



## **Institute of Social Studies Trust**

### **SDTT partners' workshop on 'Strategising for Domestic Workers at the Political and Social Level', Monotel Hotel, Salt Lake City, Kolkata, 19-21 March 2013**

As part of the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) funded Women Domestic Workers Programme, ISST coordinated the second annual workshop on domestic workers of SDTT partners entitled, 'Strategising for Domestic Workers at the Political and Social Level' from the 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> of March in Monotel hotel, Kolkata. The first two days of the workshop were supported by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), New Delhi, and the third day was supported by SDTT. The workshop was attended on all three days by SDTT partners- the organizations participating in SDTT's ongoing three year long project on domestic workers- Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), Parichiti, Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union, Saath Charitable Trust, ISST and SDTT. A new SDTT partner that joined us this year for all three days of the workshop was YUVA, which is based in Maharashtra. The first two days of the workshop was also attended by the Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR), Chennai and FES, Delhi.

Building on the last workshop held in October 2011 where the partners were introduced to each other's work, it was agreed by the participants that the objective of this workshop would be more thematically focused, and it would centre on strategizing for domestic workers at the political and social levels. In particular, the focus would be on social protection, collectivization and strategising at the social level to change the meanings of domestic work. It was a partner led and partner driven workshop, which meant that all partners contributed to the agenda and shared their experiences and expertise in relation to the broad themes of the workshop. Further, on the second day, the local partners, DMSC and Parichiti, also organised field visits for the participants to visit domestic workers they worked with to learn about the particular context of domestic workers in Kolkata. The third day was dedicated to SDTT partners alone, and focused on sharing of project related activities over the past year. Further, some time on the third day was also spent on discussing possible future collaborations between the group, and what the content of such collaboration could be.

One of the key aspects of the discussions in the workshop was a recognition amongst the group that it was insufficient to work at only the social or the political level, and that domestic worker groups needed to intervene at both levels. So, while it was important to strategise at the political level to gain for instance, better social protection for domestic workers through collectivization strategies, it was equally important to intervene at the social level to change the dominant meanings of domestic work. Each of the group discussed their strategies of intervention at either or both of these levels.

### **Social Protection for Domestic Workers**

The first theme of the workshop was on social protection for domestic workers, where Parichiti, ISST, MSK and CWDR presented the work that they have been doing on social protection. Anchita Ghatak of Parichiti facilitated this session. Anchita located the importance of social protection for domestic workers in the contexts of their retirement, child care, pregnancy, illness, etc. Moumita Chakrabarti who also works with Parichiti then located the work that Parichiti are doing to inform the domestic workers they work with about their rights under the State Assisted Scheme of Provident Fund for Unorganised Workers (SASPFUW).

SASPFUW was introduced by the Government of West Bengal in 2001. It initially covered 13 industries and 8 self-employed occupations, with additions made to the list in 2008. 'Domestic servants' are covered by the scheme under the list of what are now 14 self-employed occupations. The scheme is based on subscriber and government contributions on a monthly or an annual basis, the accumulated contributions becoming available to the subscriber at the age of 60. The scheme has several eligibility criteria- for instance that the subscriber has to be aged between 18-55 years, that the total household income of the subscriber should be no more than Rs. 3500 per month, etc. Moumita located the many challenges that Parichiti have faced in the registration of domestic workers with the scheme. For instance, the scheme requires certain kind of documentation which many domestic workers are unable to provide, such as proof of a local address. Also, there is also very little interest in registering unorganized workers within the scheme amongst the officials, as there is a misconception that workers will not be able to make the payments.

Sarita from ISST, which mobilizes domestic workers in East Delhi, talked of ISST's experiences with the Rashtriya Swasthya Bhima Yojana (RSBY), which is health insurance scheme for those living below the poverty line. Sarita recounted that in the experience of ISST, which through the Gender Resource Centre was expected to register members under the scheme, RSBY for the most part has been a failure in their communities. Although ISST had mobilized women domestic workers to register with the scheme, when it came to actually claiming the benefits of the scheme, the participating hospitals did not pull through. In this context, YUVA, which works with domestic workers in Mumbai- shared their experiences, where in fact women domestic workers were taking the benefit of the scheme. Similarly with DMSC, which works with domestic workers and for a longer while with sex workers in Kolkata, about 1000 women had

benefitted from RSBY. In Rajasthan, which is where MKS works with domestic workers, the MKS was organizing to get a domestic worker union card to be the basis of claiming the benefits of the scheme.

