



# The Women in Public Service Project Institute at the Asian University for Women

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**Final Report**

**Summer 2012**

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## **Women in Public Service Project at the Asian University for Women: August 2012**

*"By making full use of half the world's intelligence — the intelligence of women — we improve our chances of finding real and lasting solutions to the challenges that confront us."*

**Michelle Bachelet - Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women**

*"Ultimately, leadership requires action: daring to take steps that are necessary but unpopular, challenging the status quo in order to reach a brighter future. And to push for peace is ultimately personal sacrifice, for leadership is not easy. It is born of passion, and it is a commitment. Leadership is a commitment to an idea, to a dream, and to a vision of what can be. And my dream is for my land and my people to cease fighting and allow our children to reach their full potential regardless of sex, status, or belief."*

**Benazir Bhutto - Prime Minister of Pakistan and Daughter of the East**

*"No nation can rise to the heights of glory unless your women are side by side with you."*

**Muhammad Ali Jinnah - Founding Father of Pakistan**

The Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) was launched by Secretary Hillary Clinton in partnership with the U.S. Department of State and the Seven Sisters women's colleges- Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Smith and Wellesley and other women's colleges – to advance women to positions of power and civic organizations worldwide. The initiative is distinguished by the partners' demonstrated legacy of educating women leaders across the globe and linking them to each other through intergenerational networks.

The WPSP Institutes are unique and distinctive programs aimed at preparing the next generation of women leaders in public service. The WPSP at AUW program and curriculum, designed and taught by Dr. Rangita de Silva de Alwis, Director of the Global Women's Leadership Initiative at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, used a pedagogical approach based on shared and interactive learning, which enriches the experience of the students. In the summer of 2012, nearly forty-five young women from eight different countries studying at the Asian University for Women in Chittagong, Bangladesh attended the Institute.

## Introduction

This Institute at the Asian University for Women (AUW) was the fulfillment of a long journey envisioned by several founding partners who believe in the power of ideas and action to make enduring change. These torchbearers and trailblazers helped to incite a new generation of women leaders to come to the forefront as problem solvers and thought leaders.

WPSP's architects Ambassador Melanne Vermeer and Special Representative to Muslim Communities Farah Pandith realized the vision of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who planted the seeds for this historic initiative in 1994. As the First Lady of the United States, she galvanized the world in Beijing in 1995 by reminding us that "women's rights are human rights once and for all." The Seven Sisters Colleges and the commitment of the presidents of Wellesley, Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mt. Holyoke, and Smith Colleges to women's leadership around the world inspired this Institute. Finally, the Institute would not have been possible without the Honorable Jane Harman and her enduring belief in the transformative power of global public service. Her support and efforts made it possible for a new generation of women leaders to heed the call to action and to join a movement that sees women's leadership as the central moral imperative of our times.

The AUW created a crucible for women's learning and partnership in Asia; a powerful incubator that can grow the potential of women in Asia to address the urgent challenges of our time. My participation in the program was made possible by the Fulbright Program and June Shih at the U.S. State Department; Kamal Ahmed, the tireless founder of AUW; and by Wellesley College and the Wellesley Centers for Women. It is a powerful spirit of partnership that connects us across borders and boundaries to find common ground and build a common cause that is at the heart of the WPSP.

This Institute provided AUW students with the space and platform for reflection, analysis, storytelling and partnerships so that ideas could travel across borders and be transformed into concrete practice in their communities. The students participated passionately and worked with their groups to mobilize action through teambuilding and networking.

An exercise in shared learning, the Institute created a consultative process that mimicked real life law and policymaking. It employed consultative processes to reimagine new structures, new institutes, new laws, and new ways of thinking and doing in their communities and countries. The students engaged in real life legislative drafting of the Children's Law in Bangladesh. They role-played re-envisioning educational and vocational training policies that harmonize with children's work in the field; built on existing food for education programs to create new incentives for the girl child's access to education; and created anti-sexual harassment policies and workplace complaint processes based on principles of gender equality in the workplace to prevent a hostile environment for women's work. The students visited a one stop crisis center in the Chittagong hospital built on a public/ private model and used their own critical thinking to develop a model national plan of action and policy platform to combat domestic violence, acid crimes and trafficking in their communities. Their thinking was stretched by global norms, but they urged local action. The participating students discussed provisions of UN Security Council Resolutions, and with visionary zeal, they inhabited the role of consensus builder and peacemaker to resolve regional and transnational conflict using the case study of the conflict between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir

issue. They even proved to be skilled negotiators with the Taliban, arguing that women's empowerment is a public good. The students called for women to serve on Afghanistan's Supreme Court and developed a compelling platform to build their case. They debated complex issues relating to the impact of religion on family laws and on constitutional making. The women identified child marriage as one of the greatest threats to human security in Afghanistan and developed a plan of action to revise the constitution to raise the age of marriage in Afghanistan from 16 to 18. Challenging as it was, they resolved to bring together both secular human rights principles and the egalitarian underpinnings of the Koran to develop solutions to address some of the most urgent problems facing women, men, and the children of their communities.

As change makers, the students came up with a community radio project to break women's isolation and address depression and suicide among women and children. The student participants developed mentorship programs to strengthen the legacy of women's leadership and push the boundaries of change in their community. Their stories helped to redefine power, politics, and policy in an inclusive and transformative image of men and women, women who are veiled and unveiled, caregivers and heads of state.

At the Institute, the students inhabited the multiple roles of policy maker, change maker, movement builder, and alliance builder. The students learned to build bridges with religious leaders and male bastions of power—and most importantly with grassroots groups. In their simulations, they brought those women and children who experienced violence and sexual abuse to the table so that their voices could shape the policies that so intimately impact their lives. Deeply conscious that the personal is political and that decision making powers in the home are determinants of women's decision making in public life, these women negotiated a place at the table for women in the most intimate and political of spaces: their families.

The more they discussed, the more they debated, the more the students pushed the frontiers of what is possible when women are at the table. These students dismantled stereotypes and challenged the existing status quo that sees women in their primary role as mothers and caregivers, and they re-envisioned equal caregiving opportunities for both men and women so as to address the disproportionate responsibility of caregiving that impedes women's advancement in public life. The students created work/family reconciliation policies for the workplace that embraced child care policies and shared parenting and family leave.

When the time came to say farewell and to share the torch of leadership with other student leaders in Asia, many of the students affirmed that they would never be the same again because of their engagement in the Institute. These students shared the fact that they had participated in the two most transformative weeks of their life.

The student leaders declared, "We want the history books to tell our story, narrate our forgotten history," and in excelling at this Institute, they became powerful storytellers and, thus, a voice for their generation. They also became the conscience of their generation. They repeated their collective dream that "one day all women will be equal, equal partners in education and in sports and will never be reduced in the name of religion; in the name of culture." In the words of one student, "I will struggle for justice, this is my promise, this is my promise to my country, to my Afghanistan." Another student from Afghanistan inspired her sisters to drink from the "bottle of hope" that she carries with her at all times. Yet another student illustrated how she "swims in the waters of hope" that she plunges into when she is confused,

fearful, and in doubt. These women were not content in making ripples, as they wanted to “make waves,” waves that would change ways in which society limits women in their community. When asked how they would accomplish their goals, they confidently said, “If you try, you will fly.”

For many women, the issues raised were not abstract exercises. Several had practical experience in micro-credit loans and they crafted innovative ways to strengthen micro-credit based on vocational and gender sensitivity training. When they drafted a model of anti-child marriage policy, they incorporated their deeply felt experiences. To them, it was not an abstract idea or exercise. Several had courageously resisted forced marriage and child marriage in their own lives and in their families, and they knew that education was the most powerful vaccine against child marriage. When discussing violence against women, many of the women had witnessed different forms of violence in their communities. When asked to collect data in order to draft a law combating violence against women, they recalled that “one in three women in my village face violence.” A young woman from Bangladesh passionately commented “never should a woman have to be beaten up by one whom she loves so deeply, so dearly: her husband, her father, or her son.” When discussing ways to combat violence based on family honor, a young woman from Pakistan shared a tragic story of personal heartbreak and outrage – the silenced story of her aunt’s murder by the son she gave life to. She said “my aunt’s story was buried with her.” But her voice cannot be silenced. Hers is the conscience of Pakistan. She declared fearlessly, “I will never give up on my aunt, I will never give up on women who are harmed in the name of family honor. I promise that I will never let her story be forgotten, I will stand up for my rights, I will stand up for the rights of all women.”

Their stories embodied the timeless words of emancipation by Nobelist Rabindranath Tagore, legendary poet and beloved son of Bengal. “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; where knowledge is free; Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; Where words come out from the depth of truth; where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection.”

The AUW participants came together at a transformative moment in the history of the young University and proved to the world that AUW is indeed a crucible for women’s education and leadership. Never has an Institute like this been as pivotal as at this defining point in time. On the first day, students and speakers discussed why women’s leadership is the pivotal cause of our times. They brought to life that now more than ever there must be a clarion call for women to be at the forefront of law, policy, political, social, and economic change for families, communities, and countries. They proved forcefully that when women are at the table, in the words of Michelle Bachelet the former President of Chile and current head of UN Women, “we improve our chances of finding real and lasting solutions to the challenges that confront us.”

The women of AUW’s WPSP Institute came together with their energy and their lived experiences to create a shared experience of learning. They left with a shared history and a sense of shared purpose to positively impact the destinies of their communities. Most of all, they carry with them a torch that they will shine bright for their sisters at AUW and in their communities and countries. These women will continue to flourish in their community of peers. That is WPSP’s enduring gift to them. This network will support and inspire them on their journey in leadership and public service. They, in turn, will pledge to sustain that spirit of service.

The lessons learned and shared at this Institute will be AUW's call to serve. The words of then First Lady Hillary Clinton at that watershed moment in history in Beijing in 1995 will be their call to action. "Let us heed that call so we can create a world in which every woman is treated with respect and dignity, every boy and girl is loved and cared for equally, and every family has the hope of a strong and stable future. That is the work before you."

*Rangita de Silva de Alwis*

*Director, Global Women's Leadership Initiative*

*September 2012*

*"Once I was afraid to dream big, but after attending WPSP, I feel both the courage and the ability to dream big and try my best to fulfill it. I've **already started thinking as a leader.**" – Mursal Juya*

## Institute Methodology

To better prepare young women for a career in public service, the WPSP Institute at AUW used a unique combination of approaches that incorporated the diverse life experiences of students, taught them key skills, and developed their self-confidence and enthusiasm for affecting change. The approaches included discussions, storytelling as a way to inform public policy, and group role-playing. These methods were implemented to provide an experience that was both instructive and interactive so that students would benefit from the Institute as much as possible.



