with a cultural propensity to conserve problematic norms and rituals, such as corruption and reflexive distrust of outsiders.

Distrust of perceived foreign influence is a central obstacle to international donors' potential impact in supporting social development in rural communities in India. The 2010 microfinance crisis in Andhra Pradesh exacerbated fears that international donors are fundamentally manipulative in their efforts to empower India's rural poor.

Microfinance

Ideally, microfinance is designed to reduce poverty by empowering economically disadvantaged communities to become the stewards of their own economic development. One exemplary international microfinance organization is Kiva, which is a nonprofit that focuses on "leveraging the internet and a worldwide network of microfinance institutions," allowing individuals to lend "as little as $25 to help create opportunity around the world."[3] Since its founding in 2005, Kiva has provided $426,577,275 in loans to borrowers in 67 countries, and boasts a 99.01 percent repayment rate. Kiva's partnerships with local microfinance institutions around the world demonstrate how domestic organizations – and the people they serve – can benefit immensely from resources provided by international donors.

In a February 2013 blog entry, Kiva Fellow Stasi Baranoff describes a visit to a group of women who were making their final payments to WSDS-Initiate, a nonprofit organization based in the eastern state Manipur. Outside of Churachandpur, Manipur, Baranoff interviewed one woman named Thangkhawm who, along with her lending group, epitomizes success in the microfinance industry. First, Thangkhawm started a business of buying basic goods at wholesale prices and then selling them to her community. She has built upon her success by starting three more businesses based on

[3] "About Us," Kiva, 2013, http://www.kiva.org/about.

the essential needs of her community. In providing for her family of ten and by bringing important resources to her community, Thangkhawm serves as an example of a community leader, demonstrating the compound impact of innovative, entrepreneurial ventures. This is particularly meaningful given that women-headed households are generally poorer than male-headed households.[4] Furthermore, Thangkhawm and the other four women in her borrowing group have done well enough in their own endeavors – backed by Kiva loans – that they have begun lending to a sixth woman, charging her 5 percent interest. Fundamentally, this is an example of grassroots social development made possible by international funding. Their story also demonstrates the inherent social networking aspect of the group-lending model. Section five will discuss the importance of social networks in undermining antiquated norms that promote the subordination of women in India.

Baranoff underscores the short attention span of members of the international development community with respect to the tools and approaches that may be implemented to spur sustainable development in low-income communities around the world. She observes, "People seem quick to toss aside one strategy to adopt the newest, afraid that their existing methods will be criticized for doing more harm than good."[5] This concern is particularly salient to the ongoing debate on microcredit, especially in light of the events that took place in Andhra Pradesh. It has taken the past two years for the

[4] Neera Burra, *Microcredit, Poverty, and Empowerment: Linking the Triad* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005): 328.

[5] Stasi Baranoff, "The Microfinance Debate in India: Three Women Borrowers Who Put it in Perspective," Kiva, February 27, 2013, http://fellowsblog.kiva.org/fellowsblog/2013/02/27/the-microfinance-debate-in-india-three-women-borrowers-who-put-it-in-perspective.

microfinance industry in India to recover. Baranoff comments, “With the recent report that SKS Microfinance’s stock is finally making a profit, maybe it’s a sign that government regulations are bringing more confidence into the industry again.”[6]

Over the past several years, journalists, scholars, and development professionals have debated the merit of microfinance for profit. Those who support the commercialization of microfinance argue that "profit-driven companies bring discipline and much-needed capital" that strengthens the growth of the microfinance industry and bolsters the reputation of the micro-lending model.[7] However, such expansion can undermine the fundamental premise of international financial assistance. Given that smaller, individual loans are more costly to administer, the commercialization of the micro-lending industry has led to a breakdown of – or a shift away from – the traditional group-lending model. Instead, Women's World Banking President Mary Ellen Iskenderian observes that international lenders may be more inclined to grant larger loans to small businesses in developing communities. This can lead to a breakdown in the traditional group-lending model, impacting female borrowers in a negative way. Iskenderian argues that it is essential that MFIs continue to specifically target women in order to avoid a decrease in female borrowers.

One way in which the microfinance industry could be augmented to benefit communities in a more holistic way is for organizations to offer supplementary services. Wall Street Journal blogger Paul Beckett analyzes the imperative of women's economic

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[6] Baranoff, “The Microfinance Debate in India: Three Women Borrowers Who Put it in Perspective.”