Anchita Ghatak rounded up the salient points of the discussion on social protection with the following observations:

- If domestic workers are organized, it is easier to get certain demands fulfilled
- There was a consistent issue in all the presentations about the issue of identity and how to establish identity, particularly the issue of documentation, in order to access benefits
- Benefits tie a person to a place of residence, but with vulnerable communities such as domestic workers, place of residence shifts because of evictions, migration. She posed the question of how much paper poor people could gather given the precariousness of their lives.
- Further, on the issue of establishing identity, accessing officials to get requisite signatures was a problem
- The ways in which the threshold for receiving benefits are computed is also problematic, particularly for instance the BPL card- the state sets the levels unrealistically low. Similarly, RSBY limits the no of recipients of benefits in one family to 5, which means that families have to choose the persons to be included in the scheme
- There is also a difference between enrolment and delivery of the schemes

Dr Jana also posed the question about the adequacy of the benefits available to domestic workers. When we examine whether certain existent schemes reach their intended beneficiaries, we may presume that there are adequate benefits and that access to benefits is the problem, but he questioned whether this is true. What RSBY and the pension scheme have to offer are small and meager in nature. He also reflected on the inadequacy of our knowledge on benefits in relation to domestic workers. If the Maharashtra Board has been successful in facilitating domestic workers to claim benefits, are we able to assess how many have really benefited and what sort of benefits they have received. He noted that if we were equipped with this knowledge, our strategies could be more effective.

Anchita Ghatak noted that although the discussion was limited to the accessibility of schemes, there were a series of important questions that were raised by the discussion- are domestic workers able to raise their demands, is the state listening to those demands, and are those demands being realized?

### **Lessons from Collectivization of Domestic Workers**

The next theme of the workshop was on unionization within the broader rubric of collectivization strategies of domestic workers. This theme was covered over two sessions, the first of which was facilitated by Dr Smarajit Jana of DMSC, and the second by Amita Joshi of ISST.

Baby Naskar, Protima Mondal and Paramita Chowdhury from DMSC presented the work that they have been doing on unionizing domestic workers in the Dum Dum area of Kolkata. In 2010,

DMSC first started organizing workers in this area, and by 2011, domestic workers conducted their first election, electing 7 members to their union, DISHA. Simultaneously the union has been trying to get registered. Although 3 hearings have taken place, and all documentation has been received by the concerned authority, till now, there has been no official communication with regard to the registration of the trade union. The application has now been sent to the Law Referral Cell to gauge whether domestic work falls within the definition of trade under the Trade Disputes Act.

The work of the union continues however with members of the union being involved in rallies, demonstrations, and deputations demanding workers rights. There is keen union involvement in dispute resolution and a second line of leadership is being nurtured. Further, DISHA has plans for scaling up in other areas of Dumdum. The work of DMSC is being expanded to other regions of Kolkata as well. There has also been an attempt to network with other labour groups and movements, such as the New Trade Union Initiative, and groups working with hawkers, mid day meal workers, ASHA workers.

There was also a bit of discussion about why unionization as a mode of collectivization helps in dealing with the struggles of domestic workers, as well as how effective unions are based on both the context of the state, as well as in terms of the length of time the union has existed. Further a big focal point of the discussion on unionization was on the context of migration. Both in Rajasthan and in Maharashtra (where there are strong domestic worker unions) there have been laws on registration of migrant workers. Similarly DMSC's own work with migrant sex workers provided a strong background in understanding the concerns of migration, as migration is a key issue in domestic work.

Further, there was discussion around the problems with unionization in West Bengal, where trade unions have strong affiliations with political parties.

Everyone was agreed that collectivization was a key element of empowering domestic workers, because as Dr Jana of DMSC put it, collectivization also helps in self esteem building- through the carving of a new social identity- not servant but worker. The very coinage of domestic worker provides the basis of providing esteem. He further summarized some key points from our discussion:

- To collectivise is to carve a new social identity
- As domestic worker groups, we cannot look at the issue of domestic work alone, but we have to look into the wider issues facing domestic workers- domestic violence, children's rights, etc.
- It is important to also encompass in our definition of collectivization a wider joint front, through alliances/linkages with other unorganized sector workers groups. The DMSC experience has been to join forces with other unorganized workers
- We have to pay attention also to how we may interest domestic workers in collectivization, maybe through media level advocacy

