

**International Conference on Empowering Women in Developing Countries
through Better Healthcare and Nutrition
BITS, Pilani (Rajasthan), India
22-24 April 2010**

PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES: 18 Developing Countries (Including 14 Member Countries and 1 S&T-Industry Network Members of the NAM S&T Centre)

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: The Conference was attended by 54 delegates, 25 overseas participants, 4 representatives of the UNICEF (Rajasthan), 19 participants from the host country India and 6 from the NAM S&T Centre.

Women are a great human resource in all countries and the role of women in society is critical for its development. Women force comprises only a small percentage of the scientific and academic community barring teachers at the school and pre-school levels. But they have an attitude to work with sincerity and loyalty while keeping pace with the required timings. Given proper own space, women can play an increasingly important role in social, industrial and economic development of the country and they should be encouraged to bring their vision and leadership, knowledge and skills, views and aspirations into the development agenda from the grassroots to international levels. To empower women is to increase their control over the decisions that affect their lives both within and outside the household. Through their empowerment women gain greater share of control over resources - material, human and intellectual, such as knowledge, information, ideas - and financial resources involving access to money and control over decision making in the home, community, society and nation. It leads them to become a critical and vital stakeholder among the human capital and their strategic presence in the society is widely accepted.

The problems faced by women in the developing and many developed countries too are similar. These include severe gender discrimination in education and daily routine as compared with boys who get a better share than their sisters; maternity mortality mostly due to haemorrhage and sepsis; anaemia; malnourishment; and barbaric and inhuman practices of foeticide and female child killing in many parts of Asian countries like India and female circumcision in several African and Sub-Saharan countries. Poor health and education severely affects productivity. Inadequate nutrition in childhood undermines the ability of individuals to develop their full capabilities. Lack of essential minerals such as iodine and iron can impair brain development. Fortunately, access to education has improved dramatically over the past few decades and there have been a number of encouraging trends in girls' and women's education. Electronic media including television has also played an important role in creating mass awareness. Educated women generally want smaller families and make better use of reproductive health and family planning information and services in achieving their desired family size. Most women know something about modern contraception, but more educated women tend to know about a wider range of available methods and where to get them. Women's ability to choose the number and timing of their births is the key to empowering women as individuals, mothers and citizens, but women's rights go beyond those dealing with

their reproductive roles. Women should be able to fulfil their aspirations outside the home, to the benefit of themselves, their families, and their countries. It is much desirable to make reproductive healthcare accessible and affordable, extending basic amenities, empowering women and enhancing their employment opportunities.

In order to deliberate on the importance of the subject, the Centre for Science and Technology of the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries (NAM S&T Centre) organised a 3 days international conference on 'Empowering Women in Developing Countries through Better Healthcare and Nutrition', jointly with the Women Studies & Societal Development Unit, Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS), Pilani (Rajasthan), India at BITS Campus in Pilani. The Conference was supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Rajasthan, India.

The Inaugural Session was started with the Opening Remarks by Prof. Nirupama Prakash, Convenor & Chief of the Women Studies & Societal Development Unit (WSSDU) at BITS, Pilani, followed by an introduction to the Conference by Prof. Arun P. Kulshreshtha, Director, NAM S&T Centre, who also briefly mentioned about the role being played by the Centre in promoting South-South cooperation in various scientific areas, particularly on the issues related to women empowerment. Prof. L. K. Maheshwari, Vice Chancellor of BITS, Pilani welcomed the delegates and dignitaries. After the traditional 'Lighting of the Lamps' Ceremony, the Chief Guest, Dr. Padmanaban, Advisor (Public Health Administration), National Health System Resource Centre, National Rural Health Mission, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India delivered the Inaugural Address on 'Social and Health Determinants of Maternal Mortality - Plan of Action for A Developing State' followed by an Address [Accredited Social Health Activist - Sahyogini in Rajasthan] by the Distinguished Guest, Mr. Samuel Mawunganidze, Chief, UNICEF (Rajasthan).

