

## **Marching from Strength to Strength**

At the very outset, let me tell you that I, not unlike you believe that capacity comes from within and also that all of us are capable of capacity though not all of us are aware of it. But again just like you I also believe that those who are aware of their capacity can make a difference by inspiring their kind to realize and recognize their capacity. The Capacity building programme for Women Managers in Higher Education aims precisely at making the participants aware of their talents and then to sensitize them enough to see their kind as strong managers capable of sensitizing the system.

Let us now look at the need for such a movement in India. In spite of an increased access and participation of women in all sectors of education, at higher education level even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, India is one among the Commonwealth countries with the lowest percentage (below 20%) of women at senior managerial levels ( Source: ACU Bulletin, March, 2009). This is not always due to the unwillingness on the part of management to appoint women to these positions but many a times also due to a feeling of insecurity in women to handle these positions for which reason they do not come forward. Cultural norms continue to dictate that the role of women at the workplace be seen as secondary to their role at home as nurturers and homemakers. Fear of failure might be just one minor reason of reluctance shown by women to accept work-place challenges, in fact ironically it is almost always the fear of success that leads to hesitance. Fear of success is caused not so much by lack of confidence in one's ability but by lack of trust in the men (many of whom they hold dear), who might feel threatened by their women's success. Successful women are not seen as desirable women anywhere in the world.

That women have the potential to contribute to effective management of higher education, is an acknowledged fact and effort have to be made to meet the challenge to break the glass ceiling. Analysts attribute the phenomenon of glass ceiling to socio-psychological causes such as lack of motivation often due to lack of social support and nature of perception of women's role, personality characteristics, inbuilt "power structure" in the institutions and gender bias. Experts believe that changes need to come from many directions- from women themselves, from society at large and its institutions, and the government. As its contribution to the womankind (and certainly to mankind thereby) the University Grants Commission has been weaving gender equality and gender justice into its policies and university curricula. The

invisibility of women in all walks of life is being realized and through the higher education system, concern is being expressed. To remedy this situation the UGC, as one of its major thrusts among others, took a positive step to support training programmes for capacity building of women managers in higher education, which will strengthen the desire by women academicians to take up leadership positions. “To help women cut through the glass ceiling it is necessary to create a critical mass of trainers from senior managers in higher education through a process of sensitization and training. As women join more managerial positions, the power base would increase the gender perspective and leadership qualities which women bring to management. They in turn, will spread the training within their institutions and outside. It will be a “movement” of women inside the educational system, having an impact on the system to engender change.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us take a look at the **genesis**<sup>2</sup> of this ambitious programme:

The seeds of the training programme, “Women Managers in Higher Education” were laid at a workshop organized jointly by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, and the Commonwealth Secretariat, London, from 7 to 13 November 1997. Subsequently, a project was envisioned by the UGC to develop senior women managers through a process of gender sensitization and capacity building in order to bring about greater participation of women in university management and contribute to qualitative development of the system. This is how the programme started.

The second phase was initiated by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Prof. Rajasekharan Pillai, the then director of NAAC, set up the National Consultative Committee for Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education with Dr. Armaity S. Desai, former Chairperson, UGC in the Chair and the membership of senior academicians, researchers, authors of the manuals and officials of NAAC. In addition to the promotion of quality and excellence in higher education, through dissemination of best practices, NAAC’s emphasis is also on capacity building at different levels. On the recommendation of the Consultative Committee, NAAC launched the first set of five Regional Workshops in Bangalore,

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<sup>1</sup> Extracted from UGC Capacity Building Booklet

<sup>2</sup> Based on UGC Capacity Building booklet.

Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Guwahati, appointing Coordinators to conduct training programmes.

The modalities of the Training Workshops were finalized at a workshop at NAAC in March 2003. Subsequently, about 150 academicians took advantage of this training. At the end of the fifth workshop NAAC organized an interaction with regional co-ordinators at Bangalore, which recommended sustained follow-up and implementation.

In the third phase, the ownership of the activity moved back to the UGC. At a meeting of the initial Core Committee, convened by the UGC in Delhi in June 2004, there was an open discussion on the need to revise the training manuals based on the feedback from the Regional Workshops and plan future training activities.

