



Institute of Social Studies Trust

# SDTT partners' workshop on Domestic Workers

New Delhi, India Habitat Centre, 13 – 14. October 2011



Women from the Gender Resource Centre in Kalyanpuri

## Contents

List of participants.....	3
Agenda.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Summary of presentations	
Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.....	7
SAATH Charitable Trust.....	10
Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union.....	12
Parichiti.....	xx
Institute of Social Studies Trust.....	xx
International Labour Organization.....	xx
Field report from Kalyanpuri.....	xx
Finishing discussions.....	xx

List of participants

	<b>Name &amp; Address</b>	<b>Contact</b>	<b>Dates</b>
1.	Amita Joshi Institute of Social Studies Trust Saathi Centre, Kalyanpuri Police Station, Delhi – 110 091	9810782143 91-11-2272 4710 <a href="mailto:joshiamita19@gmail.com">joshiamita19@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:saathi.isst@gmail.com">saathi.isst@gmail.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
2.	Anchita Ghatak Parichiti 28/15, Dhakuria Station Road, Kolkata 700031.	09830326101 91-33-24236753; 91-33- 91-11-24236848. <a href="mailto:Anchita.ghatka@gmail.com">Anchita.ghatka@gmail.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
3.	Bharti Birla ILO India Habitat Centre Lodi Road New Delhi-110003	+91-11-24602103/1,2 9810854889 <a href="mailto:birla@ilo.org">birla@ilo.org</a>	14 Oct 2011
4.	Coen Kompier, ILO India Habitat Centre Lodi Road New Delhi-110003	+91-11-24602103/1,2 <a href="mailto:kompier@ilo.org">kompier@ilo.org</a>	14 Oct 2011
5.	Dharmender Kumar Institute of Social Studies Trust Saathi Centre, Kalyanpuri Police Station, Delhi – 110 091	91-11-2272 4710 <a href="mailto:saathi.isst@gmail.com">saathi.isst@gmail.com</a>	13 Oct 2011
6.	Durang Mullick Urban Poverty and Livelihoods Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Allied Trusts, Eruchshaw Building, 249 Dr DN Road (Opp. ICICI Bank), Fort, Mumbai 400001	022 66657038 9820924124 <a href="mailto:durang.mullick@sdtatatrust.com">durang.mullick@sdtatatrust.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
7.	Gudrun Cecilie Eikemo Helland Institute of Social Studies Trust India Habitat Centre Core 6A. UG Floor, Lodi Road New Delhi 110 003	91-11-47682222 011-8447282192 <a href="mailto:gchellan@student.ikos.uio.no">gchellan@student.ikos.uio.no</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
8.	Harkesh Bugalia Rajasthan Mahila kamgar union, Jaipur 87, Near Chald line, Mahatma Gandhi Nagar, D.C.M. Ajmer Road, Jaipur (Raj.)	09314596344/ <a href="mailto:mksk.org@gmail.com">mksk.org@gmail.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
9.	Jyotsna Chatterji	124-4053370; 98-100-17523	13-14

	Director, Joint Women's Programme, Apt. 201, Block 44, Heritage City Complex, M.G. Road, Gurgaon-122 002, Haryana	<a href="mailto:jwp@airtelmail.in">jwp@airtelmail.in</a>	Oct 2011
10.	Keren Nazareth, Executive Director, Saath Charitable Trust O/102 Nandanvan V , Nr. Prernairth Derasar Jodhpur, Ahmedabad 380 015	9925180189 [p] +91-79-26929827 09925180189, <a href="mailto:keren@saath.org">keren@saath.org</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
11.	Manju Sharma Institute of Social Studies Trust Saathi Centre, Kalyanpuri Police Station, Delhi – 110 091	91-11-2272 4710 9971244661 <a href="mailto:Sharma.manju827@gmail.com">Sharma.manju827@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:saathi.isst@gmail.com">saathi.isst@gmail.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
12.	Manjushree Mishra Institute of Social Studies Trust Core 6A, UG Floor Lodi Road, New Delhi 110003	91-11-47682234 <a href="mailto:Manjushree@isst-india.org">Manjushree@isst-india.org</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
13.	Meva Bharti Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union, Jaipur 87, Near Chald line, Mahatma Gandhi Nagar, D.C.M. Ajmer Road, Jaipur (Raj.)	+919829401102, 0141-6502030 <a href="mailto:bhartimeva@gmail.com">bhartimeva@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:mksk.org@gmail.com">mksk.org@gmail.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
14.	Namita Programme Manager SEWA Bharat 7/5 1 <sup>st</sup> floor, South Patel Nagar, Delhi 110 008	91-11-25841369 9871824834 <a href="mailto:namita@sewadelhi.org">namita@sewadelhi.org</a>	14 Oct 2011
15.	Neetha Pillai, CWDS 25, Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi - 110001,	9953643378 +91-11-23365541 +91-11-23366930 <a href="mailto:neetha@cwds.ac.in">neetha@cwds.ac.in</a>	14 Oct 2011
16.	Nilanju Dutta Jagori B-114 Shivalik, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi 110 017	91-11- 26692700 9891937561 <a href="mailto:nilanju@jagori.org">nilanju@jagori.org</a>	14 Oct 2011
17.	Paromita Chowdhury Durbar, 12/5 Nilmoni Mitra Street, Kolkata 700006	91 8420066516, 91-33 2530 3148 paromita.rumpa@gmail.com <a href="mailto:dmsc@durbar.org">dmsc@durbar.org</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
18.	Poornima Dore Urban Poverty and Livelihoods Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Allied Trusts, Eruchshaw Building,249 Dr DN Road (Opp. ICICI Bank),	022 66657038 <a href="mailto:poornima.dore@sdtatatrust.com">poornima.dore@sdtatatrust.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011

