



**Asian Institute of
Poverty Alleviation**

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

**Global and local initiative
for Women**

Associated Country Women of the World Represented by Mrs Ruth Shanks A.M., ACWW World President

The Associated Country Women of the World was founded in 1929 by the International Council of Women. Far ahead of its time as an organisation, ACWW was the first international body working to connect and support rural women. We were awarded Special Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1947, and we also hold Consultative Status with UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation or UNESCO and the Food and Agricultural Organisation or FAO.

We believe in connecting women, and know that a strong global network is the best way of ensuring that rural women receive the support that they need. ACWW consists of 1 Board, 6 Specialised Committees, working in 9 Areas, across 75 countries and with 412 member societies, including 32 in India, with one in Kolkata. Through this structure, we represent more than 9 million women worldwide. Our Board is elected by the membership, and has represented many of the world's nations over the past 88 years. In 1965, Mrs Aroti Dutt of Kolkata was elected as World President – and current World President Mrs Ruth Shanks hails from New South Wales, Australia. Together, our voices are louder and stronger.

ACWW works to improve the quality of life for women and their communities worldwide. We work to empower women through increased knowledge, raise the standard of living for rural women and their families, and to enable the voice of rural women to be heard at the United Nations. Working with other Non-Governmental Organisations, we enable rural women to be heard at international, national and local levels by policy makers and world leaders.

The Sustainable Development Goals and 2030 Agenda were announced by the United Nations in 2015, to replace the Millennium Development Goals. ACWW works within the reporting framework of the SDGs to feed back our project information, and almost all of our funded projects work towards these important targets for improving the lives of people globally.

The objectives of ACWW align with the objectives and goals of so many Non-Governmental Organisations, but with a more specific emphasis on the lives of non-urban women. We advocate for these women and their communities, and assist them in raising their voices locally and nationally. We support the sustainable development and strengthening of local communities and the connections between rural and non-rural women. Crucially, we have seen from our projects that when women are empowered and able to lead, their communities become stronger, less poor, and healthier.

In 1945, the United Nations Charter proclaimed gender equality as a fundamental human right. Just two years later, ACWW was accredited to the United Nations, which recognised the importance of our work with, and for, rural women. Sadly, in 2017, there is still a lot to be done to secure the local rights of women. The UN highlights that inheritance laws treat men and women differently in 26 out of 143 countries. 133 million women around the world have experienced female genital mutilation, and 52 countries maintain constitutional law that states women are not equal to men. Land rights, access to healthcare and social provision, and equality before the law are crucial to the safe, healthy lives of women in modern society – but are not the reality for so many.

One of the biggest reasons why women must be viewed equally before the law is that it has an immediate impact on the way they are treated within society. We know that when domestic, gender-based violence is accepted as the norm, it becomes far more dangerous and widespread. It is reported by the UN that 35% of women have experienced either physical and / or sexual violence by an intimate partner, or have suffered non-partner sexual violence. In addition, nearly 30% of women have suffered physical or sexual violence from their partner. Social or religious situations that subvert the woman's physical and sexual rights to those of the man are often enshrined in national laws. The immediate impact of gender-based violence is very clear, but it also causes significant long-term issues for women. Women who have experienced violence are more likely to give birth to low-weight babies, have double the rate of depression of other women, and can be up to 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV. The long-term impacts of Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting include haemorrhage, infection, infertility, pain, depression and childbirth complications.

ACWW has funded significant projects leading education about the issues surrounding FGM and Gender-based Violence. In Cameroon, we fund the Oku Counselling and Computer Literacy for Community Development project, run by the Cameroon Gender and Environment Watch (CAMGEW). They have successfully carried out workshops on sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, legalisation of marriages, violence against women and child trafficking – all in addition to their work on

computer literacy and vocational training. The project has reached 500 women, 300 men and 250 children – it is expected that this impact will continue to the next generations.

Workshops have been run with teenage girls to improve their knowledge of safe sex, with the aim of reducing the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, sensitisation classes have been run to increase awareness of the dangers of youth marriage, limited contraception and medical conditions such as cervical cancer, haemorrhage and high blood pressure that are associated with young, and frequent, pregnancies.

