



## **SWAN's Thimphu Declaration: Implementing SWAN's Roadmap for Sustainable Development for the Women of South Asia**

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The South Asia Women's Network (SWAN) held its Sixth Annual Conference, dedicated to the theme "**Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Sustainable Development for the Women of South Asia**", in Thimphu, Bhutan, on September 2 and 3, 2014. This Conference was organised in partnership with the Tarayana Foundation, Thimphu, with the support of the South Asia Foundation (SAF-India).

SWAN brings together women leaders, academics, experts, activists and media representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. SWAN coordinates its activities through eight sectoral networks, also called SWANs, respectively dealing with the Environment; Arts and Literature; Women in Peacemaking; Health, Nutrition and Food Sovereignty; Education; Crafts and Textiles; Women in Media; and Skills, Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Development with Access to Finance.

South Asia is endowed with rich natural resources, combined with immense geographic and biological diversity. The people of South Asia share a unique cultural and civilizational heritage, including spiritual philosophies and knowledge systems. This shared diversity is South Asia's core strength, with enormous growth potential, which has yet to be tapped. Even where growth and development have taken place, this has been done with scant regard for ecological and environmental considerations, and even worse, without involving women and ensuring their empowerment as an intrinsic and inalienable part of the process of development.

SWAN recognises the common problems that women of South Asia face, including poverty, poor maternal and child health, low educational achievements and illiteracy, violence, social injustice, economic discrimination, lack of ownership or inadequate control over resources, tremendous vulnerability during and after

environmental disasters and armed conflicts. SWAN further recognizes that these issues pertaining to women are common to all communities, religious beliefs and ethnic groups across South Asia, and have defied solution despite decades of effort by individual governments. The ongoing and overlapping financial, economic and ecological crises have seriously weakened the capacity of individual governments to overcome these problems. Despite several outstanding examples of individual and collective achievements by women across South Asia, women still constitute a large body of underprivileged citizens, surviving within the limits of an environment that is increasingly hostile and rapidly degrading.

SWAN agrees that even though efforts by individual governments to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have yielded positive results, the inability of the MDGs to take a holistic approach, or to go beyond the growth-oriented model of development to address issues of inequality, has led to the persistence of these crises, and, in particular, has failed to address the serious problems facing the women of South Asia. In this context, SWAN emphasizes that gender equality and gender equity, women's rights and women's empowerment are central and fundamentally important, even a prerequisite for bringing in sustainable development through the post-2015 Development Agenda. SWAN urges that this objective, of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, should be included as a stand-alone goal, as well as a cross-cutting priority in each SDG (Sustainable Development Goal).

SWAN's **vision** is to achieve sustainable development for South Asia through an integrated approach incorporating the centrality of women's agency, voice, participation and leadership in all the three dimensions of sustainable development : socio-political, economic and environmental. SWAN believes that gender equality, with justice, respect and dignity for all women, together with democratic and inclusive good governance, are essential and inalienable factors for bringing in sustainable development.

SWAN's **mission** is to ensure a sustainable future for all through collective civil society action with women taking the lead in supporting and promoting a new paradigm of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that recognize the centrality of women's empowerment and women's rights in finalizing the post-2015 Development Agenda. SWAN has as the core of its mission the search for pan-South Asian solutions to the socio-political, economic and ecological crises confronting the women of South Asia. SWAN affirms its commitment to provide the necessary leadership at the regional and global levels to foster the transition to sustainability. SWAN's mission is to agree upon and propose innovative initiatives that need to be taken at the grass roots, community and policy-making levels across South Asia, so as to create sustainable models for the future, bringing in the centrality of women's empowerment as an intrinsic part of this process. The proposed initiatives for structural change should recognize and bring on board concepts for sustainable societies, such as Gross National Happiness, the Planetary Boundaries Principle, and that of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities. Many such concepts are embedded in the culture, traditional knowledge and resilient traditional practices of South Asia.

SWAN's **strategy** for bringing in sustainable development for the women of South

Asia is based on strengthening partnerships through an institutional network across South Asia, working together to agree upon policy recommendations for governments, (including resistance to policies that perpetuate inequality, inequity and injustice); on strategies for leadership development (nurturing leadership among its members to implement and monitor sustainable development policies and programmes); and on capacity building for change at all levels (enhancing capacity to implement programmes that demonstrate and scale-up best practices for sustainable development). SWAN emphasizes the urgent need to develop leadership skills among the women of South Asia in order that they are empowered with the relevant education and conceptual, managerial, and technical knowledge to lead the movement for sustainable development in this region.

Based on this Vision, Mission and Strategy, SWAN agreed upon the Roadmap for Sustainable Development for the Women of South Asia, adopted on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2013 at its Fifth Annual Conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka. SWAN's Roadmap, a detailed document, provides the structure for implementation in specific sectors, grouped under three heads : the new Socio-Political Order, the new Ecological Order and the new Economic Order.

At SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference, Professor Veena Sikri, Convener, SWAN, presented a detailed Report about SWAN's activities, programmes and proposed projects, as initiated over the last one year, and as planned for the coming months.

SWAN welcomed the positive steps taken by SWAN's Sri Lanka Chapter in implementation of SWAN's Roadmap on Sustainable Development for the Women of South Asia at SWAN's Colombo Conference. SWAN's Sri Lanka Chapter has convened three Workshops for the following projects: (i) Empowering women towards better nutrition and sexual and reproductive health rights. A comprehensive intervention was carried out to reach out to women and girls on the plantations, the most vulnerable sector, through peer educators to improve health and nutrition of mothers and girls. Advocacy, linked to health and social protection, combined with male participation are some of the strategies that were used. The advocacy program has already been launched. Final beneficiaries will be 6000 men and women in the estates during a span of 1 year. This program will be replicated throughout the plantation sector. Dr Sujatha Samarakoon in association with Mano Alles are now preparing to carry this project further. (ii) To educate and empower rural women in the efficient use of energy, including renewable energy. This workshop was held by SWAN, Colombo, in association with Practical Action headed by Vishaka Hidellage. Hundred women participated, and education and information was imparted to them with demonstrations of how and where energy consumption could be minimized, and alternative energy sources that were environmentally friendly and applicable to their lifestyles could be introduced. This was part of the teaching module. Such workshops would be replicated throughout specified areas. Rohini Nanayakkara, Mano Alles and Vishaka Hidellage will work together to extend this programme to 1000 women this year. (iii) A dialogue on women for change : building a gendered media. A workshop was held to disseminate information on the challenges facing women in media, on the need for gender sensitive media reporting, and the role of women in media as agents for change. This workshop, and the follow-up, is being coordinated by Dr Sepali Kottegoda, with Nishani Dissanayake, Rohini Nanayakkara and Mano Alles.

The Sri Lanka Chapter invites all SWAN members interested in the above projects to network with them in order to extend these projects to their respective nations.

**SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference in Thimphu, Bhutan (2-3 September 2014) on "Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Sustainable Development for the Women of South Asia"**

Her Majesty The Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, in her address at the inaugural dinner for the participants in SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference, emphasized the need to keep identifying the barriers that prevent women from contributing fully towards sustainable development. This would allow for holistic interventions to be taken up to overcome these barriers. Her Majesty noted that the ground realities of socio-economic development were changing rapidly in South Asia and that our interventions should be relevant to these changing needs. She also urged the members to remember that each one had an important role to play in empowering the women so that together we can progress towards Gross Regional Happiness.

Hon'ble Minister for Works and Human Settlement, Lyonpo Dorji Choden, emphasised the importance of investing in women's development and wellbeing in order to achieve not just regional, but national and global goals. She shared that mutual respect and recognition among men and women, who are equal partners, will contribute to GNH and sustainable development.

Dasho Karma Ura, President of the Centre for Bhutan Studies said that the measure of progress based on GDP failed to encapsulate all the elements that matter the most to our well-being. He said that empirical data as captured by the indices used by the Centre for Bhutan Studies give a more holistic understanding of the well-being of the population. He said that according to the 2010 GNH survey, it was found that men and women respond very differently to stresses, and their respective perceptions of happiness as well as time-use are starkly different in that even during leisure time, more women were found to be carrying out nurturing roles.

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), first enunciated in Bhutan in 1972, is relevant in implementing SWAN's vision, mission, and strategy. The four pillars of GNH are Socio-economic growth and development; Preservation and promotion of cultural heritage; Conservation of the environment; and Good governance. Each of these provide essential inputs for bringing in the change that the women of South Asia seek through the new socio-political order, the new ecological order, and the new economic order.

Bhutan has, since 1972, used GNH as the touchstone to evaluate its developmental plans and policies. In order to more effectively articulate GNH, the four pillars of GNH have been assimilated into nine domains that form part of the GNH Index, namely ecological diversity and resilience; living standards; psychological well-being; health; time-balance; education; community vitality; good governance; and cultural diversity and resilience. Based on these nine domains, a New Development Paradigm (NDP) has been proposed, with societal happiness as its guiding vision.

Happiness here is different from the context in which it is normally understood. Genuine happiness is understood as arising from “a deep abiding sense of harmony with the natural world, of compassion, contentment and joy. It...acknowledges that basic needs like clean air and water, good health, decent living conditions, knowledge, peace, security, justice...and other dimensions of well-being are essential pre-conditions for human beings to flourish and achieve true happiness”.<sup>1</sup>

The existing growth-based paradigm, which uses GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as the central measure of progress, takes into account only marketed economic activity. It cannot distinguish between “those activities that create benefit and those that signify decline in well-being, nor does it include activities that are outside the market, such as unpaid work. To properly assess well-being outcomes, a more integrated measurement system that balances the ecological, social, economic, and cultural dimensions of development is needed”.<sup>2</sup> The new paradigm, the GNH-based NDP, essentially makes sustainable development its core concern. It recognizes that the current doctrine of limitless growth is unsustainable because the resources of the earth are finite, and their indiscriminate exploitation can only be destructive and harmful for all. In essence, GNH signifies “Development with Values”.<sup>3</sup>

The need for this new approach has been endorsed and accepted by the UN Secretary General when he said “The old model is broken. We need to create a new one...In this time of global challenge, even crisis, business as usual will not do...It is time to recognize that human capital and natural capital are every bit as important as financial capital. It is time to invest in people...Clearly we must unite around a shared vision for the future---a vision of equitable human development, a healthy planet, an enduring economic dynamism”.<sup>4</sup>

SWAN shares the urgency for the new model of development. SWAN supports the inclusion of well-being and happiness in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 Development Agenda, and emphasizes the importance of gender equality through gender empowerment as essential for achieving well-being and happiness, and for bringing in the GNH based NDP.

