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Report

By

Narendra Aggarwal
AMIC convened for UNESCO the Consultation in cooperation with the New Delhi-based Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS). The three-day Consultation was held at the UNDP Conference Room. There were 18 participants. (List attached).

The principal participants at the Consultation were Ms Rohana Ariffin of the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang; Sr Mary Soledad Perpinan, Coordinator of the Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women, Manila; Ms Harji Malik, a prominent Indian free-lance journalist based in New Delhi; and Dr Kumud Sharma, Deputy Director of the CWDS.

The first three had conducted studies on the subject in their respective countries. Dr Sharma laid down the framework for the studies and subsequently wrote the coordinated report.

The UNESCO sponsored study on Women, Media and Prostitution was carried out in three Asian countries -- Malaysia, Philippines and India.

The comparative study in the region focuses on aspects which run counter to human rights and dignity of women, i.e., forced prostitution, sex-tourism, sexual violence, the channels and methods used for sex-tourism, and prostitution and for perpetuating the exploitation of women.

Each study looks at how the existing communication media has responded to these issues. The first set of questions was addressed to the reasons why the media in most countries previously tended to be silent on this issue.

The individual researchers were also asked to look into the reasons for the recent increase in media attention and to what factors it is due to.
The three studies also covered degree of response/concern among different groups and what is the role they expect media to play.

Meeting with Dr Kumud Sharma

AMIC Senior Programme Specialist Narendra Aggarwal immediately on reaching New Delhi, held a meeting with Dr Sharma at her office on Saturday morning, February 22, to take stock of the arrangements for the Consultation.

Dr Sharma had earlier written that she would like some changes in the Agenda (prepared by AMIC in consultation with her). Her suggestions were incorporated and the Agenda revised (Copy enclosed).

While the meeting was in progress, copies of the coordinated report, including summaries of the three case studies were received at the CWDS. A few copies were collected for distribution to out of station participants staying at the hotel.

Dr Vina Mazumdar, Director of the CWDS, attended the meeting for some time.

Planning Group Meeting

On Sunday, February 23, a planning group meeting was held at Lodhi Hotel, which were attended by Ms Rohana Ariffin (Malaysia), Dr Pasuk Phongpaichit (Thailand), Dr Mazumdar, Dr Sharma, Dr Lotika Sarkar, Ms Harji Malik (all CWDS) and myself. The meeting lasted about an hour. The strategy for conducting the Consultation was discussed and Chairperson and rapporteur for the various sessions were decided upon.

Although the Consultation was scheduled to begin at 9.30 a.m. on all the three days, the sessions could only get under way at about 10 o'clock in view of the late arrival of the CWDS members and local participants.
Day I

In her opening remarks Dr Vina Mazumdar, Director, CWDS, stressed that prostitution cannot be relegated as a marginal issue because of its wide and pervasive repercussions on society.

She expressed the hope that the Consultation would come out with a new perspective to the whole question of prostitution. It might help to identify possible plans of action for the government, media and women groups in attempting to resolve such an issue.

AMIC's Senior Programme Specialist Narendra Aggarwal said that normally AMIC's interest would have been limited to a study on Women and Media, but in view of the profound social implications of the topic, it accepted UNESCO's invitation to convene the Consultation (Text enclosed).

The main objectives of the Consultation were:

(a) To elucidate the methodology used in the three case studies, possible problems in accomplishing the studies, indication of useful sources of information, etc., -- all of which could help similar studies to be undertaken on other parts of the world.

(b) To identify the results obtained through the three studies, areas possible for future action and, if necessary, further research.

(c) To identify possible recommendations, which could be addressed to various institutions and organisations, from local to international.

Dr Sharma presented her coordinated report after the tea break. Copies of the report were made available to all participants.

Dr Vina Mazumdar chaired the session up to lunch time and Ms Rohana Ariffin was the rapporteur. In the afternoon, Dr Hema Goonatilake was in the chair while Dr Pasuk Phongpaichit acted as the rapporteur. In the afternoon, Ms Rohana Ariffin presented her case study from Malaysia and Ms Harji Malik, her study from India.
Days II & III

There were 15 participants on the opening day.

