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**Making democracy work in Goa:
Promoting partnerships between NGOs and local government**

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Introduction: Patricia Pinto is a civic and environmental activist, founding member of the **People's Movement for Civic Action (PMCA)** and the **Goa Environment Federation**. She is an elected councillor (one of seven women and eleven men) on the municipal council of Panjim, in the southwestern state of Goa. Ms. Pinto visited Canada in September – October 2002 under South Asia Partnership Canada's India Linkage Program. This Program, started in September 2001, promotes greater interaction and cooperation between civil society organizations in Canada and India involved in local governance, human rights and gender equality in order to further dialogue, research, knowledge and coalition building and action towards advocacy and policy change.

During her visit, Ms Pinto was a panelist at the **Workshop on Gender Equality and Local Governance** hosted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). She also met with the Taskforce on Issues for Canadian Women in Municipal Government (an FCM initiative), Ottawa City Councillor Elisabeth Arnold, Member of Parliament Carolyn Bennett, representatives of the City of Ottawa, City of Vancouver, the Montreal Safe City Program, the Women's Access Project in Ottawa, the Centre for India and South Asia Research at the University of British Columbia, and the International Goan's Organization in Toronto. She also visited the Ottawa landfill and gathered detailed information on Ottawa and Vancouver's waste management and public participation in planning programs.

The following text is an edited version of Councillor Pinto's presentation to non-government organizations in Ottawa.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

In examining the extent to which democracy is taking place in Goa with regard to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment, there are two components to shed light on. One is the reservation of seats for women in local government, which is the 33% quota I speak of, and the other is of bringing governance closer to the people by setting up of ward committees at the municipal level and gram sabhas at the village or Panchayat level.

The 33% reservation quota has been filled, but is this enough? I feel we ought to examine the idea of the resolution for amendment of the constitution. Have women actually been empowered as members of the local bodies? There needs to be a measure of training women receive before and after their election.

Often, women are forced into politics by their husbands in order to keep the seat formerly held by the husband. So, as the wife occupies the seat for a five-year term as a "proxy", the husband's hold on the locality becomes stronger. This was definitely not the intention of the amendment. The intention was to ensure that women representatives make it to the local bodies so that these women representatives could take up the causes of so many other women who live in inhumane conditions. These women could be ensured a better quality of life and no one could deny that

a woman representative would understand better the needs of the women and the solutions to the problem she faces.

Hopefully this will change as women gain confidence. Despite the initial problems, the quota system ultimately encourages participation. And this initial encouragement is necessary, considering that traditionally women in India were confined to only the household chores while it was the husband that did the outdoor jobs. If it were an open contest for the local seat, women would be unlikely to come forward.

The difference I have noticed here in Canada is that a Councillors job is a full-time one and a Councillor is provided with an office, salary and staff. One of the challenges of being a councillor in Goa is working on what is considered a part-time basis with a meager honorarium with no office nor staff, though the work involved is full time. The honorarium received barely covers traveling costs, let alone other expenses such as telephone, stationery, meeting expenses, etc, thus putting a strain on the women's personal resources. Additionally, women face the double responsibilities of politics and domestic work. So, in order to face this challenge, women need to be economically empowered and truly motivated.

THE STATE WOMEN'S COMMISSION

In 1996, a Goa State Women's Commission was established. Unfortunately, there is an assortment of shortcomings: there is no infrastructure, no paid staff, and it is volunteer run. The grievances brought by women to the Commission cannot be given the full attention they warrant. Often, the women return home disappointed. In some cases, the Commission will refer the issue to a private counsellor. However these cases demand continuous attention; they are not solved in a day or two. The Commission itself is falling behind with the demanding cases as it struggles with the daily up-keep. Many recommendations have been made but without the staff to do the follow-up, they are often shelved.