SWAN strongly welcomes the important new concept of Gross Regional Happiness proposed by Her Majesty Queen Mother Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. Gross Regional Happiness with its focus on regional cooperation and learning from each other by sharing best practices is the way of the future for South Asia. SWAN agrees to bring the achievement of Gross Regional Happiness into all its projects and activities.

SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference focused their discussions on the following:

## **I. Launch of the UNESCO-SWAN Initiative on “Women for Change: Building a**

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<sup>1</sup> “Happiness : Towards a New Development Paradigm” Report of the Royal Government of Bhutan, 2013, page VI, available at <http://www.newdevelopmentparadigm.bt>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page VII

<sup>3</sup> Speech by His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, King of Bhutan, in his Madhavrao Scindia Memorial Lecture, “Changing World and Timeless Values”, New Delhi, December 2009

<sup>4</sup> UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Address to the High-Level Meeting on The State of the World Economy and Finance, UN Headquarters, 17 May 2012

## Gendered Media”

Gender equality is central to the idea of a pluralistic and inclusive media ecosystem. At the same time, press freedom and media development are inseparable from considerations of gender equality and gender sensitivity. Despite an overall increase of women professionals in the news industry and some improvement in the representation of women in media content over the last six years, gender imbalances in the institutional media remain acute. The 2013-14 UNESCO–IFJ report on press freedom in South Asia<sup>5</sup> observes that South Asian women media professionals are sorely under-represented both in news-making operations and also in the decision-making or ownership structure of the media industry. The report notes that: ‘Women’s struggle to make a mark in the profession begins from the stage of recruitment itself. Discrimination in work assignments, promotion opportunities, sexual harassment, lack of benefits and poor support conditions for working mothers are all part of the familiar stories told by women journalists across all the countries of South Asia’, recognising that the situation is ‘doubly precarious for women journalists in the vernacular media’, where resources are fewer than in the English language media.

The UNESCO-SWAN Media Initiative takes up this challenge through a project that emphasises the importance of gender empowerment as the key to sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability in the South Asian region. If sufficiently empowered, women in the South Asian media can themselves play a critical role in building awareness about the need for gender empowerment, and acting as agents for change through advocacy. In order to address the vulnerability of women journalists in South Asia and strengthen the gender sensitivity of the South Asian media, UNESCO and SWAN launched their initiative that will:

- Build the capacity of women journalists to mainstream gender in reporting;
- Sensitize editors and gatekeepers about the need for gender-sensitive reporting;
- Strengthen the network of women journalists across South Asia in order to:
- Facilitate the sharing of good practices, country cases, journalistic experiences, and knowledge products
- Monitor trends related to women in the media, develop strategies for mainstreaming gender in the media, and conduct advocacy on related themes

SWAN has a dynamic and interactive regional media network, which brings together media representatives from all nine SWAN nations. The SWAN media network has had several successes in bringing to the forefront of media attention gender-sensitive issues in one or the other SWAN nations, depending upon the concern expressed by the SWAN media person from that nation itself. UNESCO, on its part, has developed a wide range of tools for promoting gender equality and gender sensitivity in the media. These include UNESCO’S *Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media* (to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content); the *Guidelines on Gender Neutral Language*; a study titled *Getting the Balance Right: Gender*

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO-IFJ (International Federation of Journalists) 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Press Freedom Report for South Asia “The Campaign for Justice, 2013-14”

*Equality in Journalism*; a tool-kit on *Gender in Media*; and a training manual titled *Gender Sensitivity* that seeks to sensitize education managers, curriculum or material developers and media professionals regarding gender concerns. UNESCO and SWAN have agreed to bring together their respective strengths in order to build a gendered media.

Some of the materials developed by UNESCO would be customized for the South Asian context. A set of guidelines could be developed specifically for gender mainstreaming in the South Asian media, both in terms of media content and organizational practices. All knowledge products evolved through the UNESCO-SWAN Media Initiative will be disseminated and promoted through the SWAN network, UNESCO's networks and other related stakeholder networks, with the objective of educating both men and women about the importance of substantive gender equality.

The key objective of the UNESCO-SWAN Media Initiative is to strengthen and expand SWAN's regional network of women journalists in South Asia, by institutionalizing systems and platforms for sharing knowledge, engaging on critical gender issues, and conducting advocacy. For this a series of workshops will be conducted, targeting specific groups :

- A **three-day regional consultation and capacity-building workshop** will be held for the practicing journalists (including media NGOs) who are country moderators of SWAN's online forum. The consultation and workshop will bring in external expertise to agree on methodologies for managing and expanding the SWAN network, increase its vibrancy, develop a focused outreach and enlist new members through a methodology for optimizing participation. In addition, through this Workshop, a formal, structured system of posting and sharing best practices, country case studies and women journalists' professional experiences will be established.
- **Three journalists' training workshops** (4-5 days each) will be conducted in **India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka** respectively. The workshops will focus on (a) understanding gender equality in the context of media organizations; (b) gender-sensitive reporting that aims at gender parity and fair gender portrayal in media content; (c) identifying the barriers to gender-sensitive reporting; and (d) ways and means to overcome these barriers within media organizations (including the sensitization of editors and other decision-makers). Each workshop will be attended by around 20 women media practitioners (mid to senior career) : 12 from the host country and eight from other countries covered by the SWAN network. Participants will be drawn from the fields of print, broadcast and online journalism. Participants will be asked to produce at least three substantial gender-responsive reports on development issues in the six months following the workshops. These reports will be published or broadcast by the media organizations they work for. Participants will take part in round-table discussions with selected editors / sub-editors or other media decision-makers in the host country on the gender approach of their specific media outlet.
- **Strengthening the Involvement of rural women in media processes** : As part of the process of empowering rural women, SWAN recognizes the need to strengthen the involvement of rural women in news and information production. Women should be involved in presenting reportage from the strong, uniquely feminist perspective that is relevant to rural readers. This can strengthen democratic processes by

ensuring accountability and transparency in local governance. This can be empowering for women and can trigger change by strengthening the integration of gender issues in media. The award winning newspaper *Khabar Lahariya*, produced by 40 women in rural North India, has set a valuable example for this process. *Khabar Lahariya* (KL : News Waves) is an award-winning eight-page weekly local language newspaper brought out by a collective of rural women journalists in the states of UP (Uttar Pradesh) and Bihar in India. KL was conceptualized by the Delhi based NGO, Nirantar, a Centre for Gender and Education, and is run by the Women, Media and News Trust (WoMeN Trust), which trains and mentors KL journalists.

The UNESCO-SWAN Media Initiative has identified KL for possible replication in other SWAN nations, to facilitate gender empowerment and leadership through the media. The KL experience can provide exposure and a learning ground to participants in the UNESCO-SWAN Media Initiative. KL's success in connecting women in rural areas challenges existing gaps and stereotypes, thereby facilitating the much-needed space for women in different forms of media across South Asia. The SWAN delegates from Maldives expressed keen interest in starting a pilot project in their country based on the successful model of *Khabar Lahariya*.

The UNESCO-SWAN Media Initiative has been developed as a powerful tool for gender empowerment for and through women in media throughout South Asia. The initiative was launched at SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference in Thimphu, Bhutan. On this occasion, SWAN delegates warmly received the strong and positive message of support from Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Mr Shigeru Aoyagi emphasized "the clear convergence between UNESCO's goal of strengthening freedom of expression by mainstreaming gender in the media, and the principles of the SWAN network of media professionals". He conveyed that "this initiative will build the professional capacity of South Asian women journalists, and sensitize editors and other decision-makers about the need for gender-sensitive media content. It will also strengthen and expand the existing network of women journalists across South Asia, in order to share good practices and journalistic experiences, develop and implement strategies to mainstream gender in the media and to conduct advocacy on critical gender issues".

Discussions on this initiative at SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference recommended the following:

1. SWAN media network should focus on mechanisms to enhance direct exchange of news and views about each other through the media. At present, almost all news about individual South Asian countries is carried in other nations' media through non-regional agencies and individual reportage.
2. There should be gender audits of media content by the SWAN media network, which will be discussed in the proposed workshops.
3. Identify well-known women heroes in each SWAN country and introduce them to the objectives and goals of the SWAN media group. Each would be approached as Ambassador at large and visit the region to meet with media practitioners, media houses to sensitize them on the portrayal of women.

4. Need to increase role of women in production and decision-making levels in all media formats.
5. There should be SWAN media workshops for training of media professionals as well as training of trainers to overcome gender discrimination and to change mindsets and attitudes towards women.
6. The media apart from reporting on issues of conflict should strengthen their capacity for also reporting on natural disasters, internally displaced people (IDPs) especially those who are displaced as the fall out of militant attacks, among others.
7. SWAN should join hands with like-minded networks to influence governments to ensure a fair gender representation at the policy making level especially in the ministries of finance, foreign affairs, and when policies on state security are being framed.
8. Internship/ exchange programmes for women journalists to cover “non-traditional” subjects such as crime-reporting and investigative journalism among the SWAN member countries. These programmes could also include exchange of experiences/ knowledge among male and female media practitioners.
9. There should be a national code of ethics that should include gender sensitivity and be implemented by all media houses.
10. Through SWAN networking with *Khabar Lahariya*, their best practices can be incorporated in programmes where the voice of the rural women are heard not only through social media and print medium, but also through community radio.
11. Accomplished women journalists across South Asia should agree to mentor and guide younger female journalists in their respective countries, as well as across borders.

## **II. Changing Mindsets : Through Education and Lifelong Learning, Democratic and Inclusive Good Governance, including Elimination of Violence Against the Women of South Asia :**

It is a unique moment in South Asia's history that today there are democratically elected governments all across the region. Democracy has been accepted across South Asia as the most participatory and representative form of government, which upholds basic human rights, substantive equality for all before the law, and ensures the maximum development of individual human capabilities. However, if democratic principles are not upheld, if the strength of democratic institutions is not sustained, if the principles of transparency and accountability are vitiated, democracy becomes the vicious struggle for power through corruption, and criminalization, sidetracking the ideology behind this concept (democracy) that is so crucial for bringing in sustainable development.

