

**Narrative Report- Prepared by: Ms. Tenzin Choezin (Project Officer)**

## **9<sup>th</sup> Annual Buddhist Nun's Empowerment Leadership Training**

***1<sup>st</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> April, 2017***

***Jangchub Choeling nunnery, Mundgod***

The ninth Buddhist Nuns Empowerment Leadership Training, held from April 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> was attended by 29 nuns from Jangchub Choeling Nunnery, Mundgod South India. The ten days of Leadership training exclusively focused on Gender Sensitization, Building Effective Communication Skills, Public Speaking Skills, Conflict Resolution and Practical Outbound training. Although, we normally provide this empowerment training to nuns from various nunneries, this year we decided to experiment the effectiveness of the training if be given to particularly one nunnery to have a broader impact.

### **Pre-Training Preparations:**

For this year's training, the TWA's coordination team had spent an exquisite amount of time and effort in planning for a very intensive and effective training for the nuns. As per the lessons learned from last year's Buddhist Nuns Empowerment Program, we felt the need to have proper resources from within our own Organization to lead training sessions for the nuns. Therefore, the whole TWA team organized a Capacity Building workshop for administration sake and subjects that included were Gender, Sexual Harassment and building communication skills. The Capacity Building workshop was hosted few months prior to the fixed schedules of the 9<sup>th</sup> Buddhist Nuns Empowerment Program. After the success of the Capacity Building training, we started planning for the Nuns program and there we decided to appoint Ms. Tenzin Choezin (Project Officer) to lead the program on Gender Sensitization and Ms.Tsering Choezom (General Secretary) to lead on Communication for the upcoming program.

We think, this way we are not only adjusting with the budgets but practically putting into platform the Leadership opportunities from within our own association and strengthening the initiatives of producing Trainers from within our association.

As it is, this year we have extended the number of days for the training in order to make it more intensive and effective. The 10 days leadership training emphasizing the empowerment structure of the Tibetan Nuns in and around India is one of the most sought after program initiated by TWA. It took many months of preparation to make the program successfully possible but we are extremely happy to be announcing the vast level of satisfaction that we

have received as Organizers cum trainers and we are back home with positive feedbacks and requisitions for more such trainings.

The pre-training preparation for the Nun's Program included tasks to set the schedule, choosing topics/subjects for training, logistics, arranging training kits (Stationary set, water bottle & etc), arranging trainers, getting in touch with the working committee of the Jangchub Choeling Nunnery, the final confirmation of the trainers/ speakers, getting the print materials from the printing office, preparation on the respective topics for training by the two team members from TWA and etc.

A day prior to the start of the program, the coordination team reported to the venue and finally sets the hall with banners, flags, arranged tables and checked the electrical set up thoroughly to have the least technical hindrance and discomfort within the training venue and during the training slots.

### **1<sup>st</sup> April, 2017- Registration:**

Now that the preparation for the program has been well looked after, the trainees started to report and register at the training venue. Jangchub Choeling Nunnery, Mundgod. They collected their training kits and were instructed in bits about the 10 day long training that we as trainers and them as trainees will need to cooperate into.

TWA's president welcomed the trainees after the trainees prior to the welcome dinner and introduced the coordination team to the trainees.



## Day.1

2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2017

### Introduction/Gender Sensitization by Tenzin Choezin:

The first day of the Buddhist Nuns Empowerment Program sponsored by Science Meets Dharma, Switzerland kick started with an intensive Physio-Therapy session led by Ms. Kunga Namdol, who is working as a Physio Therapist at the Doeguling Tibetan resettlement hospital. The early morning exercises was one of the most cherished training session for the nuns over the time.

TWA's president Mrs.Dolma Yangchen, began the training with her opening remarks and addressed the trainees at the opening function by covering the introduction of TWA and the roles and responsibility of our Association since its foundation. The introduction was then followed by a short speech by the Head of the Administration of Jangchub Choeling Nunnery, Ven. Lobsang Youdon la on the overall expectations from the workshop.



The session was then taken up by TWA's Project Officer, Ms. Tenzin Choezin with the assistance of Ms.Tsering Choezom led the introductory ice breaker in which the trainees were paired and then made to introduce their partners through drawings to all the other participants. This primary introduction of the participants has generated a comfortable space to slowly part with their submissiveness and created an environment filled with creativity and fun. The next 45 minutes were kept for Orientation Round, Ground Rules, Group Division and the pairing of secret friends.

