

## **“Practicum for Domestic Workers in Asia” - India**

### **External Evaluation by Winnie Ng**

#### **I. Introduction**

In 2016, the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) launched a Train the Trainers (ToT) regional workshop and brought 14 domestic worker leaders from 6 countries to Jakarta, Indonesia for a 4-day intensive training on strategic planning. The rationale for such training is a reflection of the ongoing commitment that IDWF holds in building its affiliates' organizational and leadership capacity from the ground up.

As a follow up to the ToT workshops, each trainee was expected to develop her individual work-plan and put what she has learned in terms of planning principles and objectives into practice in her local community for a period of 3 months immediately after the training. Each participating country as an affiliated union of IDWF was in turn, to commit staff to serve as mentor(s) and provide support for the trainees throughout the duration of the practicum project.

One of the participating affiliates of this project is the National Domestic Workers Federation (NDWF), a federation of 15 domestic workers unions across 15 states in India. For the ToT workshop in August 2016, NDWF was represented by two local domestic worker leaders -Renu Linda from Ranchi, Jharkhand and Anjana Sagar from Rourkela, Odisha. Their Hindi interpreter, Fr. Chetan Chandran, who is also the National Coordinator of NDWF, accompanied them. Chetan subsequently served as the mentor for the practicum project. This evaluation report focuses on the project implementation in India, specifically, the organizing efforts carried by Renu and Anjana in their respective community.

#### **Purposes of the Evaluation**

The objectives of the evaluation are as follow:

- To evaluate the success and outcomes of the project in building and strengthening domestic worker's capacity through the practicum model
- To assess whether the DW trainees have applied their newly acquired skills and knowledge from the ToT workshop to their local organizing - in developing and implementing their respective work plan of outreach and new member recruitment,
- To assess whether the domestic worker organizations have strengthened with increased membership;
- To assess the impact of this practicum project on the overall capacity and development of the organizations.

#### **Methodology**

The evaluation process is grounded in the principles of community based action research methodology (CBA) that recognizes the importance of centering the voices and experiences of the people who have been directly involved in the project. In engaging domestic workers

in sharing their realities and assessment, the participatory evaluation provides a more authentic reflection on the achievements, shortcomings of the practicum project itself; but also their needs and aspirations for the future. In that regard, the evaluation becomes an integral part of the group's overall planning process.

Aside from reviewing the documentation provided by IDWF and NDWF including the mentor's report and the trainees' work plans, site visits to Ranchi and Rourkela were made possible through the great coordinating efforts of Kris Chiu, Project Manager at the IDWF Head office, Chetan from the NDWF Ranchi Office and Promila, the local coordinator in Rourkela. The following conversations took place

- Individual interview with the Project Mentor, Fr. Chetan Chandran in Ranchi,
- Individual interview with the two trainees (Renu and Anjana) using semi-structured interview format,
- Interview with the local coordinator and field staff in Rourkela
- 2 group discussion with local DW leaders were held in Ranchi
- 1 group discussion with 6 workshop participants in Rourkela.

With the exception of the interview held in English with the project mentor, all the interviews and group discussion were conducted in Hindi. A special word of appreciation and recognition goes to Pramila Aggarwal, a newly retired Community Worker Program professor from Toronto whom happened to be visiting her family in Delhi and graciously accepted the invitation to act as the interpreter for this project. Because of her extensive background in community organizing and her cultural and gender sensitivity, she was able to develop a rapport with the women workers and put them at ease. Our interviews were more engaging and much enriched due to Pramila's presence as the 'bridge' that goes beyond her bilingual proficiency alone.

## **II. Findings**

The evaluation outcomes are presented in two sections – first on the impact of the ToT workshop and the other on the outcomes of the practicum project. The bulk of the assessment and recommendations will be focused on the latter.

### **A. Impact of the ToT workshop, “Planning for Empowerment for Change”**

The overall impressions of Renu and Anjana towards the training have been very positive. In recalling the experiences of being there in the presence of other domestic workers from across the world. For both of them, the gathering has made them aware that they are not alone in their own community, or in Anjana's words, “ I'm no longer a frog sitting in the bottom of the well and looking up” and that there is a much wider network out there doing the same work of fighting for domestic workers' rights and protection.