	Fort, Mumbai 400001		
19.	Rajendra Ravi Institute for Democracy & Sustainability G-24 Vijay Nagar New Delhi 110 009	9868200316 <a href="mailto:rajendraravi1857@gmail.com">rajendraravi1857@gmail.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
20.	Rajib Nandi Institute of Social Studies Trust India Habitat Centre Core 6A, UG Floor Lodi Road, New Delhi – 110- 003	91-11-47682222 9971014647 <a href="mailto:rajibnandi@isst-india.org">rajibnandi@isst-india.org</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
21.	Ratna M. Sudarshan Institute of Social Studies Trust India Habitat Centre Core 6A, UG Floor Lodi Road, New Delhi – 110- 003	91-1147682222 9810508452 <a href="mailto:isstdel@isst-india.org">isstdel@isst-india.org</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
22.	Sanjay Kumar Director SEWA Bharat First Floor- 7/5, South Patel Nagar Delhi-110 008	91-11-25841369 9811306780 <a href="mailto:sanjay@sewabharat.org">sanjay@sewabharat.org</a>	14 Oct 2011
23.	Sarika Institute of Social Studies Trust Saathi Centre, Kalyanpuri Police Station, Delhi – 110 091	9958866704	14 Oct 2011
24.	Shalini Rani Institute of Social Studies Trust India Habitat Centre Core 6A, UG Floor Lodi Road, New Delhi – 110- 003	91-011-47682222 <a href="mailto:isstdel@isst-india.org">isstdel@isst-india.org</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
25.	Shalini Sinha J-56 Sector 41 Noida 201301	0120-4357345 9810111368 <a href="mailto:shalinisinha.delhi@gmail.com">shalinisinha.delhi@gmail.com</a>	13-14 Oct 2011
26.	Smarajit Jana Durbar, 12/5 Nilmoni Mitra Street, Kolkata 700006	09674162101 91-33 2530 3148 <a href="mailto:smarajitjana@gmail.com">smarajitjana@gmail.com</a> <a href="http://dmisc@durbar.org">dmisc@durbar.org</a>	14 Oct 2011

# AGENDA FOR SDTT PARTNERS' WORKSHOP – DOMESTIC WORKERS

ORGANISED BY

Institute of Social Studies Trust, India Habitat Centre

New Delhi, 13-14 October 2011

*Overall objective: To learn from each other and about each other, in order to make our efforts even more effective.*

October 13

Session I: Venue: Willow, India Habitat Centre

**9.30 – 9.45**

Welcome and Introductions

**9.45 – 13.30**

Presentations and discussion:

[each presentation, including discussion, to take about 45 minutes]

9.45 - 10.30: DMSC

10.30 – 11.15: SAATH

*11.15-11.30*

*Tea/ coffee break*

11.30 – 12.15: RMKU

12.15 – 1.00: PARICHITI

1.00 – 1.30: ISST

*1.30-2.30: Lunch*

*2.30: leave for ISST Community Centre, Kalyanpuri*

Session II: Venue: Saathi Centre, Kalyanpuri

3.00-3.15: short skit by children

3.15 – 3.45: Discussion with Community Centre team, ISST

3.45 – 4.15: Visit to ISST GRC and interaction with GRC team

4.15 – 4.45: wrap up, evaluation

*(5 p.m. leave for India International Centre)*

October 14

Venue: Willow, India Habitat Centre

**9.30 – 10.00:**

Welcome, introductions

**10.00 – 11.00:**

International Labour Organization

- On the Domestic Workers' convention

- About ILO programme on skill upgrading for Domestic Workers

**11.00 – 11.30**

*Tea/Coffee Break*

**11.30 – 13.30**

Open discussion on approach and emerging priorities of all organizations present, including:

Jagori

SEWA Bharat

Joint Women's Programme

Rajendra Ravi

**13.30: Lunch**

*(Departure)*

## Introduction

The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of October all the participating organizations in SDTTs ongoing three-year long project on domestic workers, and others interested in the topic, gathered at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi. The object was, quite simply, to get to know one another as organizations and as people., and have a space where we would share experiences and exchange ideas. We also wanted to familiarize one another with the different approaches we have taken towards decent work and decent life for domestic workers in India, and as the presentations showed – there is a vast variety of approaches as well as foci, amongst us. As the topic of domestic workers in India is an extensive one, this, we feel, is how it should be. During these two days we learnt a lot about and from each other, and the discussions, often lively, brought fruitful reflections we will bring with us on our path.

