

#LPRD# A Field Worker's Diary [#Part 37](#) # 14 August 2020

On the third day of our program in Washington, the first event we went to was at the American State Department's Global Women Issues office. There, our first meeting was with Blake and Emily, the senior advisors. They described the issues primarily faced by American women.

Intimate partner violence was one of the major issues that they mentioned. The lack of a strong family system has made it difficult for women to live alone and take care of themselves during childbirth, teen pregnancy, inadequate political representation, online violence are some of the other important issues, they said. They also asked all of us what were the main problems faced by women in our countries, and what issues we were working on. When the representatives from all the 21 countries started narrating the issues faced by women in their countries, I felt that though there might have been financial inequality between developed, developing and backward countries; however, when it comes to neglecting women's rights, their development, all countries displayed equality. I especially liked the stand of Yousuf, who was from Morocco, on women's issues. While speaking about his work on women's issues through his organisation, Yousuf stated that it is wrong for men to say that women's issues are not related to them as even men are a part of the problem. Adding that he worked in the sector because he believed that they also have to be part of the solution.

Yousuf's opinion was that when we are part of the problem, we should also be part of the solution. All of our common understanding was that — gender norms pressurise and discriminate against men just as much as they discriminate against women and that women's movements aren't against men but are movements against the social and political systems that oppress men and women equally. After this meeting, we went out for lunch. By the time we returned, Subhechya, the delegate from Nepal, was in the office. That girl was supposed to join us in Washington on Saturday or Sunday and participate in the programs from Monday, but had reached the city on Wednesday afternoon. Apparently, she had been a little late getting to the airport and had missed her flight to the USA on Sunday. By the time she bought another ticket and flew again, it was Wednesday. The next day she hadn't gotten up by the time we were all leaving for office. Instead, she called a cab and came to the office on her own. One day, I went out for a walk with Sinthu and Subha, when Subha suddenly went missing while taking photos. While I and Sindhu searched the whole of the city for her, the realisation of why she might

have missed her flight dawned on us. We both wondered how this innocent girl managed to work in the mountainous Nepal; however, we soon found out how intelligent Subha is. After searching the whole of the city and declining a dinner invitation by our friends, I and Sinthu reached our hotel in defeat, when we found to our surprise — Subha peacefully having dinner in her room. On Wednesday afternoon, we went to the office of an organisation called Inclusive Security and met its Vice-president Mirsad.

The organization believed that women's participation is essential to prevent the growing insecurity, violence and conflict around the world and to establish peace. According to calculations given to us by Mirsad, the United Nations has spent approximately 100 billion dollars on establishing peace between warring countries since the year 2000.

In 2015 alone, the USA's defense budget was 601 billion dollars. If we look at all the peace agreements reached between 1975 and 2011, in more than 42% of the countries, the situation became back to square one and war atmosphere prevailed within 5 years of signing of the peace agreements. He explained to us through statistics how when women representatives were involved in peace agreements, in 35% of the cases the agreements lasted for more than 15 years. His organisation believed that: When women are included, peace is more likely to endure. That belief was not born out of their opinions alone, there was empirical evidence to support the theory. Therefore, the Inclusive Security organisation does advocacy programs that women have special leadership qualities and that they can take better decisions. They are working with over 2000 women leaders in more than 40 countries mainly through research, training and advocacy programs. Mirsad was a very smart man. Instead of just listening to his talk, he encouraged us to ask questions. He even announced that he will give a prize to the one who has the toughest question.

I don't remember what "tough" question I had asked back then, but the cup given by Mirsad as the prize that day is still with me. Our last meeting that day was at an organisation called International Centre for Research on Women. They conduct research on various aspects related to women. Dr. Shuvenk, one of the directors of the organisation, stressed on the importance of collecting data and statistics related to the issue before working on an issue.

He stated that this is one of the main mistakes made by most of the governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — how can you design programs without doing any research, without collecting and analysing statistics and without fully understanding problems from all angles and expect to get desired results, he questioned. I had observed

that not just this organisation but many other organisations that we visited invested in statistics and research. Without investing on collecting real, empirical, quantitative and qualitative data, we cannot advocate better for any cause: that was the major lesson that I learnt that day.

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