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THESIS TITLE: Engendering the Workplace: A study of Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in Civil Society Organisations

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Affirmative Action, CSOs, Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Women and Workplace, Work life Balance, Vishakha Guidelines

This thesis details the findings of an exploratory study conducted to understand nature of gender inequality in Indian workplaces, specifically with a view to understanding the meaning, causes and processes for the prevention of sexual harassment in CSOs.

CSOs were selected as there is a paucity of literature available on gender discrimination at the workplace in CSOs in India; neither is there any study available on the specific problem of sexual harassment within CSOs. Given that many CSOs also focus on women's empowerment and gender equality as an integral part of their work with communities, it was envisaged that research about gender related dynamics in such organisations might throw up interesting insights about gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplaces.

The central research question was to understand the *nature of gender inequality in Indian workplaces*, specifically with a view to

- a) Understanding the dynamics and causes of gender discrimination in CSOs;
- b) Understanding the meaning, causes and processes for the prevention of sexual harassment in CSOs; and,
- c) Study gender fair practices within CSOs that build a conducive work environment.

The thesis defines what constitutes sexual harassment and details out the forms and types of sexual harassment. It gives information on international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), as well as international Conventions such as Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to address gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. National efforts such as the Vishakha Guidelines and the recently

passed “Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill, 2010” to both prevent and address sexual harassment in the workplace have been detailed out.

Information on the CSO workplace in the context of following the law of the land in the prevention and redressal of sexual harassment in the workplace; instances of sexual harassment; perspective of the staff on the priority to be accorded to the issue, are given in detail. Further measures such as the importance of capacity building on issues of gender sensitivity and sexual harassment in creating a safe and secure work environment have also been discussed.

Findings and Conclusions

- I. CSOs display a higher level of compliance with legal requirements of gender equality in the workplace*
- II. There is inadequate representation of women, especially in decision making positions, in CSOs, resulting in weak voice towards gender mainstreaming*
- III. Affirmative Action measures to address overt forms of discrimination are more readily acceptable than deep-rooted gender discrimination.*
- IV. A formal Complaints Committee is essential to address sexual harassment in the workplace as well as ensuring a gender conducive work environment.*
- V. Investment in awareness and capacity building on gender discrimination and sexual harassment is critical for creating a gender conducive work environment.*
- VI. Institutional support is necessary in addressing the challenges of work-life balance, as well as in creating a conducive work environment.*

Areas for further research

- Systematic research in Indian organisations on issues of gender discrimination, mainstreaming and sexual harassment are few and far between. Such a stream of research needs to be encouraged and supported, as the growth of the Indian economy is creating a varied range of workplaces.
- Comparative study of different sectors, including CSOs, could be undertaken on factors that positively influence a conducive work environment, address situations of gender discrimination, and make viable measures of affirmative action at workplaces.
- Studies on sexual harassment in the workplace with a focus on men need to be encouraged. Such research may help to understand and assess the dynamics and incidence of sexual harassment against men, as well as emphasis on distinctive preventive measures, including male support groups.