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS

Government-sponsored schemes

There are a number of schemes to help those who live below the poverty line, particularly women. These schemes are sponsored by the central government, which seek to provide gainful employment to the urban unemployed or under-employed poor through encouraging the founding of self-employment ventures. These programmes rely on the creation of suitable community structures. Delivery of inputs under this programme is through the medium of urban local bodies and such community structures. Based on the principle that without economic strength, particularly women or disabled persons, persons belonging to the scheduled castes/tribes, will remain weak, these schemes provide assistance to individual urban poor beneficiaries for setting up gainful self-employment ventures, training of beneficiaries for upgrading and acquiring vocational and entrepreneurial skills, adult literacy and counseling. The programme encourages under-employed and unemployed urban youth to set up small enterprises relating to servicing, petty business and manufacturing for which there is lot of potential in urban areas.

A non-government organization called **Desterro-Eves**, functioning in south Goa, has been very successful in providing training under this scheme to about 450 unemployed youth and women in computer basics, tailoring and embroidery, doll making, handicrafts and paper bag making so that they could set up micro-enterprises with subsidized loans. Desterro Eves has also been working with women in the red-light district on HIV/AIDS awareness besides offering free counseling services, medical reference and services, besides working towards rehabilitating them through self help groups. With government funding, the group (whose office is located in the red-light area itself) delivers community education programs as well as operating a slum-school for local children.

One concern is that very often these centrally-sponsored schemes do not reach those for whom they are intended - the poor. The intention of the scheme is totally ignored, probably because the elected representatives or the officials have not understood its significance. For example, many times it depends if the beneficiary is politically affiliated to the elected representative, or sometimes a fee (of course unofficially) is charged for getting the form of application through, etc. This cannot be acceptable considering that these very same programs are for the poor. This would not happen if the elected councilors, the officials and the scheme recipients were properly trained on the purpose of the programs. Such schemes and programs would then become more efficient.

Privately funded schemes

Bailancho Saad is a non-governmental organization that addresses all issues of women, women harassed by the dowry system, alcoholism, prostitution, women and children's health and nutrition, the sexual abuse of children, AIDS/HIV, environment awareness and education. With no funding from external sources, the budget is raised through its members. The circumstance is such that the director's office doubles as the NGO headquarters. The director is a local lawyer. Despite these economic constraints, when one sees the need for work, one works.

Bailancho Saad also addresses the issue of crime against women. The director, who is also a member of the state Commission on Women, researched and published a report. It detailed that the majority of crimes reported are classified as major crimes, leaving many smaller crimes unreported. Often when a female victim goes to a male run police station, the report has a number of errors or details incorrectly recorded but the women, often illiterate, are not able to notice these mistakes. One approach to dealing with crime has been the establishment of a woman's police station. Women officers, trained in detailing women's issues, staff this separate station's cells. Women can go very easily to this station.

Women's Groups Respond to Alcohol and Domestic Abuse

In Goa, there is an increasing problem with alcohol abuse. In response to this, there are a number of women's groups working on this issue. The typical scenario unfolds as men who, after a long day of work, return to their homes in the evening and relax through the bottle. Their behaviour is impaired and they abuse their wives. As it is often the case that the men are poorly educated, the women's groups attempt to stop the cycle of abuse through education campaigns.

Various women's groups like Bailancho Saad, **Bailancho Ekvott**, **Bailancho Manch** and a host of others are involved with raising public awareness on social issues. Using notifications and advertisements, they try to address alcohol abuse, sex-worker issues, and public health concerns. Changes to laws concerning dowry are wanted but,

without a timely mechanism, progress will be slow. Family counselling cells, funded by the government, are in place but once again, the staff is provided with small salaries. Good counsellors quickly transfer to private agencies. It is not hard to understand why: if one is not decently paid, there is difficulty in doing justice to your job.

GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Getting to the other component of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment, citizens' ward committees (representing voters of a ward or electoral sector) are required to be set up, that potentially act as a mechanism to bring the people closer to the issue of governance. The legislation dictates that a Municipality is required to set up citizens ward committees only if the population in a Municipal area is 300,000 or more. However the average municipal population in Goa is 60,000- 80,000. The committees therefore are not mandatory. However, I feel there is no harm in their voluntary formation. A mechanism that is supported by the State Government but not required in practice makes me suspect whether the state's true desire is to bring governance closer to the people.

My group, the People's Movement for Civic Action (PMCA), works cooperatively with the municipality. Although the ward committees are not mandated, we have formed ward committees and have people taking part in issues. We also invite the concerned elected representative to attend the meetings and some do.