Each day, students attended a series of lectures and panel discussions that examined important gender issues and their implications for public policy. The topics discussed included the absence of women in policy-making, women's rights as human rights, gender-based violence, women and peace-building, work/life balance, the role of the media in advancing gender equality, and many more. Discussions were led by Dr. Rangita de Silva de Alwis. Guest lecturers that Rangita invited from the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association included: Begum Shirin Sharmin Choudhury, the Minister of the Bangladesh Department of Women and Children's Affairs; Tawhida Khondke, Director of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association; Jamila Akhter, Project Coordinator of the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association; and Mitali Jahan, Program Manager of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association. Discussions exposed students to some of the most central issues in the gender community today. Also present at these discussions were Fellows from the WorldTeach volunteer program at AUW, who audited the Institute and were inspired to expand the themes, curriculum, and issues that were explored.

Secondly, the Institute used storytelling and the sharing of personal experiences as a way to inform public policy. Each day, several students were invited to speak about their journey leading up to the Institute and their plans for their future. For example, one student from Afghanistan spoke about the challenges of engaging in politics. She told the plenary that she found inspiration in the lives of the important historical figures and that "[she] wants history books to write [her] story." Another student spoke about her upbringing in Kerala, a relatively rich region of southern India. She explained that despite Kerala's reputation as a more progressive region, women are not empowered because they still lack respect. Her goal in coming to the Institute was to ensure that women are included in Kerala's development. Through these personal stories, the plenary learned about each student's background, goals, and motivations.

The storytelling approach has several goals. First, it seeks to teach students that their own life experiences are constructive, and that they can be a powerful tool to connect with an audience. As one student wrote after her first story-telling session, "[it] helped us...value our experiences and realize how our experiences can bring positive changes." Another goal is to teach students the importance of effective



communication and to give them opportunities to practice public speaking. They learned concrete public speaking skills such as voice projection, enunciation, and repetition of words to emphasize a point. Furthermore, they learned the importance of confidence, messaging, adequate preparation, and knowing the audience. These sessions were a crucial part of the Institute because they showed the students that public-speaking is not only for men. The Institute provided a space for women to learn and perfect these skills, which not only enhanced their speaking skills but also their self-confidence.

Additionally, the Institute utilized group work to facilitate an interactive learning environment. Groups were given a particular scenario and asked to devise a solution that they would demonstrate through role-play. They were given a range of options for role-playing including simulating a panel discussion, a radio interview, a talk show, or a specific event. One group, for example, was tasked with improving progress towards Millennium Development Goal #2. In their role-play, the group highlighted reasons why girls might not be educated such as the fact that they are often responsible for household labor. One of the solutions offered by the group was for schools to schedule classes around these work hours so that children and their parents are not forced to choose between income and education. The interactive and participatory nature of the group work and role-playing sessions were a powerful learning tool because they gave students the opportunity to devise solutions for real life problems and to learn from each other.



*“WPSP’s AUW Summer Institute has strengthened my dreams and goals. I feel more confident to carry out any kind of development initiative at the community level. I truly learned a lot and it also shaped my leadership skills through the activities and lessons we had for the two weeks program.” – Thasomini Palaniyandy*

### **About WPSP, GWLI, and the Wilson Center**

The Women in Public Service Project (WPSP) is uniquely situated to design and administer these training institutes. The Project was founded in December 2011 as an initiative of the U.S. Department of State and the Seven Sisters women’s colleges – Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Wellesley – to encourage the participation of women in government and politics around the world. Through its training institutes and partnerships, WPSP seeks to build a generation of women leaders who will invest in their countries and communities, provide leadership in their governments, and change the way global solutions

are shaped. WPSP joined the Global Women's Leadership Initiative (GWLI) at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in June 2012, which has given WPSP access to more resources and has connected global women leaders with the project. The goal of GWLI to achieve a leadership that is 50 percent women by 2050 supports the mission of WPSP to train women for public service.

### About AUW

The Asian University for Women (AUW) was chosen as a place to hold the summer 2012 Institute because it is the first and only pan-Asian university for young women from diverse cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds from South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. As these regions continue to develop, strong women leaders will be needed to ensure that women's issues are being addressed. The mission of AUW to educate women to become effective leaders and professionals complements the goals of WPSP and its training institutes.



*“WPSP is a great example of what we women are capable of when we come together. It is also a sign that we will be the ones to bring about the greatest change, because we feel the burden of these problems the most.” - Maliha Khan*

### Report



#### **Day 1 – “Amplifying Women’s Voices: Developing a Crucible of Women’s Leadership”**

The first day of the AUW Institute opened with a keynote address by Dr. Rangita de Silva de Alwis about the importance of women's participation in the public sector. Her remarks were followed by Women's Affairs Minister Begum Shirin Sharmin Choudhury, who discussed women leaders in Bangladesh, and by Ryan Bradeen, Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. embassy, who spoke about U.S. commitment to women's empowerment. After these remarks, students were given the opportunity to ask questions, during which time issues like female illiteracy and quotas were raised.

In keeping with the theme of the day, Dr. de Silva de Alwis spoke in the afternoon about the power of storytelling and the sharing of personal experiences to inform public policy. Students learned about the importance of effective communication for influencing policy. Communication skills that were discussed included the importance of preparation, knowing the audience, proper enunciating, and keeping to the allotted time. She advised students to speak clearly and with confidence and conviction, but to also show they are humble and willing to learn. Students listened to examples from speeches made by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Aung San Suu Kyi, Benazir Bhutto, Hillary Clinton, and Wangari Maathai to illustrate those skills.

Five students were asked to incorporate these skills into a short speech about their journey to the Institute and their goals after they leave. The young women spoke of their lives before the Institute and the injustice they have experienced due to gender-based ideas. Three women from Afghanistan spoke about the difficult nature of engaging in Afghan politics. Two other students from India discussed the challenges of changing gender roles in a traditional society. One of the Indian students from Kerala commented that women still confront stereotypes and face limited opportunities despite the region's reputation as a relatively rich and developed region. All expressed a desire to not only empower women, but to bring positive change to their country.

Students were then divided into five groups, assigned to a case study, and asked to role-play before the plenary. One group was tasked with creating new innovative indicators to measure progress towards Millennium Development Goal #2 (achieving universal primary education). During their role-play, the students brought up the problem of the gender gap in primary education and how it can limit the opportunities available to adult women because they lack proper education and civic experience. Another important point brought out during this group's presentation was the need for the MDGs to acknowledge and address the reality of child labor. The young women suggested that schools should accommodate children who have to work, and that there should be incentives such as free uniforms and books to reduce the financial burden of education.

Another group was asked to present a female Pakistani candidate for office and to explain why she would be compelling to voters in Pakistan. During their role-play, the group presented a candidate who had survived poverty and sexual violence as a child and could therefore empathize with some of the most marginalized people in the country. At the same time, the group argued, this candidate would be an inspirational leader and role model because she would show that anyone could overcome a difficult past and run for office. The group also raised several key discussion points including the difficulty of not only electing women to office, but finding female candidates who are as qualified and educated as men since girls are not typically as educated as boys.





## Day 2 – “Transformative Leadership”

The second day of the Institute focused on the theme of “Transformative Leadership.” The morning speech by Dr. Rangita de Silva de Alwis focused on the fact that women are often barred from the decision-making process by discriminatory legal and electoral codes, lack of education, and by violence or the threat of violence against women. This legacy of gender discrimination has not only kept women from holding these leadership positions, but it has also kept them from developing the skills necessary to perform these roles. Her talk also highlighted the transformative power of role models. A woman in a leadership position has the potential to inspire other women and girls to pursue similar careers, and her presence will encourage people to reimagine leadership, politics, and power. Furthermore, the presence of women in these roles has indirect effects on the community because it proves that women are as capable as men and that they should be equally valued.

The morning session also included a presentation by Dr. de Silva on a “toolkit” for students to use in the future as they seek to influence policy. First, using evidence-based research and data – particularly gender disaggregated data – is important when advocating for new policies because it provides facts to support an argument. For example, a policy designed to eliminate domestic violence should have statistics about the number of women who are affected by abuse. Another tool important for policymakers is to build networks and learn to advocate effectively. This advocacy network can include a wide range of potential alliances, including the media, the opposition, men, and religious organizations. Students were given the example of Kim Campbell, the former Prime Minister of Canada, who was able to pass gun control legislation after bringing together a wide range of voices, including gun owners, academics, sociologists, and mothers who had lost children from gun violence. Another example was the law against female genital mutilation in Egypt in which advocacy groups were able to generate community support by appealing to community and religious leaders, as well as to men and boys. These networks and alliances broaden the base of support for a policy.

Students at the Institute were also advised to recognize that change might be a struggle, and that relentless, strategic activism may be necessary. Therefore, not only is it necessary for them to be prepared for a long fight, but they should also develop a long-term strategy for achieving their goals. In Morocco, for example, family law stipulated that rapists could marry the survivor to absolve the rape. The struggle for a change in the law took more than five years and included various groups such as religious leaders and academics. The last tool that students were introduced to was the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the people to demonstrate the idea that any law needs broad public support to be effective.

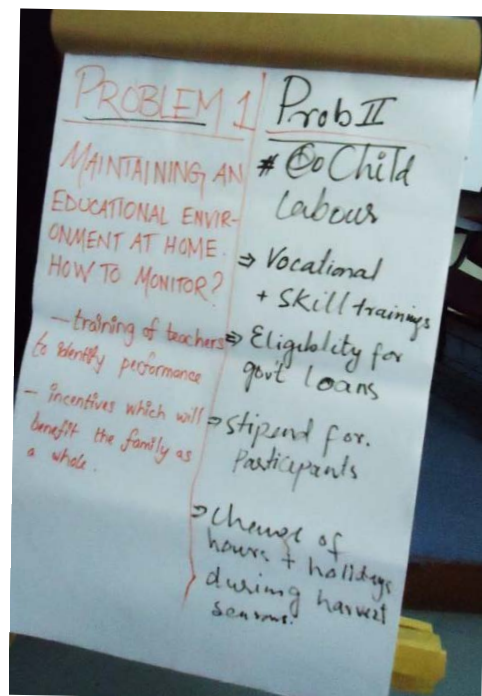
In the storytelling session of the day, several student leaders were invited to speak about how they plan to overcome the challenges they may face as women. One student told the plenary that her father advised her to study law because any woman who



understands law can face any challenges that come her way. She also spoke of her new found network at AUW, saying that “the women with me now will support me in changing the future, and I will have that same responsibility towards anyone who comes after me.” Another young woman revealed her dreams of creating a program that would provide books for poor schools.

