

MANIPUR WOMEN GUN SURVIVORS NETWORK

মহিলাদের গুলি মৃত্যু গুণগণিতের প্রত্যক্ষ



"The United Nations Security Council reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."

-United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, March 2007



Manipur's Leimatol Range and Imphal Valley

Photo by S. Mentschel

Manipur is a tiny state located in India's Northeast with just over two million inhabitants belonging to several ethnic groups. Looking back at a history of more than 2000 years as an independent kingdom, Manipur merged with the Union of India in 1949 - two years after British colonial rule ended on the subcontinent and India's independence was declared.

Since then, the state has been witnessing low intensity conflict. Over 20,000 people have been killed in the last five decades. Today more than 30 armed groups operate in Manipur - ranging from small outfits to organizations with several thousand members. Besides them, dozens of battalions of the Indian Army and several units of Indian paramilitary forces are stationed throughout the state at the Indo-Burma-border.

Manipur is one of the most conflict-ridden states in India. According to official statistics, in 2007 alone more than 400 people have lost their lives. Human Rights groups put the figures even higher. According to them, not a day passes in Manipur without armed violence and gun killings.

Women and children of Manipur suffer most in this conflict, even when they are not targeted directly. They are traumatized by the deaths of family members. They bear the brunt of the emotional and socio-economic impacts of violence. So many women have become impoverished after the killings of male relatives, who have been working for the survival of the family.

Apart from that, women themselves are particularly vulnerable to violence and intimidation at gunpoint, often used as a deliberate military and political tactic. Also women and girls continue to be tortured, raped and killed at gunpoint.

Everyday, three to four people are shot dead in Manipur's ongoing conflict. In the last decades thousands have died and even more have become widowed or orphaned. Stories of suffering are legion as those who survive look into a scarred future. Someday, this needs to end.

Binalakshmi Nepram



Photos by B. Nepram



The **Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network (MWGSN)** inception dates back to December 24, 2004. On Christmas Eve, Ms Binalakshmi Nepram witnessed the aftermath of the killing of 27-year-old Buddhi Moirangthem in Wabgai Lamkhai village of Thoubal district, southeast of Manipur's state capital, Imphal.

There, a group of three gunmen had dragged Buddhi from his car-battery workshop. Within a matter of minutes they shot him dead. Till date, his young wife Rebika Akham does not know who the killers were and why they killed her husband.

A few days after the incident, Ms Nepram contributed Rupees 4500 (USD 110) to buy a sewing machine for Rebika Akham. This machine enabled her to stitch and tailor clothes for the villagers and to secure her a humble living after the dead of her husband. This intervention in Wabgai Lamkhai village was first ever of the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network.

Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network was formed in an attempt to help women like Rebika, whose lives have been changed dramatically because of the gun killings of a beloved husband, father or son - be it by state- or non-state actors or unidentified gunmen. The Network attempts to lift women above the trauma and agony faced in armed conflict by helping them to find ways to heal the scars that decades of violence have caused to the community.

The Networks direct intervention evolves a gender sensitive approach to the gun crisis, supports women economically and bring them forward to play a crucial role in small arms policy. It is the first initiative of its kind in India. The formal launch of took place on April 26, 2007 in Manipur's capital, Imphal.



Sinam Chandrajani (53) from Malom village located a few kilometers south of the state capital Imphal shows the pictures of her two sons, who were killed in November 2000. The two young men, just 17 and 25 years of age, were shot dead along with eight other people by Indian security forces. The shooting - referred to as Malom Massacre - took place at a bus stop on the Imphal-Moirang highway, just outside of Malom. To date no-one has been punished for the crime.

Photo by B. Nepram

Take the story of Kumar Mutum of Ukhrul district, who was killed by unidentified people a couple of years ago. Since that incident, it has been a relentless struggle for survival for his widow, Lucy Jajo, and the couple's son, Lanchenba. The countless Lucy Jajos and Lanchenbas in this state have all been created by the "gun culture" .