In the Orientation Round the trainees were guided through the weeklong program schedule with emphasis on the highlights of the training; guiding them with the detailed explanation of the day to day programs and specifically instructed them the Practical Outbound Program and other expected activities.

In short, the Orientation Round gave an over view of the one week training session to be followed.

The Orientation Round was then followed by Ground Rules, Group Division and Pairing of Secret Friend. The whole team of the nuns program including the three Organizers and the 29 participants were seated together to decide the ground rules to be followed till the end of the program, we listed around 10 ground rules that we promised to co-operate into for a better and an effective training so that it will become easier for both the Organizer and the participants. After the Ground Rules were made, we divided the nuns into four groups and each had to name their teams, appoint a team captain and a time keeper. The four teams chose their team names and thus we had Dolma Group, Dhondup Group, Lhakarsang Group and Family Group. The trainees were then introduced to a 'secret friend' and the secret friends were to be disclosed by the end of the program on 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 2017. The idea was to maintain the secrecy and keep giving surprises and to make it fun for one's secret friend to weave a bond so special.

From the noon of the first day, Ms. Tenzin Choezin (Project Officer, TWA) led the session on Gender Sensitization for the Tibetan nuns. In the beginning of the session, all the trainees were asked to write down their Fears and Expectations from the training and one by one every one's fears and expectations were discussed and reflected. Miss Choezin then asked them if they have ever heard of the word Gender but sadly not a hand in the air was seen and right after she asked if they knew the word Sex, the red face of the nuns matched the robes they were wearing.

When asked what sex meant, only one or two nuns hesitatingly said it is that strange activity done between two people, few claimed to have never heard this word ever before but few bowed down in shame thinking an inappropriate word was used.

Therefore, to ease the workshop environment Choezin drifted the topic and asked the nuns if there is Gender inequality in the Tibetan community and majority of the nuns affirmed that there is no Gender inequality and everyone is treated equally and according to them, girls are more complicated and the real roots of disempowerment in the community. Finding the right time to shoot, Choezin then discussed the meaning of Sex and Gender and Nature's perspective on the changeable and the non-changeable factors of Sex and Gender. Like Sex is the biological structure of any human being and Gender as the socially constructed attributes of sexes.

Then, the nuns were asked to participate in small role plays of how girls do behave and shall behave and likewise for the boys, this made it quite apparent to them how the society has made everyone of us expect a certain behavior from the respective sexes and how few of them are so biased in nature and can be changed for better.

Slowly, Gender was discussed, so was Sex and examples to these were given with the acceptance from the participants and then the roots of Gender Discrimination were discussed.



Even after which we came to know that they were quite not agreeing upon our discussion because we distributed some Sex and Gender statements and many still think it is the responsibility of the girls to look after kids and be compassionate and they believe it is biologically upright and cannot be changed. So we took 10 more minutes to relax and reflect on what we were initially trying to learn by the word S and G. Then we dispersed the session to meet up for the next day and everyone was asked to go back to their room and think about S and G.

The nuns left for dinner at 5 pm but came back to the training spot around 7 to watch a documentary of TWA, “Breaking the Shackles: 50 years of Tibetan women’s struggle.” which made it easier for us to make the nuns understand more about TWA and its foundation since 1959 in Lhasa. Not only that, it practically moved them to see the courage, capability and strength of the Tibetan Women in the movement against the Chinese Regime.

## Day.2

2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2017

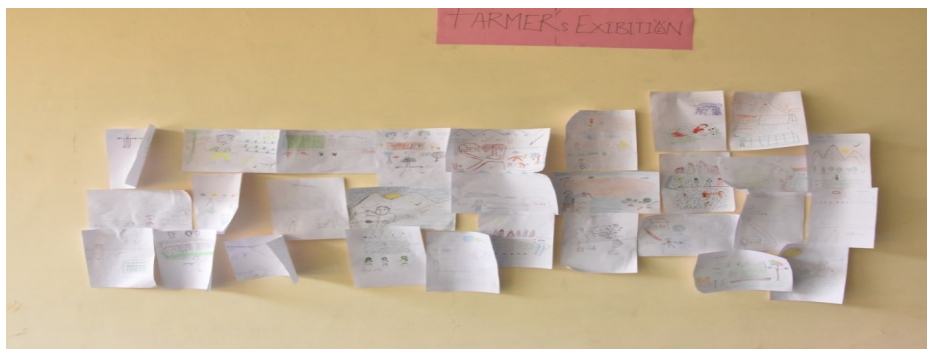
### Gender Sensitization by Tenzin Choezin:



