



Activists in Bangalore, India, protest a child's rape (left); demonstrators in Delhi, India, want safer public transportation for women.

## Street Lights and Short Grass

Local strategies help improve global women's security

**W**HAT CONCRETE ACTIONS can grassroots groups take to make their cities safer for women and girls?

The Huairou Commission—a global coalition of grassroots women's organizations formed in 1996—posed this question early in 2013 at the launching of a campaign called Delhi and Beyond: Concrete Actions for Safer Cities. The campaign was a direct response to the gang-rape and murder of Jyoti Singh Pandey in New Delhi, India, in December 2012, which sparked international outrage.

During a global day of action, 66 groups in 26 countries joined the campaign and answered that question, holding meetings with public officials in 58 cities—from Cordoba, Argentina, to Edinburgh, Scotland. They discussed ideas for localized strategies and signed agreements to work together to address gender violence.

“Showing women not as victims only, but as agents of development able to transform a conflict into a political agenda” was one campaign goal, says Carolina Pinheiro, the Huairou Commission's governance

campaign coordinator. And that goal was achieved.

In New Delhi, for example, the advocacy organization Jagori held local and regional meetings with police officers, during which academics, lawyers, activists and community members offered suggestions for what police should do to better address street harassment and sexual assault. Anupriya Ghosh, program manager of Jagori's Safer Cities initiative, says, “It was the first time women representatives were part of the police meeting at the local level. It was exciting to see how women, with just a little information and support, [could] demand rights.”

Theresa Makwara, who coordinates the Zimbabwe Parents of Handicapped Children Association in Harare, organized a meeting with advocacy groups and the mayor, Muchadeyi Masunda. The groups asked him to install more street lights in dark areas of town, deploy more police officers and cut the grass in places where long grass creates a dangerous environment. The meeting was successful, Makwara says, “be-

cause in normal situations it is very difficult to convince the mayor to come for community events.” Already, she notes, “street lights are installed and municipal police are deployed. The grass-cutting is still in progress.”

Makwara, herself a survivor of gender-based violence, advocates for girls with disabilities who face harassment. She says the meeting led to more partnerships, and that her leadership set an “example to other grassroots women who share the same sentiment.”

Pinheiro says the Huairou Commission is building “a comprehensive and permanent platform of communication through which groups working on safer cities for women can...exchange their tools and best practices.”

By Aug. 20, 2013, every group will have submitted an updated report on their partnerships and projects, and another global day of action may take place later this year. Any grassroots group will be welcome to participate. See [www.huairou.org](http://www.huairou.org).

—HOLLY KEARL

LEFT: ALJAZ RAHI/AP PHOTO; RIGHT: MANSI THAPLIYAL/REUTERS