

and fruitful transformations. And targeting policy makers are sometimes different than targeting the general public. These programs need to ensure the following if we hope to force change.

- **Orient the programs in such a way that the policymakers get a chance to come up with their ideas and means of improvement. Even if it is the idea of the facilitator, ensure mechanisms to develop it as their own.**
- **Dispel the negative and focus on the positive. Always move forward with what can be achieved as opposed to what has not.**
- **Provide an opportunity through the empowerment of women, to gain momentum for them politically as well.**
- **Make the connection between their political ambitions and issues like women's access to resources, education, alleviating disproportionate household responsibilities, employment, stopping domestic violence etc.**
- **Speak knowing who they are and what purpose they serve.**
- **Help them formulate policies that will win them hearts at the same time change the public view on the rights of women.**
- **Good policies are key to the sustainable development of women's rights and gender equality, therefore make sure that the participants leave with a need to create policies along these lines.**
- **Remember that politicians and policymakers are human too and therefore visually stimulating material and hard hitting pictures and depictions can also change their views too.**
- **Eventually ensure that they have an emotional and political stake with the alternative policies and that these policies have a place in**

their political future.

- **And most importantly, stress on the notion that change is of their making.**

Although unfortunate that issues of women's rights and stopping violence against women should require such means of promoting them, we have to be practical in what we try to achieve. One would assume that equal rights and security and safety are given and will require minimal explanation to justify them. But then the reality is that what seems so straightforward and logically determined for us are still considered and pondered for a while when we have to afford the same to women. It is for this reason and because centuries have passed with these same notions been a luxury to women that we must act now to force change. We maybe just a few hundred thousand in number, but what we change today can reverberate twice that number.

How do we imagine a mind that considers women as subhuman and not worthy of affording the same rights that men take for granted? How do we envisage a hand that constantly beats and traumatizes women for the simplest of mistakes or for non at all? How do we aspire to live a prosperous life when we attribute that prosperity to just half our population? I don't have all the answers but what I do have is a depiction of the bleakest future if we move along this path. What I have is the urgent call for change if we hope to live and thrive as the culture we so proudly embrace. What I have is a simple wish that we as human beings consider the simple act of affording what we consider worthy to us, as being worthy of affording to others. Maybe we will change; maybe we will force change, but one way or the other we all need to exist as humans and not as humans and women.



It is also significant to note that the six departments in themselves serve to cater the mandate underscored in the Human Rights Commission Act and their work in themselves complement one another. What is relevant for the purposes of this paper is the understanding of how these six departments can function to better justify the work of the Commission in the eyes of the general public. The answer is not that complicated either. For one thing the Advocacy Department requires to conduct public awareness campaigns targeting specific functions of the Commission. What the public lacks in awareness isn't just information and technical awareness on human rights as a concepts, but also the larger and broader understanding of the purpose a Human Rights Commission serves in the broader context of the newly founded democratic system of governance. It's a trip back to basics that we really require to proper things at grassroots level. The process of legitimizing the work of HRCM requires a concerted effort and a singular understanding. It must move from the notion that human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inalienable. It must be forged by the incessant belief that everyone and anyone, regardless of what the social, cultural trends may place him or her, is born with these inherent rights. It must be fortified by the singular belief that no right can be selectively chosen as that which shall be given and vice versa. But then there is the task of ensuring that the public believe these intrinsic principles of human rights. And for this mammoth task, advocacy, advocacy and more advocacy is urgently required. It isn't enough that we provide information to people. But it is imperative that they are bombarded, either through media, training programs, forum theatre, film and drama, national curriculum, publications etc or through the outreach programs that need to form part of the work of the Commission as well. It is an understatement to say that the task will be difficult. But then again unless the foundation of respect for a culture of human rights are laid, no particular vulnerable group can ever hope to acquire the same rights as everyone.

Forcing Change

Throughout this paper we have established some of the many views people hold regarding women's rights. We have tried to understand the role of awareness, particularly in relation to the work of HRCM. We have also tried to ascertain the need to legitimize the work of HRCM in order for the people to believe what we as a Commission propagate when we talk about equal rights to women. Now the question remains whether things will be as easy as we presume in bringing about the alteration of the public perception? Whether the shift from a society that simply considers women to be content with whatever status they live in, to a society that proactively promotes equal rights for them will be automatically achieved? The answer inadvertently spells out in the negative. No change can be hoped, except by the overtly optimistic, to come overnight and with just advocacy and training. The minds of the people are not set in a certain way simply through the information negating women's rights. It has been molded and shaped by countless experiences and years and years of almost ritualistic discussions about who is superior to whom. It has been effected by, albeit recent, cultural transformations and social reinventions. Thus for real change to take place advocacy and training is simply not enough. At least not just for the public.