The second day's proceedings started with Sister Soledad presenting her case study from Philippines. Dr Hema was again in the chair and Dr Pasuk acted as rapporteur. An open forum for the participants was held after the morning tea break. Dr Lotika Sarkar was in the chair and Ms Harji Malik was rapporteur. This session began with Dr Pasuk presenting her paper followed by a paper from Dr Hema from Sri Lanka. Subsequently, the Indian participants gave their presentations. Among those who took active part in the discussions were Ms Sheila Barse from Bombay, and Ms Jyotsna Chatterji from New Delhi.

The session after the afternoon tea was devoted to identification of results of the three case studies. The three principal participants who did the case studies for Malaysia, Philippines and India tried to identify the results as also looked at shortcomings and possible improvements to their studies in the light of the procedure and experience of those who conducted similar studies. On the third day, the focus was on methodology used in the three case studies; problems encountered; and useful sources of information. Sister Soledad expressed strong remarks on the manner in which her case study had been summarised by CWDS and included in the coordinated report.

Dr Kumud Sharma said that the report circulated at the meeting was only a draft and the final coordinated report would be presented later to UNESCO. In the afternoon, Dr Phulrenu Guha, M.P., a former minister in the Indian Government, spoke at length. The final session was devoted to making recommendations to local and international organisations.

CWDS hosted a dinner in honour of the participants on Tuesday, February 25.
Highlights of discussions

During the three-day discussions, it was repeatedly pointed out that the three case studies were different from each other in their approach. Hence, the studies were not truly comparable. In the light of this factor, it was also felt that it was a difficult task for Dr Sharma to put together the coordinated report doing full justice to the individual country case studies.

During the discussions it was pointed out that one of the reasons for media's lack of sustained interest in women and prostitution was due to the fact that it is more news-oriented rather than issue-oriented. Wondering whether the mainstream media can be cause orient to this topic, it was suggested that a new kind of concerned media was perhaps needed which would in turn influence the mainstream media.

One of the participants (a woman journalist) said that there was little motivation for journalists to keep on writing on the subject. There was virtually no recognition for work done in this field. To motivate journalists, some kind of recognition, social or otherwise, was necessary.

Some of the participants pointed out that there was too much focus on the phenomenon of prostitution during the case studies and also at the Consultation whereas perhaps the UNESCO objective was to see how media can be really involved in the issues relating to prostitution.

The participant from Bombay objected to criticism of media and noted that the media was virtually absent from the Consultation (the local women journalists and others invited to the Consultation by CWDS did not show up). She also objected to expressions like "use the media" and "handle the media" and said that media practitioners were not tools; they had the right to practice their profession as they wished.
Some suggestions

Some of the suggestions that emerged during the discussions were:

That women's groups should participate more in media and that all forms of sexism in the media should be eliminated. If women were given skills during schooling and in their early years they could take up gainful work rather than prostitution.

All vice legislation should be reviewed and laws enacted to conscientise the public.

The media should play a more positive role in raising the status of women in society.

The efforts to conscientise journalists must also include men and they be encouraged to look at women's issues along with women journalists.

It was pointed out that the study and the Consultation considered only the print media, which mostly covered the urban elite. Other media like TV and movies should also be included in future studies.

It was also suggested that women's groups should undertake a study of the motivation of the wide spectrum of men who go to prostitutes. The researchers felt it would have been useful if male assistants could have been used in the studies. Only part-time women research assistants were used due to monetary constraints. During the discussions it was pointed out that new type of women were coming to streets to join the ranks of prostitutes. They did it for adventure, for money, for more experience, etc, and come from higher strata of society.
Recommendations

The specific recommendations made to UNESCO were:

1. UNESCO and other organisations should sponsor similar studies for other countries for which no studies exist, e.g., Sri Lanka, Vietnam and China. More time should be provided for conducting each study.

2. Action-related research on the whole issue should be undertaken by international and local bodies.

3. Funding situation should be clear so that researchers do not have to spend own money.

4. Issues should be clearly spelt out so that a clear focus is maintained.

5. Before undertaking similar comparative studies, planning group consultation should be held so as to arrive at a common approach.

6. UNESCO was asked to publish the case studies and coordinated report as also allow the individual researchers to reproduce their studies locally for wider dissemination and feedback.

NARENDRA AGGARWAL
Senior Programme Specialist

7 March 1986