

'Gender inequality biggest challenge'

By Daiaphira Kharsati

SHILLONG: On the eve of International Women's day, Chairperson of Meghalaya State Commission for Women Theilin Phanbuh has expressed concern over gender inequality which is a burning issue globally as well as in the matrilineal society of Meghalaya as women folks demand their rightful place in the society.

In an exclusive interview with *The Shillong Times*, Phanbuh spoke on several issues concerning the problems and struggles faced by women especially single mothers and expressed concern over the deteriorating moral values evident from the number of broken homes.

"Gender inequality is prevalent here as there is lack of mutual respect. The mindset that women should not be given the opportunity to participate in areas where men dominate creates a misunderstanding in the society," Phanbuh said.

She pointed out that the customary practice that prohibits women participation in

traditional institutions should undergo change with the evolving times and people should accept and adapt to the change although since ancient times, traditional elders have entrusted women the responsibilities to take care of the households.

"Most men have agreed that women should have a place in Dorbar and become a part of the executive committee while some orthodox men felt that it is the domain of men," Phanbuh said.



**Theilin Phanbuh:
Candid**

The Chairperson informed that as a Commission it has delved deep into the problems of single mothers and has even called an interactive session where 16 women attended, she informed that women vendors at Bara Bazaar faced acute problems.

"While interacting with women vendors at Bara Bazaar, we found that after 5-6 pm they have to sell their products at a throwaway price. The basic amenities of toilets, street lights, proper storage is absent," she said.

She bemoaned the (Contd on P-7)

severe mental disability
lack of social support
ers, 2007).

downplay symptoms of
ntal illness will call into

'Gender inequality....'

(Contd. from P-1) rise of the problem single mothers which is due to the death of spouses or the husbands leaving the wife.

"The death of a spouse is mostly due to alcoholism while the wife is left to fend for herself. But most single mothers send their children to school despite the struggles," she said. On the declining moral principles of the society, she lamented that there are many cases of frauds as most women are illiterate and with the burden of poverty they are easy prey of fraudsters. Commenting on awareness, she pointed out that women are unaware of their rights and this lack of knowledge makes them the most vulnerable sections of the society.

Ignorant of CM scheme

"In the interactive session attended by 16 women, we found that only 1 woman is aware of the Chief Minister's Social Assistance Scheme and enjoyed the benefit of Rs 6000 per month," Phanbuh added.

The beneficiary, a single mother, added that the amount has been of great help in buying text books for her children. She added, "DIPR through the public address system can take the initiative to address people in the market places about the schemes offered by the Government." However, she urged the Government to provide more schemes to single mothers and women folks. She felt there is a need to upgrade the skills development industry to deal with the changing times.

Specialized Women Center

Phanbuh has informed that a pilot project called Specialized Women Center which is in collaboration with Institute of Social Sciences, an initiative of National Commission for Women will be implemented by the State Commission for Women.

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