



Women Development Resource Centre

March 31, 2018

The Women Development Resource Centre continues to play a central role in the lives of Dalit and Tribal women around Madurai, South India. Membership over the last year increased by 432 from 12 new villages, making a total of 26,646 women.

WDRC trained 137 women on issues of gender, human rights and ways to improve their livelihoods. The women passed on what they had learned to 1,210 community leaders. Linking with other organisations, they participated in the international “16 Days of Women’s Activism” from 30 November, focusing on local issues like land rights, child marriage and honour killing. Following National Government plans, they pressed for access to education for Dalit and Tribal girl children at the state and local level. WDRC organised two training events for Dalit and Tribal leaders on women’s participation in local councils. Progress was made on the applications for government allocated house sites for 2,465 people. Women learned new skills to run the credit union and Labourer’s Bank. 52 women received funding to start cooperatives and a further 20 received start up funding for small businesses selling vegetables, flowers, organic manure and jewelry.

Saving through the women-owned credit union and bank is encouraged in WDRC programmes. 215 women and men small farmers received training in seed preservation, irrigation, manure production and natural pest control. 52 men attended a conference on promoting equality for girls and women. Girls from the campaign on children’s rights formed a cultural team which performs at children’s celebrations and other events. Dalit and Tribal parents and leaders discussed the right to free and compulsory education, and joined the campaign to implement the National Plan for Girls Education and more support for schools for Dalit and Tribal children.

WDRC invited the Women’s Medical Officer from Madurai to discuss the lack of medical services and substandard care available to rural women. WDRC organised two events for 134 adolescent girls covering health issues, cultural rights including education, and protection from exploitative work practices like the *Sumangali* scheme which employs young women as bonded labour in the cotton mills. WDRC reports Dalit and Tribal women have been particularly hard hit by globalisation, devaluing their work which traditionally was more equal with men.



National Director Pauline McKay spent three days with WDRC in February 2017 and met with Tribal people. (pictured above).

Women owned Banks improve Livelihoods

My name is Tamilarasi and I am aged 45 years. I was born in a village Araiyoor near Madurai city. My parents are agriculture wage earners. I married my paternal Aunty's son and we had two daughters. My husband died at a young age due to unknown sickness. As a young widow I could only afford for my daughters to study up to the 9th standard. After my husband's sudden demise, I shifted to my native village and stayed with my parents. In the village I took my daughters along with me for agricultural work. In an eight



year period I have arranged marriages for my two daughters at the age of 17 and 18 years. As there is not enough agricultural employment, I migrated to the city and live alone.

I took a loan of Rs.10,000/- (NZ\$212) at the rate of 10% interest from a money lender to purchase vegetables and start a vegetable business. First I started the vending business in front of my house. I could not earn enough to repay the loan for the next day and only half of the interest. I was caught in a debt trap.

At the time I heard about the savings scheme and the Women Labourers Bank run by WDRC. I voluntarily enrolled in the Women *Sangam*. I also joined the savings activity of credit union. I attended all the meetings conducted by WDRC and got information and awareness about women micro entrepreneurship and techniques to save money. Until I enrolled and joined in *sangam* activities facilitated by WDRC I did not save any money.

Now I have learnt how to save money from my small earnings. I also received training on how to preserve the leftover vegetables into dry items, the process to protect the freshness of the vegetables and how to make profit for my livelihood.

I took a loan of Rs. 20,000/- (NZ\$424) from the Women Labourers Bank to purchase vegetables from the central vegetable market. Like me, 7 other women also borrowed Rs. 20,000/- each and we joined together to purchase the vegetables at the market and shared them among us. We were able to save the cost of transport and time, and the joint effort helped us to relieve from the money

lender's exploitation and build the team spirit among us.

“[Dalit and Tribal] women and workers are showing increased confidence and self-reliance in decision making and are more aware of their constitutional and democratic rights”.

Now we have made presentations to the city administration, with the demand to allot places for vending business and we hope we will get it. In all our efforts, we enjoy the joint action and the team spirit building, the mutual help among us, and we are all greatly relieved to be free from the money lender's exploitation. We are proud of our creation of credit facilities among us.

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