The following short presentation summaries are mainly focused on the various approaches and projects for domestic workers, as the organizations also have other projects and foci. Summing up the presentations overall, it is clear that we all have different approaches to working with Domestic Workers. As the discussions during the workshop showed, however, there are also broader and overarching topics we all agree on, like the importance of women empowerment and community mobilization. There was also agreements on what some of the main challenges we face are, like how to deal with the mushrooming of detrimental placement agencies, and some of the possible solutions to these challenges. Several organizations also had specific stories of incidents in their presentation about how their role in advocating on behalf of a domestic worker or community member had led to the person being given the rights previously denied to her. This clearly illustrates how activism on behalf of civil society organisations is still very much needed to ensure that underprivileged members of society truly have access to their rights and benefits.

## Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is an organization for and by socially excluded groups. Durbar was formed in Kolkata in 1995 to protect the rights and dignities of sex workers, and has since expanded to work with other socially excluded groups like domestic workers, who Durbar found was equally denied of their social and occupational rights and dignity. Their work with domestic workers has five main foci: First, they rely on community mobilization to make the community aware of their rights. They do this through capacity building and sensitization. Further, they believe in collectivization to increase the domestic workers' bargaining capacity and empowerment to foster their decision-making abilities. Building a sense of ownership is important to also initiate a process of self regulation amongst the women, and lastly they advocate sustainability, to ensure financial and institutional stability. For instance, they're trying to build a bank



especially for domestic workers and construction workers to achieve this.

Durbar make use of different approaches in their work for domestic workers. One of their main approaches is community-led intervention and involving the community in the decision-making process, because it is the community who best can gauge their needs and aspirations. Also, this includes the community in the different projects and builds a sense of ownership and belonging. To minimise the structural barriers for overall development, Durbar advocates and lobbies with other social and political institutions and stake holders. To unite the voices of the marginalized, Durbar also networks with other socially excluded groups. They're currently building a broad platform with other groups of unorganised workers, including domestic workers. Parichiti is also a part of this platform, which is 15 organizations strong at the moment.

Through a process of election, Durbar has formed an organization of domestic workers called Durbar Disha Mahila Griha-Sramik Samanwaya Committee (Disha). So far, 163 domestic workers are members of the organization, who is currently awaiting Trade Union recognition. Disha functions as a space for domestic workers to express their grievances, and the leaders are protesting against such issues as occupational hardships and domestic violence, as well as demanding workers' rights for the domestic workers. Lastly, they are lobbying with the local policy makers and stake holders, seeking to influence the policies and decision-making.

Some of the challenges Durbar has faced are general problems we all face in our work, like the perceptions of people towards domestic workers not as workers, but as servants. This perception is often something which the domestic workers themselves share. The missing policies, or the lack of inclusion of domestic workers in existing policies, as well as other ingrained practices in the country were also highlighted as general problems.

At the project level, Durbar highlights the fact that they are known as a sex workers' organization as a hindrance to implementation of the project, as they faced several kinds of stigma. Further, there has been a delay in the recognition of Disha as a Trade Union, and Paromita painted a picture of the battle they are having with the Labour directorate in this issue, a battle which is sadly not unique. Lastly, there's generally a low level of knowledge regarding workers' rights in the community, and there has also been a low disclosure of instances of sexual harassment and domestic violence, as these are considered taboo.

In the presentation, Paromita went through and discussed the Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act (2010), highlighting what Durbar hold to be both the brighter sides and the more difficult areas in it. Amongst these are worth mentioning no worker representatives in the Central and State Advisory boards, and the felt need for the grievance adressal mechanism to be stronger. Further, on the topic of responsibilities, Durbar feel that both the responsibilities of the employer and the workers should be incorporated and stated clearly in the Act. Especially how the

employer can maintain attendance and leave in a proper way, or how to adhere to a wage rate. Durbar also feel that penalties for offenses against the Act should be higher, and that registered trade unions of domestic workers should have more leverage, more powers to intervene or complain on behalf of their members.

Durbar feels that self-regulation could be an alternative to legal provision, because self-regulation and self control makes a community more responsible. The community itself will decide on the laws, rules and regulation they will adhere to, and the punishments if they do not. They are involving the wider society, but the focus is on the particular community they are thinking of. This, according to Paromita, has proven very successful, especially with regards to trafficking issues and reproductive health. In Durbars view, this idea of self regulation might collide with the act, because the community itself is given full authority to make their own decisions. An Act, universal throughout the state or even the country, may not be followed by communities of various geographical areas. For instance, if a standard level of minimum age would be implemented, the ability of the employer to be able to provide this minimum wage would vary vastly from, for instance, rural to urban areas. In the case of self regulation however, the whole community will decide what would be the minimum wage.

Besides working with the Disha project, Durbar is also developing a capacity building programme for sex workers and their children, construction workers and domestic workers focusing on administrative and accounting capacity building, awareness of basic legal matters and training on advocacy. The primary focus of Durbar is the topic of rights for domestic workers, and the importance of workers themselves understanding about their rights. They also feel that collectivization is the key to development.