Women's participation in governance has so far been very limited across South Asia. Although the countries of South Asia do count women as equal citizens through the constitutional and legal rights accorded to them, yet women's role in the political process remains weak and insignificant. The countries of South Asia have led the world in providing women Prime Ministers and Presidents, yet the women of this region lag behind most regions of the world in terms of women's empowerment

and substantive gender equality. It is important to strengthen the role of women in institutions of democracy at all levels, from the national legislature to local self-government. This is essential for ensuring effective implementation of substantive equality and equity, women's rights and women's empowerment in the system and in society, in order to bring in sustainable development for all.

Essentially, the firmly entrenched patriarchal mind-set and patriarchal system has ensured women's subordinate role within family and society. This has exposed women to violence in its worst forms, has seriously reduced access of the girl child to educational facilities, and of mothers to healthcare including maternal health-care. Even when women are involved in creative and productive activities like weaving and crafts, their disempowered status reduces their bargaining power and their ability to derive adequate financial returns or remuneration for their efforts. Patriarchy and violence, including threats of violence, erode the very foundations of democracy and gender justice, thereby preventing the exercise and enjoyment of rights by women and other weaker sections of society. In this way they undermine and negate the objectives of constitutional and legal provisions favouring gender equality, and obstruct the advancement and empowerment of women in social, political and economic spheres of activity.

The patriarchal mind-set and hierarchy has ensured that most government policies have been gender-blind in their formulation and implementation, failing to recognise, leave alone give due importance to the specific needs of women in order to help them overcome their disadvantaged position in society. This in turn has further strengthened patriarchal norms and has denied to most women any substantial or substantive benefit from the process of economic development across and within the nations of South Asia. SWAN urges that South Asian governments give special focus to ensuring that all laws are gender-sensitive, and accept the need for gender-responsive budgeting and gender-audit to empower the women of South Asia.

Gender empowerment and gender equality has so far been viewed essentially as a rights issue. SWAN seeks recognition and acceptance from the Governments of South Asia of the important economic dimension of the societal transformation that can be achieved through gender empowerment. Women do the majority of the work in agriculture, in the informal sector and in households, in bringing up children and in the preservation and sustenance of traditional knowledge. Yet, there is this fundamental dilemma of the "economic invisibility" of South Asian women, because their ceaseless and tireless labour is largely excluded from national accounting systems. There is growing awareness internationally that a gender unequal society can and does seriously hamper growth and development. Ensuring gender equality benefits men and women alike through the shared economic prosperity this brings to the community and the nation. The World Bank in its 2012 World Development Report on "Gender Equality and Development" states that "gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. It is also smart economics. Greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions more representative". In short, without gender equality no nation can overcome poverty, or achieve its full potential for economic growth and prosperity. The conclusion of the 2012 World Development Report is that empowering women by reducing the gender gap brings about a more efficient use of the nation's human capital endowment, that reducing gender inequality

enhances productivity and economic growth. "Closing gender gaps is not only a matter of human rights and equity: it is also one of efficiency".

SWAN's focus is to ensure that women themselves are the agency and the agents of change for their own empowerment. The essential change we seek is in the minds and mindsets of men and women alike. So the partnership of men is important for achieving gender equality.

These issues were discussed in great detail at SWAN's Conference on Democracy and Inclusive Good Governance for Gender Equality and Sustainable Development in South Asia, held on 13-15 May 2014, in Kathmandu, in collaboration with Shree Shakti, Kathmandu and SEARCH-Nepal. The outcome of this Conference was discussed at SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference in Thimphu. The discussions in Kathmandu and Thimphu highlighted the following issues :

(i) **The institutions of local self-governance, including *panchayati raj*, and their importance in empowering rural women :**

In the 1990s four countries of South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan) introduced quota and reservation for women in their elected local self-government bodies. Some, like Pakistan, introduced such reservation at the national legislative levels as well. In Nepal, there is one-third reservation for women in party posts, as well as for candidates in the national elections as also Constituent Assembly elections. Each country follows its own methodology, and there have been many studies, with much data and documentation, training manuals and resource materials on the outcome of such affirmative action methodologies. Women emerged in large numbers to participate and vote in these elections, where women were candidates. There was a veritable silent revolution in the rural areas of India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The key issue is that how effective have these affirmative action programmes been in empowering women at grassroots levels? We need to know whether these efforts at political empowerment of women have been sustained, and what has been their impact both on women's advancement as well as on inclusive governance. It does seem that in recent times, in the course of evolving democracy and political changes in these countries, many of the initial benefits of these affirmative action programmes for women have been seriously diluted. The enthusiasm of scholars and policy makers has also waned, so much so that there is very little fresh data or research on this crucially important issue. Even where the reservations are still continuing, as in India and Pakistan, these are now taken for granted, and the challenge to continually improve women's political and social empowerment is being glossed over.

Political parties, with all their deficiencies, are likely to remain the principal instruments for steering the functioning and activation of democratic processes, practices and values. Accordingly, it is important to assess the role of political parties, including the need for inner party democracy and the need to ensure adequate political representation for women at all levels. The low level of participation of women in politics severely limits the role they can play in strengthening democracy and democratic processes.

Without the socio-political empowerment of the women of South Asia, there can be no sustainable development in this region. Hence it is important and necessary to take stock of earlier efforts to strengthen women's political empowerment, and to suggest specific measures to enhance this process and make it more comprehensive. SWAN proposes to do this through its network of identified partners

in each country. Each would undertake a study on women's political participation at local, national and regional levels : their role and contribution; the challenges, including the benefits of affirmative action; the extent of mobility from the local to national levels; impact of and impediments to women's participation, at personal, familial levels, social and community levels, including as a result of patriarchal practices.

The expected outcomes of this project are (a) Strengthening democracy and inclusive good governance through women's empowerment, especially through women's greater commitment to accountability, transparency and non-corrupt governance; (b) Improving the social status and condition of women in the community, and promoting their awareness and enjoyment of constitutional and human rights. (c) Sustaining and encouraging the empowered and elected women to continue their political and social contribution through their careers, including through upward mobility in the ladder of governance. (d) Formulation of gender sensitive policies and measures, which promote gender equality and gender justice, including through education of the girl child and elimination of violence against women. (e) Identification of much-needed governance inputs for the capacity building of women, including improved access to finance for women, and livelihood and entrepreneurship development among women.

- (ii) **Gender Responsive Budgeting, Gender Audit and Gender Sensitive Laws for Engendering Governance and Empowering the Women of South Asia :** Engendering governance is the all-important starting point for bringing in gender equality and empowering women to participate on par with men in every aspect of national, community and family life. Therefore, right from financial allocations to each Ministry (including provincial allocations), utilization of funds within each Ministry, and formulations of laws, it is essential to ensure that the interests of gender equality and gender justice are being met. In South Asia the gender gap in governance is very high in all spheres, since women's representation in management and political positions is extremely low : just 7% in Parliament, 9% in Cabinet posts; 20% in local governance, 9% in civil services, and 6% in the judiciary.<sup>6</sup> Women are being left out of the development and growth process, and their fundamental rights to equality and non-discriminatory treatment are being ignored. Since budgets allocate resources to different sectors of the economy, an important first step in engendering governance is the principle of **gender-responsive budgeting** (GRB). The budget is the key tool in the hands of governments for affirmative action to reduce the gender gap and ensure adequate access to resources and services for women and children in crucial areas like education, health, employment, economic opportunities and political participation. Gender responsive budgeting should include targets of financial allocations for women: the optimal target of 30% gender allocations under all ministries is far from being achieved. The implementation and effectiveness of gender-responsive budgeting can be assessed only through a stringent mechanism for **gender audit**. It is fairly routine that resource allocations made under GRB do not reach on time, remain unspent, or are spent on purposes for which they were not intended. There should be proper monitoring and supervision of the allocated funds with greater transparency and accountability at all levels. Several methodologies can be adopted

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<sup>6</sup> Smita Mishra Panda "Engendering Governance Institutions, State, Market and Civil Society", 2008, SAGE Publications, New Delhi

for gender audit of budgets. In some countries, this is done by governments themselves, and in others, individuals and groups outside government undertake the budgetary analysis. Gender audit of budgets can provide crucial inputs for creating a gender-sensitive policy framework, to assist governments in integrating the correct gender perspective into the budget and other public expenditure projects. Gender audit is a vital tool for identifying and analyzing the factors that hinder (or facilitate) gender-mainstreaming in planning, policy-making and programme implementation. Gender audit should become an integral part of all development efforts within and outside government. In addition to gender audit of budgets, there should be gender audits of housing policy, water policy, energy and environment policy, population policy, labour policy, national health policy, disaster management policy, policy for financial assistance and even foreign policy! Women's interests in all these sectors have been historically neglected and there is an urgent need to deconstruct the institutionalised hegemony resulting from the patriarchal mindset that has created dismally huge gender gaps across every sector of society and activity. Above all, gender audit is needed of all legislation and constitutional amendments in order to ensure that **laws are gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory**, that they do not disadvantage women in any way. The civil and criminal legal system, family and labour laws, procedural laws, rules and regulations, and electoral laws should be subject to gender audit in order to ensure gender justice and gender equality. SWAN plans a series of workshops, focussing on advocacy (policy recommendations), leadership development and capacity-building among the women of South Asia, in order that they may be fully informed of the value and importance of gender responsive budgeting, gender audit and gender sensitive laws. The objective of these workshops is to engender governance with women as agents of change, so that the women of South Asia themselves are part of national and regional efforts to evolve a gender-just policy framework for decision-makers in government structures, local self-government institutions, legislative assemblies, parliaments, judiciary and legal systems, educational institutions, corporate structures, financial and funding institutions, and in the media.