Meva Bharti from Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union also shared the work that they have been doing in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Providing a contrast to the difficulties faced by DMSC, Meva Bharti noted that they had a relatively easy registration process when they registered their trade union in 2008. The reason that she gave for this was the long involvement of MKS in trade unions, through their work with construction workers. The work of the union has since been consolidated and the union has achieved some amount of consensus in claiming 4 days of paid leave per month for domestic workers and increased wages, and conflict resolution. The union also works with the larger context of domestic workers dealing with issues such as domestic violence against women, and children's education. The challenges that they face in organizing women in the form of unions is the recurrent question of the benefits of unionization, and the problems within the family of joining unions. Recently, they have also conducted a jan sunvayi (public hearing) which is an effective means of addressing the issues that domestic workers face, for instance, the jan sunvayi brought to the forefront issues such as accusations of theft, women's further education, their life skills (opening of bank accounts), which the union could then take forward to the relevant authorities.

Renuka from CWDR also shared her experiences of unionization in Chennai. She gave a historical account of her work and that of CWDR in domestic work. One of the milestones that she noted was that in 2005, a trade union by the name of Manushi was registered. CWDR works in 100 slums in Chennai and each one is part of the trade union. The union has 6000 members. In 2007, a separate welfare board was initiated for domestic workers in Tamil Nadu. 2800 workers have enrolled in this welfare board. CWDR is also involved in skills up gradation training, and it also functions as a placement agency (in short, it dons several hats, unlike most of the other organizations present who work either as placement agencies or as in the arena of mobilization, collectivization).

Chandana Das and Madhu Bilmore on behalf of YUVA also shared the work that YUVA has been doing since 1984. YUVA has focused on a rights based, integrated community development approach. It does policy advocacy, action research, provides training to domestic workers to increase market value, does capacity building, conducts awareness programmes on wider issues such as health, etc.

In 2004, the Kastakari Khargamgar Sangathan was formed with the efforts of two domestic workers. It now works in 9 districts of Maharashtra, with a well defined embedded structure of committees in each city based on function- the organizing committee, health committee, conflict resolution committee, financial committee and oversight committee. Each committee has 10 leaders. Currently, 25000 domestic workers select 425 group leaders in cities, of which 150 form part of the organization core team, of which 11 form the executive committee.

There are however several challenges in the collectivization work that the unions do- starting with the difficulty of organizing workers, choosing leaders and providing training, to the challenge of solidarity, particularly in relation to wages, work security, how these can be dealt

with, as well as to convince domestic workers of the benefits of the unions. Another major challenge for the work of the unions is the lack of financial support. The Union has innovated a fund based on the collection and sale of waste materials from the members, which allows for what YUVA conceives of as a sustainable and self-sufficient model.

In 2008, in Maharashtra, the Domestic Workers Welfare Board was set up. This board consists of 22 members, 11 representing the interests of employers and 11 representing the interests of domestic workers. Around this point, there was a lot of discussion about how the members of the board were selected, both to represent domestic workers as well as employers. Although there are two people on the board who have a background in representing domestic workers, the process of their selection was still done through nomination rather than election. This again led to a discussion of the role of these welfare boards as well as how we may democratize the functioning of these boards. What is useful about the board is that domestic workers are issued with an ID card from the board that allows for them to access schemes of the government such as the Janashree Yojana and RSBY, but there is no holistic social security provided by the board.

Amita Joshi of ISST concluded the session by reflecting on the difficulties of the process of building solidarity amongst domestic workers. She called for a holistic approach to dealing with domestic workers including the difficult but necessary proposition of working with employers of domestic workers. Some in the group cautioned against prescriptions of harmony between domestic workers and their employers as the relationship is built on a hierarchy. Everyone was agreed that collectivization of domestic workers was the way forward to provide domestic workers with a better bargaining voice.

### **Strategising for Domestic Workers at the Social and Cultural Level**

The second day started with a discussion facilitated by Keren Nazareth of Saath Charitable Trust, Ahmedabad. Saath conducts trainings for skill up gradation of domestic workers and functions as a placement agency, acting as a conduit between domestic workers and their employers. The theme of the session was on the social context of domestic work and how to strategise to change the meanings of domestic work. Keren posed the question to the participants of how we may change the perception of domestic work and of domestic workers. She talked of Saath's own work with domestic workers- Saath provides training for domestic workers who are then helped by Saath to be placed as 'home managers'. Some home managers have since started a franchise system to run their own business, handling 40 other women on a commission basis and/or salary basis.