Optimism, to her, was one of the most powerful ways to overcome future challenges. She explained, “Hope is the bottle of water I carry with me and drink from often.” Through their personal stories, the students revealed that their past experiences have provided them with valuable skills as they move forward in their studies and their careers.

The afternoon group discussion and role-play session focused on developing strategies to overcome political, legal, social, or cultural challenges for women’s leadership. Students were asked to provide solutions using relevant case studies and scenarios. One group, for example, tackled the lack of education for girls. The solutions presented were incentives for families to send girls to schools, better transportation options, and evening vocational training options for children who have to work at home during the day. Another group focused on policies to prevent child marriage. They proposed a media campaign and a mandate for birth registration so that a child’s age would be on the public record. They also discussed the importance of educating parents and children about the drawbacks of child marriage.



*“While attending the institute, my mind got prepared to act against these miseries and I have got the courage and confidence to make a substantial effort in changing the society of unfairness. Listening to Dr. Rangita, who has light and enthusiasm in her each sentence, empowered me with the power to act against the unfair world. I consider attending this institute as one of the best opportunities that I have got in my life.” - Minnu Jose*

### Day 3 – “Transformative and Inclusive Policy-Making”



Day three started with a lecture by Dr. de Silva on the problems of excluding women from decision-making. She pointed out that politics are largely controlled by the people involved in the influential discourses and decisions. Historically, men have been in these positions, and they have ignored the unequal distribution of power in the household and in the political sphere, which have resulted in laws that enshrined gender stereotypes and disadvantaged women. To remedy this discrimination, women need to be involved in these decision-making processes. Furthermore,

issues like childcare and inheritance need to be reimagined as policy issues so that women are not limited in their access to resources or unfairly burdened with carework.

It was also emphasized that real change requires more than the involvement of a few token women. Dr. de Silva discussed that a “critical mass” of women – generally accepted to be 30 percent – is needed to impact public policy. This introduced to the group the use of legal devices such as quotas as way to reach this critical mass. Key questions arose from this lecture, including How can laws be more inclusive of the needs of both men and women? and How can laws be recreated in the image of both men and women?

Students again were invited to practice giving a compelling speech using storytelling. A student from Afghanistan spoke to the plenary about her dream to learn English despite the limited opportunities available and her determination to change education for girls in her community. She also spoke about her own resistance to marriage and traditional life after seeing how her married friends were “living in [a] cage.” Her most important lesson was learning that “it is good to have big dreams, but it is better to have an action plan.”

During the group session, the students were tasked with analyzing a case study involving family laws, labor laws, or penal codes and identifying areas where women’s needs were not addressed. One case was on “Eve teasing,” which is a term used in Asia to describe sexual harassment. The students used role-play to depict a scenario where a woman was harassed on the street. They suggested solutions including punishment and rehabilitation to discourage and prevent men from engaging in this behavior. Another case-study focused on discrimination at job interviews. The young women presented a situation in which a female candidate was more qualified for a position than the male candidate, but was viewed as a less desirable potential employee because the management assumed she would soon get married, have children, and have family responsibilities. The students stressed the importance of perseverance and suggested policies to reduce discrimination in the workplace.

#### **Day 4 – “Women’s Rights as Human Rights”**

The fourth day of the Institute was titled “Women’s Rights as Human Rights” and training concentrated on using the human rights framework to eliminate violence against women. As Dr. de Silva discussed with the students, violence can include actions such as honor killings, acid crimes, infanticide and female feticide, sati, female genital mutilation, virginity testing, menstruation rituals, and dowry killings. Additionally, women and girls can experience gender-based violence from discriminatory feeding practices, polygamy, child marriage, and forced marriage. These multiple forms of violence put women’s personal security at risk. However, there has been some progress in attempts to reconcile human rights and traditional practices. The human rights framework has forced the world to think about women’s rights because it holds the state responsible for addressing violence that was previously considered to be in the private sphere. Domestic violence is an example of this. New laws from Asian countries have been promising. One example is the 2009 Afghanistan Domestic Violence, which seeks to eliminate “customs, traditions, and practices that cause violence against women contrary to the religion of Islam.” The law also identifies denial of the right to education, work, and access to health services as harmful for women’s rights. These types of laws are significant because they prohibit culture or tradition from being used to justify gender-based violence.

Representatives from the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), one of the leading human rights organizations, also attended and spoke about their work defending women's rights. The organization seeks to defend victims of domestic violence and trafficking. BNWLA also supports survivors through its rehabilitation services and shelters. Ms. Tawhida, the director of the organization, noted that "equal opportunities and equal rights for women in Bangladesh are not our demand, but they are the rights that have been guaranteed by the constitution."

Another issue covered was sexual harassment in the workplace. Students discussed unacceptable behavior such as sexually suggestive comments, "quid pro quo" arrangements, and behavior that creates a hostile environment for one gender. While men have occasionally been the victims of sexual harassment, females are the main targets. The discussion ended with a summary of sexual harassment laws in South and Southeast Asia. For example, in India, the women's movement has used the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to push for a national policy. This movement has inspired advocates in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan to press for policies on sexual harassment in their own countries.

In groups, Institute participants role-played different scenarios involving violence against women. The scenarios included a mock trial on domestic violence; the creation of workplace sexual harassment guidelines and tools for compliance; the creation of a bilateral agreement between two countries on human trafficking; and a panel discussion on resources for street children. The group that discussed sexual harassment, for example, role-played a situation where a female employee was repeatedly asked out by her boss. When she asked him to stop, she was told that because she was a woman, she had "no voice here" and "no rights." In the role-play, the employee approaches her female coworkers, and they form a sexual harassment committee that comes up with potential punishments for offenders and creates an avenue for victims to submit complaints.

In the human trafficking case, the groups role-played a scenario in which the Foreign Minister of India and the ambassador from Bangladesh hold a meeting to discuss the trafficking of women from Bangladesh to India. The treatment of these women after their return to Bangladesh was an important concern, and the students offered solutions which included legal assistance, healthcare, vocational training for women, and foster families for trafficked children. The issue of prevention was also discussed and the students suggested better border control to reduce avenues for smuggling people and better techniques to identify forged passports.

### **Day 5 – Site visit to BNWLA and the Children's Law Bill 2012**

Students were given the opportunity to observe firsthand an organization that is working on women's rights through a site visit to the Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association. With more than 30 years of experience advocating for women's rights in Bangladesh, BNWLA was an excellent example of an organization committed to women's rights. They target the poorest



and most disadvantaged areas of the country and are focused on providing comprehensive legal, health, and recovery support for women and children who have been the victims of violence.

The site visit offered students a practical experience and allowed them to see how organizations such as BNWLA work with other groups and the government towards a mutual goal. Students also got the chance to listen to the coordinator of the One-Stop Crisis Center (OCC), Dr. Nitay Ghosh, who spoke to the group about the origins of OCC as a joint initiative of the governments of Bangladesh and Denmark. The goals of OCC are to assist women who have been victims of gender-based violence through its health, safety, and reintegration programs. The students were able to see, through the collaboration of the BNWLA and the OCC, how they used media campaigns, helplines, and advertisements to provide their services. Furthermore, the students discovered that it is essential that both women and men are educated about domestic violence. Institute participants were also given time to ask the speakers questions, during which they asked about issues such as the hypocrisy in the OCC program given that it is a government program and yet police officers frequently harass young women.

After the discussion, the students visited a violence rehabilitation center and met several victims of gender-based violence. One woman, who was only sixteen years old, told the group that she was married to a much older man who abused her and eventually attempted to kill her and take their child. Stories such as hers gave the students a new perspective on the challenges that victims face and renewed their determination to create a better future for women.

In a separate site visit, six Bangladeshi students were giving a unique opportunity to be a part of the revision of the Children's Law Bill 2012. The drafting of the bill had been guided by the Conventions on the Rights of the Child. The revision session included a variety of participants including social workers, human rights advocates, policy analysts, journalists, teachers, and government officials. The attendees – including the students – were split into four groups to discuss the bill and potential revisions. One Institute student was even selected by her group to present their revisions to the entire body. This experience showed the students that skills they were learning at the Institute will be important for them in their careers. The six students returned to the Institute inspired and with a new outlook on the ways they can affect change.

### **Day 6 – “Women and Security: Women Negotiating Peace”**

The topic for day six was “Women and Security: Women Negotiating Peace.” In situations of conflict and turmoil, there is evidence that bringing women to the table makes peace agreements more successful and contributes to the long term stability of the country. However, as pointed out in the introduction by Dr. de Silva, women have represented fewer than three percent of mediators and eight percent of negotiators to major peace processes since 1992. The session focused on how to operationalize UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which enshrines women's participation in decision-making; the recognition of the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war (as adopted in SCR 1820); and the realization of SCR 1889, which calls for women's participation across all stages of the peace process.

Building on UN Security Council Resolutions is a necessary step towards the inclusion of more women in peace-building. This is particularly important because women and men are affected differently during



conflict and post-conflict situations. For example, women are at increased risk for sexual and domestic violence during times of social upheaval. This issue should be addressed during peace-building in order to ensure that victims receive justice and that measures are taken to safeguard against future abuse (i.e. improving security in refugee camps). To do this, however, women need to have the opportunity and the skills to negotiate. The Institute participants learned about effective negotiating skills such as pragmatism, respect, maturity, listening, and compromise. Students were also instructed to think beyond ethnicity, gender, and class to the broader values and issues at stake. Sri Lanka's Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission and Cambodia's Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (commonly known as the "Khmer Rouge Tribunal" and the "Cambodian Genocide Tribunal") were two examples of peace negotiations after severe trauma.

In groups, students worked on improving their negotiating skills and were asked to create a draft of a peace process, highlight areas of concern, and address issues like access to education for girls, economic security for families, and rehabilitation for families and communities. Students also role-played scenarios in which mediators would work with representatives from both sides of the conflict to create a framework for peace-building that included women in the process. One group, for example, role-played a scenario in which a female military member was raped by a male member. This led to a discussion of physical and sexual abuse in the military and the need to establish gender-sensitive codes of conduct. Another group discussed justice for women after a conflict has ended. The two main solutions presented by the students were compensation for women who had been captured and kept as "comfort women" for soldiers and the reunification of families separated by violence.

### **Day 7 – "Women's Leadership as Smart Economics"**

Women's economic participation plays an important role in empowerment because it allows women to escape dependency on male relatives and gives them agency in their own lives. Moreover, increased economic participation of women has important impacts on the well-being of their families and communities. This translates not only into better economic efficiency and productivity, but improved human development in areas like health and education. These ideas were the theme of Day 7, "Women's Leadership as Smart Economics."



