



ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

3 FOCUS ON PEOPLE'S EMPOWERMENT, DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Civil Society Organizations are effective as development actors when they support the empowerment and inclusive participation of people to expand their democratic ownership over policies and development initiatives that affect their lives, with an emphasis on the poor and marginalized.



Photo: World Literacy Canada

Advocacy program: World Literacy Canada

World Literacy Canada (WLC) is a secular, gender-equality charity that believes in the value of basic literacy to combat poverty and increase opportunity. Our mission is to educate and empower marginalized children and women, enabling them to enhance their standard of living and to live with greater independence and dignity.

CHALLENGE

WLC advocates a community-based approach to learning, focusing on providing Adult Literacy Classes and Pre-Schools for marginalized women and children, establishing community libraries, supporting public gatherings on International Women's Day (March 8) and International Literacy Day (Sept 8), holding skills training workshops, and increasing the social/political involvement of communities, particularly of women. The organization wanted to do more to address the exclusion of women in political life at the village level.



RESPONSE



Since 1955, WLC's Advocacy Program has sought to increase the participation of women in village political life, including the role of women as decision-makers in political processes. To that end, the program supports women in outlining a list of advocacy priorities (for example: old age pensions, work pensions) and successfully improving the delivery of government programs to their village. The program, which has active partnerships with nine local NGOs in India and Nepal, also seeks to increase capacity building and involve women in other areas of community life through the use of its literacy centres and libraries.

For over four years now, World Literacy Canada has been celebrating International Women's Day in conjunction with our NGO partners in India. At the centre of the festivities is Kabaddi, a rough, rugby-like sport popular in the Indian countryside, but usually played only by men. Our all-female Kabaddi tournament goes a long way to confront gender stereotypes and provide opportunities for neo-literate women from rural villages to travel around the region, sharing their stories and experiences with others previously confined to the home.

LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

Social perceptions and traditional gender roles in India have been barriers to women's participation. The program has also been a victim of its success: the steady growth in membership has stretched capacity, effectively limiting the number of women able to participate.



MAINSTREAMING/KNOWLEDGE SHARING



There are currently no plans to expand the program outside of its current operating area. That said, WLC is always looking for feedback from its partner organizations in ways to improve access for local women to government services.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Women's Advocacy Program
<http://www.worldlit.ca/womens-advocac/>

Go here for more examples of how Canadian civil society is improving its development practice: <http://www.ccic.ca/IP-case-studies.php>