### [SAATH Charitable Trust](#)

SAATH Charitable trust is based in Ahmedabad, and has existed since 1989. SAATHs mission is “to make human settlements equitable living environments where all residents and vulnerable people have access to health, education, essential infrastructure services and livelihood options, irrespective of their economic and social status.” Thus, they are using an integrative approach in their work. They are especially working with youth, women, children and disabled people, where 80 % are from vulnerable families, and 5% are from minority households. SAATH is currently reaching out to over 200 000 households and individuals in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

SAATH has worked with domestic workers since 1994, and has started several smaller community-based organizations. Their main approach towards bettering the lives of domestic workers now is a training and placement programme called URMILA, based on a needs assessment on the part of both domestic workers (called home managers) and clients. SAATH found that despite

a very high demand for reliable domestic help and not a sufficient supply of it easily available, the women working as domestic help receive very low wages, working as “house servants”. Further, there is a general lack of self-respect among the women working as domestic workers.

The URMILA Home Manager Project attempts to bridge the gap between domestic servants and urban households. The main objective of the project is to empower slum residents from simply being “housemaids” to working professionals, Home Managers, with a significant increase in incomes, and to provide reliable, efficient and professional home managers for the clients. SAATH aims to develop a fair and formal platform to train and place women and men who work as house-help. They offer a reliable, efficient and professional domestic service, highly sought after by the households looking to employ domestic help. This is especially the case for nuclear families where both the man and woman are working and they want someone reliable and professional to be able to manage their household while they're at work. The programme also make the clients aware of the rights and duties of the home manager, and vice versa. Further, it gives women from underprivileged households a sense of pride and achievement from the fact that they are now able providers to their families, they feel empowered. SAATH also encourage the women to save, and they have a micro-finance project as well.

So far, over 400 Home Managers have been trained and placed. Their income has increased on average from Rs. 1500,- or less to Rs. 2500,- to 5000,- each month. This adds over Rs. 36 lakh to the slums each year! The home managers are able to save in personal accounts, which fosters empowerment. The home managers experience increased self-confidence and higher aspirations due to increased training in multiple skills and broader exposure. All in all, this might add up to an enhanced lifestyle and a possible overall upward social mobility for the home managers. Indeed, some of the trained Home Managers have gone on to become relationship managers, and others have started their own placement agencies.

The URMILA platform is structured and to some extent formalize the relationship between the employer and the employee. There are formal contracts signed by both parties, proper salaries that are always paid by check, and the home managers have social security and health insurance. There's even a replacement system on part of URMILA if the home managers call in sick! There are scheduled trainings based on different course modules (basic, technical, specialization, behavioral and internship), and all the home managers obtain police clearances and undergo health check-ups from reputed hospitals preceding the training to create trust and reduce health, safety and other fears potential employers might harbour. These documents also provides safety for the home managers in case of any issues or problems with their employers. All the clients' houses are visited before placement to assess the real needs of the household as well as to make sure the working environment is up to the mark and to fix a decent wage for the amount of work the Home Manager

will have to do, and there's an initial trial period upon placement.

In addition, there are relationship managers, who supervise the relationships between around 40 Home Managers and their employers. Lastly, there's a formalized system for the clients on how to keep attendance sheets. SAATH is collaborating with the Taj Group of Hotels in the housekeeping module, as well as various professionals to train the women on technical elements like fire prevention and control, home security, Electric safety, telephone reception and first aid. There is also a mechanism of monitoring the Home Managers and the clients, operating with the help of feedback forms, visits from the relationship managers, regular emails, a helpline and a need-based refresher training programme.

In short, URMILA provides an all round, thorough training programme and skill development for the domestic workers lasting a maximum of 40 days, as well as a safe and fair placement arrangement which in turn offers a sense of job security.

URMILA is now looking to expand, providing more specialized care, for instance old age, child and patient care. They will also expand their client and Home Manager base by replicating the project in other parts of Ahmedabad, as well as other cities, and lastly, increasing the number of Home Managers by including women from other underdeveloped areas as well as opening URMILA to men.

The main challenges SAATH are facing is in enrolling women to join for a longer training period, and finding placements within shorter distances of their homes. Their suggestions for further work include the need for multiple strategies because of the size of the centre and a higher awareness and sensitization about workers' rights especially amongst domestic workers who want to work individually. Keren suggested that there should be nodal agencies to do the kind of work SAATH is doing, because nodal agencies on the state level would perhaps ensure more people to be included in programs like this, as well as a better and more wholesome recruitment into the sector. Lastly, there should be both forward and backward linkages. Just informing the workers about their rights is not enough, there also needs to be linkages set up with other mechanisms, like for instance Urban Resource Centres, to look after the interests of the workers in a holistic matter.

### [Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union](#)

The Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union (Women Workers' Union) was registered in 2008, and is the first member-based union for women in Rajasthan.

One of their major contributions to the well-being of the Domestic Workers in Rajasthan is the advocacy for a minimum wage.

Will be added after the powerpoint has been translated into English.