I've learned for the first time that there should be an objective in whatever we do and what we have to do to achieve the objective. Think of the steps ahead and work hard to get there. (Interview with Renu, Ranchi, 26/02/17)

The training is about moving forward. Being there in that workshop is like being part of the chain, joining everyone all over the world together. Each one of us is part of the chain! (Interview with Anjana, Rourkela, 01/03/17)

During the interviews as Renu and Anjana were recalling their experiences, the sense of awe and solidarity was still very much palpable six months after the workshop. They also made some thoughtful and constructive suggestions for improvement. They are as follow:

1. There is need to ‘slow down’ the pace to take into account the time lapse in simultaneous interpretation and allow time for questions and clarification. In addition, the level of the training was also “too fast and too high”.
2. The length of the workshop should be extended to 5 days to facilitate deeper sharing and relationship building among participants from various countries. The longer duration will enable participants to listen and learn from each other’s strategies and experiences.
3. It would make sense to have 2 trainees to be sent from the same area to attend such training. Not only would they be able to provide support for each other throughout the project, it would also allow better retention of information and insights in implementing the follow up plan.

## **B. Evaluation Outcomes of the Practicum Project**

### ***Increase in new members***

As indicated in the Mentor’s report and interviews with the trainees and participants, there is a definite increase of new members as a result of the intense organizing efforts of the 3-month practicum project in the two sites. In total, NDWF has witnessed a growth of 299 new members (109 in Ranchi and 176 in Rourkela). It is a very impressive outcome considering Renu, Anjana and other local domestic worker leaders continue to do domestic work for 3 to 4 employers during the week and can only find about 2 hours daily to do their outreach and organizing work.

#### **• *An increase in rights awareness and the presence of local union***

A total of 40 domestic workers participated in a rights awareness session and another 40 attended the leadership skill-training workshop in Rourkela. On the other hand, Renu used the survey as an organizing tool to initiate conversation with domestic workers about their rights. In addition, Renu along with her core team of group leaders also set up two organizing camps to recruit new members as part of the practicum. The sense of solidarity and potential power is reflected in the following quotes from the participants in the group discussion:

We’re all poor. We all work. Having a union is improving everyone’s life because we’re in the same boat.

Every domestic worker should belong to the union regardless of where they are. Government is not listening. But if there are a lot of us, a lot of people, the government will have to pay attention. They will come to us. They will “catch fever”

(literal translation of a Hindi expression which means the government will begin to tremble!) *when* we are 10,000 or 20,000 strong.

- ***Increase in leadership development and capacity building***

The two case examples highlighted below will clearly demonstrate how the concept of systematic planning process has been integrated in the local leadership-training workshop with a positive impact on how they recruit new members. While Renu and Anjana have fallen short of their personal organizing target goals due to health reasons in Anjana's case and for Renu, the unexpected organizing challenges such as transportation, they have relied on their local domestic worker leaders for additional support. This has actually generated more opportunities for potential domestic worker group leaders to deepen their skills and confidence as a leader. It is also interesting to note how the two sites have taken different strategies in their new membership drives.

### ***In Rourkela***

As a follow up to the domestic worker leadership-training workshop organized by Anjana, participants have agreed that each of them would recruit 5 new members as a target and deliver 3 as the minimum. In early December, Anjana had signed up about 91 new members (her personal target was 150) and had to stop working on the project due to a bicycle accident. A core group of 20 domestic workers who participated in leadership training workshop organized by Anjana, rose to the challenge and helped recruit 83 new members to ensure the practicum would reach its target as planned. It became a collective leadership effort and the women took pride in achieving their numbers. It was a great boost to their confidence and leadership development. The following quotes from some of the domestic worker leaders who participated in the group discussion on March 1, 2017 offer a glimpse of their level of enthusiasm and commitment:

I have recruited 5 members. It's very important to talking nicely to other women, to build up a relationship. When you do it from the heart, people will trust it. It's happiness from my heart to talk to others.

I've also shared what I have learnt with others. If someone is unjust to me or another domestic worker, we are not going to tolerate injustice...there is the sense of togetherness in being part of the union.