The Conference was attended by 54 delegates from 18 countries, including 25 overseas participants, 4 representatives of the UNICEF (Rajasthan), 19 participants from the host country India, and 6 from the NAM S&T Centre. The overseas participants were from Cambodia [Dr. Chea Mary, IYCFP (Infant & Young Child Feeding Program) Program Coordinator, National Maternal and Child Health Center, Ministry of Health]; Egypt [Prof. Safaa EL Baz, Director, Regional Center for Training in Family Planning and Reproductive Health, Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, Abassia, Cairo; and Dr. Taghreed Kamal Omar and Dr. Nagwa Ahmed Zein El Dein, Lecturer, Faculty of Nursing, Menoufiya University, Shebin El-Koom]; Indonesia [Ms. Sri Setiawati, Assistant Deputy to Minister for Ethics and Harmonization of S&T, Ministry of Research and Technology]; Iran [Dr. (Ms.) Ziba Nikaeen, Scientific Member, Iranian Research Organization for Science & Technology (IROST); Mrs. Tahmineh Shaverdi, Assistant Professor, Iranian Academy for Culture, Education and Research; Dr. (Ms.) Akram Ghadimi, National Research Institute for Science Policy (NRISP), Tehran; and Dr. (Ms.) Maryam Ghadimi, General Physician, Tehran]; Kenya [Mrs. Catherine Wachuka Mutie, Assistant Director of Research, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Directorate of Research Management & Development, Nairobi and Ms. Kimani Lydia Wambui, Nutrition Officer, Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, Provincial General Hospital, Nakuru]; Malaysia [Dr. Nayandeep Singh Kanwal, Executive Editor, Research Management Centre, University Putra Malaysia, Selangor]; Mauritius [Mrs. Aryamah Kumaree Doomun, Principal Nutritionist, Ministry of Health & Quality of Life and Mr. Vijaysingh Vishwamitra Doomun]; Mexico [Ms. Yesica del Moral, Researcher on Graphic Communication]; Myanmar [Dr. Mya Thandar Kyu, Lecturer, Department of Technical and Vocational Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, Nay

Pyi Taw]; Nigeria [Mrs. Obi Maria Nwanyibuife, Chief Scientific Officer and Mrs. Edith Chibuzor Chima, Assistant Chief Int. Auditor, Raw Materials Research and Development Council (RMRDC), Abuja]; Oman [Dr. Asya Al-Riyami, Director of Research and Studies, Ministry of Health, Muscat]; Russia [Ms. Lobach Vitalina, Researcher, Philosophy Department, Moscow State University, Moscow]; South Africa [Mrs. Sedibe Modiehi Heather, Researcher, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]; Sri Lanka [Dr. Nalika Gunawardena, Senior Lecturer, Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo]; Syria [Prof. Imad Al-Din Al-Tanukhi, New Material Hospital, Baramke Faculty of Medicine, Damascus University]; Tanzania [Ms. Judith Francis Kadage, Research Officer (IPR), Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, Dar-es-Salaam; and Uganda [Ms. Atero Angella Atwaru, Science and Technology Communication Officer, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), Kampala].

39 scientific papers were presented in the Inaugural and four Technical Sessions, which were co-chaired respectively by Dr. Sunita Saxena, Director, Institute of Pathology, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi, India and Mrs. Maria Obi of Nigeria; Prof. A.K. Sarkar, Dean ID & FD-1 of BITS, Pilani and Mrs. Catherine Wachuka Mutie of Kenya; Prof. R.N. Saha, Deputy Director, BITS, Pilani and Mrs. Aryamah Kumaree Doomun of Mauritius; and Prof. Ravi Prakash, Dean (Research), BITS, Pilani, India and Prof. Safaa El Baz of Egypt.