## Parichiti

Parichiti means identity in Bengali, and is a society based in Kolkata for the empowerment of women, working for a world where women and girls are equal citizens. They aim to work with women who are unrepresented or underrepresented in public discourse. Their research on domestic workers in Kolkata has shown that the most marginalized within an already marginalized group are the domestic workers who travel by train to Kolkata to work every day, and thus Parichiti has chosen to focus mostly on helping these women – albeit not exclusively. Parichiti calls them “Commuting fixed time help”, and highlight the fact that they live in villages “close” to the city. They come into the city to work every day, usually by train, and they often have more than one employer.

Parichiti has a number of different interventions, adding up to an approach of taking care of the workers interests holistically. One is mobilizing at two of the local train stations in Kolkata, where they conduct Baithaks (Sit-downs) weekly. Anchita stated that one of the biggest challenges in organizing the workers are that the workers simply do not have time to meet up regularly. The Baithaks, then, are semistructured meetings, where domestic workers meet each other as well as Parichiti staff. The meetings work as an arena to air their thoughts and problems and discuss solutions. Parichiti also visit the stations and spread the word about Bishramghar, a centre where domestic workers can come to rest and talk.

The Bishramghar (or Place to Rest) provides both a physical and emotional space for the domestic workers where they can chat with each other and rest. It has different facilities like toilets, kitchen, television and radio, and they also conduct special events like outings. The centre is a meeting place where they domestic workers can make appointments and share information about jobs, and it also provides short term childcare and a place for reading newspapers and magazines. It's a safe place for storing belongings, and a lot of discussions with other domestic workers and Parichitis team is happening here. This is also a place for Parichiti to reach out and meet city-based domestic workers as well. In short, the Bishramghar fosters a sense of community amongst the domestic workers.

The third intervention of Parichiti is addressing violence against domestic workers, both in the sense of domestic violence and violence at the workplace. Violence at the workplace is especially an issue regarding younger girls and children who work as domestic workers. Parichiti talks to and supports the victims and their families, and make home visits in order to find facts of the incident. They also meet the perpetrator and assist in lodging cases, as well as visiting police stations, courts and hospitals. Parichiti also links with the media.

Working with the community in which many domestic workers live is also considered very important. That is why Parichiti is mobilizing women and girls in a Kolkata slum, where they conduct regular meetings with the residents and discuss issues of the area. They also build different groups of domestic workers, installing a sense of fellowship and solidarity among them. Focusing on education is another important aspect of Parichiti's work in the slum, and they especially bring together young girls to imbibe in them and their families the importance of schooling. Lastly they help with the advocacy towards elected representatives and officials.

Moving away from the grassroots, Parichiti also works on a "higher" level with conducting research and releasing publications. They conduct and attend protests and contribute to advocating the domestic workers rights to the railway authorities, the State Commission of Women, the Unorganized workers' bill and the media. They also network with Maitree, other organisations and academic institutions. There are no toilets for women at the train stations, or no separate carriages for them to ride in. This might make commuting more difficult, and Parichiti is lobbying with the railway authorities to fix these issues.

With the help of Parichiti, the women have formed a collective called Samadhan (Solution). They meet once a month, to discuss, plan and strategize. The women are getting together to find solutions to their problems, and approximately a dozen women make it to the meetings every time. However, coming together at a specified time remains a challenge for the women.

The last main focus of Parichiti are the rights of young girls. As mentioned earlier, they focus on the education of girls, and currently have a project called "Girls out of school: Is there a future?" supported by CRY Voluntary Action. They are also building a campaign against early marriage and dowry, as well as forging alliances with better off sections of society, where girls can come and volunteer. This also spreads awareness in the more affluent sections of society.

The challenges listed by Parichiti as the most pressing ones are that the domestic workers are very pressed for time, which makes mobilization more difficult. In addition, as the domestic workers are dependent on their employers, it's very difficult to come forward with stories of oppression. In case of their projects with young girls, there's a lot of community expectations for the girls to get married at a young age, and Parichiti feels it is generally a very disempowering place for the girls.

The middle class, especially the employers of the domestic workers, are very suspicious of Parichiti. Building solidarity amongst the domestic workers are also a challenge, especially "across" different groupings as they too are often suspicious of each other. Alliance building amongst unorganized sectors have also proven to be difficult. The Bishramghar infrastructure is still inadequate and has to be worked on to be able to meet the demand for its facilities. Further,

Parichitis application to be allowed to receive foreign contribution is still pending, making funding more of a challenge.

### Institute of Social Studies Trust

ISST has had a community outreach programme since the year 2000, focusing their work in three slum communities in the Trans Yamuna Region because of, amongst other aspects, the high crime rate amongst youth in that area. Their Youth Resources Centre, Saathi, opened at the police station in Kalyanpuri, East Delhi, in 2006, and has now become the main centre in which most of their activities are carried out. The Saathi centre has several functions that seek to benefit the community as a whole, for instance, they offer non-formal and remedial education for both school going and non-school going children, as well as vocational training workshops and courses in computer use and english for youth.

ISSTs Domestic Workers Mobilization programme is a very holistic one, where they aim to improve the overall quality of life for the women and their families. There are eight main objectives of the programme. ISST will try to “mainstream” domestic workers and their families into society by assisting in the obtainment of needed documents, as well as to provide information and building awareness regarding government facilities and welfare schemes they are entitled to. ISST is also functioning as a place where the domestic workers and their families can come for legal assistance. Further, ISST is raising awareness regarding health, nutrition and the importance of cleanliness in the community.