Followed by the Exercise session early in the morning, Miss Choezin continued her Gender Sensitization program for the second day by asking the Nuns to reflect and recapitulate on the topics discussed yesterday. The nuns were a little more convinced this time and they accepted the differences between Gender and Sex. So the next activity was for them to draw a farming community of their wishes and to draw a farmer with any kinds of farming equipments they are fond of and then they were asked to name the farmer. Surprising enough, the drawings were fantastic but the number of male farmers far exceeded the numbers of female farmers

and when asked, they said female cannot be farmers because they are weak and cannot plough.

So we showed them the survey report which stated that in the exile Tibetan community, there are 1302 female farmers over 1050 male farmers but we have socially constructed the thought that female are domestic workers and delicate as well therefore, the tough works would belong to male. Although few added saying there are female farmers but the main workers are male, which all stands in contrast against the fact check that we have more female farmers than male.



With shocked faces and whispers around the table, we thought to make the session a bit relaxed so we initiated some mind refreshing games like “When the wind blew”. Everyone was laughing and physically very much awakened. Right after which, we started the activity- “What’s her Profession?” where we showed the picture of a young girl in fancy clothes and asked them what could be her profession and many wrote Singer, Dancer, model, college students and many others which did not even come close by to her hobby. She is a Mountaineer, and the youngest perhaps in India. They were then showed a small video of the girl and she asked others what made them think she cannot climb a mountain and she says, “Why should tough girls look tough?”

Likewise, many more activities were discussed and learned in the most participatory module possible. We discussed what Patriarchy is, what Gender Equality means and spontaneously generated discussions after discussions.

The nuns then left for dinner and after an hour’s break came back to the evening session on “Rivers of Life”, where the nuns were asked to relax and think of the beginning of their journey in life and to think of all the good and the bad times that flowed with time and were asked to portray it in drawings. And then they were given one minute each to share it with everyone but that evening was filled with extreme emotions to bumpy laughter filling the whole training spot. We had tears of both sadness and happiness filling the emptiness within us as individuals and for the last we told them how each one of us are the strength to our own weaknesses and thinking of all these they can motivate themselves more in the future to move ahead never giving up.

## Day.3

4<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

### Sexual Harassment by Tenzin Choezin:



Followed by the Exercise training by Ms.Namdol, the training was then taken up by Ms. Choezin to continue the last day on Gender Sensitization and particularly on Sexual Harassment.

It is no wonder that the Tibetan Community has a very limited knowledge on Sexual Harassment and its consequences. At times, many sexual harassment cases had been internally solved, leaving the victim unsatisfied and more victimized by the society, which is all the more traumatic for the victims of Sexual harassment and the accused are always on the loose.

So, we explained what Sexual Harassment means, the types that falls under sexual harassment which can be filed for a case to the police. Then we discussed many circumstances we share in common to have been harassed at some point of time in life.



Then the groups were given topics of the “Types of Sexual Harassment” to read and present to the rest of the participants. The topics were as follow- Rape, Child Molestation, Eve-Teasing and Domestic Violence.

For the noon session, since it was the last day of Gender Sensitization we tried revising what we had learned since day one till today and then took Oral and written feed backs from the nuns.

The last day on Gender Sensitization was concluded with the Circle Dance to symbolize the learning of a new knowledge for all of us.

A participant said, “We have never known what Workshop meant and never have we experienced it by taking part in it because we never got such opportunities but now we understood what workshop meant. We learned so many things we had unconsciously known for so long. The trainer was very spontaneous and gentle therefore it made us easier to understand. The training language and every activity was fun and very new for us and we would like to request you to kindly provide such workshops to as many village nunneries as possible.”