The scientific presentations were on ‘Social and Health Determinants of Maternal Mortality - Plan of Action for A Developing State’ by Dr. Padmanaban of the Indian National Rural Health Mission; ‘Accredited Social Health Activist - Sahyogini in Rajasthan’ by Mr. Samuel Mawunganidze, Chief, UNICEF (Rajasthan); ‘Maternal Health in India in the Context of Millennium Development Goal’ by Dr. S.D. Gupta, Director, Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur, India; ‘Nutritional Status of Women in India’ by Dr. B. Sesikeran, Director, National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, India; ‘Health and Nutrition for Women and Children in Cambodia’ by Dr. Mary Chea of Cambodia; ‘Women Health in Russia’ by Ms. Lobach Vitalina of Russia; ‘Trends of Cancer in Indian Women: Can I prevent cancer?’ by Dr. Sunita Saxena, Director, Institute of Pathology, ICMR, New Delhi; ‘Status Report on Maternal and Child Health in Mauritius: Report on Adolescent Anaemia as per the Statistics of the NCD/Nutrition Survey 2004’ by Mrs. Aryaman Kumaree Doomun of Mauritius; ‘Women's Health and Nutrition: Issues and Concerns’ by Dr. Arundhati Mishra, Additional Director, Population Foundation of India, New Delhi; ‘Nutrition Country Profile - Syrian Arab Republic’ by Prof. Imad Al-Din Al-Tanukhi of Syria; ‘Women Health and Nutrition in Egypt’ by Prof. Safaa El Baz of Egypt; ‘Gender Bias in the Nutritional Status of School Age Children Residing in Slum Areas of Jaipur City, Rajasthan’ by Dr. Ila Joshi, Associate Professor, Department of Food & Nutrition, International College for Girls, Jaipur, India; ‘Women Empowerment through Nutrition and Health: Some Intervention Techniques’ by Dr. Uma Joshi, Professor & Head, Dept. of Psychology, Banasthali University, Rajasthan, India; ‘Narratives Around Dietary and Exercise Practices of Young Urban Females’ by Mrs. Sedibe Modiehi Heather of South Africa; ‘Impact of Health Education on Mothers and Nurses to prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome among High Risk Infants’ by Dr. Nagwa Ahmed Zein El Dein of Egypt; ‘Quality of Care Provided to Thalassaemic Children at Menoufiya University Hospital’ by Dr. Taghreed Kamal Omar of Egypt; ‘The Role of Awareness, Comprehension and Attitude Constructs in Behaviour Adoption towards Alleviation of Nutritional Anaemia-A Before- and After- Study in Adolescent School Girls’ by Dr. Sanjana Bhat, MD (Obstetrics & Gynae.), Gynaecologist, Medical Centre, BITS, Pilani; ‘Plant Products in Promoting Nutrition among Women & Children’ by Dr. Aarati Saxena, Associate Professor, Department of Botany, Sri Venkateswara

College, Delhi University, New Delhi, India; 'Prevalence of Undernutrition and Associated Factors among Females Aged 13-16 Years in Plantation Sector in Sri Lanka' by Dr. Nalika Gunawardena of Sri Lanka; 'Empowering Women through Better Reproductive Health Care with Specific Reference to Rajasthan' by Prof. Devendra Kothari, Population Program Management, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India; 'Health of Women in Iran' by Ms. Ziba Nikaeen of Iran; 'Effects of Social Capital on Women Health (A Case Study about Iranian Women)' by Mrs. Tahmineh Shaverdi of Iran; 'The Role of Employment on Women's Mental Health' by Dr. (Ms.) Akram Ghadimi of Iran; 'The Effect of Hygiene and Nutrition on Women's Empowerment' by Dr. (Ms.) Maryam Ghadimi of Iran; 'Nutrition Knowledge, Beliefs and Dietary Habits amongst Omani Elderly in Nizwa Wilayat and Their Gender Difference: Implications for Policy' by Dr. Asya AL-Riyami of Oman; 'Impact of Gender Construction on Women's Health' by Dr. Pritam Pal, Consultant, Gender & Health, India; 'Myanmar Healthcare System' by Dr. Mya Thander Kyu of Myanmar; 'A Method for Effectively Employing Graphic Communication Campaigns in the Resolution and Prevention of Health and Prevention Problem' by Ms. Yesica del Moral of Mexico; 'Health and Nutrition Concerns of Women in Reproductive and Post-Reproductive Years in India' by Prof. Sheel Sharma, Head, Department of Food Science & Nutrition, Banasthali University, Rajasthan, India; 'Empowering Women through Better Healthcare and Nutrition: Preliminary Findings of 2008-09 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey' by Mrs. Catherine Wachuka Mutie of Kenya; 'Role of Elected Women in Panchayati Raj and Their Knowledge Level in Relation to Reproductive and Child Health Care: Analysis of A Comparative Study Done in Selected Villages of Rohtak in Haryana and Dhandhar in Pilani, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan' by Ms. Geeta Malhotra, Country Director, READ India; 'Gendered Regimes and Child Survival: Rethinking Development' by Prof. Saraswati Raju, Director, Women Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, India; 'Women Economic Empowerment through Value Addition to Local Raw Materials: The Role of Raw Materials Research and Development Council, Abuja, Nigeria' by Mrs. Maria Obi of Nigeria; 'The Impact of Decentralization Health Authority on Safe Motherhood Program in Indonesia' by Ms. Sri Setiawati of Indonesia; 'Engaging Women in Managing Low Birth Weight Babies Crisis: Country Report of Tanzania' by Ms. Judith Francis Kadage of Tanzania; 'Strategy Paper on Status of Women's Nutrition' by Ms. Laxmi Bhawani & Mr. Avtar Dua of UNICEF-Rajasthan, India; 'Traditional Leafy Vegetables as a Source of Pro-Vitamins A Carotenoids for Under-Five Year Olds in Uganda' by Ms. Angella Atwaru Atero of Uganda; and 'HIV/AIDS and Low Birth Weight Babies in Kenya: Experiences, Challenges and Effective Interventions' by Ms. Lydia Wambui Kimani of Kenya.