(iii) **Education, Life-long Learning, and the Elimination of Violence Against Women :**

In recent years violence against women has drawn wide media attention in many countries across South Asia, but the scope and seriousness of this problem continues to be largely denied. Innumerable acts of violence perpetrated against women and children range from domestic violence and battering, sex selective abortions, incest, marital rape and dowry related violence, rape, honour killings, acid attacks, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation including trafficking and forced prostitution. In situations of armed conflict, women and girls become easy targets for attack, mistreatment and even systematic rape. It is important to understand the causes of violence against women and the dynamics of its linkages with other sectors such as health, psycho-social issues, poverty alleviation and economic development. Violence against women reduces women's and girls' opportunities and capacity to work outside their homes, reduces their mobility and so their access to education and information. Hence violence against women, by leaving women out of the development process, is a major constraint in bringing in sustainable development for the countries and region of South Asia.

Violence against women is among the most pervasive violations of human rights in the world and one of the least prosecuted crimes. It remains one of the greatest threats to lasting peace and development for the societies of South Asia.

However, this problem cannot be dealt with in isolation. State laws and international agreements are important and necessary, but these are not enough until men's and women's belief that violence against women is a 'private' matter and culturally acceptable is challenged and changed. The passage of laws, by itself, is insufficient to eliminate violence against women. The implementation of laws must be institutionalized with the support and participation of all segments of society, men and women included. What is needed more than anything else is an integrated approach to change mindsets and attitudes, from political leaders to activists, to journalists, to parents and all citizens. In short every sector of society needs to understand the devastating impact of violence against women and work together to end it.

During spirited discussions on this subject at SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference, it was agreed that ***mindset change*** is essential to guarantee *gender equality and sustainable development* in South Asia. It is important to usher in this paradigm shift in mindset through the media, through participation of women in peace-(d0 building and conflict transformation, through educational curricula and a process of lifelong education, through inclusive good governance and elimination of violence against women. Mindset change has to be inclusive (all genders, adolescents and children) followed by positive action backed by impact monitoring and empirical research in each of the eight sectors advocated and implemented by SWAN.

Education with gender as a cross cutting theme is required, where the importance of gender equality and gender empowerment is emphasized, and the strong negatives associated with violence against women, domestic violence and gender based violence are embedded in the curriculum and teaching plans. The education sector must have a good framework that includes good curriculum reviews, good modules, diversity in teaching-learning tool kits, and access by all sections of the society. The teaching-learning model must have diversity in terms of language, culture and spiritual anchorage. This framework and model in education has to be networked for solidarity and replication across communities, societies, nations and regional institutions and governments.

Mindset changes and positive action must be holistic and gendered. All advocates must be mindful of the fact that society needs neither the dominance of masculinity (patriarchy) nor femininity (matriarchy), but equality of women and men. The current education models are inadequate and we have to build fundamentally fresh educational models and educative processes from family, community, society, national, regional and international levels in order to ensure mindset change.

Small is beautiful and small success stories must be told from each community in order to replicate such good practices at the community, national and regional level. Violence against Women, domestic violence and Gender Based Violence (GBV) is perpetrated due to the fact that women's position and status is so substantially unequal. This is due to lack of awareness, valuation and acknowledgment of women's contributions to household and related work, including through nurturing, the reproductive cycle and in the informal unorganized economic sector. Women's

contributions in all these sectors must be communicated and publicized through evidence-based research in each country and across the region.

Education combined with economic empowerment are two important drivers of equality. Hence, education of girls and women is of paramount importance for changing mindsets to ensure gender equality, as both women and men are influenced by patriarchy. Quality education of boys and girls as well as women and men is important, since this can transform discrimination, prevent early marriage, and ensure a healthy environment for girls in schools, and in society at large. Ensuring adequate and separate sanitation facilities for girls in schools and all educational institutions is particularly important. Women have achieved noteworthy accomplishments in the education sector thus far and currently are on par with men in terms of enrollment and continuing education from adult education and lifelong learning to higher formal education. Education for women and girls must be inclusive, helping to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes and ensure opportunities and inclusion in all subjects including sports and technology-based subjects.

Despite some laudable accomplishments, we must continue with campaigns, gender advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, policy research, networking and curriculum reviews to ensure a quality education that transforms mindsets and brings in the required change in favour of positive gender equality. Education Action Plans must ensure teacher training, collaborative action research and awareness campaigns through mass communication and media to involve people at all levels, i.e. home, family, role modeling, community, society and the nation. Emphasis must be focused on involving male youth early in their formative years, during infancy, childhood and adolescence. Through their families and through the educational system, male youth should imbibe values and perspectives that will ensure reduced violence against women and girls and reduction of gender based violence in society.

Mindset change, in order to have a positive impact on reduction and elimination of violence against women, should involve men and youth as part of the solution by providing them every opportunity to participate as equal partners in the process of change that women seek. Networking and alliance building with men and youth at familial, societal and institutional levels and in campaigns for quality education is important. Men are also victims of patriarchal practices, and they should be encouraged to identify with the suffering of women, including their close family members. Hence, collaboration and cooperation with men is possible. Patriarchal dominance often forces women to condone, even accept all patriarchal practices, including those that mitigate against gender equality and gender empowerment, and thus encourage gender based violence. This problem must be recognized and dealt with in order to ensure a gender-violence free society in our family, society, nation and region.

Violence against Women and GBV is also perpetuated by external factors such as religious and ideological fundamentalism, extremism, trafficking in women and children, sexual and psychological exploitation of women at family, society, corporate-business, religious and political levels and through internal and international conflicts. These constraints and barriers must be responded to

positively through people to people contacts and networking, quality education, mass educative campaigns, theatre presentations, documentary movies and feature films that have mass appeal and outreach. We also have to analyze all the anti-women laws, policies, rules and regulations in state institutions that are barriers to women's rights. All laws should be gender-sensitive and gender-responsive.

The mindset change in the area of inclusive good governance must be embedded in local good governance practices based on inclusive and 'corruption free' spaces, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, equal participation and gender justice. This requires good governance at the state, provincial, national and regional political level.

In conclusion, bringing in mindset change leading to positive behavior to ensure gender equality and sustainable development requires that we re-examine how we mediate relationships and behaviors among one another. This entails transforming our relationships and behaviors from the '*objective*' to the '*subjective*'. This entails that gender relationships at all levels be formed on the principles and basis that recognize and connect the entire ecology of the mind and mindset change to one based on eco-feminism connected to nature. Strategies should be based on energies at the physical and vitality level; energy at the emotional level; and self-respect and esteem at the personality level. Both women and men should be made aware of their respective roles as change-makers and leaders for gender equality. Policies, rules and regulations should lead to institutional arrangements that ensure morally and ethically abiding justice (*nyaya and niti*) and ethics. It involves **building and cultivating capacity** for responsible citizenship through concepts, issues, and skills training of children and youth of both genders.

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), Dhaka, informed the Conference about the nation-wide campaign "Equality Through Dignity" launched in Dhaka in March 2014 by MJF and others with the goal of changing "the mind set and attitude of society towards women and enhance(ing) their status in private and public domain, hence reducing discrimination and violence against them". As part of this campaign, an empirical study is underway to assess women's economic contribution to the nation through their unpaid and unaccounted work, and to evaluate the contribution to the national GDP of taking this into account. Recognition of women's largely unevaluated contributions to the GDP will have a strongly positive impact on their self-esteem and empowerment, raise their dignity and status in society, and thus reduce discrimination and violence against them. All agreed that SWAN would benefit immensely by learning more about this project, and, if possible, participating in some aspects of the project to gain direct experience on this crucial subject.

These ideas and concepts articulated above by the panelists and participants in SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference, should lead to a framework which provides a robust basis to design a detailed programme proposal for the SWAN region, based on Gross Regional Happiness (GRH).

Based on these discussions, SWAN agrees on the following:

### **a. Institutional Network:**

SWAN agrees on creating an institutional network that will, through discussions and exchange of best practices, agree upon the SWAN Action Plan for Elimination of Violence Against Women. The SWAN Action Plan will combine policy recommendations and advocacy with leadership development and capacity building for change at all levels. SWAN emphasizes the importance of involving young adult males in the implementation of plans to eliminate violence against women. Only through changing their mindset is it possible to break the cycle of sexism and violence against women. Changing and shaping the attitudes and behavior of young people is critical for preventing violence against women. This can be done by creating social diversity through education, advocacy and service. SWAN agrees that not all men are the problem, but all men should be part of the solution through combined efforts targeting the elimination of violence against women.

### **b. Education Reform To Curb Violence Against Women and Build Peace**

In the South Asian context, where many countries are currently embroiled in extended internal conflict and insurgencies, the hardest hit sector of communities are women and children. There is urgent need to establish a dialogue, not only among stakeholders for girls' and women's education nationally, but also across borders, among countries in the region, to enable them to share experiences and learn from commonalities and differences through best practices that have worked elsewhere in similar contexts.

To create an environment in which the women of South Asia can thrive and participate on an equal footing with the men in all aspects of social, economic, and intellectual development, it is imperative that traditional mindsets that perpetuate gender discrimination and Violence against Women (VAW), among both men and women, undergo change. The objective is grounded in the rationale that VAW and gender discrimination has repercussions not only for individuals but communities as a whole. Change is possible with continuing life-long education for all, starting from elementary school, or even before in the home setting, to instill a gender-neutral value system within the family unit to begin with. Support for such initiatives along with democratic good governance that responds equally and equitably to the needs of women, men, and children, is necessary to improve the lives of women in South Asia, and to protect them from physical and psychological violence.

Four South Asian countries decided to come together in a regional research and advocacy initiative that uncovers the relationship between education curricula and gender relations and perceptions that relegate women and girls to a disadvantaged position, and to come up with collective and context-specific recommendations for correcting the explicit and implied messages (conveyed through educational curricula) that create gender imbalance and put women and girls in vulnerable and disempowered positions. The partners involved in the intervention are from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, in view of the extremely high incidence of gender-based violence (OECD Gender Index 2012) in these countries.

Goal: Influence the education systems in South Asian countries so that they contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Objectives:

- 1- To identify characteristics and gaps in the school / adult literacy curriculums in South Asian countries that reinforce and promote gender inequality and discriminatory mindsets about gender.
- 2- Advocacy for curriculum reforms at policy level in member countries at the regional level to address gaps and make it gender responsive.