Students were challenged to develop an action for companies to facilitate the rise of women to top positions. Today, women make up only about 3% of top positions at Fortune 500 companies and the "glass ceiling" continues to limit the potential of talented women. In order to achieve gender equality, more women need to be included in these high-level jobs. One group presented their plan to encourage women to pursue these positions by addressing some of the problems in the workplace. The first problem is that many companies do not offer positions to men and women equally. The second is women's lack of

skills or resources to learn the tools needed to perform higher level jobs. Also, the lack of mentorship opportunities may keep women from realizing that have a right to pursue top positions. To overcome these issues, the group suggested that companies use a combination of evaluation tests and quotas for women and men in positions in which they are underrepresented (i.e. men in secretarial roles). Companies should also have gender-sensitive guidelines for employees and should focus on providing mentorship opportunities. The group emphasized that the goal is not only to encourage more women to pursue high-level position, but to change the attitudes and mindsets of employees about gender. If a female employee sees another woman pursuing a higher level position, it may change her own goals and expectations.

Students also learned about many other issues that affect the economic opportunities for women. One problem is unequal access to jobs and incomes. Not only are some women denied from certain jobs or industries because of their sex, but many who do work receive less pay than their male counterparts. Another related issue is the unequal burden of carework that women are expected to perform. In many places, women are also denied equal access to property, land, and credit. This inequality inhibits women from investing in businesses or in themselves (i.e. education), which then limits their economic potential.

One tool to solve this inequality is social entrepreneurship. In groups, students discussed some of the most successful entrepreneurship programs – like the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh – and how they can support civic engagement and empowerment for women. The groups then role-played the creation of their own social entrepreneurship programs. One group member explained that in Afghanistan she had taught women how to use computers and graphic design. The group presented a plan in which her program was granted \$5,000 to invest in equipment and would be able to provide many more women with opportunities for technical training. This not only would help the group member to grow her business, but it would also help Afghan women learn skills that could be valuable for them in their own careers.

*“WPSP is a blessing for the global women community as it believes in and values the voice and dignity of womanhood. Being a part of this project, I feel privileged to join the dreams of future women leaders who aspire to take the lead of shaping a smart future for women when women’s voice will be equally heard.” - Bushra Tanzila Ahmed*

## **Day 8 – “Transforming Gender Roles: Achieving Work/Family Balance”**

The eighth day of the institute focused on “Transforming Gender Roles: Achieving Work/Family Balance.” One of the biggest issues that women leaders across the world have identified as challenge in their lives is meeting the demands of their careers while also upholding their responsibilities to their families. Because traditional gender roles assign most of the household responsibilities to women, this can be one of the major impediments to women in their advancement in public life. These responsibilities include childcare, cooking, housework, and elderly care. Since the majority of this work is traditionally assigned to women, this forces women who work outside the home to work “double days” because they have to take care of the household as well. Therefore, it is important to create policies that encourage

both men and women to undertake an equal share of caregiving and to ensure that both receive similar treatment.

The lecture presented by Dr. de Silva posited several questions for students to discuss: How can workplace policies be drafted to recognize the role that both parents play in childrearing and caregiving? How do we honor the value of caregiving, cooperation, and responsibility? How can we celebrate the responsibility of both sexes to fill caretaking and nurturing roles? In groups, students discussed these questions, and brought up issues like childcare and parental leave in the household. Many pointed out that mandatory and nontransferable parental leave could be used as a way to encourage both men and women to take on caregiving roles. They also suggested providing quality childcare services as a way to make sure that women in the workforce are not discouraged from pursuing their careers due to familial responsibilities.



Another topic discussed during the Institute was the role of religion and religious text in informing gender roles, particularly in the family. The students talked in depth about new initiatives led by women to reinterpret the Koran and seek to reconcile the reality of women's lives with both the human rights framework and the core principles of the Koran. For example, some of this research has looked at the negative ways that the family is impacted by polygamy. In places like Indonesia, efforts are underway to create laws based on the principles of equality and not on the more traditional patriarchal interpretations of Islamic values. These laws call for equality in marriage, guardianship, custody, property, and inheritance. Students discussed with each other ways that some of these ideas could be applied to the challenges of their communities such as sexual harassment on the streets of Afghanistan.

### **Day 9 – “Role of Media in Advancing Gender Equality and Good Governance”**

The ninth day of the WPSP AUW Institute was dedicated to understanding the “Role of the Media in Advancing Gender Equality and Good Governance,” and how students can integrate the power of the media in their own projects as they move forward with their careers. The media can be a very important tool because it has the ability to influence the attitudes, thoughts, and perceptions of the community. In this way, the media has the potential to change views on gender roles and norms, and can transform stereotypes regarding men and women. Furthermore, bringing attention to gender and women's issues can facilitate discussions at the policymaking level and encourage gender sensitivity.

In small groups, students were tasked with creating a role-play in which there is a press conference for a political candidate with questions about the candidate's view of the media and how she plans to incorporate it into her campaign and into government if elected. Student groups were also challenged to design a website and a social media campaign – including a YouTube video – based on a cause-driven issues. The participants discussed the importance of women in media, such as Christiane Amanpour, a

high-profile reporter for *ABC News*. Women in such highly visible roles break stereotypes about the jobs that women are able to perform, which can inspire future generations of women and girls to seek out positions in male-dominated fields.



Finally, students discussed the issue of media content and its effect on gender. They pointed out that a stereotypical portrayal of women in advertisements can further reinforce gender norms. Also, content can be harmful if it promotes an unhealthy body image for women and girls, or if it encourages violence against women. These issues underscore the importance of creating a dialogue on gender issues and of including women in the discussion.

#### **Day 10 – “The Transformative Power of Mentoring and a Critical Mass of Women”**

Achieving 50% representation of women in decision-making bodies will only be possible if steps are taken to promote the participation of women in politics. First, students participated in a discussion led by Dr. de Silva on the importance of mentors and mentorships. She pointed out that a mentor could be a role model, advisor, coach, teacher, counselor, supervisor, or friend. Mentorships for young women are critical because it pairs someone who is starting out in their careers with someone who is established and has valuable experience to share. A mentorship relationship can give young women the advice, support, guidance, and confidence to pursue their goals.

In groups, students developed their own plans for a mentoring program at AUW. They raised questions concerning how to best match interests, the types of responsibilities a mentor should have, the types of qualities that are most important to nurture and how to do so, and what the best forum is to introduce and develop these relationships.

The second half of the day focused on institutional measures to erase the gender gap in public policy. Students listened to a case study highlighting India’s experiences with quotas, particularly the Panchayat Raj Act, which reserves one third of seats in panchayats (village council, council of neighboring villages, and the district council) for women. Today in India, there are almost one million elected leaders serving in the panchayats, and research has shown more transparency and a decrease in corruption. The act encouraged women to enter politics and to also serve to prove to the community that they are capable of performing these roles. There is an effort to introduce a similar quota in the national parliament, but efforts so far have been unsuccessful and women currently only account for 8.3% of the members of parliament.

In groups, students focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the quota system, including how to address the fact that, at least in the beginning, women are often seen as symbolic and not as qualified as other candidates. Another issue debated was the use of “bottom-up” quotas, which first create a critical mass of women at the local level to prepare women to run for office on the national stage. Finally,



students asked each other whether quotas were enough to ensure women's participation in politics and what other measure should be taken to prepare women for these positions.

*“Our class at WPSP was a microcosm of the world and everything we learned together only brought us closer... Hopefully no matter which path we choose to follow, we'll have a network of brilliant WPSP graduates to support us.” - Raiya Kishwar Ashraf*

### **Day 11 – Closing Remarks**

The final day of the Institute, the students revealed their own platforms for action to advance women in public service. They were told to work as groups or as individuals on some of the most pressing issues of today and to contextualize them in their communities. The goal was to get students to apply their new skills to bring gender equality into practice. Some of the topics they tackled included eliminating child marriage in Afghanistan, speaking out against sexual harassment in Bangladesh, bringing attention to the conditions of sex workers in Vietnam, building leadership skills in Sri Lanka, and linking women over the internet in Kabul (see Appendix B). Many discussed the importance of awareness-raising through avenues like social media and education.

Students were presented with certificates that signified their completion of the learning Institute and listened to farewell speeches by Dr. de Silva and by the Honorable Jane Harman, Director, President, and CEO of the Wilson Center. The students were urged to follow their dreams, even in the face of adversity and to rely on their newly established WPSP/AUW Institute network of friends. As future leaders, the young women were told, they have the potential to change the dynamics of their families, communities, and countries. Finally, they were reminded that they have a duty to help the girls and young women that follow in their footsteps to build on their successes.

### **Conclusion**

The inaugural WPSP/AUW Institute created an incubator for women's leadership in public service in Asia. It gave the attendees new skills and tools to apply as they move forward in their education and careers, including in public speaking and problem-solving. Students left with more knowledge about some of the most important gender challenges in public policy today. The Institute also built a network of emerging women leaders who will continue to support each other throughout their journeys. Finally, it inspired and motivated the students to take on some of the most



important gender challenges facing Asia and the Middle East today.

## Appendix A

### Concluding Thoughts from the AUW Summer Institute Participants

*The Women in Public Service Project has been privileged to work with such an inspiring group of students during the Asian University for Women Summer Institute. They are all powerful change agents and will certainly be models of leadership in their own communities and in the world! We are thrilled to share their concluding thoughts on the impact of the Institute.*

**Thasomini Palaniyandy:** WPSP's AUW summer institute has strengthened my dreams and goals. I feel more confident to carry out any kind of development initiative at the community level. I truly learned a lot and it also shaped my leadership skills through all the activities and lessons which we had for the two week program.

**Tran Thi Ngoc Bich:** The Institute gave me a chance to “challenge myself and push myself to the limit” to know more about the world in which “women’s rights are human rights.” The Institute and Dr. Rangita inspired me, and let me know that I can be a positive changer.

**Tausifa Tajali:** “The Women in Public Service Project” has made us realize the fact that “women are not born; they are created by the society.” My traditional mother did not try to change the social stereotypes that insult my identity as a woman. As a result, I have been suffering for being born as a woman in this patriarchal society, but I will try my best to ensure a sanctuary in this world for my daughter and thousands of daughters in the future. I am really thankful to Dr. Rangita for making me realize my responsibility as a privileged woman to work for my community where thousands of women are suffering who need me as a pioneer to change their lives.