Over the past 3 months, I have recruited over 40 new members. I never miss saying hi to a domestic worker as I walk down the street even though she may be a stranger. I want to reach out to anyone and don't want to miss any opportunity to talk about union and their rights.

The unfortunate health 'crisis' experienced by Anjana ended up becoming an opportunity for other women activists to step up, hone their organizing skills; and provide support for each other. The organizational capacity of the Union at the local level has also been strengthened as this group of new leaders emerged.

## ***In Ranchi***

In her work plan, Renu identified 17 new slum areas as her catchment area and set a personal target of 120 new members. Some of the key challenges in this round of outreach included the time and costs spent in transportation to get to areas that are farther away from the city, the fear shared by domestic workers about losing their jobs which are more scarce outside the city proper; and last but not the least, the unaffordability of paying union dues which was 60 Rupees (about 1 USD) per year. As a result, the organizing effort was stalled.

Renu enlisted the help of 4 experienced group leaders to help organize two organizing camps. I had the opportunity to meet with 3 of them during my site visit in Ranchi. They are more seasoned group leaders as compared to the ones we met in Rourkela. They have overcome some personal challenges to stay involved in the union and earned the respect of their families and employers. The direct involvement to assist Renu in the organizing of the Organizing Camps has deepened their leadership practice. They were also buoyed by the success in recruiting new members and saw the need to get the union message out.

We need to educate people in our community that domestic work is work and it is important. Both the workers and employers need to respect each other and follow the law. Domestic work is dignified work!

As a result of this positive experience and increase in confidence, Renu and the core team have decided to designate April as the month of new members to keep up the momentum. This development would undoubtedly lead to more leadership capacity building.

## **Areas for Improvement**

It has been a really inspiring experience to meet this group of staff, organizers and domestic worker leaders who are committed to empowering women workers and passionate about organizing a strong domestic workers union. Both locations have made considerable achievement despite the under-resourcing and organizing challenges they are operating under. Rather than framing the following section as ‘weaknesses’ or ‘what has not worked so well’, I am entitling it as areas for improvement as a way to move the project forward.

## **Development and Implementation of the Work plan**

In reviewing Renu and Anjana’s respective work plan, one cannot help but be overwhelmed by the new neighborhoods and catchment areas that they planned to cover to get the union message across. The interview with the trainees further confirmed that. In any given day, the travelling time by bicycle ride can be time consuming and thus little time for the real conversation with potential new recruits to take place in a more thoughtful manner.

A case in point, Renu reached out to 17 groups including some in more remote areas away from the city in the 3-month period, she was only able to do one round of visit. In her interview, she expressed her frustration about not having enough time to do follow up visits in the new areas and saw that as the main reason why 5 out of her 17 organizing groups were not successful.

As a very capable leader and organizer, Renu offered some very insightful reflection. She felt that even though her work plan was seemingly ambitious, it could have been achievable if she was given proper resources in terms of time and money to carry it out

Money is a big issue to cover the transportation costs. I wish I could have more time, more financial support and have another person to work with. It is much harder to organize outside the city where jobs are scarce and domestic workers will endure a lot more to hold on to their jobs. People are just too afraid.

In retrospect, the work plan could be more realistically set or adjusted to focus on quality rather than quantity. For example, the plan could have drawn to focus on fewer areas in order to allow more time for follow up and relationship building. Zeroing in a smaller number of groups and areas will also translate into a concentration of resources in those areas. That being said, a proper budget with adequate resource allocation would greatly alleviate the stress of any organizers.

Both trainees also pointed out the importance of using creative tools to speak more directly to the domestic workers. Aside from the door to door organizing and public speeches used in awareness campaign, street theatre would attract more people to pay attention, and in Renu's words, "so they can see themselves".

### **The mentoring process and the Practicum**

Fr. Chetan as the National coordinator of NDWF and the project mentor has played a pivotal role in the project implementation. While he is a highly talented and inspiring leader for the movement, he is also extremely over-extended and may not be readily available for consultation and guidance. As much as he has put priority and energy on this practicum project, time was a factor in setting regular check-in and follow up with the trainees. Aside from the time availability, distance has become a challenge since Rourkela is 3.5-hour train ride from Ranchi. Being in the same city, Renu has had more access to Chetan than Anjana.

