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Demanding Rights for All

IT'S TIME TO 'CLOSE THE GAP' OXFAM INDIA'S NEW CAMPAIGN CALLS ON THE PUBLIC TO JOIN A NATIONWIDE DEBATE ON INEQUALITY



CLOSETHEGAP launch: (From left to right) Chairperson, Forum on Women in Leadership, Poonam Barua, Actor and social activist, Nandita Das, Oxfam India CEO, Nisha Agrawal and social activist, Kiran Bedi launching the campaign on March 8 at Constitution Club in New Delhi.

There was a palpable sense of excitement at the Constitution Club of India for the launch of Oxfam India's CLOSETHEGAP Campaign on March 8, International Women's Day.

CLOSETHEGAP is one of Oxfam India's most ambitious campaigns in years. It is a public conversation about inequality that aims to energize tens of thousands of people to push for change. It will begin as a campaign against gender inequality, and will later broaden to challenge the discrimination faced by marginalized groups such as dalits, tribals and Muslims.

CLOSETHEGAP has a particular focus on young people, who are often treated as

passive bystanders in policy debates. Oxfam wants to empower these people to shape public conversation.

Oxfam is doing this with one of the most democratic mediums of all—the phone. It has set up two free lines—one in English and one in Hindi. People who call in are asked to say how THEY would close the gap between men and women in India. Oxfam India will sift through the messages it records and take the public's demands directly to decision makers to press for change.

More than 100 people—students, diplomats, activists, and politicians—crammed into a small room for the launch to hear speeches from social

activist Kiran Bedi, actress Nandita Das and Chairperson, Forum on Women in Leadership, Poonam Barua, and CEO of Oxfam India, Nisha Agrawal at the launch of the campaign.

The gathering was diverse but everyone in the room had a common conviction:

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that India's attitudes towards women must change radically before they will be able to realize their dreams or living without fear of violence or discrimination.

The panelists endorsed the strategy and gave some powerful speeches about gender equality. Kiran Bedi was in fine form—funny, caustic and bold. She demanded greater female participation in the police force: "We need to put quality women in crime prevention and investigative roles. They need to walk the beat! ... A woman can do it, we just need to give her confidence!"

Actress and film-maker Nandita Das was more reflective but no less scathing. She said people in India need to speak honestly about the way women are treated by their families.

"Much of the abuse of women happens behind closed doors," she said. "We need to nip this cycle of abuse in the bud and stop the silence. That is where change will start."

Das also reflected on the prejudices that she has encountered personally.

"Stereotypes are also a problem. I have been asked – how come you are so confident despite being dark? The media has projected that dark women do not have confidence and are not good enough," she added

Nisha Agrawal said, "It is an outrage that in the 21st century, women don't feel safe when they walk home at night and that women's representation in places of power is so insignificant. Currently only 12 per cent of the Lok Sabha is made up of women and the figures for other positions of power are even more shocking. Just 5 per cent of the Indian police force are women, an especially worrying statistic given the fact that many crimes against women go unreported

because they don't feel safe reporting them to a man."

Poonam Barua said, "Only 5% of women are in the top management of Indian Corporate Sector—there must be equal opportunity for all talent. A list of Best Employers for Women is one awesome idea that can Close the Gap".

The launch was a big success, but it is just the beginning of the campaign. Over the last two weeks Oxfam India's partner Purple Mangoes has also held several public events in universities and other youth hubs. They have engaged with hundreds of young people, using theatrical techniques to persuade them to share their thoughts about gender discrimination, and encouraging them to call the CLOSETHEGAP phone line.

If you attend these events it is a wonderful experience as dozens of young people talk honestly about the way women are treated in India, and together commit to do everything in their power to change things for the better.

There has been a fantastic online response to the campaign too. Another Oxfam India partner Youth Ki Awaaz has hosted online discussions about the way women are treated in India, sparking furious debate. Traffic to Oxfam India's online social media sites has also soared.

If you listen to the thousands of personal testimonies flooding in from across India it becomes clear that India is neglecting millions of its women. This represents not just a human tragedy of an immense scale, but also an enormous missed opportunity. Until India's attitudes change countless women will continue to languish. We hope CLOSETHEGAP will be a big part of making that change a reality!

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NO WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT IN BIHAR

One of the more progressive states in India does not have a dedicated Women and Child Development Department to deal with women's issues. At first, this statement was considered a slip-up but when this startling fact was revealed it came as a shock to all the 60 participants who had come to attend the consultation on the status of the implementation of the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) organized by Oxfam India. This consultation was organized with support from UK AID on 21st March, at Constitution Club, New Delhi.

Initiating the discussions on the status of PWDVA in various states, grassroots voices highlighted major gaps such as survivors having to face judicial biases, not getting relief within the specified time limit of 60 days, unavailability of protection officers (government representatives who help survivors access relief as mentioned in the Act), the additional burden on protection officers in some states, and non-existent and inactive service providers.

Farzana Begum, a former Protection Officer from Bihar said, "The Social Welfare Department in Bihar handles cases related to violence against women. My organization is one of the NGOs identified by the state government to run women help line centres. We have a dual role of handling project officers as well as protection officers."

With regard to the callous attitude of judges, magistrates, and the police, one of the participants, K. Satyavati, from Andhra Pradesh said, "We have organized a series of awareness programmes with judges and are now organizing gender sensitization workshops for magistrates and court judges. Initially it was difficult but now it comes as a demand from them. This has led to positive results." The open forum platform was well utilized and witnessed an exchange of ideas and strategies to be replicated in different states.