Gram Sabha's are bodies of voters set up at the rural or village level which falls under the jurisdiction of the Panchayat (local authority). There you have not the ward committee but the *Gram Sabha*. Its presence is not dictated by population size. The problem is to create awareness and educate the people on the importance of a *Gram Sabha* and what issues they can bring up to their representatives in the meetings. Once again, NGOs in Goa such as the **Goa Desc** and the **Peaceful Society** have stepped in to educate people, distributing booklets, printed in the local language and English, to every village highlighting their rights, the functions of the *Panchayat* and the *Gram Sabha*. The *Gram Sabha* meets one Sunday, every four months. The meeting date and location is posted on the board of the *Panchayat*. The timing is fixed in Goa i.e. at 11.00 a.m. This overcomes the problem experienced in various other parts of India, I am told, where the time is fixed for late at night and the venue of the meeting at a distant location, thereby discouraging people from making it to the meeting.

To cite an example of having the voice of the people heard, recently, the *Gram Sabha* of St. Cruz in Goa, used its collective power to contest a state government scheme to build a sports stadium on one lakh (100,000) square metres of fragile ecosystem. The issue was so important to the community that a large number of people attended the *Gram Sabha* meeting. They passed a resolution to prohibit this type of land development (and duly recorded it in their minutes) and submitted it to the state-government for discussion. The proposal of the Government has since been shelved.

WASTE MANAGEMENT IN GOA

There is no proper landfill in Goa, just garbage dumps. The biggest problem we face is the dumping of garbage from one village into another. There are documented cases where active *Gram Sabhas* have spoken out against the illegal dumping. There needs to be a municipal responsibility to establish the proper infrastructure and mechanisms to deal with waste.

The issue concerns biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste. As the former is compost-friendly, the real issue arises with non-biodegradable waste. Metal, tin, paper and cardboard are picked up by ragpickers and sent for recycling, but thin plastics such as bags and bottles are the problem. As a tourist destination, too, Goa experiences increased problems with garbage lying about everywhere in the absence of proper landfill sites. In the cities, there is a systematic garbage collection system. However, in villages, with limited resources, there is no proper collection system. Garbage is simply dumped into another village.

We are legislated to have garbage management committees. They have been formed in most cities but their effectiveness is problematic.

In the city of Panjim, these committees have initiated a house-to-house garbage collection system. We found that having open bins on the streets was ineffective and caused more problems since stray dogs or cattle would feed on the bins, overturn them and create a nuisance in the locality. The residents were advised to segregate their garbage with biodegradable waste kept aside for daily collection by the Municipality. This is a real partnership. The scheme

took off on December 2, 2000, and not a day has gone by when the truck has missed its round. We hope to expand this scheme to more localities. We charge a token fee of one rupee a day towards this collection. The result is people are most willing to pay because it's a service they want and a service they are pleased with.

A PLASTICS-FREE GOA

Fifteen years ago, there were no plastic bags lying around in the streets of Goa. As the convenience of plastic, particularly shopping bags, has taken hold, the problem has intensified. Today fields, beaches, road-sides, streams and rivers are all strewn with plastics which is an ugly sight and causing major environmental problems. Incidentally, there are no recycling facilities in Goa. Even for instance if these plastic bags were properly disposed off in the bins, all that would happen is it would land up in the garbage dumps reducing the life of the dump.

The Goa Environment Federation took up this matter of garbage and its proper disposal with the High Court. The government was court-ordered to provide a detail of their waste management policy and they had no response. A committee was formed to provide their response plan. They documented that there were laws that say plastics should be 20 microns (in thickness). However this results in bags so thin even ragpickers pass over them. Laws dictate that all plastics should not be coloured with dyes that are dangerous to foodstuffs. A central law was written to ban these bags; however, the state government did not bother with it.