### Proposed Strategies:

- 1- A regional meeting of SWAN partners in Education to determine the road map : Members of the consortium in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan will hold an initial planning workshop to finalize a roadmap for the 3-year project, to determine specific indicators and design a study to be conducted in all four countries, and identify specific actions and a clear time frame to monitor progress.
- 2- Country-level research on content and curriculum of education and its impact on gender relations, equity, and diversity : Each member SWAN will undertake a country-level study of education curriculum and analyze specific content that can impact on gender relations, equity, and diversity in the local cultures, and compile findings in a draft country-level report.
- 3- Second regional meeting with members to share findings : The second meeting of SWAN members of the consortium to share report findings, compare findings, and through this, to identify gaps and problems specific to individual countries and common to some or all of the member countries. Partners will provide feedback, and revise and finalize country reports, and devise individual and joint advocacy plans. The separate reports will be compiled into a regional study report.
- 4- Publish and disseminate a compiled regional report : The compiled report for the region will be finalised and printed for a wider dissemination. The report will also be used as advocacy material by each partner-member in their respective countries to lobby with policy makers and educationists, as well as with implementers of educational interventions.
- 5- Regional advocacy conference with policy-makers and education stakeholders in member countries to share findings and recommendations : Bureaucrats and policy makers, as well as other stakeholders will be invited to participate in a conference to share and discuss how the education system can be made gender responsive.
- 6- Cooperative action plan to be proposed to each Ministry of Education of each country : Each country member will work closely with policy makers and education system bureaucrats to develop a plan of action to address the gaps identified through research, to make curriculum and content gender responsive.

At a later stage it would be expected that each country should be able to translate the project into action by bringing about change in the curriculum and content from the perspective of gender equality.

**c. Advocacy, Research and Capacity Building :**

Though women do suffer more because of it, patriarchy is entrenched equally in the perceptions of men and women in the region. Women and men are equally a part of the problem, and it is imperative that both genders take responsibility and become a part of the solution. There is a need to go beyond the debate of “victim” and “perpetrator”. Instead of being victims, women need to assume the role of agents of change, while men come forward as role models to curb VAW. All are expected to ultimately contribute in their capacity as human beings and citizens of countries. SWAN proposes the following recommendations to enable women to reach their full potential, and to end VAW :

a) Advocacy and Awareness Raising:

- I. Advocating at the grass root levels to promote gender-neutral perceptions of rights and responsibilities within family, community, and nation;
- II. Initiating ongoing reinforcement of positive and empowering messages related to gender roles and relationships through media targeting both women and men;
- III. Engaging with community opinion formers to raise awareness that education-for-all is in the interest of the entire community and is in accordance with religious and cultural values;
- IV. Initiating campaigns at individual levels to spread literacy – save one starfish at a time;
- V. Developing awareness-raising campaigns against the harmful effects of VAW, using school-boys and men to disseminate awareness;
- VI. Raising awareness to highlight positive masculinity role models so that the status quo could be challenged
- VII. Raising awareness about role models that challenge and redefine the existing notions of masculinity through publications and short video clips.

b) Research and Policy Advocacy:

- I. Undertake research on the gender perceptions relayed through primary school curriculums across South Asia;
- II. Share findings with the Ministries of Education and other stakeholders in the education sector, and offer specific recommendations for curriculum reform where necessary
- III. Lobby with the government ministries to plan the implementation of the reforms
- IV. Document positive masculinity models from South Asian countries
- V. Publish research on successful women stories from the region

c) Capacity Building:

- I. Design regional gender awareness and teacher training workshops for school heads and teachers to change mindsets about gender and promote gendered education and equal opportunities for girls and boys
- II. Organize regional exchanges to learn from best practices.

(iv) **Culture and Sustainable Development** : Cultural diversity is a reality. It holds the key to releasing creative energies of individuals and groups in society. The strongest bond among the nations of South Asia is the unity of their civilizational and religious heritage, within which lies the tremendous cultural, linguistic, and pluralistic diversity of each nation, and within each nation, of the different regions and ethnicities. Unity in diversity is the real strength of South Asia. Individually and collectively, the nations of South Asia need better policies to make the most of this reality. Culture should inform national, regional and global strategies for development. Equally, development strategies must be sensitive to cultural specificities of peoples, of nations and regions, in order to gain their full support, participation, and ownership. SWAN emphasizes that governments across South Asia should give culture a higher profile in strategies for development.

Culture includes the millenia-old traditional indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in all areas, be it health and medicine; music, literature, dance, theatre and poetry; religion; language; or customary practices associated with birth, marriage and even death. This traditional knowledge contains within it respect for women, and for their honour, dignity, and equal participation in all aspects of social endeavor and development, combined with respect for the environment and ecological sustenance of every region. Women of South Asia continue to be leaders in the preservation and sustenance of traditional knowledge. Preserving this traditional knowledge is important equally as heritage, for its contemporary relevance, and as empowerment, since it provides jobs and helps strengthening rural economies.

Culture represents our identities in this globalized world. Culture survives even in the most difficult times of conflict and natural disasters. Culture is an important vehicle for bringing in sustainable development to regions such as South Asia, today and in the future. Cultural diversity and creativity are the ultimate renewable resources and the only sure path to freedom and peace.

In March 2010, the first-ever **LEELA : South Asian Women's Theatre Festival** was organized by the SWAN Network on Arts and Literature. LEELA brought together 14 outstanding theatre presentations on women's issues, one each from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and 6 from India. These plays, presented at three venues in Delhi, as well as in Kolkata, Mumbai and Chandigarh, received popular and critical acclaim. They showcased serious issues facing the women of South Asia, including violence against women, women as a force for moderation in society, women seeking economic empowerment in conservative patriarchal societies, and the spirit of independence of young modern South Asian women.

SWAN urges that the importance of preserving cultural diversity be included, with targets, in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 Development Agenda. SWAN supports the following cultural action that would help in the implementation of SWAN's Roadmap for Sustainable Development for the Women of South Asia :

- The performing arts, literature and the electronic media are powerful instruments for spreading awareness about and promoting SWAN's objectives and message, be it

in the field of education and lifelong learning, in peace and conflict resolution, and above all in changing mindsets regarding violence against women. SWAN is coordinating efforts to convene LEELA II on the theme "The Sacred and the Secular : Rediscovering Women's Voices".

- Sustaining traditional knowledge can achieve the twin objectives of preserving culture and enhancing economic activity within the framework of sustainable development. Cultural and creative industries already make up more than 3% of global GDP, and these industries are growing at an annual compound rate of more than 6%. SWAN should develop programmes that combine the objectives of cultural preservation and empowerment of women by focusing on those cultural and creative activities where women play a prominent role. SWAN proposes to develop a programme for documenting Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) for all relevant areas including traditional health and medicines, nutrition and culinary practices, natural resource management, as well as life skills for family and household management. This programme would include recognition, revival and strengthening the use of IKS through educational curricula, development practices, and public interest campaigns.
- UNESCO, in its 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage emphasizes the importance of intangible cultural heritage as the mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development. Equally, this Convention emphasizes the deep-seated interdependence between intangible cultural heritage and tangible natural heritage, and the invaluable role of intangible cultural heritage as a factor in bringing human beings closer together and ensuring exchange and understanding among them. Intangible cultural heritage includes oral traditions and expressions, including language, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. SWAN proposes to develop a programme on reviving one or more traditional, women-related aspects of intangible cultural heritage in each of the nine SWAN nations.

The expected outcome of these projects is (a) bringing together policymakers, leading activists, and NGO representatives from across the nine SWAN nations, for experience sharing, finalising policy recommendations (including for proposed SDGs) and dissemination strategies on the importance of culture, including maintaining cultural diversity, for sustainable development; (b) Leadership development among cultural workers and practitioners for gender empowerment through developing entrepreneurship and livelihood enhancement in identified areas of cultural traditions; and (c) Empowerment of women through capacity building which targets preservation and revival of intangible cultural heritage practices.

### **III. Strengthening Women's Role in Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution Processes in South Asia : The South Asia Women's Peace Charter :**

War is no longer an acceptable option for the people of South Asia; neither are war-like situations resulting from violent conflict, terrorism, extremism, fundamentalism, and deprivation because of extreme poverty. Peace and sustainable development are closely interlinked. Peace is not just absence of war : internal conflicts threaten societies from within and prevent peaceful economic development and growth.

Threats to peace, whether conventional or non-conventional, internal or external, have a disproportionately adverse impact on all marginalized sections of society,

most particularly on women and children. Women face discrimination and repression during war and conflict situations, including violence and forced exclusion from education. Women Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees are exposed to risks of rape, human trafficking, and sexual harassment, they lack access to justice and legal aid is inadequate, especially since women law enforcement personnel are most often not available to make legal aid women-friendly. Access to education, and health services such as maternal and reproductive health care, are limited or absent. In war and conflict zones, women without male earning members are overburdened with providing for the family amidst prevailing stagnated economic activities.

UN Security Council Resolutions, 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1890 (2009), highlight women's role as central in conflict-prevention, and when conflicts occur, to the process of peace-building and conflict resolution. Women are inherently the anchors of family and community, and a force for tolerance and peace, supporting co-existence across cultures, religions, and ethnicities. As such they can play a key role in re-establishing the fabric of recovering societies, and therefore, must be involved in the development and implementation of post-conflict strategies in order to ensure inclusion of their perspectives and needs. The UN recognizes that marginalization of women can delay or undermine achievement of durable peace, security and reconciliation, and expresses deep concern about persistent obstacles to women's full involvement in conflict resolution and peace-building, because of violence and intimidation, cultural discrimination and stigmatization, and the rise of extremist or fanatical views on women, as well as socio-economic factors including lack of access to education.

SWAN emphasizes that good governance, peace and sustainable development are inextricably intertwined and mutually reinforcing in their attainment. Conflict is development in reverse : it negates the efforts to bring in sustainable development. Women's agency, participation and leadership are central to achieving these three goals. The SDGs must recognize the critical contribution of women's participation and rights in conflict prevention and in peace-making and conflict-resolution. Decisions should be made with women, not for them. Women recognize differences, but build on commonalities.