Once a month, they call many of the Domestic Workers in the area in for a meeting, and let the Domestic Workers have a space where they can air their grievances and explore solutions together with the ISST staff. ISST are also assisting in the formation of pressure groups and self help groups amongst the women. ISST are running a very successful Right To Information (RTI) help desk, and lastly, the Saathi centre adhere to establishing linkages through networking with the head office at ISST, the Gender Resource Centre in Kalyanpuri and other government and non-governmental initiatives. Being located at the police station in Kalyanpuri, having a good relationship with the police is both a requirement and an outcome of their proximity.

The Women Domestic Workers Programme is based on the results found in a study done by ISST in collaboration with SDTT in the fall of 2009, where 400 domestic workers were surveyed. The methods of contacting the domestic workers include holding community meetings and focused group discussions, as well as conducting regular individual home visits by a community mobilizer from ISST.

The main grievances of the domestic workers included in ISSTs programme are absence of toilets, both in the slums and at their working place, as many of them are not allowed to use the

toilets in the houses. Not having access to food rations are also a matter of worry for the women, as well as the absence of an adequate number of taps in the slum leading to scarcity of water. They also feel there is a lot of difficulty in trying to obtain certification or availing required documentation – a problem the RTI help desk has been able to offer some relief from.

Further, the domestic workers and their families are constantly living with the fear of their jhuggis being demolished by the government, as it is not a registered and approved slum area. The domestic workers report many incidents of domestic violence, and also of husbands or others in their families extorting hard-earned money from the domestic workers. Alcoholism is also a very big problem in the area. There is generally a non-availability of health services in and around Kalyanpuri, and as many of 3 out of 4 hospitals in the vicinity have stated that they are simply not interested in participating in the governments' RSBY scheme.

As working women, there is a lack of resting hours and possibilities for the domestic workers, as well as a constant fear of losing their jobs. Most domestic workers in the area work part time and in several houses, and if they have the possibility, they will come home in the middle of the day to take care of their own family and homes before venturing out for the “evening shift”. Lastly, the domestic workers are tense about leaving their children behind unsupervised, as Kalyanpuri is a high-crime area. However, not many have the option of bringing them to work either.

Thus, ISSTs work focuses broadly on two main parts to try to make life easier for the domestic workers – one is the mobilization of the women around their rights, and the other one is the establishment of Child Care and Youth Resource Centres in the area.

### [International Labour Organization](#)

The ILO presentation Bharti Birla and Coen Kompier gave us were divided in two – Coen told us about the convention on Decent work for domestic workers and what has happened since the adoption of it in June this year, while Bharti told us about ILOs Skill Development Initiative for Domestic Workers. Coen also highlighted the fact that the role of employers had been left somewhat in the air during the International Labour Conference where the convention was adopted, and that this is something ILO is working on now. There are different sets of issues and solutions for each country, but in India welfare associations might be one way to group employers together to more easily fit the situation for domestic workers into a labour set-up for discussion.

He also mentioned placement agencies and the registration of them as a very important issue. As we all know, placement agencies are mushrooming, and they are often a source of exploitation and also trafficking. In India, the Secretary of Labour has asked for the registration of placement agencies under the Shops and Establishments Act, which might be a start to have a better



control over these agencies.

Another aspect is awareness building and information sharing, which Coen stated is not happening too much. He shared with us stories of himself asking his domestic staff if they were aware of their rights and what is happening with the mobilization regarding their right to decent work. They said no, and this illustrates a real problem. Thus, working with building awareness is a big and important task. Further, Coen informed us of ways we could easier access the ILOs resources on the topic of Domestic Workers and information on how the process of ratifying the convention is going in different countries, both online and by contacting ILO directly.

Talking about labour inspection, a very tricky issue regarding domestic work as it is happening in the private homes of individuals, Coen said we could draw inspiration from what is written about labour inspection in other and similar conventions, like the convention for Home-based workers. He urged that an inspection-like system is a must also in the “industry” of domestic work, though it depends on each issue and situation how one best can handle it.

Coen also discussed some of the development worldwide, highlighting countries like Zambia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka especially working for domestic workers' rights and towards a ratification. They have especially focused on international migrant workers, and there is a darker side to this development: Saudi-Arabia, a country that have many domestic workers from especially Sri Lanka and the Philippines has recently started banning migrants from these countries coming to work as domestic workers because they are “too aware about their rights”. A truly horrific development, it shows that international investment and cooperation on the road towards decent work for domestic workers is an absolute must.

The ILO in India recently received 20 000 \$ to work towards a ratification in India. A lot of things has been happening, especially the establishment of the Task Force and their suggestion towards a recommendation on a national policy domestic workers (now online at: <http://labour.nic.in/dglw/DWpolicy.pdf> ). Coen felt that it is heartening that we are all in this together, and he urged us all to keep working and collaborating towards the ratification of the convention in India by, for instance providing comments to the ILO committee of experts at any time. He finished with stating that even if ratification of the convention in India turns out to take a very long time, there are alternatives and other conventions we can work with to better the situation of domestic workers in India, and it is important that we know about these alternatives.