[7] Paul Beckett, “Does Microfinance for Profit Hurt Women?” *The Wall Street Journal India*, June 17, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2011/06/17/does-microfinance-for-profit-hurt-women/.

empowerment, illustrating why it is a critical step in Indian development overall. Beckett writes, "Women tend to be the financial gatekeepers of their households and the family saver so they are most likely to handle savings programs, insurance policies, and pensions – areas where some microfinance firms are trying to expand their business." Designing such programs to appeal to women could help ameliorate some of the issues associated with the commercialization of microfinance. Basix is one domestic Indian organization that offers "comprehensive livelihood promotion services" beyond microlending activity. Basix details its services in terms of a "Livelihood Triad" comprised of financial inclusion services, agricultural/business development services, and institutional development services.[8] Established in 1996, Basix works in seventeen states and has impacted over 3.5 million clients mainly in rural areas. The Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, in partnership with the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation and the Ford Foundation, recognized Basix in 2009 for its social performance. In 2010, during the panic in Andhra Pradesh, Basix chairman Vijay Mahajan admitted that "many lenders grew too fast and lent too aggressively. Investments by private equity firms and the prospect of a stock market listing drove firms to increase lending as fast as they could."[9] His perspective illuminates the inherent imbalance between the commercialization of microlending and the intent to empower the poor through microfinance.

Clearly the benefits of microfinance do not come without challenges. Individuals and organizations that aim to support international development through financial

[8] "Our Services," Basix, http://www.basixindia.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=61.

[9] Polgreen and Bajaj, "India Microcredit Faces Collapse from Defaults."

donations must consider micro-lending in light of its purpose rather than its potential to generate surplus gains. In 2010, Reuters blogger Felix Salmon claimed, "Andhra Pradesh is simply the latest and largest proof that microfinance as an industry is at the mercy of regulators and politicians, who are more likely to get things wrong than they are to get things right."[10] In light of the tragedy in Andhra Pradesh, the Smart Campaign – "a global campaign committed to embedding client protection practices into the institutional culture and operations of the microfinance industry" – has designed a set of seven core principles to maximize the holistic impact of microlending endeavors.[11] The client protection principles are: appropriate product design and delivery, prevention of over-indebtedness, transparency, responsible pricing, fair and respectful treatment of clients, privacy of client data, and mechanisms for complaint resolution. One way international donors can support the growth of microfinance is to fund the expansion and adoption of the client protection principles outlined by the Smart Campaign. The Smart Campaign is an initiative designed by the Center for Financial Inclusion at Accion and the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, which further illustrates the role international organizations play in establishing crucial linkages between members of the development community throughout India. These linkages can facilitate the processes of sharing information, promoting awareness, and maximizing outreach efforts designed to promote grassroots stewardship of developmental efforts.

While it is true that microfinance is not a developmental panacea, it remains an important tool for channeling funds to underserved communities in low-income areas of

[10] Salmon, "The Lessons of Andhra Pradesh."

[11] "About the Campaign," The Smart Campaign,2010 http://www.smartcampaign.org/about-the-campaign.

the world. In order for international lenders to be most impactful in addressing social inequalities that beget violence against women in India, they ought to support programs that focus on social performance rather than economic outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

Social Networking

Social networking is integral to human rights advocacy, and – more specifically – to women's empowerment. When it comes to lobbying for policy pertaining to women's rights, pressures by solidarity networks of organized, informed activists can be essential to the effective authorization of proposed legislation. Critical mass of public opinion can be crucial to passing socially progressive legislation. This is particularly relevant to legal issues related to challenging or ambiguous issues related to gender or sexuality, given the traditionally *private* nature of such topics. Chapter 5 will focus on two [exemplary] international human rights organizations that have successfully implemented social networking technologies to combat oppressive social, political, and economic inequalities.

Social networking is a crucial element of global human rights advocacy because it enables change agents to build, chart, and expand international consensus on important issues that require redress in developing and industrialized nations alone. While well-targeted funding is the most basic way international actors can support efforts to protect and empower women, building solidarity networks is an important step in catalyzing sustainable progress. Larger development institutions such as the UN, USAID, and the

World Bank – in partnership with NGOs and other civil society actors – can provide critical resources that influence the scale on which programs or initiatives may occur. Relationships between individuals, organizations, and institutions are made evident through public interactions on sites such as Twitter and Facebook, and in scholarly articles and other publications.

Modern social networking technologies underscore the interconnectedness individuals and groups can establish over the Internet. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter allow organizations to publicize important and enlightening information about their work, further allowing civil society groups and human rights advocates to evaluate and emulate strategies that have been successfully implemented in other contexts. In creating a digital view into organizations' daily activities, social networking devices can lend a perceived aspect of transparency, which may be attractive to potential donors or volunteers. This chapter will focus on the social networking successes of two international human rights organizations: Breakthrough and the Pixel Project.