The group discussed the issue of nomenclature, and how important that was in changing the status of domestic workers with some asking whether there was power in the changed designation (home manager), which was a name which Keren emphasized was chosen by the women. The question was about whether the changes in meaning were also commensurate with a change in power. If the relationship between domestic workers and their employers was

hierarchical, then did the changed nomenclature reflect the employee status of domestic workers? Dr Jana shared the example of the use of the term 'hygiene manager' in Japan. Further on the question of whether there was a 'management' component in domestic work, Dr Jana's assessment was that every job had an element of management, and if this aspect could be highlighted to reduce stigma, then it was useful. However, this change in designation would not be useful in isolation, for instance without collectivization.

Keren also located all the current models that are employed in working with domestic workers- unions, training institutes, training and placement agencies, placement agencies, contracting agencies and co-operatives.

YUVA shared their experiences of trainings they conduct, which are not only on domestic work and up gradation of skills in the sector, but also trainings on other sectors, such as the banking sector.

There was also a discussion of co-operatives and the distinction from self help groups (with the former being a self-banking system, which is guided by RBI rules and regulations)

The discussion was followed by a small groups exercise, where the participants were divided into groups and asked to brainstorm about the strategies they would employ to change the meanings of domestic work at the level of the self, family, community and mainstream. This group exercise generated a lot of interesting debates, with the group coming out with interesting strategies, including for instance at the level of the mainstream- having a strong and active national forum on domestic workers to deal with the policy implications of the draft national policy as well as the Bill on domestic workers, and mobilizing to have representation of domestic workers on state level Domestic Workers Boards. The further strategies at the level of the mainstream was associate domestic worker groups with other campaigns, such as old age pension, right to food; and to involve their families as well.

At the level of the community, there were other interesting strategies, for instance, developing a community committee to address issues of civic amenities such as transport and safety, which were also concerns that domestic workers and their families faced. This community committee would provide voice to domestic workers issues, which would form the basis of a charter of demands through which the community committee could participate in governance systems, day to day demonstrations and deputation on both governance issues and mobilizing on evictions.

At the level of the family, the strategies ranged from the suggestion that family members should also be involved in the trade unions to strategizing to prevent child marriage, to the importance of the provision of crèches and day care for domestic workers' children. At the level of the self, strategies ranged from increasing self respect and dignity and bargaining power to linkages with banking to facilitating life skills development, legal literacy, and career building of domestic workers.

All of these strategies however, would, as Dr Jana pointed out, remain empty thoughts, without a recognition that implementing these strategies was only possible with adequate support systems in terms of infrastructure and personnel. Further, where basic information on domestic workers was not available, it was important also to conduct research on domestic workers.

Amita Joshi of ISST then made a presentation on how to strategise in relation to domestic workers by arguing that first and foremost we had to change the understanding of domestic work as unproductive work. She argued that domestic work is crucial (therefore it cannot be unproductive), and that because domestic work is invisible, does not mean that it is unproductive.

After lunch, the participants were divided into two groups for field visits that were arranged for the participants by our local partners, DMSC and Parichiti to understand the local context of domestic work in Kolkata.

### **Sharing of SDTT partners project activities**

The third day of the workshop was facilitated by Pradyut Bag of SDTT, and it was focused on the sharing of SDTT partners' project activities. The day began with a sharing of the experiences of the two field visits from the previous afternoon.

#### **Field visits report**

The Parichiti field visit was held in Shahidsmriti, near Peerless hospital. This meeting was attended by over 50 women domestic workers, who shared their experiences with the participants. Parichiti has been working in this area since 2011 when they conducted a survey in the area, and the rapport and trust that they had built with this community in a very short time was evident. There were so many women who attended the meeting in the middle of their busy working days to spend time with the group, which was a good indicator of the high regard the women workers have for Parichiti staff. Although the work has slowly begun on collectivizing the women in order to change the terms of employment, including fixing of wages, negotiating holidays, etc., it was also clear that the challenges Parichiti face in mobilizing women domestic workers are immense. The contracts for work were individually negotiated by the women domestic workers, and they faced immense economic hardships from the poor pay and working conditions. Moreover, the conditions of the area in which the women lived, the long distances they had to walk to get to work, the number of hours each woman spent working either at home or on domestic work spoke of the importance of the continued presence of Parichiti in the area. The women domestic workers also wanted to learn of the experiences of mobilizing domestic workers that the participants of the workshop had, and were particularly keen to learn of how MKS was working on changing the working conditions of domestic workers in Jaipur. The sense



of solidarity that the women obtained from recognizing that groups were being mobilized in other parts of the country on issues that they also faced was palpable.