It is imperative that social and cultural change occur over time. Like the natural process of change, the cultural process also follow the same pattern when it comes to the duration it takes for change to occur. i.e. it's very slow. This can work both positively and negatively for the proponents of women's rights and gender equality. For one thing the cultural and social attitudes towards women's rights have not been rooted in Maldivian culture. Even during the 1950's and 60's women's participation in civil and political life was commendably high. Therefore forcing change to occur will be easier than having to eke out change in a social makeup that is embedded with antagonism to such a cause. Secondly as a society in transition, new ideas and new trends are not that difficult to promote

in the Maldivian society and the level of acceptance, significantly by the youth, are high and the probability of arguments propagating the rights of women are more likely to hold water with this important demographic. With that in mind there could be certain means and mechanisms one can target to force change on public perceptions about women's rights.

- ***Create training and awareness programs that draw from the personal experience of the youth. Ensure that the discussions conducted reflect the emotional value they have towards those they love and value.***
- ***Foster a sense of the social direction we will be heading towards without hope for women's rights and compare it with other developed countries that have prospered by taking the remaining half of their population as equals.***
- ***Render the theories promulgating the subjugation of women and violence against women pointless by associating this same violence with people they know. Give a face to the violence that occurs.***
- ***Depending on the age group, make sure the presentations are hard hitting. Make sure they are visually stimulating and sometimes graphic enough to hit the point home. Hearing of violence and seeing violence have very different reactions.***
- ***Humanize the issue and create a dialogue based on that.***

The second area that we need to focus when trying to force change is that it is not just the public we need to target when trying to change public perception. Policy level decisions and political will as well as the mentality of decision makers play a crucial, albeit sometimes subliminal, role in how the larger society thinks and believes. In order to ensure the empowerment of women and the propagation of gender equality and women's rights a change in the perception at the level of policy makers is key to sustainable



The basic idea behind the programs are simple, yet the message it needs to convey and the process one needs to go through to achieve that idea is highly complex. Firstly, the idea of human rights, leaving aside the rights of women, are still a novel concept as has been stated in the previous issue. The country has for far too long been devoid of the universal idea of certain rights being inherently theirs and thus has begun to look at anyone promoting human rights with a certain degree of apprehension. In conducting these awareness programs HRCM has to work on several fronts not the least of which stems from the public considering the terms "Human Rights" and the "Human Rights Commission" as being clichéd and dogmatic and without any relevance or benefit to them. Any advice, recommendation or advocacy coming from an institution that a portion of the public considers to be ineffectual is bound to be taken with a lot more than just a grain of salt. And therefore the advocacy of women's rights and the importance of gender equality and equal access requires that HRCM also legitimize the public acceptance of the institution as well. Specific rights can only be promoted by being accepted as an institution on a larger scale.

'Legitimizing' the Work of HRCM

To understand how and in what context the work of HRCM can be better reflected and portrayed to the public in order to better legitimize its recommendations and sayings, it is crucial to look at the inherent structure of the Commission and the purpose which it serves. The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives has six (6) main departments:

- Corporate Affairs Department
- Investigations Department
- Legal and Policy Department
- Advocacy Department
- Research and Monitoring Department
- National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)

FORCING CHANGE: Altering the Attitudes Towards Women's Rights An Awareness Perspective of the Maldivian Context (Continuation from issue 10)

By: Ahmed Tholal

So how does an HRCM awareness program inculcate the elements of human rights to its recipients? What purpose does it intend, and I use intend against saying what purpose it serves for a specific reason, to serve in the overall paradigm of promoting specific rights such as those of women? What elements of these training are particularly dissected to understand the desired and the actually achieved impact of these programs? What role does the already preset and preconceived notions play in the overall success of such programs and how much does these programs act to change these already held ideals and notions? These are questions worth pondering when one tries to understand the issue of forcing change and attitudes about the rights of women in Maldives. Particularly when one looks at it through the HRCM awareness programs telescope.

The awareness programs conducted by HRCM aims to fulfill a multitude of objectives. They include inter alia:

- To inculcate knowledge of human rights.
- To create a mindset that is conducive to a culture of human rights.
- To create, amongst individual groups within the society, awareness and acceptance of issues pertaining to them. E.g. Women, Children, Teachers, Politician etc.
- Update communities on the latest issues relating to Human Rights.
- Identify and create means of discourse amongst members of certain social groups.
- Identify and discuss various issues relating to Human Rights in Maldives.

