

INDIRA SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANISATIONS (ISWO) AT A GLANCE

Indira Social Welfare Organisation was started by a group of enthusiastic young teenagers comprising mainly of girls in Dhenkanal district, Orissa, INDIA. A group of girls who had been attending tailoring classes in a skill training centre identified the need for some kind of skill training for women in their town and armed with their own newly acquired skill, set out start a centre in Dhenkanal town in 1985. The organisation was given a name in recognition of the widely recognised political leader Indira Gandhi and duly registered.

VISION

The vision of ISWO is to help bring about greater justice for the weakest sections of women so that they become equal partners of men in society ISWO firmly believes that the key to this lies in the economic empowerment of women.

MISSION

ISWO thus took up the mission of helping the most deprived sections of women in the slums of Dhenkanal district get economically empowered. The fact of the group members being incredibly young has proved to be an advantage rather than a deterrent. The enthusiasm and fervour to remove oppression against women has helped them.

- * To raise their voices against any kind of victimisation or oppression in any part of the world.
- * To resolve up cases of Exploitation and oppression of women in their neighborhood.
- * To raise awareness among women and men on various kinds of oppression of women.
- * To lobby with the Government at the local and regional levels on crucial issues affecting the lives of women.

STRATEGY:

On the whole, it can be said that ISWO's strategy has been to use income generating programs and literacy as the medium through which social issues get addressed. Any income generation or literacy program in ISWO's perspective has and will continue to be a means to an end- NOT an end in itself. The end is that women get justice from mainstream society and the state in every sphere of their lives.

- The team caters to the needs of victimised women through
- * Counseling where the problem identification, analysis and desire of the victim as regards addressal of the problem is concerned are assessed.
 - * Internal team discussion where its strengths and weaknesses, the constraints and likely backlash are discussed.

- * Confrontation with the perpetrator of the oppression using counseling and negotiation as first steps, wherever possible.
- * Discussion with the village community on the best way to resolve the issue.
- * Approaching the local legal machinery as a last report.
- * Rehabilitation of the women within their own community to the maximum extent possible.

In the case of broader issues like obscene portrayal of women, anti liquor, violence against women and women's right. ISWO largely uses the cultural medium to convey its message. Being endowed with a talented set of young women and men, ISWO carries out its consciousness raising through song, dance and street theatre.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

The organisation has come a longway from where it started off as a skill training centre for adolescent girls. Its original focus was only adolescent girls and there were 17 such in the first batch of skill training. Very soon there were requests that older married women also get opportunity to equip themselves with some skills to enable them venture into some income generating activity. The number rose to 70 with the inclusion of older married women emerged a different role for ISWO. Cases of family violence began to surface, the stimulus for which must have been the mental space women. Experienced as a result of the physical space. they got at the centre. ISWO can claim to have made an impact on the lives of some specific women who came to the team for tackling their personal issues. The young age of the team members stirred strong feelings of anger at the oppression women narrated and there was no hesitation in taking up the cause of the victimised women. Despite the threats and in some resentment from the family the team has taken the cases to a logical end where the women got justice. This is particularly difficult in Indian families where a women is considered the ward of her parents or older brothers till she is married-whatever age she may be. In the case of the ISWO team all the members are now 30 years of age. Their work is purely voluntary and they do not get any remuneration. The team collects donations locally for its activities. Some landmark cases are cited below.

In 1993, ISWO decided to put an end to sale of illicit liquor and trafficking in women in one of the villages in Dhenkanal District. It so happened that a group of three women were carrying this work. ISWO had long sessions with the women and persuaded them to stop their activity. Naturally the women demanded an alternative source of income. ISWO negotiated with the local municipal office and got these women rehabilitated as daily wage labour in the same office. Two women continue this alternative job where as one women gave it up and went back to selling liquor. The local liquor mafia threatened ISWO of dire consequences if it continued this work any further, undeterred ISWO organized a protest rally and public meeting in Dhenkanal town as part of its campaign against brewing and sale of country liquor. Women came in large numbers to participate in the rally.

The campaign drew the attention of the District collector who was impressed by the organizing capacity of the ISWO team and while assuring Government support to the team requested it to take up the total Literacy campaign in the slums of Dhenkanal town. ISWO readily took up the program since it would be beneficial to the community. It did to however restrict itself to literacy only. It took the opportunity of raising the awareness among the target community on women's subordination. This attracted the attention of the national group. Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS) which included two of the ISWO team members in its Cultural training and subsequently in its troupe, which toured different parts of India doing a plan on equal rights called "Faces of Women".

A 25 member group from ISWO took out a cycle rally covering all the blocks of Dhenkanal and Angul districts over a period of 20 days to raise awareness among the community on gender equality and dowry in 1994.

On the day of the Holi festival in 1995 the ISWO team campaigned against the exhibition of obscene posters in public places in the town of Dhenkanal. The volunteers, primarily young women, went around the shops, men's hair dressing saloons, with their odni spread out for the people to pull down such posters and throw them into their "Odni". This drew a very good response from the general public and awareness about ISWO grew.

- * ISWO has been regularly taking up issues of individuals, women victims of gender oppression/violence with success.
- * ISWO mobilised 5000 grassroots women from in and around Dhenkanal on the anti-liquor state level campaign.
- * ISWO promoting the women artisans on Handicraft sectors i.e. Dhokra, Zari & patch work, Embroidery, straw art & toys making etc.
- * ISWO provides legal aid support to victimised women in & around Dhenkanal district.
- * ISWO started a girls (SC/ST) school for primary education in rural sector.
- * ISWO conducted campaigns on the issue of the atrocities against Anjana Mishra, whose issue has taken a national stature.
- * ISWO networks very well with like minded activists/groups on common issues.
- * ISWO is known for rising to the occasion whenever and wherever there is a need, be it for counseling, emotional support or confronting in justice.

CONSTRAINTS

The major constraints of ISWO is that it relies purely on local contribution within its district. Which does not amount to much, considering the amount of work the team does. The constraints also is that the group members are very vocal and articulate in the regional language and lack fluency in English. Yet another constraint is that the team members have not thought of their own financial needs. Initially they were students and so could get a long as dependents of the family. However, the time has come for the members to

independently earn their income. If they have to do this by taking a full time job elsewhere, they would not have any time to spare for ISWO work. The kind of issues the team has been taking up has also caused displeasure within their families. The team does not have a person to think of all these aspects and plan for some kind of regular fundings support which help meet running costs like remuneration, rent and also expenses involved in taking any issue.

GLORY:

Ms.Puspanjali Jena, the present secretary of ISWO was honoured by the National Alliance of women as the BRAVE WOMEN OF THE STATE on the 17th October 2000. We received the memento from Shri Naveen Pattanaik the honourable chief Minister of Orissa.

“NATIONAL YOUTH AWARD” was received from the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Govt. of India on 12th January 2001 in recognition of the outstanding voluntary work rendered in the field of “NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICE” on 7th April 2001, one more pearl in the crown of ISWO was affixed by the District Collector of Dhenkanal again a NATIONAL AWARD for the outstanding and marvellous performance in the field of women development & empowerment.

All these awards give us more spirit to continue our services in future and for which we shall duly honoured by the blessing of the God almighty.