SWAN proposes a Workshop on Strengthening Women's Role in Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution across South Asia. Towards this end, SWAN has already initiated discussions on the South Asia Women's Peace Charter. The proposed Workshop will analyze the particular needs of women and children in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict situations, the challenges they face, and how to overcome these challenges. Through this Workshop, SWAN aims to raise awareness about the negative impact of conflict on women, to build consensus among stakeholders on adopting non-violence as the methodology of choice for all situations, and to support the role of women as peace leaders through appropriate capacity-building for representation in all mechanisms and institutions of governance. Society, especially the younger generation, should be educated on the nature of peace and avoidance of conflict, including through the promotion of tolerance and coexistence across different cultures, religions and ethnicities. Parliamentarians should be informed about the importance of women's representation in peace-making initiatives, and women leaders should be equipped with skills to enter peace talks at national, regional and international levels.

Discussions among the panelists and participants in SWAN's Thimphu Conference highlighted the following key issues:

- Strengthening women's participation in peacemaking and conflict resolution processes across South Asia will contribute to GNH and GRH.
- The strength of women can become an important contributory factor in conflict resolution and peacemaking processes. In order to play this role, women should move away from the discussion of victimhood to one of reinforcing their strengths. For this, all aspects contributing to victimization and vulnerability of women in society should be ameliorated, such as illiteracy, poor health and malnutrition, inadequate sexual and reproductive health rights, gender-based violence, and other ill-effects of the entrenched patriarchal system. Eliminating violence against women in politics is especially important and necessary.
- Gender equality should be recognized as an integral and inalienable part of democratic good governance.
- There have been very few actionable discussions on implementation of UNHCR 1325, the Beijing+20 Plan of Action and CEDAW. SWAN should agree upon and conduct advocacy on the most important issues that need to be highlighted in this context.
- Governments should be urged to mainstream gender considerations into all conflict transformation processes within and between states. This includes increasing the numerical and substantive representation of women at all stages in conflict transformation processes, and in multi-track diplomacy initiatives. The contribution of women in these processes should not be restricted to the so-called "soft issues" but should be comprehensive and all-inclusive (including participation of women troops in national/ international peacekeeping operations).
- To facilitate women's participation in conflict transformation processes, SWAN agrees to conduct advocacy as well as leadership development and capacity building programmes to encourage women's participation across South Asia.
- Special attention should be paid to women's and children's concerns in all issues of IDPs.
- Environmental issues and the contribution of women towards ecological sustainability should be given due importance, since this is an important sector of ongoing and potential future conflict within and between societies.
- Peace that is not engendered is endangered. Peace and security discussions should be reconfigured as an intertwined matrix of issues of education, public health, the feminization of poverty, unpaid labour, skills and livelihood development, invisibilised domestic and agricultural work, and elimination of violence against women in order to emphasise the importance of human security in engendering peace.
- SWAN's process of building solidarities across borders and boundaries in South Asia in the framework of people to people engagement as opposed to formal government to government engagement is in itself a strong force for peace and security in South

Asia.

- SWAN reiterates that all peace processes within and across South Asia should be inclusive, representative and gender sensitive by taking gender perspectives into full account at all stages and phases.
- SWAN emphasizes the importance of understanding each other's approach to peace and conflict transformation. For this, SWAN should explore the strategic directions that SWAN members are taking related to gender inclusion and women's rights in the peace process so as to better understand each other's work and approach(es) in the region.
- Such an understanding is essential for the region of South Asia to achieve peace and security. This will help the countries of South Asia to work towards shared goals. SWAN should identify and set collective goals in its work on gender and women in peace processes.
- SWAN agrees to exchange good practices and ideas on how organisations are advancing women's rights and gender inclusion in conflict resolution processes. For this, SWAN needs to enhance its networking and communication arrangements.
- Enhancing the effectiveness of women in peace processes is inextricably linked with enhancing the representation of women in all institutions of democracy including legislatures, constitutional reform processes, and other important decision-making structures beginning with village councils to the top negotiating table.
- Gender representation in these processes is an important cross-cutting issue which will contribute to greatly reducing patriarchal mindsets.
- SWAN strongly urges the de-weaponisation of society and elimination of small arms especially in the hands of non-state actors. Terrorism and fundamentalisms of all kind are tremendous barriers in peace building since they generate pervasive violence and fear within societies.
- Above all peace building is about transforming relationships by building bonds of understanding and trust among and between peoples (as distinct from Governments). This process should be interactive and inclusive, covering all sectors of activity that can contribute to gender empowerment and sustainable development. SWAN will work to identify mechanisms for dialogue mediation and confidence building across South Asia.

#### **IV. Skills, Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Development, with Financial Access, for the Women of South Asia, including in Crafts and Textiles :**

SWAN agrees to catalyse women led skill sets into viable enterprises through empowering 300 women entrepreneurs to leverage their crafts-based skills across South Asia.

Women in South Asia, a predominantly agricultural and tradition-bound region, are dynamic participants in the broad spectrum of economic activities. Due to the nature of their work, which is most often intertwined with household activities, their labour

and hard work almost invariably remains unaccounted, unpaid, or at best poorly paid in the unorganized sector.

While women in South Asia over the years have increased participation in all spheres of the economic ecosystem, they continue to uphold cultural values and traditional skill sets. In this context, it is important to note that a significant proportion of these economically active women are fine crafts people who are skilled as part of their traditional customary social context. Their craftwork represents the eternal struggle of people forming the base of the socio-economic pyramid for their rightful place in society. They struggle to hold their place against the mass growth of mechanized production methods. Each SWAN country has taken numerous steps in addressing the obstacles faced by crafts-persons in general and by craftswomen in particular. The SWAN countries share a humongous wealth of culture and crafts. At the same time, they also share the misery and drudgery of their crafts-persons in the backdrop of mechanised products making inroads in the marketplace. SWAN steadfastly stands by its commitment to propagate and promote righteous livelihood opportunities for the women of South Asia.

**SWAN's skills and livelihood initiative** would create a unique opportunity for catalyzing the collectivisation of these crafts and empowerment of the women creating them. This initiative would identify prominent crafts from each country (textile and paper to begin with) and facilitate enterprise-development and entrepreneurship-development around these crafts. This enterprise and entrepreneurship development initiative will look at each aspect of the value-chain, including skill enhancement, product design, marketing channels and credit channels. A special effort will be made to track developments in the region in the area of financial services that can be accessed by women entrepreneurs. In order to ensure the viability and sustainability of SWAN's skills, livelihood and entrepreneurship development project, it is vital to strengthen the availability of financial services in a regular, affordable, and timely manner. SWAN strongly supports special measures for enterprise-linked and entrepreneur-linked financial services for women-led enterprises across South Asia.

This project, covering a period of at least three years, would include identifying the women craft workers, their training, enterprise development and some handholding for activities like access to finance, product design and marketing.

The objective of SWAN's enterprise development initiative is to demonstrate the model of a woman-led enterprise, the challenges it faces and the potential solutions that can be explored to make it move forward.

The key aspects of the project are :

- Identifying 100 women craft workers across SWAN countries who have the potential to run enterprises;
- Provide them entrepreneurial training on different aspects of an enterprise including management of the enterprise, understanding the market, quality of the product, presentation of the product and raising and managing finances;
- Identify credit channels operating in the SWAN countries and connect with the channel appropriate for member country;

- Identify marketing channels appropriate for each of the SWAN countries and weave them into the intervention;
- Identify and document developments and experiments on similar issues among all nine SWAN countries and create a platform for sharing;
- This initiative can also scan various models of entrepreneurship operating in the member countries and provide inputs for entrepreneurship development in the respective countries.

Expected Outcome after 3 years :

- At least sixty per cent enterprises already started and running;
- Increased incomes for women in their households;
- Access to livelihood-based financial services;
- Branded products of SWAN in the market;
- Role of SWAN : appoint a coordinator and a project manager for the project and ensure that the proposal is sent to the funding agency and monitoring is done by a committee regularly;
- Role of the Local NGO: Each country representative of SWAN will, through consensus, identify a local NGO to undertake the project and this local NGO will ensure that the project is successfully implemented.

This project will be implemented jointly by the SWAN on Crafts and Textiles, and the SWAN on Skills, Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Development with Access to Finance, with Shaheen Anam as the principal coordinator.

#### **V. Health, Nutrition and Bio-Safety for the Women of South Asia, including Waste Management :**

These problems affect all segments of society, but women and children are the most vulnerable, and their concerns need special attention. Women's health and nutrition concerns are determined by a multiplicity of forces at home, in the work place, in society and in the environment, including air pollution, water pollution, food-production and waste-management systems.

Recognizing the diverse groups, the plight of the girl child, women and elderly, and the marginalized groups within the varied eco-systems of South Asia from the mountain to the oceans, deserts and island nations,

Recognizing the urgent need for achieving MDG targets and working towards Sustainable Development Goals in the post-2015 development agenda,

Understanding the health-related issues confronting South Asian women and children,

Recognising the emerging challenges, and the changing and diverse needs of women and girls of South Asia :

1. SWAN urges developing a code of conduct for projects that could impact environmental health;
2. SWAN emphasizes nutrition-security and food sovereignty;
3. SWAN promotes healthy, nutritious food and discourages industrially produced processed food;