For women to be treated equally in the eyes of the law, they must be represented equally in those bodies that make the law. In 2013, the United Nations found that whilst women made up 49.56% of the world's population, only 22% of elected representatives were women. Countries that have made recent and significant moves towards peace and stability have also seen the positive impact of women in their political leadership. Both Rwanda and Bolivia have parliaments with at least 50% women members – they are joined by Andorra as the only countries in the world where this is the case. Because of their isolation and distance from governmental or judicial centres, women in rural communities are the most vulnerable to gender-based violence. Reduced access to support services, social education and the lack of relevant law enforcement all compound the issues.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979, and instituted in 1981. CEDAW's Part IV establishes the woman's rights to equality in marriage and family life, along with the right to equality before the law. Whilst 189 countries have ratified the Convention, the United States of America, Palau, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Tonga and The Holy See have not. ACWW believes that universal adoption and support for CEDAW, with relevant enforcement of national law, will make the world safer for women and families globally.

Within some countries that have ratified CEDAW, there remains a reluctance to fully integrate international and regional legislation into domestic law – in many countries the discussion of domestic or gender based violence continues to be a taboo subject. Across the world, recent governmental policies of austerity have led to the closure of many women's refuges. We welcome New Zealand's recent strengthening of the Domestic Violence Act, including clauses on coercion to marry – but note that these changes come only in light of revelations that the country reports that one in every three New Zealand women experience sexual or physical abuse in their lifetime.

Recent developments in child-protection and national policy in Malawi offer positive models of societal change and gender equality for rural women. Though Gambia has suffered recent and significant political turmoil, the government passed legislation banning FGM in December 2015, with a significant fine or imprisonment for those who carry out the mutilation.

At the local, national and international level, rural women must be prioritised for funding of social services, health care and co-ordinated programmes highlighting the danger and impact of gender-based violence. Gender-sensitive training must be provided for police forces and judicial bodies, with legislation enforced at all levels – and relevant sentences imposed upon perpetrators. Governments must act to promote recruitment of women into essential services including healthcare and law enforcement, as well in the judiciary. This is crucial in safeguarding the reporting process for at-risk women and girls to ensure crimes are reported and that victims are protected from reprisal. Weak judicial systems, poor understanding of the law and a lack of trust between victim and law enforcement are all serious problems for women, and in particular rural women. The process of re-victimising women must end – if a woman is abused, raped or suffers violence, she must be treated with respect by the judicial system, not suffer further indignity.

Educating our populations in human rights, improving understanding of gender-related crimes and simplification of legal language will all help change the current situation. Underlying causes of domestic violence, such as stress and loss of dignity due to poor education, unemployment and poverty, also need to be addressed. Mothers must be free and able to empower their children – ensuring girls value themselves sufficiently to find gender-based violence unacceptable, whilst boys are raised with the same belief and fervently support the rights of women. There must also be an understanding that not all perpetrators are men, and other forms of relationship-based abuse and harm damage our societies.

ACWW believes that existing programmes such as the UN's 'Step it Up for Gender Equality', 'UNiTE to End Violence Against Women' and 'HeforShe' initiatives should be supported globally. Community engagement initiatives, including the use of role-play, films, cartoons and other informational materials, must be launched and supported in rural and more developed areas. These methods are regularly used in ACWW projects, and have been successfully employed by the Victory Rural Development Society in their HIV/AIDS prevention and education project in Andhra Pradesh.

Project leaders used cultural performances, street theatre, exhibitions, public meetings and a media campaign across villages to help and protect young women and those who are recently married. Education work alongside the project inspired the creation of village monitoring committees, consisting of two beneficiary representatives, one woman social activist, two members of the VRDS, one local church pastor, one lawyer, and one elected representative of the Panchayat, or local government. This is a wonderfully positive model, and which has been very successful.

Development of representation in society is facilitated by equal access to education and the ability to widely communicate ideas and information. To this end, many of ACWW's projects involve improving education or developing specific skills.

In February 2016 ACWW began funding our thousandth project, working with the Country Women's Association of India to train underprivileged young women and children in computer literacy. This improves the employment prospects of these beneficiaries and has already had a significant impact. In the past 40 years, our Projects Committee has awarded more than 2.2 million pounds in women-to-women projects.