Breakthrough and the Pixel Project are primary examples of human rights organizations that have successfully utilized new technology to proliferate important messages of social change. These organizations strategically employ multimedia technology in order to open an international conversation on violence against women, an issue that transcends culture and plagues societies worldwide. Uniting the voices of global human rights advocates helps to build consensus regarding underlying currents of gender discrimination worldwide, which attests to the need for transnational collaboration in overcoming entrenched cultural biases against women.

Breakthrough

Indian-American human rights activist Mallika Dutt founded Breakthrough in 2000 with the release of *Mann ke Manjeeré*: An Album of Women's Dreams, which highlighted the social inequalities faced by women in India. Since then, Breakthrough has cultivated a reputation for its unique approach to cultural entrepreneurship, characterized by the organization's creative implementation of multimedia to encourage social change. In 2008, Breakthrough launched Bell Bajao, an award-winning international campaign that promotes awareness on domestic violence policy and social responsibility.

Breakthrough epitomizes social innovation in its efforts to transform people's perceptions of human rights at a basic human level. Breakthrough's mission implores individuals to become agents of social change, centering on the notion that "human rights start with you."[1] According to the organization's 2010 annual report, "Human rights are universal and fundamental. More than just a matter of oppression in far-off lands, they are intrinsic to the way we treat one another in our communities, in our families, and in our homes."[2] With bases in the United States and India, Breakthrough has launched several international campaigns intended to spread awareness and incite people to become activists in their own lives. Breakthrough's advocacy hinges on the transformation of cultural attitudes by teaching individuals to challenge social norms that reflect a fundamental disregard for human dignity.

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[1] Breakthrough, 2010 Annual Report, 3.

[2] *Ibid*, 6.

Breakthrough's award-winning campaign *Bell Bajao* centers on an inclusive approach to human rights advocacy by specifically calling upon boys and men to become agents of social change within their communities. Literally meaning "ring the bell," *Bell Bajao* consists of a series of public service announcements depicting conventional scenes of Indian residential life in which a spousal argument takes place behind closed doors. The disputes portrayed in the *Bell Bajao* PSAs reflect the oppressive spousal dynamics that beget domestic violence, illustrating women's powerlessness and demonstrating the speed with which simple altercations can evolve into situations of violence. The *Bell Bajao* campaign is based on the premise that bystanders can interrupt moments of domestic violence by simply ringing the doorbell, diffusing the situation by forcing the man to pause and answer the door. By galvanizing boys and men to interrupt their neighbors in moments of conflict, *Bell Bajao* undermines the power of abusive husbands, who are the preeminent authorities within a household. According to Breakthrough founder Mallika Dutt, *Bell Bajao* has reached more than 130 million people in India, correlating with an 11.5 percent increase in awareness of India's Protection of Women Against Domestic Violence Act, which was passed in 2005.[3]

Bell Bajao stands out in that it directly challenges the traditionally-revered boundary between public and private life in India. One participant in the Breakthrough Rights Advocates program explains, "Most people believe that they should not interfere

[3] Mallika Dutt, "Defending Children's Rights Means Defending Their Mothers, Too," *The Huffington Post*, November 14, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mallika-dutt/defending-childrens-rights-means-defending-their-mothers-too_b_2130379.html.

in domestic matters of other people."[4] After his training with Breakthrough, he became an agent of social change by teaching his cousins to take action against their abusive father.

At the 2012 annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative, Mallika Dutt explained, "Our most recent campaign, Bell Bajao – or *"ring the bell"* – calls on men and boys to become partners in breaking the cycle of violence against women."[5] By encouraging people to interrupt neighbors in moments of conflict, Bell Bajao undermines the notion that the husband is the preeminent authority within a household. For example, Breakthrough highlights the story of a group of teenagers in a small town in Karnataka that decided to watch television in their neighbor's home every night to keep him from beating his wife.[6] One representative of the Breakthrough Rights program explains, "After the Bell Bajao campaign we became more aware of abuse in our everyday lives."[7] Using social media and community outreach methods, Bell Bajao has reached 130 million people in India. The success of the Bell Bajao campaign is a testament to the evocative power of symbols, imagery, and stories to which many Indian men, women, and children can relate. In constructing compelling minute-long narratives – some of which are based on true stories – Breakthrough has reframed human rights in a visceral, undeniable, and accessible way.