**Fahria Kabir:** Currently, I am studying Computer Science in the Asian University for Women. I have a strong passion in Information Technology, and I cherish a dream to establish an IT firm which will try to include the Bottom of Pyramid in IT besides IT professionals. I look forward to engage more women in the IT field through my IT firm so that fewer women will face the stereotypical view on gender specific job in STEM that I have faced and am still facing. To achieve my dream, I need to have the skills of advocacy, problem solving, strong networking and leadership skills. I did not know how to integrate my knowledge with these leadership skills. When I came to know about this Institution, I took it as a platform to gain leadership training. Though I was confused before starting the course, in the opening ceremony after hearing Dr. Rangita’s inspirational speech, I grew a strong belief that this is what I was waiting for. After completing the Women in Public Service Project, I can try to integrate the concept of leadership with IT. Importantly, this is not the end of my journey; I have just started my journey of acquiring more knowledge and experience to fulfill my dream. I sincerely thank AUW, Dr. Rangita and WPSP to give me a platform to reshape my thoughts and plan.

**Ganga Silva:** WPSP built a home for my thoughts and actions by creating a family with like-minded sisters across my region who share the same passion as me, who believe in the power of change as me, who want to fight against the impediments for women in the society just like me, and most importantly, who keep inspiring me to retain the change we all believe in despite of the fears and failures because now I know that I am NOT ALONE!

**Savitri Kumari:** Thank you very much Dr. de Silva for giving me an inspiration to make positive changes. After participating in the WPSP, I feel like the seed of service inside me is will form a plant. I feel like I have courage to do something good for the world.

**Mariam Khatun:** After Summer Leadership Institute at AUW, I have become much more experienced in how a leader can bring social, political, and economic changes. I was fortunate to learn and share my ideas, thoughts, dreams, and fears via WPSP at AUW. Now, I have become much stronger in fighting against violence and discrimination, as I have now 43 students who also share the same goal as mine. I thank WPSP for giving us the opportunity to share the experience of womanhood at AUW.

**Fariba Housaini:** I am Fariba Housaini from Afghanistan. I am pleased to be at the Asian University for Women, and that I had the opportunity to participate in the leadership program with Dr. Rangita de Silva de Alwis, who taught us at the institute. In the leadership institute, I learned through stories of students from diverse ethnicities how many challenges they faced being a girl in the community. But, they did not get frustrated and also worked hard to overcome their challenges in their conservative society. The leadership institute reminds me why I came to the Asian University for Women and what my dreams and goals are in life. I remember how bad it was, from my neighbor's perspective, for a girl to go to school and learn, but my parents were strong supporters of me. They told me to not imitate the wrong idea of them and let me study. My parents believe that one day I will be the person to change the wrong idea of my neighbors and I am sure I am that person. Through the leadership institute I believe that I can bring changes in my community in order to develop others' idea about women's education and gender equality. The program inspired me to think about women's issues in my country and to begin finding solutions for them. I am so thankful to Dr. Rangita de Silva de Alwis for teaching me the skill of leadership and for inspiring me to work for the empowerment of Afghan women through sustaining their education.

**Anowara Begum:** "Shake the history, make the history" was the inspiration that I got from this Summer Institute. From this institute I learned that no matter who I am and what I look like, I can change the environment. I can shake my own history and others'. In addition, I also got to learn things in different ways that I did not know before. I have experienced the procedures of real policy and law-making and learned how to make action plans from experienced lawyers. The trip to One Stop Crisis Center (OCC) was really important to me because I was encouraged to raise my voice. Overall, the fifteen days of the institute was like a wind of spring that decorated my dreams and thoughts that can be achieved. I heartily thank our mentor Dr. Rangita de Silva without whom my dreams would be only dreams. I am also grateful to my university, Asian University for Women for giving me this extraordinary chance.

**Gangodawila Nimanthi:** Before I started the summer leadership institute, I was so sad because I could not go home. However, after I finished the institute, I was so happy since I learned many things and shaped my skills through this institute. Indeed, this summer forced me to spend my next summer vacation in an effective way by helping my community. During the institute, each day, Dr. Rangita brought the whole world to us; one story of Vietnam, one women movement from Arab world, another grassroots movements from India, another snapshot from Africa, and so on. These stories strengthen us. She also gave us a chance to learn from our peers. We were not comfortable or proud to share our personal stories before this course but at the end, we were so passionate of sharing them as Dr. Rangita illustrated "personal is political" through personal narrations. Though it was two weeks, we gained much knowledge which helped us to light our nation. It is time for us to utilize and spread this knowledge around our nation to send women to the decision-making table. Finally, I am so thankful to AUW, Dr. Rangita, and everyone in WPSP and Wilson Center for giving us this special opportunity to find ourselves to work for a better future.

**Sharmin Akhter:** The Women in Public Service Project's Institute at the Asian University for Women is a unique seminar which helped me a lot to organize my thoughts and ideas and also introduced me to the powerful methods to share my story with other women. Moreover, this seminar prepared me to claim women's rights for all women and strongly encouraged me to raise my voice against all unjust practices and laws existing in the family, community and all over the world. This seminar also gave me an opportunity to celebrate the collective efforts of women leadership with South Asian future women leaders. Additionally, this seminar inspired me to join the public service, and also to work jointly with private organizations. After completing the seminar, I strongly believe that women need to join politics and higher positions to make policies and decisions for the betterment of all human beings.

**Fatima Hashimi :** "Your ideas must take shape and must fly"- Dr. Rangita de Silva

I had never thought of bringing changes in the constitution of Afghanistan especially one like raising the age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18. The reason for that was that I truly did not have the courage and potential, even though promoting girl's education was my hidden aim and desire. The leadership program at AUW led by Dr. Rangita paved the way not only for me but for all of us to make our hidden goals and ideas become reality. Each day of leadership program was about women's empowerment, women's voices and women's rights. These powerful tools convinced and inspired us to let our ideas fly and take shape. Dr. Rangita, as an invigorating and effective woman leader demonstrated the potential for change and actively and thoughtfully empowered us to think of bringing changes and making differences from the grassroots levels to higher levels in our country and community. We are really thankful to Dr. Rangita.

**Minnu Jose:** Being in the Institute exposed me to many people's lives and sufferings. I heard the stories of sufferings from my Afghani friends and others. All these stories made me look into the lives of those people, who are striving hard to move forward in their lives and who are being kept back from their right of freedom. Even though I felt bad about those people who were deprived from their rights I could not do anything to change these situations. While attending the Institute, my mind was prepared to act against these miseries, and I have the courage and confidence to make a substantial effort in changing the society of unfairness. Listening to Dr. Rangita, who has light and enthusiasm in each of her sentences, empowered me with the power to act against the unfair world. I considered attending this Institute as one of the best opportunities that I have got in my life. Apart from preparing my mind to fight against the world of inequality, I got an opportunity to listen to many great women and study from them. Also, doing many role-plays made me think and find ways to tackle many of the issues around us. Through this Institute I have the chance to do a future project in my community to raise awareness among the youth about street harassment and the need to prevent that. This Institute developed a personality in me that identifies with the people who suffer and prepared me to raise my voice and action without fear.

**Mursal Juya:** I had one of the most wonderful and inspirational moments of my life in the two weeks of the WPSP program. I'd always been searching for ways by which I could contribute to my community, but I'd never been able to do so. However, this program made the way of reaching my goal clear. Moreover, the impression that it has put on me is so noticeable. Once I was afraid to dream big, but after attending the WPSP, I can feel both the courage and the ability to dream big and try my best to fulfill my dreams. Throughout the stories that we shared during the Institute, I realized how many unheard voices we have. I feel as if I have found my voice which I probably hadn't heard myself. Also, what I am really glad about is the fact that I've already started thinking as a leader. Of course, all these things wouldn't have been possible without one of the most amazing and inspiring personalities, Dr. Rangita. I am so sure that she's been an inspiration to all members of WPSP. I would like to heartily thank Dr. Rangita for helping us realize our voices, our abilities, and our personas as the future leaders of our communities. I



heartily wish this program to be continued in the future so that more students will be able to benefit from this great opportunity.

**Bushra Tanzila Ahmed:** WPSP is a blessing for the global community of women because it believes in and values the voice and dignity of womanhood. Being a part of this project, I feel privileged to join the dreams of future women leaders who aspire to take the lead in shaping a smart future for women where women's voices will be equally heard. All the best WPSP. Special gratitude to Dr. Rangita for being an amazingly dynamic personality. It was a privilege to observe and learn from you. Thank you.

**Maliha Khan:** WPSP is a great example of what we women are capable of when we come together. It is also a sign that we will be the ones to bring about the greatest change, because we feel the burden of existing problems the most.

**Raiya Kishwar Ashraf:** Our class at WPSP was a microcosm of the world and everything we learned together only brought us closer; it made us more aware than ever that our futures are linked and so are our goals. Hopefully no matter which path we choose to follow, we'll have a network of brilliant WPSP graduates to support us!

## Appendix B

### Students' Action Plans

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Group:

#### Developing Women's Skills in Shelters

Group members: Fatima Saadat, Jan Afza Sarwari, Batool Askari

We have planned to meet women in shelters and their children in Kabul in order to raise their skills.

Due to a large range of domestic violence against women in Afghanistan, there are a significant number of women and their children who are living in shelters under the protection of government or human rights organizations. Though these women are given high security protection inside the shelters, they are not allowed to leave the shelters for their own safety. The shelter walls protect them from the death threat, but at the same time imprison them as long as they live within the shelter. We can imagine how boring and frustrating their lives are. And we know they don't deserve such a destiny. The situation for their children is even worse. They grow up knowing almost nothing about the world outside of the shelter. For most of these women, we cannot change the situation outside the shelter completely and make it safe for them, but we can help them to have more productive, happier moments of life inside the shelters.

- We are going to have some training programs so that they can make handicrafts with recycled papers and second hand objects
- We will teach them how to play chess in their free time
- We will also conduct an art workshop for sketching and water color so the women and children in the shelter can express their thoughts and feelings through art
- We will conduct a book collection event and collect some novels and magazines for the shelter so that the literate women read books to illiterate women and children in the shelter. We encourage them to read books by conducting some reading circles.

We are focusing on three issues through our program.

1. Enabling the women to be financially independent
2. Having reading and writing programs
3. Teaching paintings and chess for the children

We have learned that in order to empower a woman we have to empower her financially.

The women who are living in the shelters have no source of financial supports, so we are going to have trainings for them to teach handicrafts and dressmaking methods.

After learning these skills, those women will be able to make their own products and sell them to the markets, or we want the managers in the shelters to help them to sell their products.

Secondly we are going to encourage the women and the children in the shelters to spend their free times by reading books, magazines and writing their dailies.

We can ask our friends and relatives to support us to collect the novel, books, story books and magazines which they might have in their homes and are not using anymore. Those books can be a great source for making a person more educated.

Third, we are going to teach the children and also the women playing chess and painting.

Chess is a game of all ages which develops critical thinking and encourages us to be inventive.