4. SWAN promotes growth and production of bio-diversified food crops and rejects genetically modified foods/crops;
5. SWAN discourages the use of pesticides that impact on the health and wellbeing of people, especially women and children;
6. SWAN strongly advocates, and supports those (especially its own members) advocating for organic farming, in the interests of food-security, seed-sovereignty and bio-safety for the people of South Asia;
7. SWAN promotes climate resilient (salt resistant, drought resistant, flood resistant) strategies for protection of indigenous crops and prevention of bio-piracy;
8. SWAN promotes revival, documentation and use of traditional knowledge practices and resources in all aspects of health, nutrition and bio-safety, including waste-management;
9. SWAN advocates protection and safe-guarding of traditional knowledge and resources, and, in this context, urges prevention of misuse and abuse of intellectual property rights by those seeking to misappropriate such traditional knowledge and resources through bio-piracy;
10. SWAN promotes respectful maternity care;
11. SWAN emphasizes the health and nutrition requirements of vulnerable groups so that women receive nourishment to prevent adverse effects on the foetus, and infants are safe from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS;
12. SWAN emphasizes advocacy for preventing child marriage and teenage pregnancy;
13. SWAN emphasizes women's choice on reproductive health care;
14. SWAN urges focus on urban health issues resulting from the rapid and unplanned urbanization across South Asia;
15. SWAN insists on elimination of sex trade and trafficking of women and children;
16. SWAN advocates universal health coverage and promotion of comprehensive primary health care services, ensuring, *inter alia*, access to essential medicines for women's health, maternal health and reproductive health;
17. SWAN promotes environment friendly alternative sources of fuel/energy;
18. SWAN addresses occupational health hazards;
19. SWAN promotes strengthening of women's networks in order to extend psycho-social support for the health and wellbeing of South Asian women throughout the life cycle;
20. SWAN urges specific policies and measures to address disability, communicable (such as acute respiratory diseases, diarrhoeal diseases, tuberculosis, malaria, vector borne diseases like dengue and avian influenza) and non-communicable diseases (such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cancer, chronic obstructive lung diseases, etc.), mental health, malnutrition, and the rational use of drugs;
21. SWAN promotes accessible, affordable and safe cooking systems/ovens, and calls for a gender-sensitive fuel policy;
22. SWAN prioritises access to safe and adequate drinking water, sanitation, hygiene, food safety, and biosafety;
23. SWAN affirms Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in order to ensure that manufacturers make sustainable and non-toxic consumer products that can be disposed off in a safe manner, and that do not pollute our bodies and the environment (compact fluorescent lamps (CFL), batteries, sanitary towels etc.);
24. SWAN advocates the use of safer indigenous technologies and local resources for waste management solutions, and discourages expensive imported technologies

25. SWAN emphasizes the need for a comprehensive health information system at the national level
26. SWAN urges the development and use of gender-sensitive, ergonomically appropriate tools, machinery and equipment for women farmers and women workers;
27. SWAN seeks an enabling policy environment for the implementation of policies and sharing of evidence based best practices.

In keeping with SWAN's Roadmap for Sustainable Development enunciated in their Colombo Declaration, several new and follow-up initiatives have been agreed upon :

- (i) SWAN's **Sri Lanka** Chapter has already planned a comprehensive health-nutrition intervention program in one of the most vulnerable sectors of the country. As part of this, an advocacy program was launched. This will be followed up by training peer educators (men, women, adolescent girls and boys). Each educated peer will reach out to 100 peers. The outcome at the end of one year would be to empower 6000 men and women to achieve required standards in this area for a better life.
- (ii) In **Bangladesh**, BRAC is implementing large-scale programmes on health, nutrition and population, reaching out to 120 million out of the population of 160 million in the country. The programmes cover reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health; nutrition of children, adolescent girls and mothers; urban health; communicable (TB, malaria) and non-communicable diseases; eye care; disability; health care financing; and m-Health. Since SWAN is focusing on advocacy and training for infant and young child-feeding practices and maternal nutrition, food safety issues, respectful maternity care, and adolescent health, it would be important and useful to involve SWAN members to join in BRAC's endeavor for advocacy and training on aforesaid issues. BRAC delegates would make a specific proposal in this regard.
- (iii) UBINIG (*Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshana*, or Policy Research for Development Alternatives), **Bangladesh**, with its special focus on nutrition, food-security and seed-sovereignty for protecting bio-diversity, and Navdanya, **India**, the women-centred movement for protection of bio-diversity and cultural diversity, with a network of seed-keepers and organic producers across seventeen states of India, will collaborate in organizing two workshops, one each in Bangladesh and India, on women-centred solutions to the issues of nutrition, food-safety, bio-safety, and food and seed sovereignty, including organic agriculture across South Asia. Relevant educational and advocacy material on these issues will be developed and disseminated, with the focus on advocacy (policy recommendations), leadership development and capacity building at all levels among the women of South Asia.
- (iv) Navdanya, **India**, is organizing the *Bhoomi* (Earth) festival in New Delhi on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014, on the theme "Annapurna : Women Feeding the World" to spread the message about the benefits of organic agriculture and cuisine.
- (v) Chintan, Environmental Research and Action Group, **India**, works for environmental justice in partnership with people and groups from diverse sections of society. Chintan has proposed a major SWAN intervention on Materials Efficiency and Waste Management. Materials efficiency is the term widely used to embrace sustainable materials cycles. Instead of merely worrying about waste, we have to look at the entire life-cycle of materials.

Where does the plastic resin for our bottles come from? And where does it go? What happens all along this process, including to the people interacting with these materials at different stages : the producers, consumers and waste generators, waste-pickers and municipal workers? How does the creation of the product help or harm their well-being? Who bears the environmental burden of this process? How can these impacts be reduced or nullified? How can communities benefit further from their contribution to this cycle? Several initiatives across South Asia show that the solutions to these problems lie not in expensive imported technologies or the privatization of waste handling, but in using local resources-**human resources**.

Chintan proposes an intervention where organizations from across the 9 SWAN countries will undergo a rich experiential training that will enable them to intellectually challenge and provide tangible solutions as alternatives to the status quo. This will take place through two workshops of three days each, at least one of which will be in Delhi, with a gap of four months between them. Detailed activities will include:

1. Understanding the Big Picture-Participating organizations will learn about the landscape of the issue-what it encompasses and why; Technical terms and concepts will be discussed to familiarize participants with the sector vocabulary and ideas; and hands-on training on toxics and health will ensure the participants are better able to argue their case for materials efficiency.
2. Taking things apart : Understanding models, where participants will visit at least two sites where projects are ongoing, in order to understand how they contribute to sustainability, green jobs and women's empowerment; relating this to their own work; and identifying the essentials for an inclusive, sustainable materials recovery process in their own countries; creating an exhibition to take the message out to audiences; and discussing policy recommendations that are needed to overcome the serious materials efficiency and waste management problems across South Asia.
3. Hands-on, problem solving exercises where participants will work in groups to find innovative, sustainable solutions; and a final round table to discuss how materials efficiency can result in a more sustainable, inclusive planet where women win. This will include key issues and concerns regarding waste management and how they are being handled and what are the means by which they can be converted into livelihood opportunities. All this will be documented for a publication.

Expected Outcomes of this Intervention are :

- Building SWAN capacity to argue about the most important green issue, namely materials efficiency and green jobs debate, at any national or international forum.
- Developing a gendered approach to materials efficiency.
- Advocating for national agendas for such approaches, with targets.
- Holding producers responsible for their products through Extended Producer Responsibility.

## **VI. Eco-Tourism for Sustainable Development and Gender Empowerment in South Asia:**

The Workshop on “Eco-Tourism for Sustainable Development and Gender Empowerment in South Asia” was held in Thimphu, Bhutan on 31st August and 1st September 2014. This Workshop was organised by SWAN in collaboration with Tourism Council of Bhutan, with the support of ICIMOD (Kathmandu)’s EU-funded Himalica Program.

Participants in the workshop were eminent representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The delegate from Pakistan could not attend.

Tourism is the major revenue generator for all countries of this region. The workshop recognised that conventional mass tourism must become more responsible in order to be sustainable. Tourism activities should not destroy either the environment or local traditions and indigenous knowledge, nor should it exclude local communities. In all these aspects ecotourism is showing the way forward by being inclusive and strengthening rural communities. Ecotourism is essential for sustainable development of regions and people.

The Workshop participants agreed and emphasised that it is crucial to integrate women into the process of sustainable ecotourism development. In rural communities, women play a central role in crafts and textiles, waste management, arts and music, cuisine and hospitality, preservation of the environment and culture, and inculcating traditional values in the next generation. All these are core activities for the development of ecotourism. The Workshop emphasised that in making local communities the beneficiaries, even stake holders in eco-tourism projects, the aspect of gender empowerment for the women in these communities should be given the highest priority. Ecotourism should become part and parcel of skills, livelihood and sustainable development programs for the women of South Asia.

The workshop provided an opportunity for leading eco-tourism practitioners and promoters, and leading activists promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in South Asia to share best practices and exchange ideas on ways and means to benefit rural and underprivileged women in South Asia by enhancing the quality of their lives through ecotourism with community involvement, based on empowering them through their traditional skills and knowledge.

The key recommendations of the Workshop with the focus on gender empowerment, relating to policy advocacy, leadership development and building capacity, are :

1. SWAN and ICIMOD will explore collaboration and partnership for implementation of ecotourism pilot projects, together with allied services and pro-poor value-chains and products development with the focus on youth and gender empowerment. To begin with this could be explored through the EU-funded Himalica program in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal, as well as in North East India through other initiatives.
2. SWAN and ESOI would explore collaboration and partnership in the implementation of similar eco-tourism pilot projects in Maldives, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.

3. As the direct output of the collaboration in this eco-tourism workshop, SWAN and ICIMOD plan to bring out a joint publication of the case studies presented in the Workshop. ICIMOD will take the lead in the quality control and editing/publishing of the book. SWAN and ESOI will support the ICIMOD team in this by providing the required inputs. The publication, if done, is planned to be launched in the International Eco-Tourism Conference being hosted by ICIMOD and Myanmar Ministry of Hotel and Tourism in April 2015.
4. The workshop recommends that each country should establish norms and criteria for the development of sustainable tourism with due attention to gender empowerment, to cover all forms of tourism, such as heritage, adventure, water-based, medical, wild life and nature tourism. ESOI recommends that each country use the Sustainable Tourism Criteria of India (STCI), which are based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC). Additionally the Safe and Honourable Tourism Code of Conduct as launched by India could also to be adopted.
5. Bhutan's best practices regarding high value, low impact tourism policies as well as the organic farming and community based tourism practices were appreciated and recommended for emulation.
6. It is important to inculcate the right mind set on issues of hygiene, waste management, energy conservation and other eco-tourism practices by sensitising children in school through education curricula and compulsory social service.
7. Cultivating capacity in order to create proper infrastructure, including hospitality training, home-stay facilities, interpretation centres, information availability centres, safety and security facilities, carrying capacity, among others, for the development of ecotourism.
8. Financial provisions (through banking and micro financing channels) should be provided at low interest rates, especially for small and medium entrepreneurs including women, to encourage their participation in the development of ecotourism facilities.
9. All governments in their tourism policies should give special incentives for environment friendly investments and practices.
10. Encouraging greater tourism exchanges among South Asian countries, including through improved connectivity, easier access (visa facilitation), development of portals and websites for access to updated information.
11. The delegates from each country identified specific projects and issues in their respective countries to be implemented in a time bound manner and to be presented at the next SWAN Ecotourism Workshop :
  - a. Afghanistan : Bamiyan Buddhas should be reconstructed to reinstate the pride of history among the people, and also as a great tourism asset. Ecotourism is a critical sunrise industry for Afghanistan after decades of war and destruction. All collaborations and assistance from SWAN countries are welcome.