The second group went on the DMSC facilitated field visit. DMSC has 16 centres in Kolkata of which one centre is working with domestic workers since 2010. The group that went to visit DISHA spoke of DISHA's work on both domestic workers' rights as well as their welfare. They shared how well organized the domestic workers were, for instance the women they met were clear that 4 days of holiday per month was a must and that it was important to mobilize new entrants to domestic work on this issue. The group also commended DISHA on the services they offered - crèche services for domestic workers' children with mid day meal schemes, a drop in centre, counseling services and health check-ups. They also mentioned the problems that DISHA faced in mobilizing urban domestic workers, who are a shifting population and unorganized.

The groups then shared their project related experiences, which will be shared in more detail later. The overall outcome of the workshop was an increased interest from the participants in the varying strategies that the different groups employ in working with domestic workers. In terms of immediate outcomes, ISST is planning a trip to Jaipur to learn more about MKS strategies of mobilizing and collectivizing women. Similarly, Saath is interested in setting up a co-operative of domestic workers based on a recognition of collectivization in working with domestic workers.

The further outcomes of the workshop can be discerned only in the long term. One interesting possibility the discussion around which was initiated at the workshop was of the group forming a loose network to strategise at the policy level on domestic work. They would like this network to be anchored in ISST, and intend to mobilize for policy level interventions particularly in relation to the national domestic worker policy, the proposed domestic worker bill, as well as the ILO convention. The extent to which this takes off will be dependent on many factors, including whether the group is able to generate enough financial support and funding, but the seed of the idea was planted at the workshop.

### Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC)

Pratima Mandal (along with Baby Naskar and Paramita Chowdhury) of DMSC gave a short introduction to the work of DMSC with domestic workers which started in 2010 with an initiative in 2010 with field visits, workshops and groups discussions. In 2011, domestic workers formed their own organization by election. 12 people stood for election and 7 were elected. Since then DISHA has worked to resolve 5 cases of bonus related disputes, 4 cases of termination, and addressed 6 cases of domestic violence.

There is also a new leadership which is being developed in DISHA which started in April 2012 through training in keeping books and accounts, maintaining minutes, formation of committees, and to make decisions, monitor and supervise activities.

As mentioned in the field visit report, DISHA also conducts health camps providing medical support to the community including blood tests, eye camps, etc. They do this in collaboration with different organizations, for instance, with Mission for Vision to conduct cataract operations.

They also do advocacy activities with various stakeholders at the local level including local clubs, municipality, police stations, with the labour department on various entitlements (SUSPFAW) and with policy makers. They also network with other unorganized sector workers such as zari workers, quarry workers, tea plantation workers, hawkers, mid day meal workers, ASHA workers, etc.

They are also involved with seminars, for instance with Jadavpur university (research on why domestic workers were not being allowed to register as an union) and with the Pension Parishad.

The future plan of DMSC is to scale up the organization in other areas, build local level leadership amongst the domestic workers, and work on registering the union.

### Parichiti

Shubra Das and Ranjita Dey of Parichiti talked of the work that Parichiti have been doing with commuter women domestic workers who travel from places like Sonapur (they commute 1 ½ hours by train and then walk to the employment which sometimes takes another 1 ½ hours – one way). In order to reach commuter domestic workers, Parichiti works in two local stations. They also have a Bishramghar, a drop-in centre, which was started in 2007, and which provides a space for the women to rest, to meet each other, cook, use the toilet, watch TV, etc. A Samadhan group has been formed by the women who visited the Bishramghar, which meets once a month to discuss, plan and strategize. This group works with on deputation to railway authorities with a leaflet of demands, including issues that domestic workers face such as termination without

notice, extra pay for overtime, bonus, maternity leave, no employment of minor girls. They also lobbied the railway authorities to increase the number of ladies compartments in the train, and to provide shade and shelter, and toilet facilities to them at the railway stations. This has been successful in part, as the number of bogies has increased from 9 to 12 and the provision of a toilet though this is generally under lock and key.