So through playing chess the women and the children will bring some changes to their lives and they will learn the strategies that chess teaches us.

The other program we want to apply in the shelters is painting for the children.

One can gain self-esteem and confidence through painting. Painting allows us to associate creativity with every aspect of our life.

Children can paint every aspect of their lives in the shelters and outside.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Group:**

### **Raising awareness of sensitivity towards domestic workers in Bangladesh**

**Members:** Maliha Khan, Raiya Kishwar Ashraf, Bhuiyan Nahiya Mahmood

**Aim:** Improve the conditions for domestic workers by raising awareness among children and their family members to increase sensitivity from the employer families.

**Field of the project:** education, social, volunteering initiatives and media projects.

#### **The problem description:**

Domestic workers are found in most middle class and elite households in Bangladesh and most often they are women and children. Their lives emulate modern day slavery where they are often abused physically, mentally and sexually, but aside from that, they suffer severe exploitation due to the stigma of their class. In most cases these workers are underpaid, overworked, isolated, underfed and have lack of access to their civil rights.

We wish to raise awareness among families of sensitivity towards domestic workers. We hope to help ensure employers are more aware of the effects of their behavior towards domestic workers and the learned discrimination that their children adopt.

#### **Our possible plan of action includes:**

1. Volunteering at Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) drop-in centers to better learn from domestic workers themselves. ASK is a human rights organization which provides free legal aid to the disenfranchised all over the country and works on developing the economic, social and civil rights for women, men and children through research, advocacy campaigns, human rights monitoring and media action. They specialize in labor rights and have had a history of working with and providing special assistance and training to domestic workers. More information about ASK can be found on their official website: <http://www.askbd.org/web/>
2. Writing about their plight-blog, magazine articles, possibly a play (using both traditional and new media)
3. Work on writing an illustrated children's book (in English and Bengali) with a professional cartoonist, especially creating a memorable character

We are targeting children using a family friendly book to illustrate the typical life of a domestic worker and what needs to be done to improve their condition in the domestic abode as well as employees to the

family. This measure hopes to pressure families into treating their workers with the dignity and respect one would accord to any human being.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Group:**

#### **Harnessing the power of social media to raise social awareness**

Group Members: Ankhi Banik, Anowara Begum, Arpita Palit, Fahria Kabir, Fahmida Yesmine, Mariam K., Shema Mahjabin

#### **• Background**

"When [my tormentor] pulled my scarf and harassed me physically in front of the house, onlookers at the scene laughed. Nobody protested. None of my family members are responsible for my suicide." This is the last few words Pinky, a 13 years school girl has written before she has chosen suicide to be the only way to save her from the severe mental and physical trauma<sup>1</sup>.

Sexual harassment is one of the prominent issues in Bangladesh. In fact, sexual harassment against girls and women in Bangladesh is turning deadly. According to the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, almost 90 percent of girls aged 10-18 years have experienced what is known locally as "eve-teasing," where boys throw bad words at girls, shout obscenities, laugh at them or grab their clothes.

Mariam and Anowara Begum, students of Asian University for Women have observed the deadly effect of sexual harassment with their school friends. Though Mariam is from Bogra and Anowara is from rural Chittagong community, they both have observed that their friends were forced to get married during the age of 13 to 15 only to avoid "eve teasing". They have seen when girls get to the age of 13 to 14, boys from different ages start giving them love proposals or sexual harassment while going to school. If the girl refuses to the love proposal or even if the girl does raise her voice, they are then threatened to face severe sexual or physical attacks. Therefore, the parents are left with no choice but child marriage.

All the case studies show that sexual harassment has become a burning issue that should seek attention of both males and females.

#### ***Goal***

##### **Short term goal:**

Raising the awareness among high school and college students to reduce the practice of sexual harassment from the youth

##### **Long term goal:**

This project will solve the co-related issues such as decreasing the rate of early marriages, the number of school drop-outs, and the number of suicides.

#### **• Timeline:**

Tentatively the project duration will be from September 2012 to April 2013.

#### **• Funding**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10220920>

To be decided upon campaigns

- Target groups:

High school and college students in both city and rural schools and colleges (grade 8 to 12) of Chittagong and Bogra

Focused issue:

Sexual harassment

Action plans:

Tools that are going to be used for this awareness program:

Social Media (Blog, facebook, twitter, WPSP website, Telecommunication Companies)

Role playing on case studies

Presentation by AUW students, Lawyers, Journalists and Local representative

Open Discussion of audience with speakers

Collecting anonymous recommendations from students

Media partnership

Documentation

Our pilot project begins with inviting the lawyers from Bangladesh National Women Lawyer Association to supervise us. We will also discuss about our project with the Journalists from different local newspaper and radio. Moreover, through their help we create our network with the local representative. After discussing with everyone, we will come up with a group of people who will go to different schools of Chittagong and Bogra.

In the schools, we will have day long program. We will start our presentation with a role playing on a case study. And then we will introduce issue of sexual harassment to our audience. Our lawyers then will briefly talk about the existing law and guidelines.

Some of our AUW peers from foreign countries will have a presentation encouraging the female students to build their network with us. And they will mostly encourage male students not to involve themselves in sexual harassment.

Our note takers will note down students' opinions, photographers will take photos, and one person will video the whole process. Overall, our documentation group will keep records of every campaign and publish it through blogs and other social media.

We will have media partners with Chittagong Television (CTV) who will promote our projects. And also we plan to create our network with FM radios in Chittagong.

Throughout the project, we aim to create awareness about sexual harassment among the youth via different organizations and social media.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Group:

##### **Raising Awareness against Domestic Violence in the Grassroots Level**

Group Members: Tausifa and Savitri

#### Action Plan:

We are planning to campaign in our own villages to raise awareness against domestic violence. For this campaigning, we will seek help from our local representatives for example, union parishad member or panchayat member. Therefore, after going to our villages, we will go to the local representatives to discuss our ideas about promoting awareness against domestic violence. As soon as they agree to help us, we will work to arrange a program for the villagers. To make the program a success, we have come up with some ideas as follows:

1. At first, we, a group of AUW students will talk with the local representatives, police inspector of the local police station, local lawyers, influential people in the village and a religious personality about the aim of our program. We will request them to participate with us.
2. Then we will fix a date and time when we can arrange the program which will be convenient for most of the villagers (i.e. Sunday and Friday). In order to announce the date and time of the program, we will request the *Imam* (the religious figure) of the nearby mosque to tell all the villagers to attend the program.
3. In the program, first we will address the abuses that a woman may face in her household which are treated as domestic violence. We will tell them about the negative impacts of domestic violence over women and their children too.
4. We will request our lawyers and police to address the prevalent laws against domestic violence to the villagers. The local representatives will also talk about the negative impacts of domestic violence over the whole society, and about the punishment of such a heinous crime. Our speakers will convince the villagers that domestic violence is not just a day to day behavior; it is a crime recognized in the state law. Therefore, every man should be aware of the crime he is committing, and every woman should be aware of her legal rights as well.
5. We will also request the religious person to talk about women's rights described in the holy books. For example, he will also talk about the punishment stated in the holy Quran for the abusive husbands or in laws. He will tell them how respectful it is to have daughters as Allah has declared that parents of daughters are the most respected to Allah. This religious idea of respecting women could help to diminish some harmful social practices such as female feticides or the tendency of having more children with the hope of having a son.
6. Next, we will show them video clips about domestic violence and educational "Meena cartoon" that UNICEF has made to empower the women. In addition, we AUW students will perform a mock trial against domestic violence.
7. We will also distribute pamphlets among people about our mission in where we will write what are the steps women should take if they are victims of domestic violence. For instance, we will write the existed laws and also some other organizations addresses who are willing to help abused women. On the pamphlet, we will also write about the harmful effects of domestic violence so that domestic abusers try to give up their bad practice for the sake of their family and children. In addition, we will also provide these pamphlets to people in stations, markets, schools, amusement parks so that who do not attend the program they will also have some knowledge about what we have discussed in the program. We will also try to make some posters about the issue of domestic violence and paste them

at some public spaces of our villages. We will post these small pamphlets in our social media websites so that we can get some more friends who will be willing to work with us.

8. We will finish our program by taking some of their questions and comments, and requesting them to make a promise on the spot that they will together promote awareness among all people against domestic violence, and they will never let their own daughters suffer for not having proper education, secure society or because of early marriage.

The aim of our program is to raise awareness against domestic violence. Also to convince them that a daughter is not a burden for a family; she can be an asset if she is provided with proper opportunities. We ourselves will request them to ensure a secure environment for your daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers so that they can prove their worth too.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Group:**

### **Action Plan to Enhance the Female Education in Slum Communities in Chittagong**

Ruvani Nisansala Nagoda Gamage

#### **I. Overview**

“Hope,” a basic literacy and leadership program, seeks to support the competencies of young girls from impoverished slum communities in Chittagong as an important step toward the larger goals of overcoming poverty and promoting social justice and women’s rights. While targeting slum girls, the program mobilizes, trains, and empowers undergraduate university students from the Asian University for Women who will play an active role in designing and leading classroom activities as their summer project. In doing so, the program helps build strong connections between university students and female children from slums and their families and communities. A total of fifteen students and three faculty advisors from the university are expected to aid in teaching fifty female children in slums. The program’s curriculum will comprise both theoretical and practical components that will be tailored to the local community context and special needs. Classroom exercises and resources will be developed to improve basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, making use of easy visuals, case study discussions, and role-plays and simulations. In addition, participants will be involved in community projects and skill-building activities. It is envisaged that the children and students involved will gain self-confidence and an awareness of their potential role in decision-making and eradicating poverty and gender disparities.

#### **II. Needs**

Although access to education is a fundamental right and the foundation of development, many female children cannot reach their potential. Their education might be interrupted by a range of factors: extreme poverty, schooling expenses, family financial needs, malnutrition and other health issues, social norms, conflict, and other crises. The underrepresentation of slum children, particularly girls, in primary and secondary education has been documented as a pivotal social concern. Without effective education, young female children are at risk of continuing to live in poverty, or slipping into abusive forms of child labor, prostitution, begging, drug addictions and early marriages. Therefore, this is time to educate the female slum children to enhance their living conditions.

#### **III. Target Groups**

The program targets two specific groups:

1. Female children, who lack access to a basic education due to poverty and other factors or who have dropped out of school due to poverty, and hail from slum community in Chittagong (area with limited access to basic needs, inadequate sanitation, dense population, poor quality housing, high rates of crime, limited security). Age cohort: 9-15 years.
2. Undergraduate university students, from the Asian University for Women from a range of personal and disciplinary background/majors, who seek valuable community experience during summer months, have strong skills in English language and mathematics, are dedicated to

teaching and to social justice, are creative, self-motivated and self-aware, and enjoy working in and leading teams.

