

## About Hearts and Minds: Shaping the Post-2015 Development Discourse and Agenda

*Hearts & Minds: Women of India Speaks* brings to the centre stage the “lived experiences” of women and girls across five states of India: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan.

The analysis contained in this report is based on in-depth interviews in 2013 with women and focus-group discussions with almost 200 elected women representatives — a constituency over a million strong in India that can shape the Post-2015 global development agenda.

The report ensures that the voices of those who remain socially, economically and geographically marginalised are meaningfully reflected in the emerging Post-2015 global development discourse and agenda. While their lives have improved with greater visibility, education and employment opportunities, the women report they still do not have proper access to water, sanitation, housing, roads and electricity.

They cite low literacy, lack of financial independence and highly patriarchal values as the major hurdles they face on a daily basis. In the report, the women aspire to attain the most basic of services and call for an end to discrimination.

At the same time, there are glimmers of hope. This report also showcases how these women have not only become the change themselves, but are leading it, and that they have the potential to bring about lasting positive transformation in women’s lives.



## Key Findings – Women of India Speak

*“There was no material available to build our houses except big stones. We used to heat these big stones. We used to heat these big stones in fire to a very high temperature. When they would weaken, we would break them into small manageable pieces and use those to build our houses. We used mud to bind the stones together. After the rains, we had to build our houses afresh.”*

- Savitri Boiyan  
Gajapati District, Odisha



Photo credit: UN Women/Praveen Rao Kaliga

### Poverty, Deprivation and Social Security

Women experience destitution and poverty in oppressive ways. Women in all five states brought up a major governance and public-service delivery challenge — people living below the poverty line (BPL) are not correctly identified and thus cannot access their basic entitlements whereas those with assets, land or means are often wrongly categorized as poor and are misappropriating benefits.

- Many rural women feel that poverty has increased in the past few years and there is a very uneven distribution of wealth and growing inequality.
- Women acknowledged that men and women both experience poverty but women shoulder a much larger burden of its negative impacts as compared to men.

### Livelihoods, Employment and Skills

While professional employment opportunities for educated girls have increased in rural India over the past decade, women farmers feel cornered by the lack of viable alternative livelihoods due to shifting weather patterns and resulting crop failure.

- Most women attributed their subordinate position in the household and society to low literacy levels or lack of education and the resulting inability to find proper jobs and attain financial independence.
- Women pointed out to the lack of skill-based training and employment and where available, they felt that there are no opportunities to use those skills effectively to earn income or a livelihood.
- Women shared concerns about where to leave their children when they go out to work, implying a lack of child care infrastructure and crèches in work places.

*“Earlier, we grew crops and vegetables of our choice in our fields. There was variety in the food I prepared at home. Now we have to purchase all the grocery items and vegetables. We have to prioritize spending on food items according to the cost and not nutritional value.”*

*-Suvarna Amrutappa Alkatti  
Dharwad District, Karnataka*

*“The cost for child delivery came to 65,000-70,000 rupees at the private hospital. We don’t make so much in farming. I had to call an aunt to borrow money and also pawned my jewellery.”*

*-Kali  
22, Gundipada Village, Madhya Pradesh*

## **Nutrition, Food Security and Hunger**

Women reported positive changes and improvements in village-level nutrition facilities and centres for children and pregnant women. However, tribal women in many areas still find these facilities relatively far and inaccessible.

- Some women pointed out that ensuring nutrition for people with disabilities requires greater attention but there was positive feedback regarding the current availability “food cards” for people living with HIV (PLHIV) in some places.
- Many women drew a link between alcoholism and greater poverty, food insecurity and gender-based violence in the household.

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## **Education and Growth Opportunities**

Functioning of primary schools and the attendance of girls in primary schools has improved considerably. Secondary schools and colleges were found to be far-off and inaccessible, generating safety and security concerns and resulting in a large number of girls continuing to drop out after primary school.

- Women acknowledged that awareness levels about government schemes and services, including for education, are still very low, especially in settings with entrenched patriarchy and feudalism.
- There is an increased trend of sending children to private convent schools in tribal areas, which cost more than government schools. Since parents prefer to invest in educating their sons more, the education of girls suffers.

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## **Health and Well-being**

Women gave positive feedback about improvements in healthcare services, especially those for pregnant women and lactating mothers, infants and children, free vaccinations and immunisations, reduced maternal and child mortality greater awareness of health and greater proximity to primary health care centres and hospitals.

- Women living with HIV are most concerned about their children, as they find it difficult to earn a living and if the community concerned knows the status, their children also suffer stigma and discrimination.
- Women cited pollution and health and women’s security and rising crime against them as emerging concerns.



Photo credit: UN Women/Mayank Pratap Singh

*“Due to changes in climate and scanty rainfall, the agricultural output has decreased. We have lost hope of seeing returns on the investments we made in our land.”*

*-Suvarna Amrutappa Alkatti  
Dharwad District, Karnataka*

## Access to Infrastructure, Adapting to Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

One of the gravest concerns women shared was about successive rain and crop failure, which they attributed to shifting weather patterns such as intense rain, no rain, erratic rain, more intense summers and winters and deforestation. Rural farmer women said it is impacting their lives very negatively and giving rise to poverty and food insecurity because they are primarily dependent on agriculture as subsistence farmers.

- Women shared that water shortages during summer months are particularly severe and affect them the most. They reported rapid depletion of ground water. In some cases, water scarcity is so acute that people are finding their own coping mechanisms such as purchasing water.
- Women cited lack of good and well-connected roads to villages as a critical challenge.

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## Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

In terms of women’s empowerment, most women feel that there have been positive, even some transformative, changes in their lives over the past decade compared to previous generations. Regarding gender equality, women feel that their continued subordinate position in society vis-à-vis men is due to traditional roles and duties thrust upon them, which deprive them of their freedoms and growth-related opportunities.

- Women unanimously agreed that they received no help from their husbands in household chores. On the contrary, any mistake or delay is an invitation for admonishment or possible violence.
- The lives of girls were found to be as difficult as women in rural areas due to restrictions on their mobility, expectations to assist in domestic work, livelihood generation and farming-related work and preparation for matrimonial roles to marry early.