In 1998, ACWW passed a resolution calling on Govts. to ensure that religion and culture should not be misused to withhold basic rights to food, healthcare and self-determination from women and girls. Religious, cultural and social traditions are important in any community, but all members of that community must have equal rights. This is particularly important when it comes to the registration of births. In 2010 we passed a resolution urging governments to record, without prejudice, the births of all children born within their jurisdiction to ensure that all children are recognized as citizens. This is crucial as it impacts upon the rights of movement and travel, land ownership, voting and of course recognition in, and protection of, the law.

Citizenship not only allows for civil responsibility, but ensures access to state support and other freedoms and rights. We must ensure that we care for those within our societies who require additional help to access these rights, just as we must care for women refugees and displaced persons. This last point is particularly noteworthy given ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Africa.

The issues that affect women can often be difficult to discuss, embarrassing or thought to be improper. Societies are often slow to accept change, and this is why leadership is so important. Changes can be made at the highest levels, and may take time to become popular or fully effective – but if they are not enacted, there will never be meaningful change. Our governments at national and local levels must have the bravery to take decisions which may be initially unpopular, but which will benefit their people for generations to come.

It is so important that young women are prepared for the world around them, and given the skills they need to live equally in the future that they will shape. Children learn from their parents and unless patterns are changed, they will repeat what they have learned. Boys must respect girls, and girls must respect themselves. If our youth are empowered, our elders will be safer; if women are treated equally, our societies and communities will be stronger. Our future can be secured if we take action to ensure justice and genuine equality for all our citizens, and guarantee access for those most at risk of being overlooked.

As the organization moves towards its 90th year in 2019, ACWW calls for significant work on the topics of education, responsibility and global sustainability. We recognise the achievements of the past 90 years and, incorporating the 2030 Agenda, look to the challenges and opportunities of the next 90 years. We have identified the following three elements as crucial to this goal:

1. Access to healthcare, disease prevention and well-being globally
2. Sustainable energy – in terms of food security, water supply and access to affordable, sustainable energy sources for societies and industry
3. Greater awareness of our responsibilities as one human-kind sharing this planet – both in terms of humanitarian actions and global responsibility through industry, agriculture and societal behaviours

ACWW is a unique body, with an international network of rural and non-rural women, willing to work together to improve the quality of life of others. We work to ensure that we are all better informed, and use our increasingly strong organisation to secure our current achievements – and build on them. We have shown that ACWW can be an inspirational leader in Women's issues and will continue to strive for the very highest levels of impact and improvement in the lives of rural women around the world. For more information about ACWW, please visit www.acww.org.uk.

Associated Country Women of the World (ACCW)

Mary Sumner House, 24 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3RB

Email: info@acww.org.uk

**Struggle for Livelihood: A case story of Mrs. Mithu Mandal, Jogeshganj G P of Sundarban region in Hingalaganj Block
Sougata Bhattacharya, Secretary, Andrewspalli Centre for Integrated Development (ACID)**

E-mail: acid.mgnt@gmail.com or acid.edu@gmail.com

&

Dr. Sukumar Pal, Department of Social Work, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan & President, ACID

E-mail: sukumarpal66@gmail.com

Mrs. Mithu Mandal (33) lives in the Dakshin Jogeshganj village of Jogeshganj GP. The area which she lives is very prone to frequent floods, cyclones and disasters. She could not forget one of such unfortunate calamities happened in 2009, the area witnessed huge damage due to Aila. As a result of it the whole area is contaminated with saline water, and the soil of the area is contaminated with salinity that decreases the agricultural production in the area.

Her family possesses one bigha land and one small pond including a house. She lives with her two daughters, husband and

mother-in-law. She led a simple life of a housewife for quite some time as like other normal rural women in the area. Once upon a time her family was active in agricultural activities with a little piece of land prior to 'Aila'. Her husband Mr. Sukumar Mandal (38) was engaged with cultivation in the field. Soon after 'Aila' they started facing acute food crisis as they could not produce anything on their land due to its salinity. Consequently her husband had migrated to Tamil Nadu for earning money to support his family. She has two daughters. As there was crisis in the family, she could not concentrate much to look into the study of her two daughters, Archana and Mausumi. They were very irregular in school. They could not score good marks also. They have lost all their household animals and cultivated fish in their little pond, which ultimately resulted in immense economic loss and that has made a financial crisis in the family. Further, the winter crop is being affected due to lack of storage of rain water in pond and proper irrigation facilities.