Apart from the stations and the Bishramghar, Parichiti also works with communities in their places of residence. They work in Shahidsmriti (which the participants visited) and Nonadonga, where many previously evicted communities live. Based on a survey by Parichiti, they learnt that 46% of women who live there are domestic workers. Apart from mobilizing the women on their rights, Parichiti are also carrying out safety audits in Shahidsmriti. These safety audits are being carried out for the commuter domestic workers as well. Parichiti is also considering ways in which they can take the work they have done on the safety audits forward.

There are several challenges that Parichiti face in the work that they do, many of which are shared by the other organization- the women have very little time outside their work to get engaged in mobilization, building solidarity amongst domestic workers is difficult, as is breaking the cycle of child marriage, amongst other things.

### Saath Charitable Trust

Dr Neeta of Saath shared their work on the Urmila Home Manager scheme which she described as a scheme to institutionalize processes of transformation of unorganized domestic workers into formal home managers. The scheme is conceived of as a business model and focuses on training and placement. Saath's work also includes community mobilization, marketing strategies, capacity building, relationship management and monitoring and evaluation.

The training component lasts for 15 days and includes sessions on hygiene and grooming, patient and geriatric care, cooking, effective communication, facilitation and access to government schemes. They also have confidence building training, awareness and exposure visits.

Saath's work also involves facilitation of the contract between the employer and the domestic worker- they negotiate better wages for domestic workers based on a fixed rate, conduct home visits to the client, and do hand holding for both client and home manager for a month. They also have a blacklist of employers, and when domestic workers file a complaint, they provide full support to the domestic worker.

From December to Feb 2013, 138 home managers have been trained and 45 have been placed as well.

## ISST

ISST (Amita Joshi and Dharmender) shared the work that they do on their Domestic Workers Mobilization programme under which over 700 women have been approached so far, of which they are in regular contact with over 400 women. The women domestic workers that ISST works with, is a heterogeneous group including migrants from West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh. In the slums in which ISST works with domestic workers, there are other worker groups- vegetable vendors, construction workers, etc. The basis of the mobilization work that ISST does with domestic workers is an understanding of self-reliance for domestic workers- their inviolable right to live as citizens of the country. ISST conducts fortnightly home visits, camps and workshops, and support the formation of SHGs. They also run a helpdesk everyday for 2 hours for domestic workers. They have mobilized about 20 women into a pressure group.

Health is one of the biggest challenges that ISST has identified for domestic workers to continue the work that they do. In an informal survey that they conducted with **40 domestic workers** (check), most of them had left work due to poor health, including UTIs, TB and poor lungs. This is why ISST focuses its energy on health camps, as well as para-medical training, which focuses on the use of thermometer, BP apparatus, dressing of wounds and injuries, using and giving simple medicines and syrups for fever, cold, cough, itching, vomiting etc.

An integral part of this programme is their Bachpan programme which works with domestic workers children between aged between 4-14 years. The idea of ISST's work with these children is to work with the wider domestic worker community, addressing their concerns, not just as domestic workers. ISST provides training to these children on computers, English, carpentry, mobile repairing.

## MKS

Meva Bharti of MKS presented the work that they have been doing over the last year. MKS has received support from SDTT for the past two years, before that they were supported by the union. In terms of their recent activities, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February this year, they held a jan sunvayi (public hearing) which identified some key concerns of domestic workers, particularly for migrant women. One of the key issues was that migrant women find it difficult to establish identity to claim benefits from government schemes. The other issues that the jan sunvayi identified was the caste, class and religious discrimination in Rajasthan, particularly towards the Bengali Muslim migrant domestic worker population. As with ISST, the health of domestic workers was identified as a key concern, apart from the lack of social and economic security (including security of employment), as well as the lack of status that domestic work and domestic workers suffer from.

In terms of the work of the union, which MKS has already shared in depth with the group, the important thing to note was that the conditions of work have slowly improved for the women that the union works with. 4 days of holiday, ration cards for domestic workers have been success stories. Again, about 300 women have been helped to get the benefits of the national pension scheme (using worker IDs provided by the union).

The union now has 8500 members and works in 17 areas of Jaipur through 17 committees. There are several challenges that they face in their work, including working identifying and working with young girls who are in domestic work. An acute challenge that was shared across the group as well was on how to survive economically without support. Although the committees generate a small amount of income, it is insufficient to continue the work that they have been doing. Moreover, a challenge which was also echoed by others in the group pertained to the difficulties arising from those who benefitted economically from the movement leaving it behind.