Subsequently, it was further decided that the coordinators and resource persons, a number of whom had exposure to the previous regional Workshops, and also who were in Women's Studies, should be provided the necessary skills as trainers. Hence, from October 25 to 27 in 2004 a Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshop was held at the National Institute of Education and Planning (NIEPA) where emphasis was given on trainer skills. The outcome was positive as they prepared their activity plan and practised the methodology of delivering the sessions, learning from experience. Some methods were new to the participants and required to be demonstrated. The objective was to expose them to participatory training methods, which would touch the participant at the feeling level, maximizing the participation of the group through greater sharing.

The regional workshops were planned to be conducted in the nine regions between December 2004 and March 2005 using the revised manuals. These workshops were meant for sensitization and awareness raising of women academicians. Each regional workshop was followed by identifying the trainers from those workshops and equipping them with training skills, so that, an ever increasing number of awareness raising workshop may be held with increasing availability of trainers every year, each one followed by workshops for identified academicians as trainers. These two types of workshops met the main objective of creating an aspiring critical mass of women managers in higher education, making the training local and ongoing, encompassing the entire university system.

The method adopted is a dual strategy which envisages that we will continue to organize sensitization workshops to motivate women academicians to become academic managers and

also use the same workshops to identify the potential trainers, and, subsequently, train those emerging trainers.

### **Rationale**

In India there have been three perspectives to explain the dearth of women in senior administrative positions, namely, 'person centred', 'structure centred' and 'culture centred'.

- a. The 'person centred' focus attributes the paucity of women to the psychosocial attributes, attitudes and behavioural patterns of women themselves. Women are victims of martyrdom syndrome; they are generous in taking over additional tasks which do not add up to recognized career terms. Being ambitious and motivated is not considered a womanly quality.
- b. 'Structure Centred' paradigm is a result of the disadvantageous position of women in the organizational structure – few women at top means less power and very limited access to resources. There is a definite bias in recruitment and promotion.
- c. The 'Culture Centred' approach relates to the process of socialization, carrying stereo type gender based baggage to the workplace. There is a great divide between women's work place role and their role inside their homes. It is her role as the nurturer that is taken more seriously by the society.

For women to manage their work place roles is a uphill task, and to help them take up the challenge it is necessary to offer training programmes in higher education for capacity building to become managers in order to participate in policy and decision making, ensuring gender sensitivity in governance and administration of the university. The participation of women in key university committees and decision-making process continues to be low, which is one of the major factors leading to under-representation of women in management positions. Old Boy's club still rules and women are rendered helpless in the system. There are certain areas which are supposed be meant for men and women's command of them is seen as serious encroachment. In India women who are good at managing money are looked at as dominating vamps. A docile, foolish woman batting her eyelids at every mention of money is still the centre of all male attraction and sadly even female admiration. To change the present scenario it is necessary to develop an understanding of functional skills, structures and goals of an organization, an awareness of opportunities and constraints and a shared perspective between women and men, so

that, both women and men work together on an equal footing.

### **Goals<sup>3</sup>**

The overall goal of the programme is to facilitate the constituencies of women faculty, administrators and staff, within the higher education system to:

- a. Increase the participation of women in higher education management for better gender balance.
- b. Sensitize the higher education system through policies and procedures, which recognize women's equity and diversity, and facilitate their advancement.
- c. Qualitative development of higher education, by involving the unutilized pool of women capable of becoming administrators.

### **Specific Objectives :**

To:

- a. Critically analyze the gender gaps in higher education.
- b. Develop a perspective plan for reducing this gender gap.
- c. Develop a strategy for reducing the gender gap.
- d. Offer training programmes at different levels to women for stimulating them to aspire to become administrators and, thereafter, to develop programmes which provide the requisite skills.
- e. Train a critical mass of trainers for all levels of programme.
- f. Develop relevant training materials for the various programmes in print and through other media.
- g. Support gender positive initiatives in the higher education system such as gender equity cell, and developing sensitivity index. UGC and all other professional Councils to set up a mechanism to monitor the indices.
- h. Encourage and support development of linkages among women managers in higher education at regional, national and international level through networking.
- i. Carry out impact analysis to assess the efficacy of the programme.
- j. Undertake all such measures necessary to further the activity.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on UGC Capacity Building booklet.