#### **IV. Goals**

1. To develop and sustain a cost-effective basic literacy and leadership program for female children in slums.
2. To engage university students from the Asian University for Women in social change through a valuable practical experience that can contribute to their career progression.

#### **6<sup>th</sup> Group:**

##### **Daughters of Nations: Women Leadership Chapters**

Ganga Silva, Dakshini Nimanthi, Thasomini

In many part of the world, women and children from all walks of life are subject to violence and discrimination. However, often these incidences of violence are underreported and unaddressed. Two major reasons for this underreporting of violence and discrimination are that women who are victims of violence are unaware of their rights, so they are scared to speak up or seek assistance, and unfortunately, most of them accept the violence as a part of their life by normalizing its acute impacts. Since this is something that occurs irrespective of age, marital status, race, religion, culture or income level, it is important to take actions against it.

Susan B. Anthony, a prominent civil and women's rights advocator in the 19<sup>th</sup> century said: "I declare to you that woman must not depend upon the protection of man, but must be taught to protect herself, and there I take my stand."

Thus, while it is crucial to bring structural changes to our existing social, political, and legal frameworks to improve the status of women, it is equally important to empower women themselves to become self-reliant, so that they can stand up for their rights to live in a safe and violence free society where they are liberated to make their own decisions without being discriminated.

We believe that self-reliance is the key to empower women, therefore educating women to identify their inner strengths is important. So, as the initiative step of this process of empowering women, we want to establish Women Leadership Chapters: 'DAUGHTERS OF NATIONS' at the school level starting from the girl school which we attended in Sri Lanka and few other girls schools in my town with the help of my sisters here at AUW-WPSP. These chapters will be functioned as extra-curricular clubs at schools, but they will also include academic materials related to women and human rights, capacity building, and real life social, political, economic and environmental problems which affect women and the communities as a whole. In this way, the female students will be given "the right tool-box" to act and to be aware of their rights and their potentials as equal citizens in the society while having the opportunity to address issues not just related to women but also to society and environment as a whole. Moreover, time to time, there will be seminars, workshops and talks by community women leaders, national women leaders, and women experts in various fields through which these school girls get to see the role-models who they can follow and look up to as they grow. The final goal is to spread these chapters to many schools as possible and to organize events across the chapters building a strong national women network among the members of these chapters which will last long.

#### **7<sup>th</sup> Group:**

##### **Action Plan to Combat Child Marriage in Afghanistan**



Prepared by: Nazifa Alizada, Mursal Juya, Fariba Housaini, Fatima Hashimi, Gulsom Mirzada, Munira Sharifi, Zainab Hassanpor, Nafasgul Arezo

This project mainly aims to empower women through sustaining their education. As the second obstacle, child marriage prevents 39.4% of the Afghan women from education right and adversely affects their future life. Early marriage not only stands to take women's education right, but downgrades their economical, medical, psychological, mental and social status in family and community. This way, it paves the way to women's exploitation and increases domestic violence. Currently, around 60 percent of Afghan girls are forced to marry on their early ages. Therefore, it is important to take serious steps to end up the vast series of this long last traditional and cultural practice through raising people's awareness as well as changing article 70 and 71 of Afghanistan's Civil Law which announces sixteen as the legal marriage age for girls.

### **Prevention:**

- **Social Awareness Campaigns**

To make people aware of child marriage's negative social, medical, political, economical, and cultural impacts:

- Contacting with calergies to hold gatherings in mosque [encouraging parents both father and mother to avoid child marriage]
  - Dramas
  - Mock Trials
- Delivering direct speeches in girls' schools [covers girl students not to forfeit easily and stand against this practice]
  - PowerPoint Presentation
- Media
  - Publishing articles through newspapers and weekly magazines
  - Arranging and participating in television talk shows
- Social Networking through Facebook [special page]
- Publishing noticeable billboards in crowded areas, as well as posters, brochure during speeches in mosque and schools
- Asking human right organization to broadcast advertisements from its own credible position through media

- **Legislative Process**

- Making serious efforts to change article 70 and 71 of Afghanistan's Civil Law to raise girl's marriage age from 16 to 18 years
  - Contacting Independent Human Rights Commission for support since article 70 and 71 are against Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  - Contacting with social activists and organizations who struggle for the same issue and setting up shared plans to approach to main goal
  - Contacting with male and female MPs for support
  - Contacting with Ministry of Women Affairs and asking for their serious attempts to defend women's right
  - Contacting with youth parliament and constituting a huge mass

### **Expected Products of Awareness Campaigns**

- Women's social, educational, economical empowerment
- Paving the way for girls to sustain their education
- Preventing girl's health risk (physical and sexual abuse)
- Avoiding domestic violence against women

- Decreasing the high mother and child death mortality rate
- Overall social and economical growth in society
- Raising people's awareness
- Gradually eliminating the long practiced traditional and cultural belief
- Diminishing gender inequality
- Maintaining Universal Human Right rules [specifically marriage rules] in Afghanistan
- Averting girl's from committing suicide, self-harm, self-immolation and self-mutilation
- Reducing running away and honor killing cases
- Changing article 70 and 71 of Afghanistan's Civil Law

### **8th Group:**

#### **Action plan to stop punishment of children in Afghanistan**

**Group works: Mitra Shiva Hussaini, Zahra Rezai, Shaiesta Ehsani**

In Afghanistan one of the biggest problems is punishment of innocent children at school and at home, due to backwardness of our country and illiteracy of parents, in order to come out of these tragedies we must bring new traditional cultural changes through different training courses for both parents and teachers.

#### **Objectives:**

- 1- Improvement of training courses on punishment of children and exchanging information on those courses.
- 2- Corresponding studying of the nature, character and results of children's punishment. Analysis of exercising legislation against violence or punishment.
- 3- Expand information on domestic punishment; make it a subject of public discussion. To finish violence and punishment completely.
- 4- Systematic monitoring on work fulfilled.

#### **Solutions:**

- 1- Preparing courses on combating children punishment through the whole province and statistic digestion of the data (these different courses for parents and teachers are prepared to have psychologist's teachers to teach them how to behave with children in schools and stop physical and mental punishment).
  - a. Substitute of teaching methodology on new methods (for example: - to make the class very interesting to attract the students through practical studies and activities for their science subjects and there must be fieldtrips practices of fighting against children punishment in schools and homes.
  - b. To bring into fulfillment legislation against punishment with the minister of Ministry of Education and Children Affairs to announce punishment against children as violation of human rights. To elaborate policy of incompatibility to any forms of punishment against children.
- 2- Acknowledgement of society that punishment of children in families or society is a criminal offence and is punishable by law, so we must reach our voice to all population that children punishment is an illegal activity.(through Media).

- 3- Broadcasting of our all plans for fighting against children punishment, against domestic punishment (through Television, Radio, News paper, Magazine and internet).  
Realization of this legislation, create such environment in the society, which shall make punishment against children shameful and inadmissible. (For this issue which is significant, we must practical this in parliament).
- 4- Collecting all the information from our monitoring team about how the whole society schools have fulfilled the result of our training program; how much the ministry of education rewarded to this issue; how much the Children Affairs completed their promises; and what are the sources which they used for the success of stopping punishment against children

### **9<sup>th</sup> Group:**

#### **Two months workshop of reading comprehension and academic writing for Afghan Students**

Saidy Raihana

In Afghanistan especially in Kabul, most girls and boys are really interested to apply for scholarships. They are attempting for scholarships but most of them cannot succeed in the program though they have good speaking and listening skills.

The reason behind this failure is that they are not good in reading comprehension and academic writing.

What I want to do is to help them succeed in their desire.

Whenever I will have an opportunity to go Kabul, I would like to take a special course for two months to develop students' academic reading and writing skills.

The question is how?

When I was in Kabul, Afghanistan I was learning English in AKES-A (Agha Khan Education service for Afghanistan) where I completed advance level and worked there for more than three years as an English part time teacher. So I will ask this organization to support me and give me a class to work on my project.

By the help of the organization I will first make an announcement if anyone is interested in this program come and register their names and we first take placement test to know whether these candidates have the ability to continue this course or not. Then the selected students attend the class regularly and improve their knowledge in these two skills.

By this way students will improve their reading comprehension and academic writing and will be able to work with other students who are eager to continue their education abroad and succeed in scholarships programs.

What are the criteria of selecting students in this program?

1. Students must be 12 graduated (scholarships come for 12 graduated students)
2. Students must have completed advance level of English language (however complete advance level but still they don't have academic writing and reading comprehension)

### **10<sup>th</sup> Group:**

#### **Social Entrepreneurship**

Tahmina Raoufi

Social Entrepreneurship:

How to create concrete changes?

Social entrepreneurship is the recognition of social problem and the uses of entrepreneurial principles to organize and manage a social venture to achieve a desired social change.

## **1. Female journalists**

### **Objectives:**

Women's journalism not be an imagination

- Proving to be true the imagination of women to be journalism esp. investigative journalists
  - Promoting women as TV representators and journalist
- To pave the ground to be meaningful and productive member of society
- To get the desire for social mind changing about women abilities

Mechanisms:

- A committee or a union for women investigators
- Increasing their self-confidence by different practical and theoretical programs
- Media wide range releases
- A social website for the journalist women
- Celebration of a day by the name of journalist women
- Social advanced competition
- Providing them for getting international scholarship by competition
- Media releases

## **2. People with disabilities**

### **Objectives:**

- People with disabilities must be accepted as another class of the society.
- Ensuring of their mental and psychological security
- Strengthening of their self-confidence to think themselves as independent people of the society
- Increasing of their capacity for working as the other class of the community
- Elimination of discrimination against people with disabilities
- Make them be the meaningful, confident, and productive people of the community

Mechanisms:

- Providing work opportunities in order to desert their mental depression and increasing their self-confidence and not to be discriminated.
- Media releases
- Different publish ways by electronic media and non-electronic one
- Approving a specific law for their material and intellectual welfare
- Celebration from their personality and their activities by many ceremonies

**10<sup>th</sup> Group:**

### **An action plan after coming back to your country to support poor children**

Zahra Rezai

I have this idea that every big idea works, and for sure starts at a very grass roots level. So I think when I come back to my country, I would first start a small business at home. It could be like an organization. I would gather small afghan kids to my home and would start teaching them different courses like first English which is so necessary, Computer course, sewing and etc, but all of them for free. It seems that it is a very small but helpful institute. So after graduating from my institute they can find a part time job and earn money along with continuing their education. They learn how to be responsible and independent. The point is that they can work in my institute as well and we can make a bigger business. We can sew and sell clothes, solve people computer's problems, work as an English tutor, and etc. As I think and I hope I can develop my small institute by the time that I can find some donors who support us financially due to this dream of attaching a Clinic to it.