- b. Bangladesh : Declare Sylhet into an Eco-Tourism zone and promote tea estate development.
- c. Bhutan : The development of tourism products be accelerated in Southern and Eastern Bhutan.
- d. India : Each state should create Eco-Tourism Boards; and Eco-Tourism should be developed in the Chambal region (Madhya Pradesh), which should seek to be declared a World Heritage Site.
- e. Maldives : Strengthen the arts and crafts of the local people and create its market among the hospitality industry.
- f. Myanmar : The government should evolve a policy to support of tourism development, with specific reference to small entrepreneurs seeking to revive their heritage, and to ecotourism / responsible tourism.
- g. Nepal : Promote organic food and goods in the hospitality and trekking industry.
- h. Pakistan : Integrate the Buddhist sites in Pakistan into the Buddhist tourist trail across South Asia.
  
- i. Sri Lanka : Develop and establish agro-tourism, managed solely by women, to be coordinated by the Sri Lanka Eco-Tourism Foundation.

All participants agreed to convene the second SWAN Eco-Tourism Workshop in 2015, and committed themselves to working towards early implementation of the recommendations.

### **Conclusion:**

The Valedictory Address was delivered by Chime Paden Wangdi, Secretary General of the Tarayana Foundation. Chime reflected the views of all SWAN delegates when she expressed her sense of encouragement with the spirited discussions and exchange of ideas, project proposals, and other possibilities for cooperation, all fueled with collective passion and the spirit of unity that is characteristic of SWAN. Chime emphasized the need for early and timely implementation of the projects agreed on through SWAN's Thimphu Declaration.

SWAN delegates are excited and impatient to get started with implementing SWAN's roadmap for sustainable development. They want to make sure that SWAN's sustainable development goals are achieved through collective actions, be it at the policy-advocacy level, through structural transformation, and system evolution or on the ground rolling out of activities' level.

SWAN wants the women of South Asia to be equal partners on this journey towards sustainable development, and as Her Majesty the Queen Mother so very graciously suggested, towards Gross Regional Happiness. The wellbeing of South Asia can deepen only with the inclusion of women in all spheres of socio-economic development.

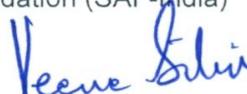
Yet, SWAN delegates are plagued by the feeling that they could be doing so much more with all the talent and resources participating in SWAN's Sixth Annual Conference. We are aware that each one of us present here is an outstanding achiever in his/ her own field, and represents a much larger network of women and men working towards progressive outcomes of gender equality and equitable opportunities.

SWAN appeals to all its participants, in this and previous annual conferences, to join hands and rededicate themselves to the important cause of sustainable development and Gross Regional Happiness for the women of South Asia.

SWAN's Seventh Annual Conference will be held in Myanmar in the last quarter of 2015.

## SIGNATORIES

1. Professor Veena Sikri, Convener, SWAN (South Asia Women's Network), former Ambassador and Vice-Chairperson, South Asia Foundation (SAF-India)



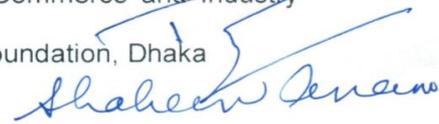
### AFGHANISTAN

2. Hon'ble Ms Safura Elkhani, Member of the National Assembly of Afghanistan, Kabul
3. Ms Zulaikha Rafiq, Executive Director, AWEC (Afghan Women's Education Centre), Kabul
4. Ms Mina Sherzoy, Deputy Chief of Projects, USAID-FAIDA, Kabul
5. Ms Marzia Meena, USAID-FAIDA, Kabul



### BANGLADESH

6. Ms Rokia Rahman, President, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka
7. Ms Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Dhaka
8. Ms Munni Saha, Head of News, ATN News, Dhaka
9. Ms Farida Akhter, Executive Director, UBINIG (Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona, Policy Research for Development Alternatives), Dhaka
10. Professor Afsana Kaosar, Director Health, Nutrition and Population, BRAC, and Professor, James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, Dhaka
11. Ms Suraiya Chowdhury, Director of Design, Prokritee, Dhaka
12. Ms Rehana Begum, Deputy Programme Manager, Policy Advocacy and Mass Communication, CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education) Bangladesh, Dhaka
13. Ms Bachera Aktar, Senior Manager Health Nutrition and Population Programme, BRAC, Dhaka.



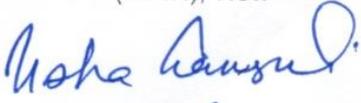
### BHUTAN

14. Ms Chime Paden Wangdi, Secretary General, Tarayana Foundation, Thimphu
15. Ms Chhimmy Pem, Director, Tourism Council of Bhutan, Thimphu
16. Ms Kesang Tshomo, Coordinator, National Organic Programme, DOA, MOAF, Bhutan



17. Ms Kesang Chuki Dorjee, Managing Director, KCD Productions, Thimphu 
18. Dasho Tashi Chhozom, Justice, Supreme Court of Bhutan
19. Dr Meenakshi Rai, Director, Community Outreach Department, RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women), Thimphu
20. Ms Namgay Zam, Freelance Journalist, Thimphu 
21. Ms. Pema C Wangchuk, Royal Textile Academy
22. Ms. Kesang Choden, Traditional Foods of Bhutan
23. Ms. Kaysang Samdrup, Media and Communications Specialist 

INDIA

24. Dr Meenakshi Gopinath, Principal, Lady Shri Ram College & Founder and Honorary Director WISCOMP (Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace), New Delhi 
25. Dr Mira Shiva, Director, Initiative for Health, Equity and Society, and founder member, Diverse Women for Diversity, New Delhi 
26. Ms Jaya Jaitly, Founder President, Dastkari Haat Samiti, New Delhi 
27. Ms Nandini Sahai, Director, The International Centre, Goa 
28. Ms Shalini Joshi, Co-Director, Nirantar, New Delhi 
29. Ms Archana Dwivedi, Deputy Director, Nirantar, New Delhi 
30. Dr Sabiha Hussain, Associate Professor, Dr KR Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minority Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi 
31. Ms Bhavana Gadre, CEO, CareerSeeker, Nasik, Maharashtra
32. Ms Chitra Mukherjee, Manager (Outreach and Advocacy), Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group, New Delhi 
33. Ms Achla Savyasachi, Consultant, Micro-Finance Institutions' Network (MFIN), New Delhi
34. Ms Usha Ganguli, Theatre Director, Rangakarmee, Kolkata 
35. Ms Sarita Kumari, Social Activist, Ghanerao, Rajasthan 

## SWAN's Thimphu Declaration

36. Shri Sunil Binjola, Director of Operations, South Asia Foundation (SAF India), New Delhi

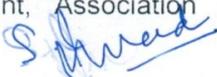


### MALDIVES

37. Dr Mariyam Shakeela, former Minister for Health and Gender



38. Ms Sheeza Imad, President, Association for Maldivian Women's Economic Development (WED), Male



39. Ms Asiyath Mohamed Sayed, Online Editor (In Charge), Haveeru Daily News, Male.

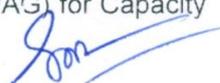


### MYANMAR

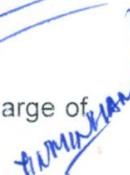
40. Ms Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Chairperson, Women Organizations' Network of Myanmar (WON); Founder and Director, Phan Tee Eain (Creative Home), Yangon



41. Ms Naw Hla Hla Soe, Director, Karen Women's Action Group (KWAG) for Capacity Building and Empowerment of Women, Yangon



42. Ms Yin Min Han, Co-Founder, RAINFALL Gender Study Group, Editor in Charge of WCDI Magazine (WCDI Women's Network), Yangon



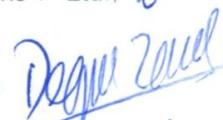
43. Ms Khyn Hla Hla Aung, CEO & Designer, Elephant House Co. Ltd, Yangon

### NEPAL

44. Ms Yankila Sherpa, Former Minister of State for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Nepal; Owner and Managing Director, Snow Leopard Treks P Ltd., Kathmandu



45. Mr Deepak Tamang, Chief Executive Officer, SEARCH-Nepal, Kathmandu



46. Ms Indira Shrestha, Chief Executive, Shree Shakti, and Former Member, National Planning Commission (NPC), Social Development Division, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu



47. Ms Manisha Ghimire, President, Initiatives of Media Women (IMW), Kathmandu



48. Ambica Shrestha, President, Dwarika's Heritage Hotel

### PAKISTAN

49. Ms Mariana Baabar, Diplomatic Editor, The News, 27 A, Harley Street, Rawalpindi *Mariana*
50. Ms Abida Malik, Senior Vice President, Behbud Association of Pakistan, Rawalpindi *Abida M*
51. Ms Madiha Kazi, Textile Designer, Thardeep Rural Development Programme, Karachi *Madiha Kazi*
52. Ms Madeeha Gauhar, Artistic Director, Ajoka Theatre, Lahore *Madeeha*
53. Ms Mome Saleem, Research Coordinator, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad *Mome Saleem*

SRI LANKA

54. Ms. Rohini Nanayakkara, Chairperson of the Lanka ORIX Leasing Company (LOLC), Colombo *Rohini*
55. Justice (Retd) Shiranee Tilakawardane, Former Justice of the Supreme Court, Colombo *Shiranee Tilakawardane*
56. Ms. Mano Alles, Board Member, Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WCIC), Colombo *Mano Alles*
57. Ms Sepali Kottegoda, Executive Director, Women and Media Collective, Colombo
58. Dr Sujatha Samarakoon, Medical Consultant, Trustee AIDS Foundation Lanka, Public Health Specialist to LFA/ GFATM, Colombo *Sujatha*
59. Ms. Nishani Dissanayake, Foreign News Editor, Lakbima, and Editor, "Samudura", Colombo *N. Dissanayake*

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