The other challenge as expressed by Chetan is the difference in literacy level and the level of understanding of the training materials by the two trainees. While Chetan sought to rely on the local coordinator to extend more guidance to Anjana, it was frustrating for the person who did not attend the ToT workshop and has not been involved in the initial planning of the project to step in. The presence and availability of a mentor for regular check in is a key component for the success of the practicum project.

### **The Practicality of the Practicum Period**

The duration of a 3-month practicum was viewed as too short and too rushed by both the mentor and the trainees. They shared the concern that it was not longer to nurture a solid commitment among the new members and deepen the relationship building. Given the limited hours that the trainees could spare from their regular paid domestic work to devote to the project, a longer practicum period would have made a lot more sense. A much longer period of two years and one year were suggested. Chetan candidly shared his sentiment, "we can't do the organizing

within two or three months. It should be a 2 year program – support them with travel, lost wages and costs incurred during the organizing. The longer term support will definitely bring results.”

While there is merit to extend the practicum period to allow more solid organizing to take root, it is also important to ensure that the duration does not become a long drawn process. There is advantage for a more intense and targeted organizing period to build the momentum. The challenge therefore, is to find the right balance and avoid the organizing model of “one size fits all” by taking into account the specificities of local organizing context such as cultural and/or religious differences.

### **Sustainability and the next step**

While the practicum project has reaped concrete results in terms of increase in membership and leadership development and organizational capacity, the age old question on how to sustain the momentum after such an intensive organizing campaign is a relevant and sobering one for this evaluation report.

For the new recruits, one can surmise on the possible retention rate of new membership after 6 months or after one year. With the intense organizing campaign and influx of new members, is there adequate staff capacity to handle some of the ‘complaints’ and manage the expectations? While this may be beyond the scope of this practicum project, it is however, a pertinent one that one must incorporate as a component in a thorough campaign planning process even after the funding support has expired. The indicator of success for a given project is more than just the figures but the comprehensive basket of support and membership building in the follow up phase. For example, what are the follow up work that will sustain their interests and nurture their sense of belonging with the union?

#### *Need to nurture the sense of belonging*

One unanimous suggestion put forth by all the domestic worker leaders and participants is the desire to have a union identification card as a proof of their membership. The ID card can become a symbol of strength for domestic workers to demand better rates, respect and dignity.

We are working in people’s homes because we need an income to run our homes. So the employers need to recognize that we are also workers. Without DWs, they can’t go to work. The ID card will give us confidence. People will respect us and I’ll also be able to draw on the support of others.

As there is an increase of new members through this project, the advantage of giving out a union ID card to nurture the sense of belonging and solidarity cannot be underestimated.

#### *Need to address the high dropout rate of activists/leaders*

On the other hand, Chetan has also observed that relative high dropout rate of activists and leaders whom they have trained. For the emerging domestic worker leaders who are actively engaged, what are some creative ways to deepen their skills, confidence and their collective sense of agency when there is a lack of family support, domestic violence, sexual harassment at

work, and not to mention, the precariousness of there is a prevalent and dismissive attitude held by general public that domestic work is less deserving work, workers disrespected and therefore, the notion of organizing a domestic worker union becomes a target for public taunting. Many of the women leaders shared their experiences and as well their retorts and strategies in confronting such backlash.

#### *Need for literacy and advocacy training*

The domestic worker leaders spoke to the need for practical skill building courses that can immediately benefit union members, such as literacy training, cooking skill training, video training and computer training, etc.

We can't write. So when we launch an oral complaint with the police, they can write down anything because they can see that we are 'blind', and they can claim whatever they want. Our issues are not being taken seriously and we are not taken seriously because we can't read and write. Being literate will give us some sense of control, even in terms of keeping track of what our children are up to.

For many domestic workers, the notion of literacy as reflected in the above quote, goes beyond just knowing to write your name but the sense of political efficacy and their collective desire for respect and meaningful participation in the society.

As for the group leaders who have gone through the leadership training, this initial training needs to be followed up by a comprehensive program of assertiveness training, legal information on various topics; and advocacy skill training specifically on how to speak to police and the various representatives so they can act as better advocates for their members.