دعوتِ ابراهيمي افرق
62

پاڻي	پاڻي	پاڻي	پاڻي / پاڻي (1 فرسٽي ڪتابچي)
17 ڏينهن	25 ڏينهن	43	پاڻي ابراهيمي ابراهيمي ابراهيمي
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دعوتِ ابراهيمي افرق
267

پاڻي	پاڻي	پاڻي	پاڻي ابراهيمي ابراهيمي ابراهيمي
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پاڻي	10-8 ڏينهن	18	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي	7-5 ڏينهن	24	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي	23-21 ڏينهن	19	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي	28-26 ابراهيمي	28	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي	28-26 ابراهيمي	29	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي	31-29 ڏينهن	30	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي	14-12 ڏينهن	24	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي	29-27 ابراهيمي	24	پاڻي ابراهيمي
پاڻي (پاڻي ابراهيمي)	18-17 ڏينهن	21	پاڻي ابراهيمي

.....	27	1
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.....	32	2
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.....	34	11
.....	35	74
.....	36	20
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.....	40	20
.....	41	1
.....	42	6
.....	43	17
.....	45	1
.....	48	77
.....	50	8
.....	54	23
.....	60	1
.....	62	31

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NEWS :

Campaign Against Child Neglect in N.Lhohi

Human Rights Commission of the Maldives carried out a range of activities in N.Lhohi Island as part of the Commission's 'Every Neglect is an Abuse' awareness campaign against child neglect. The activities were held from 12-14 October in collaboration with a local NGO 'Social, Economic and Environment Development (SEED) Association of Maldives', the Island Council, School, and Maldives Police Service.

In addition to the campaign HRCM advocacy team also facilitated a human rights awareness workshop conducted by SEED Association on 12 October. The program was attended by members of SEED Association, the Women's Committee, the Island Council, Staff of the Health Center and the island's youth from various occupations. Different aspects and issues of human rights, International Conventions, Constitutional Rights and the role of HRCM were covered in this workshop. This program was funded by HRCM as part of the program for providing financial assistance to members of the HRCM Human Rights NGO network for human rights related projects.

To initiate 'Every Neglect is an Abuse' campaign in the Island, Lhohi School students from grades 5, 6 and 7 were provided information on rights and responsibilities of children, while the teachers of the School were given information on child neglect. In addition to this, a child abuse awareness program for parents and another program for students of grades 8, 9, and 10 against bullying was conducted by Maldives Police Service in association with HRCM.

The most significant item of the campaign was the 'Children's Evening' organized by HRCM, SEED Association and the Island Council on Friday, 14 October. The Children's Evening fair was attended by almost all the children and parents in the island. The fair had many stalls where children participated in a variety of fun activities for which prizes were awarded. Most of these activities were designed to be fun, engaging and with a messages related to child rights and responsibilities. In addition to HRCM, SEED Association and Island Council, Maldives Police Service, Lhohi Health Center, Lhohi Youth Club and Lhohi School also set up activity stalls in the fair. Several dance items were performed by students of Lhohi School, while facilitators from HRCM and Maldives Police Service delivered messages and information on child abuse and child neglect. Awareness videos and songs were also screened at this event.

On Friday night a 'Forum Theatre' event was held with the participation of youth volunteers and Parents. In this activity the volunteers acted out short scenes highlighting social issues, especially those related to child neglect and its negative impacts. The participants then discussed the right way to deal with such situations and enacted how they would do it. Information on these issues was given to the participants by facilitators from HRCM and Maldives Police Service.

'Every Neglect is an Abuse' Campaign was launched on 19 November 2010 to mark the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse. The main objective of the campaign is to raise awareness and attention given to the issue of Child abuse and especially Child Neglect in the Maldives.



NEWS :

Citizens' Assessment of Democracy in the Maldives

A training workshop on a methodology framework developed by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in assessing democracy was conducted at the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives from 25 - 27 October. The workshop was attended by participants from Villa College, Maldivian Democracy Network, Democracy House, Democracy Island and Transparency Maldives. A total of 14 participants completed the training entitled 'Citizen's Assessment of Democracy in the Maldives'.

At the training discussions were held about the meaning and purpose of democracy and how to conduct a local democracy assessment by citizens. Technical information regarding the methodology of such an assessment was shared with the participants including the steps involved in planning, contextualization and implementation of the assessment. Facilitators of the workshop were Commission member Dr. Aly Shameem, and visiting experts of the subject Mr. Ramon Fernan, University of the Philippines- National College of Public Administration and Governance (UP-NCPAG) and Ms. Keboitse Machangana, International IDEA.