Bharti opened her part of the presentation by briefing us about the task force, an inter ministerial force with members from the trade unions, SEWA, the National Domestic Workers Forum, and other invitees being called on from time to time. The first set of recommendations the task force suggested had five basic recommendations: First, to extend the social security and welfare

schemes to the domestic workers; Second, to get a regulation of placement agencies in place to minimize risk of exploitation and trafficking; Third, that domestic workers should be included in the state schedules for minimum wages and that proper wage rates should be defined for them; Fourth, the establishment of a Skills Development Initiative Programme, and; Fifth, drafting a national policy for domestic workers. The draft policy is now ready and available at the Ministry of Labour website for comments, and all the recommendations were accepted by the Government leading to, amongst other things, the RSBY-scheme being (in theory) extended to domestic workers. There is, as we are all aware of, a lot of challenges regarding the RSBY-scheme, who is included and how to implement it, and these challenges were duly discussed during the course of the workshop.

Moving on to the Skill Development Initiative, it started as a cooperation between ILO and the Government of India, and ILO also saw it as an approach to professionalize domestic work and as a step towards realizing the vision of decent work for domestic workers. There is a module within this initiative called the Modular Employable Skills Scheme, that seeks to develop domestic workers as trained, professionalized workers by offering modular flexible courses in levels, categorizing a possible career path and offering both horizontal and vertical growth for the domestic workers. For instance, a domestic worker can go from “conventional” domestic work to being employed in the hospitality, business, nursing or community health sector. Though a fee is demanded, this is given back to the workers in full upon completion of the courses, along with NVCT certificates and competency certifications.

The Skills Development Initiative are now working on a skill card system, which is like a credit card with a USB drive attached. The USB drive means that all the different certificates a domestic worker has acquired, her career profile, is all in one place and easily accessible (and verifiable) for prospective employers. They have trained 500 domestic workers in Delhi until now, and Bharti told us that the card gives the workers a sense of identity and pride, as well as much more confidence in the work they do as domestic workers. This illustrates the importance of proper documentation of skills also in the sector of domestic work. Further, the skill card system also has the potential to function as a central depository of certified and specially trained domestic workers, as well as a management tool for ILO, the Government and the overall Civil Society Organizations seeking to measure how skill development has influenced domestic workers' quality of life.

Bharti requested any of us who might be interested in taking on skill training as part of our projects to apply to the Ministry of Labour, as the books and curriculum, and the network of Vocational Training Providers are ready to be utilized on a larger scale. Further, she stressed the importance of awareness building around this project and the benefits of skill development, because the vast majority of domestic workers, and even civil society organisations, does not know about its

existence as of yet.

The discussion following the presentation was very lively, and amongst the recurring topics was access to overall social security schemes and how to go about implementing and securing these for unorganized workers generally, and for domestic workers specifically. The RSBY-scheme was thoroughly discussed and criticized as an example of this. Further, the relationship between the employers and the domestic workers were discussed, one of the main issues being how the domestic workers would get enough time off from their work to complete the different courses. The negotiation, organization and bargaining skills of the domestic workers, not just their cleaning skills, were emphasized as very important skills to develop, and some uttered concerns on whether the development of these kinds of skills were being attended to in a sufficient manner.

Ending the discussion, we agreed on the need for further institutionalizing the role of the civil society and member-based organizations, especially on facilitating a much needed documentation process of concerns and experiences across different sectors.

### [Field report from Kalyanpuri](#)

We visited ISSTs community centre in Kalyanpuri, Saathi, where the youth theatre group had prepared a small play for us about the plight of a domestic worker, complete with musical contributions. We all thoroughly enjoyed it! We met the Saathi staff and learnt about the different activities and contributions they are making to the community. Especially the courses in English and Computer Science, as well as the RTI desk are very popular. The Saathi centre also provides remedial education for the children of Kalyanpuri, and we got to see the little classroom they have inside one of the *galis* of the community. We also visited the Gender Recourse Centre, which is run with support from the government of NCT of Delhi under its Mission Convergence Scheme since October 2009. The GRC is an initiative to spread awareness about various government schemes among the community, and they also have occupational courses, for instance beautician- and sowing courses. The main activity at the GRC the last months has been the issuing of UID cards, proven to be immensely popular amongst the community members.

We ended our short field visit with a walk through the community, ending with a visit to the small classroom in one of the *galis* in Kalyanpuri, where we meet the teacher Neeraj, who told us about the Bachpan programme offering remedial education and care to some of the local children.

## Finishing discussions

The ending discussions started being focused around 3 main topics, or levels: State; Employers-Employees relationship, and; Community, with each having their own issues. Ratna proposed that we are all working in different parts of this larger canvas, and so it was purposeful to start our discussions here.

The State level encompassed everything involving the state in how we work. Especially the proposed Domestic Workers Act and the sexual harassment act, where domestic workers actually are excluded, were mentioned. Also, we discussed infrastructure and access to toilet facilities around cities for domestic workers, which actually poses as a great difficulty for many. Domestic workers access to social security was also posed as an important issue, and it is hoped that our work can contribute to more Domestic workers being covered by, and have access to, social security. A more united approach across organizations and unions working with the entire unorganized workers' sector were also timely being called for, as many groups of workers struggle with not being included in welfare schemes or social security implementation.