## Day.4

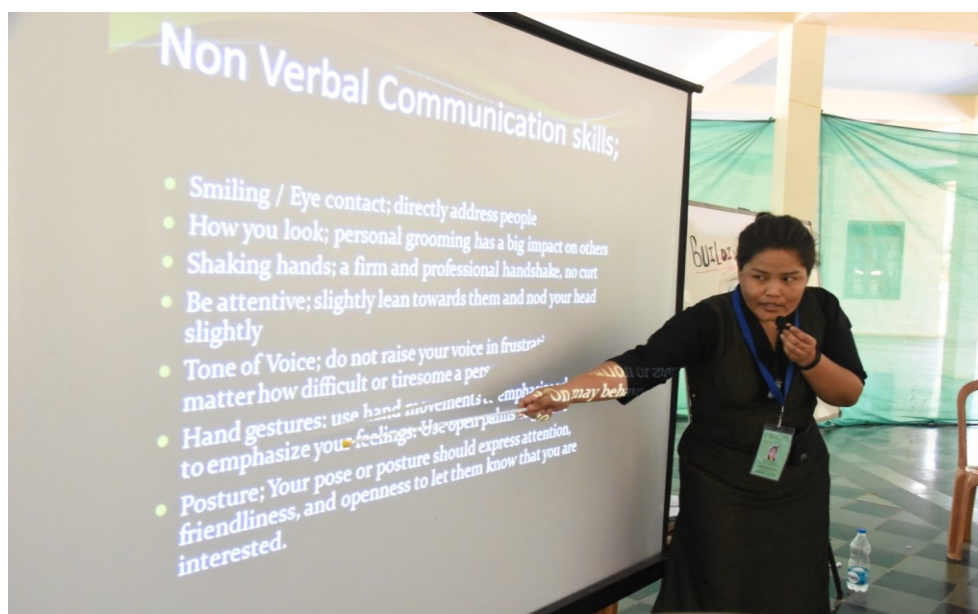
5<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

### Building Effective Communication Skills by Tsering Choezom:

Ms.Tsering Choezom, General Secretary of TWA led the day’s session on ‘Building Effective Communication Skills’ She started the session by asking why it is important to



learn how to communicate and the meaning and importance of communication was discussed for 10 minutes and then she directed all the nuns to take part in an activity of 'Finding the animal partner' which intensively highlighted the importance of communication and also showed the clear differences between animals and human beings; specifying the enhancement abilities to communicate. They were briefed on the definition of communication, as the most basic meaning itself indicates that 'it is the act of transferring information from one place to another and its' various forms of communication, for example, gesture, writing, speaking and touching. Disclosing the fact that communication is the primary factor which distinguishes human beings from animals and the ability to communicate 'well' distinguishes one individual from another.



Choezom then discussed the importance and uses of effective communication, an effective communication could help us understand a person/situation better, enables us to solve differences, build trust and respect and helps us connect with people without creating any spaces for misunderstanding. The training was very participatory in nature and included a lot of activity, presentation, games and group exercises.

Choezom led the Adzap, which helped the trainees understand that communication is a part of our lives and the ability to enhance it in a creative way is a skill and to be able to use it in the promotional field is an art.

To convince and impress another individual, one has to have a strong communicational ability that which not only attracts another person but convinces the other person to understand the idea or likewise.

The nuns were asked to prepare a group presentation advertising any items they have discussed internally and they were made to present it in groups to the rest of the participants. We tried reflecting the skills of communication through each presentation and they were made to use it as a platform to replicate creativity through communication.

The trainer instructed the nuns how to improvise one's communicational skills, with the key of listening skills. To learn to communicate, one has to learn to be an engaged listener by paying attention to non-verbal communication, keeping stress in check and most importantly by asserting yourself.

Therefore, the key to a good communication skill is always the listening part, until and unless an individual engages as a good listener, it is always going to hinder the whole understanding of a conversation thereby generating more misunderstanding which will later demean the whole meaning of an effective conveyance of message to one another.

Choezom rightly told the nuns, how an improper conveyance of a message by a sender to a receiver could result in a conflicting situation and how important it is to be an active listener to be a good communicator. And the ability to communicate well is a universal art.

The participants were actively involved and the session has given them a day's lesson on the importance of building effective communication skills through their daily endeavors.