International IDEA earlier this year had met with and proposed the offer of assisting HRCM to conduct an assessment of newly embraced democracy in the Maldives. HRCM welcomed the proposal and so through the mutual cooperation between the two institutes, the first phase of the democracy assessment project, the training workshop was held. HRCM hopes to embark on the democracy assessment project next year. It would be first of its kind held to understand the lapses, and gaps existing in the democratic system of the Maldives and generate debate and dialogues as to how to ratify the problems towards strengthening newly embraced democracy in the Maldives. Meetings planned to be held amongst relevant stakeholders will decide how the assessment will be carried out and the roles of the organizations involved.

The International IDEA is an intergovernmental organization which provides knowledge and assistance for democratic reform to promote sustainable democratic change. Their 'State of Democracy' assessments have been undertaken in 20 different states since the year 2000. Among these countries include Bangladesh, New Zealand, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uzbekistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Philippines, Mongolia and Indonesia.

NEWS :

A First Step towards Developing a Child Participation Mechanism in the Maldives

As a first step towards developing a child participation mechanism in the Maldives, Human Rights Commission of the Maldives is conducting a research to assess the knowledge on child participation in the Maldives. The research funded by UNICEF is being carried out by a local consultant. The main objective is to qualitatively assess level of knowledge that girls and boys, and duty bearers including parents, schools, and communities have of children's right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

The research will analyze the knowledge of children and families and stake holders have on children's right to participate. It will also examine and identify gaps in the existing mechanisms for participation and children's access to these mechanisms. The research team will be meeting relevant stakeholders and focus groups including state institutions dealing with children, the Family Court and Maldives Police Services. Focus group meetings were held today with students, parents and teachers.

Considering the importance of strengthening child participation in the formulation of legislations, policies, and regulations that affect them, HRCM with support from UNICEF is working to create an enabling environment where girls and boys can express their opinions and take part in decisions that affect their lives and that of their families and communities. The research is a first step in the Commission's effort to develop a child participation mechanism in the Maldives and is part of the 'Child Protection Programme' funded by UNICEF. The commission will also be working with UNICEF towards strengthening its capacity to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Maldives.



NEWS :

Monitoring the Atolls for CRC and ICCPR Reporting

Human Rights Commission of the Maldives has commenced monitoring visits to the Atolls this week to collect information for reporting to two UN human rights treaty bodies. HRCM monitoring team visited GDh Thinadhoo from 20 - 24 November and will be visiting Alif Alif Atoll Ukulhas and Maalhos in the coming week.

Information collected during these visits will be used to monitor progress in the implementation of the recommendation by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and in compiling the Commission's Shadow reports for Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to the respective UN treaty bodies.

The monitoring team will meet with relevant stakeholders including schools, students, parents, teachers, courts, island councils, media, women, migrant workers and other members of the public during the visit.



COVER PAGE NEWS (Cont)

Rights Camp, A Children's

There was a stamp booth where 'human rights' postage stamps were sold. These were a set of stamps with winning posters from the 2009 'children's human rights poster competition' on it. The proceeds from its sale will go to a Victim Support Fund established to aid and protect victims of human rights violations that require such help.

HRCM Partners in this event include: ARC (Advocating the Rights of Children), Tiny Hearts, Care Society, CAPS (Child Abuse Prevention Society), Maldives Autism Association, Maldivian Red Crescent, Wataniya, Maldives Police Service, Ministry of Health and Family, Gender Department, Ministry of Education. The commission also got a lot of support from Male' business community in organizing this event.





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Human Rights Commission of the Maldives

December 2011

Human Rights Commission of the Maldives Newsletter

Issue II



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Rights Camp, A Children's Evening in Male'.

HRCM with several partner NGOs and Institutions organized a Children's Evening to mark the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse as part of our Child Abuse Awareness Campaign 'EVERY NEGLECT IS AN ABUSE'. The main aim of this event was to provide an environment where families can have some quality fun time with children while getting informed on child rights issues, especially child neglect.

The Camp was inaugurated by the Vice President of Maldives, Dr. Mohamed Waheed Hassan. The Vice President and HRCM President Maryam Azra also gave a speech on Child Rights situation in the Maldives.

The Rights Camps had stalls where children and parents could get information literature and win prizes by participating in activities like Can Knock down, fishing game, Coloring, Face painting, Racing, Quizzes, and Board Games etc.

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