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[4] LetsBreakthrough, "Bell Bajao: About the campaign," August 1, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbZi_hXGQi8.

[5] LetsBreakthrough, "What is Bell Bajao (Ring the Bell?)" September 6, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etSUUw_gphw.

[6] LetsBreakthrough, "Bell Bajao: About the campaign."

[7] *Ibid.*

Bell Bajao has garnered international notoriety for its innovative approach to combating violence against women. By targeting men and boys, Bell Bajao nurtures human rights advocacy at the grassroots level. The public service announcements have been replicated by human rights groups in China, Pakistan, and Vietnam. The movement to “ring the bell” has taken root in the United States, Denmark, Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Many journalists, bloggers, and human rights organizations have cited the program as an exemplary social media campaign, highlighting the straight-forward, accessible nature of its message as critical to its success.

Through its various programs in India and in the United States, Breakthrough has established crucial partnerships with other groups – schools, organizations, secular and religious – that have enabled Breakthrough's mission to take root in disparate communities. In the Bell Bajao Campaign and the Breakthrough Rights Advocates program, Breakthrough's innovative approach to cultural innovation hinges on educating teams of advocates and empowering them to go forth and spread information on basic human rights, health, and equality. By creating a social network of human rights activists – both in terms of individual representatives and the numerous partnerships the organization has established – Breakthrough has been able to spread its mission of fundamental social change in a profound and tenacious way. Breakthrough has also been able to leverage its success and bring clout to its cause by working with famed Bollywood actor Boman Irani. Irani was featured in a fifteen second clip in which he points to the camera and says, “If ever you hear sounds of domestic violence in the neighborhood, here’s what you should do: you go up to their house, and ring the bell so

that he knows you know."[8] Finally, Breakthrough has allied with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who was named Breakthrough's first Global Champion. In aligning with his UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign as its first global partner, Breakthrough has further enhanced its image as a leader in cultural innovation within the international human rights community.

Furthermore, Breakthrough's Rights Advocates program trains young people to act as agents of change within their communities. Throughout India, Rights Advocates have spread information on critical human rights issues such as women's rights and HIV/AIDS, reaching over 75,000 people. Partnered with over eighty schools, foundations, and organizations dedicated to social development, Breakthrough's Rights Advocates Program works "within culture to change culture."[9] To do so, they use creative methods of communication to explore human rights issues in accessible ways. For example, "These change agents often use local or traditional forms of expressions – puppetry, Yakshagana folk theater – as a means of introducing provocative new ideas."[10] In several cases, educating girls about gender, reproductive health, hygiene, and sexual harassment compelled girls to report sexual violence they had suffered at the hands of their teachers, for which their teachers ultimately faced disciplinary action. These stories attest to the tremendous power in effective advocacy efforts, especially in targeting youth to reprogram people's perspectives on the universality of human dignity. Training and

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[8] LetsBreakthrough, "Bell Bajao- Boman Irani's Call to Action," January 9, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XmAw8kA5SJg.

[9] Breakthrough, 2010 Annual Report, 15.

[10] *Ibid.*

education programs – particularly those that emphasize youth empowerment – are crucial to eliminating the systemic inequalities faced by women in low-income communities.

Breakthrough's success attests to international organizations' ability to impact deleterious cultural norms through training programs and the propagation of critical information regarding human rights, which are themes that will be explored in Chapter 6.

The Pixel Project

Similar to – and in partnership with – Breakthrough, the Pixel Project uses social media to underscore the ubiquity of violence against women worldwide, and to spread awareness regarding human rights issues in a widely-accessible way. The Pixel Project is a "first step organization," challenging global citizens to combat violence against women in their own communities. The Pixel Project's mission is fourfold: to raise awareness, funds, and volunteer power; to involve men and boys in the struggle against gender-based violence; to generate conversation by eliminating taboos and creating safe online spaces in which to discuss violence against women; and to challenge expectations and inspire activism by using social media to spread information in creative and relevant ways.

The Pixel Project uses Twitter to share critical resources with victims of domestic violence around the world. Because the Pixel Project's team is spread across four continents, the organization provides a constant stream of information on violence against women, including helplines for women to call, articles on current events, and ways in which people can prevent violence in their own communities. Through its outreach and advocacy efforts, the Pixel Project demonstrates the value of Twitter as a platform from which to build transnational relationships between individuals and organizations

committed to addressing the root causes of violence against women. The first step in overcoming cultural attitudes that beget and excuse abusive behavior is building consensus and spreading awareness on the basic human rights and dignity of all people.