But it was coincidental that she came in touch with an organization called ACID in 2014 when the organization started a baseline survey of 304 families at Jogeshganj Gram Panchayat. Their Survey Report revealed that 82% of them reported food insecurity and 42 % of this is particularly vulnerable soon after the Aila. The average family income is about 3000/-month in this area. Due to non availability of employment, a large number of people migrated to places such as Tamil Nadu, Andaman, Gujrat etc. and her husband is one of them. But she did not lose her faith and desire to solve her immediate problems, therefore, made herself to struggle in search for alternative livelihood opportunities as she is having dream to keep her children safe and secure and bright. It is within this context and her self-desire that she first had participated in a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method towards forming Self Help Groups, as was formed by Andrewspalli Centre for Integrated Development functioning in Jogeshganj, Hingalgaanj. She became a member of the SHG formed, consisting of 10 women with a vision to create savings and upliftment of themselves through livelihood activities. Her associated SHG name is 'Padmabati'. She is one of the active members of the said group--'Padmabati' group, started since July, 2014. Each month she is contributing Rs. 30/-to this group. The total fund of the said group is Rs. 104300 so far. As she underwent a training programme on vegetable cultivation, goat rearing scientifically, her interest rose to an extent that urged her to apply for a loan for undertaking the said activities. Soon her appeal for loan was granted. She took a loan amounting Rs, 8000/ only. She is now cultivating vegetables including tomato, potato, onion, cabbage etc in her 16 katha land with use of rain water.

She is very interested to learn various aspects, like SHG management, fisheries, vegetable cultivation, domestic breeding, livestock farming etc, therefore, joining training to improve knowledge and skills to become self sufficient. She now-a-days sells her all agriculture and livestock products in the local market directly. So, she does not believe any middle man. Till December, 2016 her total investment was Rs. 26000. Now her capital is Rs. 41,500. Her net profit out of her investment is more than Rs. 15500/- which helps her not only to run her family but at least she could overcome her immediate problem to solve food insecurity and other necessities of life. Now she has opened a saving bank account in State Bank of India, Hingalgaanj Branch. She operates the bank account properly. Her future activity plan is to increase area for cultivation and goat farming. Along with such livelihood activities, she could engage herself in several government schemes she is entitled to. She enrolled her name for job card for MGNREGS. She could receive her job card from the Jogeshganj Gram Panchayat. It may be worth mentioning that the SHG she is connected has received Rs.2.5 lakhs loan under National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) with a minimum interest from bank. She could also get Rashtriya Swastha Bima Yojana (RSBY) card for free treatment upto Rs.30000/- in a year. Her two daughters are studying respectively in class IX and VII and got good marks in their last examination. Her elder daughter is studying in class eleven in Jogeshganj High School. She gets 62% marks in her secondary examination. Younger daughter Arpita Mandal is now studying in class seven and she gets more than 60% marks in the last annual examination from Jogeshganj High School.

Above all her husband also came back and staying at home. It is all of her effort she could organize making herself engage cultivation and fisheries but now her husband's also joined them and is trying to understand the scientific process of problems of productivity. So, she found the path not only empowering herself but also making an identity in the society by supplementing amount required to run her family. She has considered SHG as an important self organization and trying to help other members by sharing her benefits from different activities and also how she could secured other benefits from different schemes.



Asian Institute of Poverty Alleviation

Promoting models that are self-replicating and sustainable to reduce poverty

81C, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Sarani, Kolkata-700054, India

+91-33-64610972 +91-9831475718

director@aipaasia.in www.aipaasia.in

Regd. Office: 240-B, Ansal Chambers-II, 6 Bhikaji Cama Place, New Delhi-110066,

+91-11-26168798

Registered under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956, Registered in Delhi
Section 25 Licence Number: 103198 dated 9th July2013

C I N-U85100DL2013NPL255779 of 2013-2014 dated July 24th 2013, PAN: AALCA8328F
Exempt U/s 80G: NO.DIT (E) I 2014-15 DEL AE25256-24062014 5022 dated 24.06.2014