### **11<sup>th</sup> Group:**

#### **Proposals: Action Plan for Asian Young Women Entrepreneur's Association**

Bushra Tanzila Ahmed

- Primary aim of the association would be to produce and sustain strong, bureaucratic, career and service oriented Asian regional women entrepreneur's and business personnel's society. In this case, one of the main aspects of the Asian culture that the association would bring shape about is the tendency of educated female students to not join bureaucratic workforce or independent entrepreneurship initiative for the cultural pressure of solely carrying out domestic responsibilities.
- The target group of members of the association will be constituted with young women aged between 20-32 who are students from business and entrepreneurship or relevant background or who are young entrepreneurs themselves.
- The operating environment of the association would be designed using the environment of the parliament of the Asian countries. Each association members, while communicating in the official environment of the association, would play a role of a ministry that would be assigned to the member. However, the ministries will be designed relevant to issues and topics of business and entrepreneurship. For example: ministry for infrastructural development of the association as a social enterprise. This will bring an effective psychosocial change among women to think differently that it does not require being of a particular gender to play a role in public service.
- The association will work on establishing relationship with the topnotch welfare of women entrepreneurship spirit related training, investment and other programs operated by any local, national, regional, and global organizations and entities.
- The association would procure license to perform regional trade. In this case, the association would trade and promote solely the output of entrepreneurial initiatives of its members which can be in the form of products, concepts of business strategies and other both abstract and concrete form of production.
- The members will also be divided into small groups of entrepreneurship bodies as co-operatives. This is to promote individual business or any other plans of the individual members of the entrepreneurship bodies. In this case, the process of micro-lending can be initiated for the entrepreneurship bodies. The association will provide loans to the EB which will be utilized by the EB to promote each member's business concept. Through incorporating this system, a culture of women's agency to voice will be promoted as well as, each member will be economically empowered.
- To start with, a proportion of 10% of the profit made by each entrepreneurship bodies will be collected for the AYWEA (Asian Young Women Entrepreneur's Association) Reserve.

- The association will also work as a social enterprise. For the first 10 years of the association's journey, the major theme for social welfare for the association would be to promote women empowerment and equity in the sports and fashion industry of the Asian region. The association dreams about strong, sound and trendy group of Asian mothers and Professionals. In this case, the association would invest 25% of its reserve to subsidize rigorous organizational programs for establishing women empowerment and equity in the sports and fashion industry. In this case, the ability of the organizational programs to operate through respecting the cultural context will be considered as one of the primary criteria for judging eligibility of those organizations to be subsidized.

## 12<sup>th</sup> Group:

### **Conducting a Campaign to Raise Awareness about Public Sexual Harassment**

Masooma Maqsoodi, Zeinab Noori, Renu Johnson, Minnu Jose

For the three months of summer we plan to start a campaign to address the issue of public sexual harassment (P.S.H) against women in Kabul, Afghanistan and Kerala, India. As women, we personally have experienced numerous street harassments by men while walking in the streets of Kabul and Kerala. Women who commute to work or school or just go out for shopping or other purposes are normally molested or harassed in public spaces especially in the streets. It takes women's confidence away and discourages them to fully participate in social activities, shoulder to shoulder with men. The problem is that not only the society acknowledges women's equal right to secure and safe public spaces, but unfortunately in a conservative, Muslim country like Afghanistan, women are the ones blamed for this social phenomenon. Even though people in Kerala are well educated, women are not often given the respect they deserve. They are expected to walk in a manner that doesn't attract men's attention and if they are harassed it's because there has been something sexually provocative about their makeup, their dressing, or their manner. This view mandates any public sexual harassment as an accepted social behavior. Even if people do not agree with it, nobody protest against it. We want to change society's perspective and start a public discussion on the issue of street harassment, religion's views toward this social phenomenon, women's equal rights and dignity to use public spaces safely, and the social and psychological effect of street harassment on women's life.

In order to change social attitude of the citizens in our communities, we have decided to include three main activities in our campaign.

#### School Campaign

- Providing a handout that includes women's narratives about street harassment, psychological and sociological analysis about the issue. In case of Afghanistan, Islamic quotes from the Quran and Hadith that address the issue of women's rights will be included.
- Broadcasting short documentaries or performing a drama that features a common example of street harassment and the problems women face because of this issue.
- Open discussion followed by a short writing session in which students are asked to write about their experiences, their ideas or messages about P.S.H. These writings will be collected both as feedback and students messages to others.

(In case of Kerala, we will be working with students in co-educational schools. However, as in Afghanistan most of the awareness raising programs and campaigns about women's rights has been held in girls' schools, we will be targeting the boys' schools in Kabul. It

is more challenging, but this time our aim is to let boys (male students) be the judge of their actions and we want men to raise their voice to support women's rights.)

#### Caricatures and Posters

- We will call for young artists to come up with some caricatures or posters calling for a review in social behavior of citizens in our communities and will distribute them in the schools and public places such as intersections and shopping centers

#### Radio program

- We will ask one of the leading radio channels (both in Afghanistan and India) to have a program on P.S.H. which will include interviews with different groups of people in the society and open discussion of audiences through phone calls and messages they send during the live program. We will invite women activists and religious experts as guests to discuss the issue in the program.

During the campaign, project partners in Kabul and Kerala will share their experiences and resources with each other.

### 13<sup>th</sup> Group:

#### **Action Plan for Ensuring Property Rights of Muslim Women in Bangladesh**

Sharmin Akter

Bangladeshi women endure oppression and deprivation in their own family and in the society at large. They are also subjected to violence and discrimination because they do not get equal rights like men. These women are also considered as powerless and useless for the society and family. Like many other communities in Bangladesh, in my community, (Kadir Hanif ) where women do not have decision making power in any serious matters in the society as well as in the family because of their low economic status. To improve women's social and economic condition in 2011 the constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh declared a new law which says, "Every child will inherit an equal amount under the new law" (BBC news, on 4 April 2011). The women rights groups in BD appreciated the new law, but protesters organized by Islami Oiko Jote argued that the new law proposal goes against the Koran. They claimed that according to Koran and Sharia Law in Bangladesh, "a Muslim woman normally inherits half as much as her brother not equal". They also threatened to start a strong movement to compel the government to cancel the "Anti- Islamic Policy. Considering the current situation, I strongly believe that there is a need of a strong movement to make people aware about the importance of ensuring women's property rights to empower women. To strengthen the movement, there is also a need of a policy for reviewing the new law and also to strengthen the implementation of the previous property rights law for women. These actions will help to protect women from domestic violence, to improve women's economical status and ensure their decision making rights in every sphere of family and social life.

Our recommended law would be "in the matter of inheritance by the constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh according to the Sharia Law a woman should get her property fully without any interference of other family members and the society people." If this law is granted and implemented properly than women empowerment will be ensured because property rights will help women to empower themselves in all spheres in family, society, public and private life.

**To ensure women's property rights some of the actions we would be taking:**

Firstly, I am going to talk with some of the young girls and boys in my community who share the similar interest of working for women empowerment. After that, these young boys and girls together will work with the head of the villager and his secretaries to convince the local religious leaders to make the community people understand women's property rights.

Next, the main responsibility of the Muslim religious leaders will be to arrange discussion seminars weekly with the villagers where the religious leaders will analyze the importance of ensuring women's property rights to the community people. We believe that those discussions will encourage the male in the community to give the female their property rights and will also encourage the female community members to raise their voice for property rights.

We are also going to work with the school, college and university faculty members to make the young male and female students aware of the property rights laws and its proper implementation. In the academic institutions, we will have a day long program. We are planning to give presentations and also to have a role-playing on a case study where we will show that having property can empower women and it can give women decision making power in the family and the society.

We are also going to write a draft to the Ministry of Educational Affairs to have a chapter in the text book about the rights of property for Muslim men and women, which will help people to learn more about their rights and responsibilities by following law.

To strengthen our movement, we are also going to work with the lawyers from Bangladesh National Women Lawyer Association (BNWLA) to supervise us. The director of the BNWLA ensures us that her team will help us to provide law-related support for women in Kadir Hanif. In the academic institutions and in the community based discussions, these lawyers will also briefly talk about the existing law and guidelines to make people understand about the significance of property rights. Moreover, we are also going to work with the Journalists from local newspaper. We will also have media partners with the local Channel of Noakhali Television (CTV) who will promote our projects for our audience. Throughout the project, we aim to create awareness about women's property rights among the youth through the help of public and private organizations' and social media.

### **Group and Group Members**

1. Fatima Saadat, Jan Afza Sarwari and Batool Askari (*Raising Women Skills in Shelters*)
2. Maliha, Nahiya and Raiya (*Raising awareness of sensitivity towards domestic workers in Bangladesh*)
3. Ankhi Banik, Anowara Begum, Arpita Palit, Fahria Kabir, Fahmida Yesmine, Mariam K., Shema Mahjabin (*Post WPSP Action Plan: Harnessing the power of social media to raise social awareness*)
4. Savitri Kumari and Tausifa Tajalli (*Raising Awareness against Domestic Violence in the Grass Root Level*)
5. Ruvani Nisansala Nagoda Gamage (*Action Plan to Enhance the Female Education in Slum Communities in Chittagong*)
6. Ganga Silva, Dakshini Nimanthi, Thasomini Palaniyandy (*Daughters Of Nations: Women Leadership Chapters*)
7. Nazifa Alizada, Mursal Juya, Fariba Housaini, Fatima Hashimi, Gulsom Mirzada, Munira Sharifi, Zainab Hassanpor, Nafasgul Arezo (*Action Plan to Combat Child Marriage in Afghanistan*)
8. Mitra Shiva Hussaini, Zahra Rezai, Shaiesta Ehsani (*Action plan to stop punishment of children*)



9. Saidy Raihana (*Two month workshop of reading comprehension and academic writing for Afghan Students*)
10. Tahmina Raoufi (*Social Entrepreneurship*)
11. Zahra Rezai (*An action plan after coming back to your country to support poor children*)
12. Bushra Tanzila Ahmed (*Proposals: Skeleton Policy and Action Plan for Asian Young Women Entrepreneur's Association*)
13. Masooma Maqsoodi, Zeinab Noori , Renu Johnson, Minnu Jose (*Conducting a Campaign to Raise Awareness about Public Sexual Harassment*)
14. Sharmin Akter, (*Skeleton a Policy and an Action Plan for Ensuring Property Rights of Muslim Women in Bangladesh*).