Like Breakthrough, the Pixel Project has established partnerships with other organizations and campaigns dedicated to ending violence against women. The organization's awareness-raising partners include UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's Say NO – UniTe to End Violence Against Women campaign with which Breakthrough is also affiliated. The Pixel Project also lists Thomson Reuter Foundation/Trustlaw Women – the organization that published the survey demonstrating the low quality of life for women Indian women – and the Center for Social Research in India among its partners. The Pixel Project spreads crucial information and connecting people with important information, empowering women to become their own advocates in situations of violence.

The December 2012 Delhi gang rape incident generated a long-overdue discussion on prevailing attitudes on violence against women. The episode, and the extra-legal conversations it sparked, brought India under international scrutiny for its authorities' remarkable, repeated failures to protect women who venture outside their homes. As with the Arab Spring, countless individuals took advantage of web-based social media platforms to express their opinions on the event. For example, the World Bank held a contest for which over 1,200 people between the ages of 18 and 25 submitted answers to the question: "What will it take to end gender-based violence in South Asia?" Limited to 140 characters, entrants submitted responses in nine different languages by text message, Twitter, and email. One eighteen-year-old girl from India proposed,

"[People must] shed femininity notions, spread gender sensitive-education (sic), make women fiery and gritty, launch 'Safe Cities' campaigns."[11] This contest supports the claim that social media is a valuable tool that international development professionals can use to build solidarity networks and to empower young people to speak out in favor of human rights.

Breakthrough and the Pixel Project, having already established their online advocacy presence prior to the crisis, drove home their missions for human rights in the context of this incident, further demonstrating the power of social media technology. By constructing a personal narrative of human rights advocacy, these organizations appeal to societies en masse to reframe the way they consider critical issues of social inequality. In connecting the ongoing fight against cultural biases that beget violence against women to the contemporary legal battle being fought in India, these and other organizations like the World Bank capitalized on the opportunity to impact public opinion in an enduring way.

In sum, social media is a highly cost-effective means of building relationships amongst human rights advocates worldwide. These relationships are critical in that engagement with a broader network enables organizations to access funds and other important resources that can contribute to positive outcomes. Furthermore, interfacing and connecting with global leaders can bring clout to an organization, giving it greater power through visibility and perceived legitimacy. Leveraging the global human rights network in order to highlight common themes of social injustice brings these critical

[11] World Bank, "Young Voices Send a Message Against Gender-Based Violence," April 9, 2013, http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/04/09/young-voices-send-message-against-gender-based-violence.

issues to the forefront, affording activists greater space to voice their grievances and demands.

Section six will explore some of the reasons why spreading information on human rights – and promoting universal access to education – is essential to eradicating poverty and advancing human development around the world.

CHAPTER 6

Training, Education, and Information Propagation

The Pixel Project and Breakthrough's Bell Bajao campaign both illustrate the ways in which international actors can impact cultural attitudes on violence against women through social networking and through information propagation. With respect to these two organizations, "social networking" refers more to the broader connections being made between and amongst human rights advocates worldwide. This process is almost entirely enabled by the communicative platforms offered by social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Paying particular attention to the Bell Bajao's significant role in impacting cultural attitudes in India, "information propagation" pertains more directly to inter-human, educational programs intended to teach students and communities throughout India about basic human rights. In this sense, training, education, and information propagation are natural functions of effective human rights' organizations efforts to combat cyclical violence against women. Training and education efforts intended to empower women center on teaching them how to mobilize, or how to become more active participants in public life.

Training

Chapter 3 discussed some of the ways in which NGOs can play a central role in providing training to locally elected officials to help them maximize their impact in designing and executing social development programs. Similarly, the training Breakthrough provides to members of its Rights Advocates program helps participants essentially reprogram attitudes regarding women's rights and domestic violence. One student described the training as "mind blowing," referring to the abuse statistics and authorities' failures to protect women. Training is imperative, especially in the context of women's advocacy groups and social networks, because empowering women with the resources to care for themselves and their children can have a catalytic effect in the sense that, under ideal circumstances, women will share their skills and knowledge with their communities. NGOs have played a central role in training government officials involved in projects pertaining to social development since the post-independence period. By conducting workshops to provide members of rural communities with skills and confidence training, NGOs promote sustainable development by informing the policy process at the most basic level.

In addition to its exemplary use of social media and technology, Breakthrough stands out in its approach to training individuals to become agents of change in their own homes and communities. In an informational video, one Breakthrough Rights Advocate tells the story of Ragini, a widow who is HIV positive. Upon the death of her husband, she was thrown out of her house. The representative from Breakthrough explains that he informed Ragini of her rights, so she was able to secure her property. This story supports

one important theme of this thesis, which is that raising awareness and providing women with information at the grassroots level is essential to catalyzing sustainable social change. Awareness can be generated through training, education, and information propagation, and – as Chapter 5 indicated – international human rights groups are instrumental in building social networks through which important data can be collected and shared.