The main objectives of the workshops were to prepare those who have the potential to occupy management positions and to identify potential trainers from among the participants and to empower those holding positions to be gender sensitive, as being a woman by itself does not imply such sensitivity. The participants for this training programme are senior and middle level women academicians. Initially, the main goal is to develop in them a conscious desire to take up management role and, at the same time, sensitize them to make administration more women friendly. In the initial phase, the agenda is less on management skills and more on motivation and self- reflection on being managers.

Though this programme is addressed to women, the agenda is equally applicable to men. In fact to gender sensitize men to understand women's issues in academia and to reorient their traditional way of thinking, it is necessary to tap the best from both men and women for the qualitative development of the system . The fact that the programme currently caters to women is because of there being a wide gap between men and women managers in the system. Also it is true that the group dynamics that an all women activity leads to might not be achieved by a mixed group. As minority members of academic community, a feeling of social isolation is experienced. Training with other women helps the groups to network with each other and address issues of gender inequities. Women only groups further help women to share strategies to increase confidence, as also to lobby and network with decision-makers, who may often be men.

The UGC formally institutionalised the scheme in the X Plan after its formative period of preparing the training manuals, planning and implementing the programmes. It was based on the need to develop universities and colleges as gender friendly institutions where both women and men work together, sharing power and decision-making collectively.

- a. In approaching the activity, the first step has been to offer training programmes focused on increasing their sensitivities to issues concerning women becoming managers. In the first level workshops the emphasis has been not to teach administrative skills but to help women faculty to see themselves as becoming women managers in the university system and break their invisibility.
- b. A second approach is to make it a movement of women rather than only a scheme like any other. Consequently, some women participants of the first level workshop are identified

by the Local and Regional/Sub-Regional Coordinators and Core Group resource Persons and requested to volunteer to be trained as trainers and trainer-coordinators, and themselves carry the subsequent workshops.

c. A third approach that has been crucial to the development of the programme, and will be continued in the scheme, is the involvement of the Vice Chancellor in the University, or the College Principal, depending on the institution selected for the workshop where a participant had been nominated for the sensitivity/awareness/motivation workshop and subsequently permitted to attend training as Coordinator/Trainer. The Local Coordinator discusses the plan with the Vice Chancellor/Principal and the latter also signs the proposal for forwarding to the UGC. The Vice Chancellor/Principal writes to the Vice Chancellors of universities in the designated cluster and invites nominations for the workshop from middle and senior level academicians and administrators from the university and affiliated colleges. Their presence at the inauguration and valedictory, as well as at some meals, has been crucial in setting the tone of the programme. It is the underlying premise of the scheme that a programme such as this one has to be led by those who head the system and believe in using women's unique capacities for the management of the system. Registrars and other senior officials also play a supportive role. In some universities, it has begun to impact the system as they have undertaken to review the gender biases in the university Acts and Statutes. The approach is holistic as the involvement of the system is necessary if the impact of change has to be not only on the individual participant, but on the whole system as the ultimate goal.

Further, to supplement the above skills, aside from manuals, modules in identified areas are being prepared for developing administrative skills.

- a. Research stimulation workshops have been considered but not implemented.
- b. Networking, information dissemination and mentoring will be important aspects of the programme for which plans have been formulated to be implemented.

It is recognized that several specific cognitive and technical skills like managing resources and finances, crises situations, conflicts, information technology, managing change and team building are vital for educational managers. Since the objective of these manuals is to sensitize participants and to genderize the system, these skills though necessary, were not initially included in the programme. The second step in developing women managers is to

provide such administrative skills as well. The participants of the sensitization workshops are, then, further exposed to such skills if they show interest in moving to managerial roles.

### **Making Connections:**

Women need to network and one of the missions of Capacity Building Programme is to provide them with a platform for networking. A database is prepared and we are all given a directory so as to facilitate our association in future. Networking, which is more popularly known as lobbying in our circles has always been looked down upon. Usually people would say I don't need to lobby. I deserve this and I am strong enough to stand for it. But Capacity Building Programme has changed all this. We have realized the value of networking and we say: I have the support of my colleagues and we will push the matter forward. From individual strength we are moving on to the realization of collective strength. And the results are for all to see.