Our main strategies for working at the state level are organizing domestic workers and advocating their causes. It was stated that we should focus even more on the RSBY-scheme, as this scheme has the potential to directly influence the social security of domestic workers. Topics such as literacy, and the special difficulties for migrant domestic workers also came up at this level.

On the topic of the relationship between the domestic worker and the employer, we discussed how we could build better trust between the two. This became a topic of some disagreement, because it should not be a matter of “trust”, it should be a proper employer – employee relationship. However, trust is part of all such relationships, and given the nature of the work domestic workers do, in the private sphere, trust is an aspect not easily avoided. The employer needs to have confidence in the Domestic Worker being honest and good at her job – but the Domestic Worker also needs to trust the employer to give her fair pay, and a good working environment – and that she is not suddenly replaced. This trust can be formal, in the shape of an employment contract, but it has to be there in any employer-employee relationship. It was agreed, however, that a Domestic Worker should not be viewed as “a part of the family”, and she should certainly not be viewed as a servant or a maid. There should be a recognition of the duties and the rights on both sides, and as many domestic workers are illiterate, civil society organizations and/or others might need to work as a third party in formulating and agreeing on written contracts between the employer and domestic worker.

As Domestic Workers are a very heterogenous group, it might not be very easy to detect a sense of solidarity among them. There is also evidence of different “groups” of domestic workers

competing with each other. To be as successful as possible, however, a sense of solidarity is key – as they say, there is safety in numbers. In terms of advocacy, we need to make Domestic Workers a strong and big group to be reckoned with, and for this further mobilization are necessary.

It was also discussed quite extensively how we could look at employers as one group. In the discussion Resident Welfare Societies came up as an option, though these are found mostly in the Metro cities. Another possibility are the placement agencies, another issue discussed thoroughly. There was a call for more information and research on the placement agencies, who can be exploitative and even engage in trafficking. On the other hand, SAATHs presentation gave us a clear image of all the benefits a placement agency can bring if it is done correctly and with the right intentions. Keren also brought this up in our discussion, and their URMILA programme is clearly the sort of placement agency that benefits domestic workers. The problem is that most other placement agencies are often market-driven and not at all transparent. This endangers the domestic workers, because the main object of these kinds of placement agencies is to make a profit. As there is no fixed form for placement agency, we have to try to do a lot more research on this mushrooming form of “organizing” domestic workers. If it is true that placement agencies are mushrooming, it's not enough for us to say that we do not want them – they will come either way. It was called for a much needed strategy to include the regulation of placement agencies in the legislation and national policy on domestic workers, and discussions on how placement agencies can be properly framed and regulated.

Our methods for working at this level are many. One method is formalizing the whole employment system, as SAATH is an example of, another is organizing groups more informally, making a space to share experiences and efforts. Still another is working with employability and creating awareness, especially amongst younger Domestic Workers.

The third level is the community. The main issue here is how we can influence norms and values. It is important to remember that Domestic Workers and their Employers often belong to the same communities – but have vastly different socio-economic statuses. Notions and attitudes towards gender, workers and what constitutes work, for instance, might be common for them. So is tolerance for domestic violence.

In this respect it is important to work with community mobilization, and raising awareness. One can for instance work with youth, and both men and women need to be a part of this. Changing norms and values in a given society is not easy, and takes a lot of time and effort. In the discussions it also came up that things might actually be worse for a while, before it gets better. It is important to keep believing in your cause, and keep working towards your project goals. Regarding this, we discussed why we viewed the employer as also being female, and how it is that domestic work

appears to be so thoroughly feminized We were cautioned to not view the domestic workers issue as a “Womens' issue”, because if we were hoping for a sense of womanly sense of solidarity on the part of the employer, we would be disappointed.

Further, an important topic that came up regarding skill development was that we also need to appreciate the skills domestic workers already have, we need to also organize them “where they are”, not only try to upgrade their skill and move them away from doing regular domestic work. Regular domestic work *is* decent work, and decent wages and working conditions provided, it is not an occupation to be ashamed of. In this respect we also thoroughly discussed the importance of negotiating- and leadership skills to be developed amongst the domestic workers.

We also discussed more overarching and administrative topics. Amongst these were networking amongst civil society organizations, and this was a topic of some disagreement. What shone through, whatever, is that networking for the sake of networking might often prove futile, and it was implied that many NGOs use a lot of their energy on networking rather than actually working. It might be better to base one-selves on issue-based networking, where we have informal contact, and when and if we share the same issues and challenges, we come together for the cause. It was decided that we, the SDTT group of NGOs working on domestic workers, should keep contact informally through sharing comments and our experiences in mailing lists and, in future, perhaps a Google group or through a newsletter. Our first task is reading through the Draft for a National Policy on Domestic Workers submitted by the Task Force, and the share our comments with each other. We will also continue to meet once a year for the workshop, and it was proposed that next year domestic workers themselves would also be included, and that the meeting can be held somewhere else than in Delhi, while still being organized by ISST.