Professor Kanchan Mathur summarizes prevailing attitudes on women's empowerment. Mathur concludes, "Women can become empowered only if they become aware of their subordination by gender, class, caste, and organize themselves into strong collectives to tackle the multiple sources of their exploitation and oppression."[1] Accordingly, NGOs and other agencies promoting development programs – particularly those dealing with violence against women – pursue the strategic foci of "training and identifying change agents or catalysts who in turn organize poor women into collectives at the village level."[2] The Women's Development Program of Rajasthan is an exemplary model of a "social empowerment approach" because it exemplifies a productive relationship between civil society and the local government. In particular, it demonstrates the power of sheer numbers in the process of advocating and effecting policy change and legal rectitude.

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[1] Kanchan Mathur, "Emerging Possibilities and Alternatives," *Countering Gender Violence: Initiatives Towards Collective Action in Rajasthan* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 351.

[2] *Ibid.*

The prevalence of women's collectives – as seen in rural development and applied efforts to empower women in decision-making processes in other areas of India – attests to the inherent strength and value in women advocating for themselves. These processes of community-based deliberation verify the need to bring domestic violence issues – and other issues pertaining to gender inequality – out of the untouchable realm of private, family life and into the public sphere. Empowering individual women to advocate for themselves can be more effective in group-based settings, where women are more likely to identify and connect with others who have faced similar situations of violence and oppression. It is imperative to discuss areas of oppression and potential ways to undermine cultural norms and reform attitudes regarding the marginal status from which women are entering public decision-making bodies. In this sense, social networking and training workshops facilitated by development agencies can function as a means toward the end of combatting violence against women. Based on her acute study of social development in Rajasthan, Mather summarizes, "It is fairly obvious that the government only responds to broad social consensus."[3] However, it is clear that even when women's rights advocates have built critical mass in consensus regarding women's empowerment, Indian governments may still be reticent in adopting policy measures and implementing sufficient incentives to promote social change.

Education

Education is a central component of women's empowerment in India. Numerous development efforts around the world stem from the basic premise that universal

[3] Kanchan Mathur, "Emerging Possibilities and Alternatives," 257.

education is essential to social development. The *Girl Rising* documentary mentioned in Chapter 4 is one example of an international organization's effort to spread awareness of – and raise funds to support – efforts to promote the education of girls in low-income regions of the world.

The HUNGaMA survey, which will be explored in the following section of this chapter, demonstrated that mothers' education levels correlate with child malnutrition in rural areas. Women's education is a critical first step in maximizing children's opportunities to grow, participate in public life, and contribute to collective efforts to overcome poverty. Empirically, mothers with higher levels of education take better care of themselves, their children, and their families than women who are deprived of the opportunity to attend primary and secondary schooling. Research has demonstrated that higher levels of female illiteracy correlate with child malnutrition. Furthermore, the education-related contingencies in the conditional cash transfer programs mentioned in Chapter 2 attest to the centrality of education in women's empowerment and in combatting cultural biases against girls.

NIRMAN, an education- and arts-based nonprofit in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, is one organization that illustrates the value of building international relationships to contribute to the empowerment of students and their families in North India. With two campuses – one urban and one rural – NIRMAN is distinctively structured to provide crucial insight into the functioning of a progressive domestic NGO. By focusing on post-colonial education through civic engagement, community-building, and social consciousness, NIRMAN deconstructs traditional norms in order to promote sustainable

development. NIRMAN emphasizes the critical value of education by involving families in community events and by instilling children with a sense of personal pride and investment in their schooling.

In addition to operating two schools, NIRMAN provides entrepreneurial training and support to women in the community. The organization's expansive library is open to the public, and NIRMAN often hosts concerts and workshops on health and other important issues for community members to attend. Though progressive in terms of its values and praxis, NIRMAN is also pragmatic about "playing by the rules" in terms of abiding by local custom. For example, in anticipation of a construction project that would give the school more classrooms, thereby giving the students more space in which to learn, one of the organization's managers was given a "bribery budget" to help acquire the necessary permits to break ground on the new study space.