I will only give two personal examples:

- In our University Department of Humanities was created along with four other departments and its creation was recommended by the Executive Council which happens to be the highest governing body. Thereafter the Executive Council's recommendation was sent for the Chancellor's approval. Usually what is sent is always approved; hence in anticipation the Department of Humanities as also the other four departments started working. Being the senior-most person in the Department, I functioned as its head. In India Government sector operates at a snail's pace. So it took us three years to finally get the Chancellor's approval. But by this time the vice-chancellor who created the departments had finished his term and the new vice-chancellor in the chair decided that the University does not need a Department of Humanities. So he notified all the four departments that had been sanctioned except the Department of Humanities. I did not understand what to do. I was told that it was the Vice-chancellor's prerogative to accept the creation of a department, or to push a case to quash it. Then Capacity Building Programme happened to me and my 6 days with women full of zeal and enthusiasm, asserting their way through the impossible transformed me into a different person. I went back to my University completely decided that I will not let the Vice-chancellor play with my status. The University can't be an object of the V.C.'s whims. I pleaded my case U/S 68 which gives us the right to complain against V.C.'s decision to the Chancellor directly. In my next workshop I narrated the whole story before the participants and the core group. The core group met the Vice-chancellor who understood that since Humanities would be the only department with a



woman as its head, he could be in real hot soup if he does not notify it even before the Chancellor's verdict came through. The department was saved and for me, Capacity Building proved the beginning of my self-assertion.

One more example:

- In India there is a Supreme Court ruling that every organization shall have a cell for women's grievance redressal but that is on paper. Most of the Universities constitute one when their NAAC accreditation is due and forget about it once the NAAC visit is over. Our university is no different. Since there are very few women teachers at the senior level, the three members of the cell constituted in 2002 also had me as a member. In the December of 2003, a woman colleague complained about the misbehavior of a male teacher in one of our informal chit chats. I asked her to lodge a written complaint with us the next day and also I assured her that I will apprise the chair person of the matter. But next day when I told the chair person we have to take up the matter, I was informed that our term had ended in August itself. Practically, there was no cell functioning at this time. I was helpless, as was my colleague. In 2006, inspired by one of our sensitization workshops, I brought the matter up with the Vice-chancellor and we have a functional cell now that is dissolved when the term is over and re-constituted afresh.
- UGC proposes many schemes every plan term but this one far surpasses the foreseen results. Every year a new chain is formed, every year new friends join, every year the network is growing, and every year new goals are achieved. The only concern lies in the fact that at the policy level government aims at gender mainstreaming but in terms of its implementation not much shows.

In the system itself, I remember my first workshop drew mixed reactions. A handful of women were extremely elated, they thought I now could work wonders. This was undue because I was as weak or as strong as them and their expectations were putting extra pressures on me. There was a large majority of women who were scornful and labeled me a hostile woman who is more manly than womanly. This second group joined with men who thought it's simply a hollow cry which would soon die down. They also said, U.G.C. has so much money to waste why doesn't it give us some to work. Clearly, they thought what I was doing was not work. Needless to say that the handfuls that were elated were completely disillusioned when they realized I had no gratis crowns to offer to women, I only wanted them to work with me to improve situations. Clearly, they did not want to act, it was always someone else taking up for them. I was not disheartened

though, one of the main objectives of the Capacity Building Programme is to make women realize there is no outside saviour, they shall have to fight their own battle.

My biggest problem was those that had no faith, and hated women who were aware of their rights. I decided I had to tackle the unbelieving women first, then I'll come to men. I could understand and perhaps even accept men's apathy. But women's apathy! The programme was meant to serve their interests! There were all kinds of pressures and I have to confess I was tempted to succumb initially but my good sense prevailed. I asked myself: Am I really looking for such participants? There was pressure from the regional coordinator that the number of participants should not decrease. But I did not give up and at the same time I had to stick around because my regional coordinator might easily find a person with bigger numbers following them. There are women even today who do not come for the cause but because they think it is an all-expenses paid holiday. My only satisfaction is the fact that for one such woman I have three dedicated ones.

There are times when even today I feel weak as to why I am into this for women who do not see which side of their bread is buttered. But from amongst this group I have found some amazing women who have the zeal that it takes. I cannot and will not count numbers because I am proud of the quality certainly. We started with a vision to build a chain of managers who would manage not only the Higher Education system but also every sphere of their lives. Women who would dream the impossible and then make it real, and we have women who do not give a second thought when faced with a challenge. They accept it always as yet another opportunity.