The Telegraph, April 27, 2007

With many women in Manipur trying to cope with life under the shadow of the gun, Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network attempts to make them economically independent. The Network is working towards building sustainable livelihood measures for women affected by violence.

So far, more than 40 women are getting financial assistance as well as legal support for small-scale entrepreneurial work so that they can move on in life with newly found courage.



Ms Sinam Chandragini (left) and Ms Kshetrimayum Subadini of Manipur's Malom Village in interaction with MWGSN-Founder Binalakshmi Nepram (right). Photo by MWGSN



Member of the Panthoibi Self Help Group in Mekola village at work. Photo by B.Nepnam

Manipur enjoys a distinct place among the handloom zones in India. And like many women from Manipur's different communities and ethnic groups, most of the gun survivors are skilled in making handloom and handicraft items.

Selected garments from Manipur woven by Network members

Phanek is a large sheet of fabric, wrapped around the waist as a skirt. It is worn by women of all social groups and ages throughout Manipur. Phaneks are produced with hand looms, in different colors and shapes, with or without horizontal strips. However, there are various styles for different occasions and in the different regions.



Enaphi is a special type of shawl that is wrapped around the shoulders. This thin and often transparent cloth is hand woven from fine cotton or silk. The embroidery is rich, with beautiful motives that differ according to region and the traditional tailoring school. The Enaphi is usually worn with a Phanek.



Leiroom is a hand-woven scarf, used in ceremonial occasions by ethnic communities throughout Manipur state. The Leiroom is, e.g., an essential item of presentation during marriage, to receive guests in house, village or at functions. The design differs according to the ethnic group that are producing it.



Photos by MWGSN

Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network supports women gun survivors throughout Manipur state. To enable them to start a small production unit or other business venture, the Network helps the women to open their own bank accounts and provides them with micro finance in form of interest-free loans of Rupees 3000 to 9000 (USD 75 to 225).

With the help of this money the women are able to start and carry on work related to silk reeling, weaving, the production of mats made from water reed or even agricultural occupation such as fishery, piggery or mushroom farming.

The Network also forms “Solidarity Network” of committed young people who believe in helping the gun survivors and in controlling the use and spread of small arms. They keep in touch with the women gun survivors supported by the Network and assist them in whatever way they can.



Ms Prava Devi of Panthoibi Self Help Group is spinning silk.

Photo by B.Nepram



Lamkhonem Haokip (above) of Khodang village in Churachandpur started her own piggery with a small loan from the Network; Hidam Jamini (right) of Moirang, who lost her 15 year old son, sells local eatables at the market; Geeta Huidrom (right) of Imphal is working on a Phanek

Photos by K.Haokip, MWGSN (2)



Future Plans

- (1) The Network will continue to support women gun survivors throughout Manipur with small loans. This will enable them to start work on their own and to earn an income to support their families.
- (2) The Network will support women gun survivors financially so that they are able to provide education for their children.
- (3) The Network will keep documenting the testimonies of women and children gun survivors in the valley and the hill district of Manipur. A documentary film is planned.
- (4) The Network will ask support of doctors and psychologists, to professionally counsel women gun survivors and deal with their mental trauma.
- (5) The Network will also keep organizing meetings, organize exhibitions to raise the awareness to the wider public on the problems women gun survivors are facing.
- (6) The Network is collecting shoes of victims of gun violence, which will be displayed in an exhibition. Each shoe will depict a victim of Manipur's armed conflict.

You can give support the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network by volunteering your time or by making a donation which will enable us to help many more women gun survivors.

Donations should be made in name of **Control Arms Foundation of India** as Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network functions as a project of the foundation. For more information log on to <http://www.cafi-online.org>

In India, donations are exempted u/s 80 (G) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.



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Cover: Nupi-Lal-Memorial in Imphal remembers the rise of Manipuri women against British colonial rule in 1939. The uprising is known as Nupi Lal or Women's War. Photo by B. Nepram