Furthermore, NIRMAN exemplifies the connective function civil society groups can serve in bringing international funds to development efforts in low-income communities. Like other organizations that have been examined in this thesis, NIRMAN has effectively constructed a transnational network of individuals who have participated in – or contributed to – the NIRMAN community in some way. By facilitating relationships between international volunteers and the students and their families, NIRMAN manifests the ideal of global civil society. The ability to successfully construct, sustain, and build out from international networks is an important indicator of an organization's capacity to convey its mission to donors in order to pursue long term projects.

Information Propagation

In many cases, international organizations are uniquely positioned to collect, publish, and circulate important data on poverty and indicators of human development. Unlike domestic organizations that tend to focus on addressing the basic needs of underserved communities, international NGOs have access to more resources that enable them to conduct research on social development at the national or international level. Surveys that examine indicators of poverty such as child malnutrition, maternal health, and illiteracy are necessary in order for development professionals to compare strategies, evaluate programs, plan for future projects, and maximize the impact of initiatives designed to empower women in low-income communities at the grassroots level. Also, it is worth reiterating that raising awareness on issues of women's rights and protections can increase funding. This further demonstrates the value of building transnational solidarity networks, because partnering with well-reputed international organizations can attract vital funding and other necessary resources to grassroots efforts in developing nations.

Organizations like Oxfam and Landesa show that women's property rights are an international development issue. Tackling legal issues of gender injustice in different parts of the world permits these and other organizations to explore the nuances of rural development from different angles. By addressing legal loopholes that undermine women's economic security in different regional contexts, international organizations are able to hone their approaches to development and determine experientially which

strategies may be most effective, comparatively, based on the types of regulations and cultural hurdles faced by different communities.

HUNGaMA is one example of a successful campaign to gather accurate information related to poverty and human development throughout India. Based on the overarching objective of eradicating child malnutrition, the Naandi Foundation first set out to "fill the data gap" on child malnutrition at the district level. One journalist reporting on the HUNGaMA survey noted, "If the solution lies in timely intervention at the district healthcare level and long term focus on gender and agrarian issues, the lack of workable data is a dampener."[4] Prior to the Naandi Foundation's efforts, the most recent data available to development professionals was from the National Family Health Survey of 2005-2006. In order to update the information available on child malnutrition, one thousand researchers trained by the Naandi Foundation interviewed 74,020 mothers and weighed 109,093 children in villages across India.[5]

Maternal health is an area of critical concern to women's empowerment – and social development more broadly – in India. The HUNGaMA survey reveals a dearth of information regarding medical best practices in rural communities. For example, researchers found that a concerning number of women in rural communities do not feed their children breast milk as their first intake. In over half of these cases, women explained that they were following tradition, or the advice of family members. The

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[4] Sangeetha Devi Dundoo, "Sit Up and Notice," *The Hindu,* January 20, 2011, http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/sit-up-and-notice/article1103772.ece.

[5] HUNGaMA, "The HUNGaMA Survey Report," 2011, 2.

HUNGaMA survey is representative of a successful initiative that contributes to the advancement of human rights causes in India because it illustrates the misinformation being passed down to women in rural communities that lack access to – or fail to seek – modern medical care before, during, and after childbirth.

The survey also revealed the necessity of empowering women within their own households. While a majority of mothers (68.1 percent) reported having "a strong say in decisions regarding their children, only 13.7 percent reported that they are able to play a similar role in decisions regarding major household purchases.[6] The surveyors also found that an overwhelming majority of mothers who do not feed their children non-cereal foods do so because non-cereal foods are expensive.[7] This connects to the issue of women not having a voice in household decisions beyond the purview of childcare. While groceries may not appear to fall under that category, it is imperative that families prioritize nutrition when allocating resources. The information gathered for the HUNGaMA survey also illustrates the significance of a large network to building consensus on policy issues pertaining to rural healthcare and women's empowerment more broadly.

Because international organizations have access to more financial and technological resources than their domestic partners, they are better positioned to evaluate development programs on a comparative, international scale. For instance, the Global Fund for Women recently commissioned an external evaluation of its strategic grant writing approach to pursuing the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in

[6] *Ibid.* 34.

[7] *Ibid*, 39.

South Asia. The report's key findings attest to the value of transnational solidarity networks in addressing aspects of women's empowerment encompassed by the third MDG. The evaluation also revealed the need to provide guidance, training, and infrastructural support to grantees in order to maximize the impact of international funding. Professor Brooke Ackerly, who compiled the report, explains, "Some grantees need to develop (or further develop) ways of doing their work that enhance the political skills of their beneficiaries, partners, and networks."[8] This is an area in which international organizations can play an instrumental role in training leaders of grassroots organizations to be more effective in executing projects designed to promote social development.