### YUVA

Chandana Das and Madhu Bilmore shared the work that YUVA has been doing, apart from the major work of unionisation that they have been involved with, which they shared over the previous days.

YUVA's work is broadly divided into capacity building and policy advocacy. In relation to capacity building, YUVA provides several kinds of training including legal training, kitchen and housekeeping training, training of group leaders, social entrepreneurship training, personality development training as well as training to stream into other jobs, apart from domestic work. Apart from these trainings, YUVA also conducts exposure visits, cultural programmes and awareness programmes on health and government schemes.

In relation to policy advocacy, YUVA does networking, lobbying, rallies, jan sunwais, apart from being involved in several andolans. For instance they have been involved in a signature campaign for domestic workers rights, a railway roko across 9 districts, as well as a mundan andolan for the implementation of the Act through the Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board. They have also been involved in the Pension Parishad andolan.

The other activities that YUVA has been involved with are in facilitating domestic workers in registering for BPL cards. They have managed to have 925 yellow BPL cards registered across districts in Maharashtra. Going forward, they are keen to build on social entrepreneurship possibilities for domestic workers.

## **Strategising for Domestic Workers**

This session was facilitated by Amita Joshi, ISST. The purpose of this session was to identify whether there are any areas in common that the group would like to work on as a collective, and if so, how.

Dr Jana kicked off the session by noting that each group has been working at different levels, for different lengths of time. For instance MKS has been working in Rajasthan from 2006 onwards. He noted that each group will need to work for at least 5-6 years for the work they are doing to bed in.

In terms of a national platform on domestic workers, he noted that there are ways in which we could work together in order to build this network.

### 1. Capacity building

In order to truly understand the benefits that other organizations were reaping in terms of the depth and breadth of their work, we should understand for instance how they have engaged in capacity building, viz., how have the unions been built in Rajasthan and Maharashtra? Research that focused on an impact analysis of unionization in the two states would be of benefit here.

### 2. Exposure and exchange visits

Exposure and exchange visits between organizations, if facilitated, would hugely benefit each organization. Just as the workshop functions as a space for learning, actually visiting the various groups, and learning in depth about their strategies would be of benefit to the group as a whole.

### 3. Advocacy

Advocacy on domestic work has so far been at the state level for the groups concerned. If the group could come up with some common demands, then a national platform to coalesce these demands could be formed. Dr Jana also suggested some issues around which we could form a national platform

- a) If it is possible to determine through research that the Domestic Worker Boards that have been instituted in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have been successful, then this could be a demand that is made across the states as well.
- b) The advocacy that is happening in other states on minimum wage legislation, for instance in Jharkhand, would help the group in its own advocacy strategies, at the state as well as national level
- c) National policy on domestic workers as well as the draft legislation on domestic workers- this is something that the group could strategise together to get them passed.

Dr Jana was also clear that these efforts to coalesce at the national level require support of professional institutions as well as donor institutions. He also recommended that a co-ordination unit based in Delhi to prepare advocacy materials and co-ordinate the efforts of the group could be worthwhile.

There were several discussions that followed Dr Jana's. Anchita Ghatak of Parichiti talked of the different nature of the work being carried out by the various organizations, as well as the different resources at their command. She emphasized that the local was where the change would have to happen, and energies expended.

There was however a general enthusiasm to see a loose network formed which would work towards consolidated work at least at the policy level. Chandana Das was keen on this network as she saw important work that this network could carry out at a national level. Keren Nazareth talked of the possibility of a skill development strategy that could be the focus of this group. Dr Jana suggested that the co-ordination unit at Delhi be based at ISST.

The overall outcome of the workshop was an increased interest from the participants in the varying strategies that the different groups employ in working with domestic workers, particularly on social protection, collectivization and unionisation. In terms of immediate outcomes, ISST is planning a trip to Jaipur to learn more about MKS strategies of mobilizing and collectivizing women. Similarly, SAATH is interested in setting up a co-operative of domestic workers based on a recognition of the importance of collectivization strategies in working with domestic workers.

In terms of the long term, one interesting possibility is the group forming a loose network to strategise at the policy level on domestic work. The group would like this network to be anchored in ISST, and intend to mobilize for policy level interventions particularly in relation to the national domestic worker policy, the proposed domestic worker bill, as well as the ILO convention. The extent to which this takes off will be dependent on many factors, including whether the group is able to generate enough financial support and funding.