The leaders also felt strongly see the priority to allocate resources for local training to develop all rounded leaders before they are sent to international training workshops. "Local training before international gatherings!" The local training will provide more opportunities for local leaders to expand their skills, knowledge and confidence.

### **III. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The practicum project is an ambitious and innovative project undertaken by IDWF and its partnering affiliates. It has the potential to serve as a viable organizing model for organizing domestic workers who are working under such conditions of precarity and adversity. The mentor, local coordinators, trainees and their teams of domestic worker leaders in both locations have made considerable achievement in implementing the practicum project given their limited resources, time constraints and work and family responsibilities.

To deepen the achievements of this work the following recommendations are made.

#### *Developing and Implementing Work plan Process*

- For future planning process, careful consideration should be applied in setting the target goals and budget to maximize the potential and effectiveness of the

organizing campaign. Regular review of the work plan should take place in order to adjust it accordingly based on the progress of the implementation.

- On the implementation of the plan, the organizers and mentor should always weigh the pros and cons of various options – either going broad or going deeper. At times, it would be advisable to consider focusing on fewer sites and doing deeper kind of follow up and rather than the ‘touch and go’ broad stroke approach.
- Good campaign planning should incorporate approaches that will address the realities and potential resistance of domestic workers to join a union due to fear, cynicism or the mere necessity to survive. Creative strategies and tools such as street theatre, music and storytelling should be utilized to draw resonance and move people to action.

#### *Training of Mentors Workshop:*

- For future ToT training workshop, there should be a day set aside as Training of Mentors (ToM) workshop where expectations on roles and responsibilities are clearly spelled out and where potential mentors can strengthen their coaching skills in dealing with participants of varying levels of literacy. The training should incorporate a module on how to train local mentors.

#### *Developing a hub of mentors and Trainers in local communities:*

- Upon their return from the ToM workshop, the Lead Mentor should identify a core team of potential mentors who have proven track record of organizing in local communities in different regions and provide the contents of ToT workshops and the important role that they will embark on as mentors to local domestic worker leaders. Such training can be an integral part of leadership and organizational capacity building at the local level. The presence of mentors and trainers in local communities will undoubtedly enhance the confidence and skills of domestic worker activists/leaders.

#### *Extend the duration of the practicum to ‘up to’ 6- month period:*

- For future practicum projects, an up to 6 month time period should be considered to enable a deeper level of organizing and commitment building among new members. The notion of having an up-to 6 month period will offer the local leadership some flexibility in mapping out their plan and strategies in response to their local and/or regional differences. The extended time frame will also allow trainees/organizers to have time to reflect, analyze and act accordingly.

#### *Sustainability of Membership and Leadership*

- ***Feasibility of a Union Identification (ID) Card:*** IDWF along with its affiliate, NDWF should jointly explore the feasibility of producing a Union Member ID card and the budget required for such initiative. The ID card will be a branding of IDWF worldwide and at the local level, it will serve as a tool to bind their identity and build their confidence. Rourkela and Ranchi can be used as the sites for such a demonstration project.
- ***Implementing Literacy Training Program for Domestic Workers:*** NDWF with the support of IDWF should explore funding sources to support a pilot project that will systematically provide literacy training and civic engagement. A comprehensive need assessment and delivery model can be a joint collaboration with universities as a community university partnership project.
- ***Advocacy Training and Assertive training as an integral part of domestic workers leadership training.*** IDWF can potentially use the ToT workshop model as a template for the training of these critical issues. It will be a logical follow up to the training done through this practicum project.
- ***Local training first before international Training:*** to maximize resources and benefit a wider group of domestic worker leaders, the emphasis should be placed on local training with the presence of co-facilitators (one from international and one from local) to deliver such training at the local level. It will be a better utilization of resources maximizing the benefit and its reach.
- ***Utilize women trainers and resource persons as much as possible in training workshops with domestic workers:*** it makes ample of sense as the overall mission of IDWF is to promote women leadership and to build a union of women and by women. The presence of women trainers and resource persons will undoubtedly deepen the conversation on matters such as violence against women, sexual harassment at work, domestic violence etc. and engage more women in sharing their experiences. At the same time, the presence of women to deliver the training can also serve as potential role models for participants.