The second half of the consultation was on discussions relating to the budget for implementing the Act. PWDVA was passed in the Parliament without a dedicated budget for various provisions like support to service providers for counseling, health interventions, food for survivors, and so on. The PWDVA Advocacy and Action Group, a loose coalition of women's organizations working on domestic violence, has demanded Rs 1,158 crores for implementing the Act as this was developed as a part of a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the aegis of the National Commission for Women and submitted to the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Currently, the Minister has only committed Rs 67.5 crores for the implementation of this Act.

In terms of moving ahead it was agreed to continue with lobbying for an adequate budget for implementing PWDVA by preparing and disseminating fact sheets among members of the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, initiating small group meetings with them and the media, mass appeal and post cards to be sent to the Finance Minister, and at the same time creating greater awareness on this issue at various social media platforms.

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A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA –MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AFTER 2015

India's current model of development which focuses on growth is incapable of solving the problems of poverty, inequality and sustainability. Even after six decades of independence, India's growth story is still haunted by basic struggles by the poor for food, water, land, and livelihoods. It needs a new direction to achieve sustainable well-being for all its people. Global discussions around the post-2015 'development' goals (when the current Millennium Development Goals or MDGs are up for review) are an opportunity for India to chalk out a different pathway, and also advocate for such alternative pathways at the global level. At the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development held in 2012, the world's countries committed to framing sustainable development goals. Such a commitment entails upgrading the current MDG7 (on environmental sustainability) to a general orientation underlying all development goals, even as very specific environmental targets can remain within one goal.

Oxfam India and Kalpavriksh organized a national consultation on 'Sustainability and Development in India: Possibilities for the Post-2015 Framework' on March 18, 2013 at the Indian Social Institute, New Delhi. Participating in the consultation, Avinash Kumar, Director-Policy, Research & Campaigns, Oxfam India said, "This present assessment of MDGs can be an opportunity to re-assess the MDG goals from the perspective of the most marginalized communities and putting an alternative sustainable development paradigm on behalf of the poor." Caitlin Wiesen-Antin, Country Director, UNDP India said, "The post-2015 agenda needs to end the fragmented approach to development and bring the three pillars of sustainable development—economic, environmental and social—together at all levels. This is not a choice but an imperative for all developed and developing countries." The consultation discussed the paper 'Development and Ecological Sustainability in India: Possibilities for the Post-2015 Framework',¹ commissioned by Oxfam India and authored by noted environmentalist Ashish Kothari. This paper is aimed at policy level discussions, as well as being an aid to civil society to push for necessary changes to take the Indian economy, society, and polity towards the goal of human well-being with ecological sustainability as one fulcrum. It provides a context for the poverty-development-equity-environment linkages in India, comments on India's



Session in process: In the photo, (from left to right) Author of the paper, Ashish Kothari, Director, Policy, Research and Campaigns, Oxfam India, Avinash Kumar, Country Director, UNDP India, Caitlin Wiesen Antin, and Chairman, Development Alternatives, Ashok Khosla.

implementation of MDG7, and describes the key conceptual and implementation related gaps in achieving this goal. The paper delineates goals and targets relating to sustainability, outlines key indicators for them, and lists some tools to help measure these indicators. Finally, it outlines some of the major challenges facing the achievement of such a framework, and some follow up steps that may be taken.

Ashish Kothari reiterated, "If India has to achieve the well-being of all its people in an ecologically sustainable way, we need an integrated approach that enhances the opportunities for people traditionally or currently deprived, curbs the obscene levels of wealth and consumption of the super-rich, conserves nature and sustains the environmental base of our existence."

The discussants of the paper - Ashok Khosla, Aseem Shrivastav, Amita Shah and Uchita De Zoysa--stressed the need for putting ecological sustainability at the heart of development. They argued that the cost of unsafe environment hits the poor first, thus reversing gains in poverty reduction in the long run. They also argued that the post-2015 framework need to be ambitious enough to reach out to the poorest of the poor. Shekhar Singh, while moderating the discussions, also said that the environmental agenda is still not an important one at the grassroots level. Interestingly, the need for political mobilization on environment and the post -2015 framework was also echoed by Muhammad A. Khan, the Officer on Special Duty to the Minister of Rural Development, Government of India.

¹ <http://www.oxfamindia.org/resources/oxfam-india-working-papers-series>

DONOR SPEAKS

VIPUL N. PRAJAPATI
CA Final year student
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Many organizations are working for social causes like urban development and rural upliftment but I can proudly say that I am part of an organization that works for grassroots solutions to a problem and gives permanent solutions, rather than spoon feeding the beneficiaries. I thank Oxfam India and its staff for giving me an opportunity to add a drop to the noble cause. I wish them all the best for all their future endeavours.

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Oxfam India is a good organization and I am very happy to support it. The continuous effort of Oxfam India to provide basic needs to the needy, underprivileged people is remarkable. I try to help such organization as it gives me a chance to fulfill my obligation to society. I will always be thankful to Oxfam India for giving me such sense of satisfaction. I would like to support it in the future also. Thanks Oxfam India!



Yes, I want to make a change today!



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Enclosed is my first donation of

Rs. 6000/- towards providing learning material for 5 children.

Rs. 4000/- towards empowerment of 5 women belonging to poor and marginalised communities and to ensure a violence free lives for them.

Rs. 3000/- to provide emergency survival material and rehabilitation to 3 families affected by a natural calamity.

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All donations are exempted from income tax under 80G of IT Act

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