

Know Your Rights: Report from Our New Program *Legal Empowerment of Tibetan Women in Exile*

The first phase of the project has started; *TWA Legal Empowerment Training* has been successfully held in five of seventeen regions.



This April, TWA launched a new one-year project for Tibetan women all over India, called the *Legal Empowerment Program*. It aims to improve the safety and status of women in the exile community from a legal approach. It is essentially a campaign for increased education and empowerment in terms of both human rights and women's legal rights. The training seeks to close the gaps between the rights of men and women as well as inform communities on the status of human rights, women's rights, legal rights, and the significance of gender empowerment. The program also encouraged women to pursue justice rather than wait for it to come, informed them about its means and procedures, and emphasized the strength of sisterhood and female power to overcome discrimination against women.



The program includes five phases: a survey on the current female exile situation, a quantitative analysis of the results, an expert conference to discuss further action, an academic report of the survey and conference, and preparation for future improvements.

The first phase, the core of our project, was implemented in May. The project coordinator of the Legal Empowerment of Tibetan Women Action Team (LETWA) has been holding two-day training sessions for Tibetan women in 17 Regions throughout India. These trainings are also the environment in which we provide questionnaires for our survey and collect opinions and impressions from the women in each region. Through intensive education awareness campaigning, the training intends to increase the legal rights of Tibetan women.



This program's journey started on May 18th from the TWA headquarters in Dharamsala to Changthang in Ladakh, where the first training was held.



The project coordinator and the General Secretary of TWA arrived on May 22nd in Sonamling and met with representatives of the settlement and regional TWA members. To do their field research, they spoke to the settlement's authorities, trying to get a realistic impression of the current situation. They aimed to determine the widespread problems among the settlements and find out what legal action can be taken to solve them. The first day of the training started on May 24th and around 60 people

participated in the training. It gave the women insight into the situation of International Human Rights and especially women's rights. The TWA women talked about Universal Human Rights as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Many women were unaware that the rights to ensure reproductive health and decision-making were internationally recognized. The participants also watched a movie about the worldwide women campaign '1 Billion Rising' on V-Day 2013.



All participants were very engaged in discussions and eager to share their views. The second day dealt mainly with the discussion of rights and procedural provisions women can take advantage of in difficult situations, for example when they suffer abuse or violence. An issue that resonated with many was the importance of birth and marriage certificates. It was not surprising that most Tibetan married couples do not have a marriage certificate; there is not enough awareness.



In discussion groups, the importance of legal evidence of major life events was made clear. Men sometimes voiced their objections to the training, saying they were concerned that the law could be too favorable towards women and cause inequality that would hurt the male population. Although the training was mainly for women, it was very important to the Legal Empowerment coordinator to involve these men and their concerns in the discussion to achieve a community open to new ideas from everyone. After the third day of training, TWA provided questionnaires for the women, with a lot of questions concerning the women's safety

and their role as a woman in the community. The data from the first five regions has already been collected.



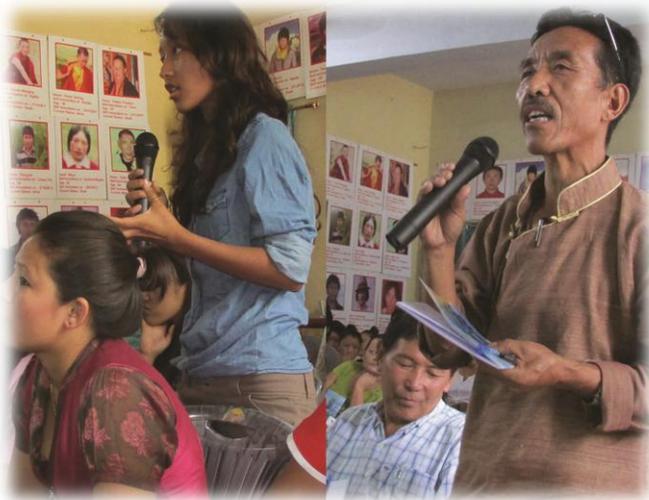
On July 10th, the project coordinator started the second round of training in twelve more regions, where more questionnaires and more answers are waiting to be collected.



Quotes from the Participants

“Information about human rights and provisions under the Indian constitution may be easy for people in the city but I think remote areas like Ladakh, Mio and Rawangla who are unreached by organisations need more of such helpful workshops. Trainings like today is very educative and enriching for us therefore we are thankful and look forward to more of such workshops in the future.”- SonamGhangsang, 29 years old, Sonamling settlement, Ladakh.

“The Legal Empowerment project organised by the Central TWA which was conducted for two days was very helpful and I truly appreciate it.” Zedon, 60+, Samyeling Settlement. Delhi



"I was able to learn many new things about various Civil Certificates and legal procedures under the Indian constitution which is very beneficial for all the participants hence I request the organisation to arrange more of such trainings in the future." Kelsang, 57 years old. Samyeling

"So far I never knew that the Indian law provided same protection against crimes for Tibetan women as well but today I am clarified about this misconception...if I ever become a victim of violence then I

will definitely follow the required legal actions as I am guided in these two days of training."
Tenzin Yangkyi 19, Dekyiling, Dehradun

"I always assumed that abuses and harassment against women exist only in the Indian society but today after listening to the other participants I am really surprised and simultaneously glad that we are trained about the Acts under the Indian constitution which protected us and also the ways of dealing with the police which should never happen with bribes." Dasel 20, Dekyiling, Dehradun

"It is an undisputable fact that violence against women exist in the Tibetan society, therefore it is about time we accept this reality and address the means of resolving this crime. I am thankful of TWA for initiating such facilitative training." Samkyi 60+, TseringDhonden.