The Concluding Session was chaired by Prof. Arun P. Kulshreshtha, Director, NAM S&T Centre and Prof. R. K. Mittal, Director Designate, BITS, Pilani (Dubai Campus), in which the summary of the Technical Sessions was presented by Prof. Nirupama Prakash of BITS, Pilani; Ms. Anuradha Chandran Maharishi, Communication Specialist, UNICEF-Rajasthan; and Prof. Suman Kapur, Biological Sciences Department, BITS, Pilani. The foreign participants (and some Indian participants too) shared their ideas on how they and their concerned agencies back home intend to proceed with appropriate follow up on the issues raised during the conference. This was followed by deliberations to work out a set of recommendations for submission to the governments and concerned agencies on matters concerning the women's empowerment, with specific reference to their health and nutrition, which yielded in the adoption of 'Pilani Recommendations', appended below.

Finally, the Valedictory Address was delivered by Prof. Deoki Nandan, Director, National Institute of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India, followed by an address by Ms. Anuradha Chandran Maharishi, Communication

Specialist, UNICEF-Rajasthan. The Guest of Honour Prof. G. Raghurama, Director, BITS, Pilani addressed the gathering and introduced the Chief Guest Honourable Dr. Rajkumar Sharma, Minister of State for Health, Government of Rajasthan, India, who made a power point presentation on the health status in the State of Rajasthan and handed over the Certificate of Participation to the participants of the Conference.

A cultural programme was organised on one of the evenings, which was replete with variety of Indian traditional dances and music. The Russian delegate, Ms. Vitalina Lobach, presented a highly professional and enchanting Odissi dance, the famous classical Indian dance from Orissa, India with its origin in the Devadasi tradition. The participants were taken on a field visit to the Science Museum, Social/Women Empowerment Initiatives in Villages, Naturopathy Centre and Alsisar Mahal, a Heritage Palace Hotel with traditional Rajasthani hospitality and cuisine.

The participants thanked the organisers of the workshop, in particular, Prof. Nirupama Prakash and her colleagues at BITS Pilani, UNICEF – Rajasthan, and Prof Arun P. Kulshreshtha, Director, NAM S&T Centre and his colleague Mr. M. Bandyopadhyay, and hoped that the NAM S&T Centre will organise a similar event on Women’s Empowerment soon in future as part of its endeavours on South-South cooperation.

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PILANI RECOMMENDATIONS

A 3-days International Conference on ‘Empowering Women in Developing Countries through Better Healthcare and Nutrition’ was organised at Pilani, Rajasthan, India during 22-24 April 2010 by the Women Studies & Societal Development Unit, Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS), Pilani jointly with the Centre for Science & Technology of the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries (NAM S&T Centre). The Conference was supported by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Rajasthan and was attended by the delegates from 18 countries, including Cambodia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, Oman, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda and UNICEF Rajasthan.