The issue of visible plastic still remained. To transport it outside of Goa was not an easy thing to do. The state government insisted that they would take the responsibility of sending it out of Goa for recycling. The Goa Environment Federation decided to do some positive work. We had an eighty-day campaign to clean up all of Goa. Two locations for dumping were identified and from there, the state government would transport it out as promised. A large budget was necessary for the campaign, with the state government demonstrating commitment and funding. It was a cross department initiative – the municipality, the tourism industry, the education department, and the Panchayats were all involved. The message to cooperate and start the clean-up was broadcast to everybody. After the eighty days, we reported our job complete, now the government was responsible for its transportation to an outside recycling facility. Even today, the plastics collected are still awaiting disposal. Despite this, the government was made to realize the seriousness of the issue.

Although the central government law states bags should be 20-microns thick, in Goa last month, we increased it to 40 microns. The state legislation was achieved because at 40 microns, the plastic is suitable for recycling as say the plastic industry. The Goa Environment Federation sits on the advisory committee to monitor the law's effectiveness. It is a long path but it is aimed at the solution.

Another problem with plastic is plastic PET bottles. We managed to get the major bottle manufacturer's to discuss this issue. Coke, Pepsi and 'Bisleri' are helping out the collection and issuing a 30 paise refund for each bottle in a "buy back" scheme. This cooperative scheme is proposed to take off shortly.

Another group that is part of the federation, the Goa Foundation, imparts training in vermi-composting of bio-degradable waste. By composting waste in your own compound, it reduces the overall amount of garbage going to the dump. Landfills in the western sense do not exist in India. Training materials on composting have been developed and are distributed free to those who participate. Again, this is a scheme carried out by a non-government organization and funded by the Government.

MUNICIPAL NGO RELATIONS

Most NGOs in Goa work as an accounting check to both the municipal government and state government, taking them to court if there is a problem but also working in partnership with them when the opportunity presents itself. The Municipality invited NGOs, and qualified individuals to identify development projects to be taken up in the city. NGOs are a closer link to the people for consultation on planning.

NGOs have been consulted on increased parking spaces, city beautification projects and environmental protection.

An NGO protest saved an avenue of age-old rain trees from being chopped down for a road expansion project. The People's Movement for Civic Action organized this community protest along the same avenue with the idea of creating an awareness and love for trees, with artists, balloons, wall paper messages, posters and other competitions

while a brass band played. We received very good media coverage commenting on the unique and very effective style of protest.

Another central government scheme that we assist with is an environmental school education project that integrates the environment into every subject. We are involved in infusing curriculum and teacher training with environmental content, which is now a pilot project in 100 schools.

Another example of partnership is a malaria education campaign that seeks to remove problematic pools of stagnant water due to garbage buildup. It seeks Panchayat and municipality – people’s cooperation.

The *Friday Balcao* program organized regularly by a NGO called the Goa Desc is a particularly innovative program that builds upon the tradition of non-formal discussions that typically take place on people’s verandas. A member funded initiative, the organizers bring in resource people to talk on different issues - gender, garbage, human rights, health, environment etc. – and produce public awareness booklets on the topics discussed.

The **Miramar Baywatch Association** a Panjim based Non-governmental organization seeks to address the problems of increase of drowning cases. With insufficient lifeguards and so many tourists, especially from the north India with little knowledge of swimming or the dangers of the sea, the risk is high. It tends to be the case where the government lifeguards have a laid back attitude with fixed timings from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., prompting the NGO to hire its own lifeguards who would be on duty early in the day or late evening when people really venture into the sea. Once again it is a privately funded initiative where some money is raised through membership fees or voluntary donations.

DISCUSSION

After the conclusion of Ms. Pinto’s presentation, the table was opened for discussion. A number of issues were discussed. Ms. Pinto estimated that very few of the active NGOs were involved in providing capacity building. Outside of one World Bank funded project, which she is aware of, no major links have been formed between local NGOs and international foundations for funding the projects she described as currently operating from private or partly from state budgets. One attendee highlighted an international organization that promotes eco-tourism as a potential avenue for funding.

Patricia Pinto returned home very inspired by her Canadian visit and plans to incorporate many of the things she learnt here in her work in Panjim and Goa. Canadian municipal representatives, academics NGO officials and others who interacted with Ms Pinto also found it enriching to learn about the political decentralisation and women's empowerment taking place in India.

India Linkage Program’s activities to promote the increased participation of women in local governance continue. For more information contact Veena Gokhale, India Program Manager at vgokhale@sapcanada.org