[8] Brooke Ackerly, "Breakthrough evaluation: an External Rights-based Evaluation of Grantmaking for Gender Equality" (report presented to The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and The Global Fund for Women, February 26, 2012).

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

There is an overarching need to redefine the systemic issues of violence within the public sphere. In India, numerous manifestations of violence against women demonstrate cultural biases against women in several ways. Discrimination is revealed differently according to a woman's age, caste, and community, but the social norms that result from generationally-reinforced prejudices are extremely problematic, and limit India's ability to effectively ensure the safety and security of half its population. Traditionally, domestic violence has been viewed as a private matter to be settled within a household. Shifting perceptions of social responsibility – particularly with respect to violence against women – at the individual, familial, and community levels is a critical step in overcoming problems related to the undervaluing of female life in India.

India's new anti-rape legislation only matters if it is enforced. In order for policy pertaining to the safety and security of women to be effective, cultural apathy and sexism must be overcome. Breakthrough has innovated human rights activism by personalizing its mission and by creating solidarity networks of human rights advocates around the world. Both Breakthrough and the Pixel Project demonstrate ways that successful organizations are able to leverage their web-based social media platforms to reach an

expansive global audience, reinforcing their mission to end global violence against women.

By fostering networks of human rights advocates belonging to disparate communities, these organizations successfully illuminate the ubiquity of violence against women while also underscoring the grave, cyclical consequences such violence wreaks on a nation's capacity for social, political, and economic development. Illustrating the pervasive quality of violence against women is a critical step in catalyzing a shift in cultural attitudes towards basic issues of human dignity and social inequality. Such a shift is essential to enhancing a community, region, or country's capacity for sustainable growth. Redefining human rights in accessible terms that appeal to people's sense of communal responsibility personalizes these issues in a profoundly impactful way. Framing the manifold issues of violence against women as violations of women's basic human rights forces the problem to the surface in a visceral, productive way.

This thesis has demonstrated that there are numerous angles from which to approach women's empowerment in India. International organizations and development professionals should support, extend, and strive to emulate the positive outcomes of programs and institutions that are designed to effect social change at the basic, intellectual level. Cultural attitudes that impede progressive policy with respect to the safety, security, and dignity of women in India must be overcome through pervasive grassroots change. International donors should support local groups that approach human rights advocacy by confronting the norms and attitudes that people have used to justify or excuse sex-selective abortion and different manifestations of domestic violence.

The pitfalls that international development professionals, scholars, and volunteers must avoid include giving the perception that they are acting on behalf of malevolent governments. The ejection of the Asia Foundation from India in 1967 and the establishment and continual modifications of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act reflect the precarious post-colonial politics surrounding international organizations' role in Indian development efforts. Furthermore, the 2010 microfinance crisis in Andhra Pradesh exacerbated distrust of foreign donors and their perceived influence in India's low-income communities. In order to most effectively connect with grassroots actors to build advocacy networks and promote women's empowerment, international actors must also avoid giving the impression that they are trying to infuse local development efforts with foreign norms or values.

Although this thesis has emphasized the role of international organizations in effecting sustainable social change, it is imperative to recognize that the real strength of potential efforts to improve the status of women in India lies in domestic grassroots organizations. Sustainable social change must be organic, and women's rights advocates should focus on educating women in low-income communities on their legal rights and protections. Fundamentally, international organizations are most effective in enhancing the status of women in India by providing grassroots organizations with critical resources to which they would not otherwise have access. Building and expanding transnational solidarity networks is key to spreading awareness on global issues of inequality and to raising the funds necessary to combat antiquated norms that perpetuate violence against women in India.

On March 8, 2013 – International Women's Day – Bhanwari Devi, the Rajasthani woman who sought justice after being gang raped outside of Jaipur in 1982, delivered a keynote address to over five thousand women in Mangalore, Karnataka. In her speech, she implored her audience to hold the government accountable in providing for their safety. Devi proclaimed, "Women should fight together for their rights, equality, freedom, and respect."[1] Bhanwari Devi is iconic in the Indian women's rights movement, which is a testimony to the power of grassroots networks mobilizing in response to atrocities committed against women in India. To influence policy change pertaining to the safety and security of women in India, international organizations should support and collaborate with grassroots groups that advocate for social change. In order to eradicate the systemic inequalities that produce violence against women, it is imperative that development professionals frame issues of gender-based violence in terms of women's basic human rights.

[1] "Mangalore: Bhanwari Devi calls upon women to collectively fight for their rights," Daijiworld Media Network, March 8, 2013, http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=166654.

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