The Conference was aimed at:

- Critically examining the healthcare risks facing women of child-bearing age in developing countries.
- Understanding the current status of women’s health and nutrition along with related tradition and policies and also identifying the areas of weaknesses, obstacles and challenges in providing adequate healthcare and nutrition to women.
- Identifying gaps and formulating strategies for improving status of health and nutrition of women and children (with specific reference to low birth weight babies, adolescent anaemia and appropriate obstetric care).

The delegates unanimously felt that empowering women in developing countries for better health care and nutrition are only possible when they have economic independence. This is essential to combat poverty which is the key factor affecting their access to health care and nutrition. Improving women's situation can benefit society in ways that transcend the direct benefits to individual women, reduce poverty

and stimulate economic growth. Income for women, better access to and control over their resources lead to better health and nutrition for children, well-being of their families and communities and increased household consumption. The governments have a very crucial role to play in terms of ensuring policies strategies and commitment on providing better healthcare for women and their families.

Currently, in developing countries, only about 20% of working-age women are employed. However, there are several barriers to success in realizing these goals. Investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect across the MDGs. Some ill effects of nutritional deficiency are:

- Micronutrient deficiency is a major health problem and low birth weight infant delivery is associated with high morbidity and mortality rates.
- Vitamin A deficiency is prevalent despite the fact that several governments have put programmes in place to alleviate the problem.
- Appropriate communication strategies help in alleviating health and nutritional problems effectively only when the solutions suggested are specific, viable and relevant.
- The elderly lack knowledge of nutrition which leads to imbalanced nutrition and/or obesity.

The Conference came out with concrete suggestions and recommendations for sharing with policymakers in order to accelerate the process of providing better healthcare and nutrition for women and children in the developing countries. The delegates recommended that:

- There has to be a clear political will to formulate policies to ensure that they are gender focussed.
- A concerted effort is required at the implementation level to regularly monitor policies and programmes to ensure good health and nutrition status among women and children.
- An integrated socio-economic strategy for empowering women with clear measurable indicators should be developed and further establish a system monitoring and evaluation to ensure effectiveness of this strategy.
- To expedite the process of women's empowerment, earnest efforts should be made to create an environment where people, especially women, can take decision regarding number, timing and spacing of their children.
- A continuum of care approach to women's nutrition and health including stage specific nutrient supplementation, and women health needs should be adopted in all the developing countries.
- Programmes on micronutrient supplementation to reduce occurrence of women and child anaemia should be supported through appropriate political, legal and community interventions.
- Improved Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices should be encouraged and popularised.

- Communication strategies should be viable to the society and relevant in alleviating health and nutritional problems effectively.
- There is a need for better targeting of health and nutritional strategies to reach the excluded women and their children.
- Women must be adequately empowered to actively defend their position and freely express their views.
- Special orientation programmes for elderly women to impart knowledge of nutrition should be initiated to minimise imbalanced nutrition or obesity among them.
- Special education programmes for parents and nurses to enhance public awareness, financial support and health education coverage for special need such as thalassemia, shaken baby syndrome, etc. should be undertaken.
- Women's legal skills and status may be strengthened in terms of their rights enabling them to take meaningful part in decision making processes, including national legislatures to ensure equality and equity.
- There is need for governments to look at integrating both health and nutrition components as they being in two silos does not promote optimal use of the strategies and approaches.
- There is a need to involve research institutions, academicians and universities to ensure continuous quality enhancement in formulating programme according to people's needs. This should be done at the level of the local government.
- There should be focus on availability of nutrition data at the level of the local government which is disaggregated by social groups and economic strata to ensure better policy formulation and implementation. This can be done through special survey.
- Special budget should be allocated to support the programmes and activities to improve women health status in an integrative way.
- Consumption of local food items which are rich in Vitamin A should be encouraged. Appropriate knowledge to different sections of the society should be imparted.
- Private health industries and government together should make an effort to provide quality health services at low cost to all vulnerable groups - children, adolescent girls, women in reproductive age and elderly females.
- Renewed special attention should be given to a holistic nutrition of adolescent girls to effectively prepare them for future.
- Other similar meetings of the NAM and other developing countries on issues related to women's empowerment may be held after 1-2 years to continue with the ongoing dialogue.

Unanimously adopted this day, the Twenty Fourth of April 2010 at Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani, Rajasthan, India.