## **Day.5**

**6<sup>th</sup> April, 2017**

### **Public Speaking Skills: Led by Tenzin Choezin:**



Although this day was not scheduled to be hosted, it was added after a strong requisition received from the nuns to take up a session on public speaking because it was their ultimate fear to be able to speak in the public. To overcome their fear, we led a day on very basic Public speaking skills and tips.

As per the norms of the workshop, we first tried recapitulating all the new things learned from Day.1 and then we asked the participants if there is anybody who does not fear public speaking and not a hand in the air, not even mine. Therefore, we discussed the fact that every single body in the whole wide world is nervous and fearful of public speaking, even the world leaders are fearful of their orations but if we ask for a medicinal cure to overcome public speaking skills, we do not seem to have one.

So we came to conclude that the best solution to overcome such nervousness is to practice, practice and practice. It would be innate abnormality to receive a weapon out of nowhere and then be commanded to go for a battle but if that individual is put to practice many times before being forwarded to a battle, the person will be more confident and readier. Therefore, we internally discussed that practice is the root to perfection, so we learned the bodily gestures and positions to beautify any sort of public speaking events. The more comfortable you are in your clothes; less distracted you will be about your discomfort. And finally, we learned how to organize a speech before we talk in the front, so we discussed about Introduction, Body and Conclusion.

The changes in these fields are very imaginative in nature, therefore we believe that its impact can only be determined in a long run but we wanted to show them how to grab a platform. Therefore, each groups were given topics and an appropriate time span to prepare themselves with points and to learn how to talk in the public and then they were given an opportunity to talk in the public.

To our amazement, they did far better than our expectations for we feared they would submit themselves into mute, the way they weren't even able to say their names in the public. Although you couldn't expertise right away in the field, we saw them attempting an expert public speaking ability and the way they used points to attract us and their positions and sense of humor, all added to the glamour to a first timer.

Many other activities were included in the one day's program, detailing of which could cover many more pages in the report so we briefed it as much as possible.

## Day.6&7

7<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

### Conflict Resolution by Karma Lekshey and Tenzin Yangkyi:



Mr.Karma Lekshey and Mrs.Yangkyi has spent days in advance to plan for the workshop so that there wouldn't be any setbacks during the workshop. The preparation has enabled them in strengthening and building confidence to lead a successful workshop.

A Brief introduction to the objectives of Tibetan Centre for Conflict Resolution for the nuns program:

- They vision to introduce the skills of Conflict Resolution to the nuns, who lives in the same institution and promote non-violent management of conflicts.
- They aim to empower the nuns to take up leadership roles and responsibilities in their nunnery and in the Tibetan community and to equip them with a deeper understanding of non-violent management of conflict and democratic leadership.
- To make the best use of conflict resolution tools and skills for bringing harmony in the nunnery.
- To create a friendly and safe workshop environment, where each individual will feel free to participate.
- To improve mutual understanding and support so to build a bond among them.
- To ensure the equality and impartiality among the participants by the trainers.
- To boost the confidence level of the participants to confront conflict in their daily life.
- To make the workshop practical and useful as well as knowledgeable.

The content of their two days program were based on their aims and objectives of the workshop. They planned to choose the topics related to conflicts that are generally exposed to every community and open on suggestions with contents received from the participants.

The contents are:

Day.1 -

- a) Conflict Understanding
- b) Active Listening
- c) Conflict Escalation
- d) Opening and blocking Language

Day.2-

- a) Non-violent communication
- b) Empathetic Listening
- c) Cooperation

According to their training module, every beginning of the day, they start with the recap and took feedbacks from them on the previous day's activities by questioning them if anything was difficult from yesterday, what was useful and what wasn't, what was interesting and why? They evaluated that with different method such as talking pen, go round method, voluntary method which will empower their interest in stand up and talk in front of groups. For many participants, the recap method proved to be very useful in reflecting the previous day's activities.

Between every interval of the session when there is a need for the groups to feel refreshed, they initiated different refreshment acts, which was enjoyed by them all and it also helped in bridging a comfortable space amongst them.

As per their experience, all the participants were very enthusiastic and interactive throughout the workshop and it has contributed a lot to the successful outcome of the workshop. They felt well accomplished as per their preparation for the workshop, for they believed to have created a joyful environment for learning where everybody has the space to share their individual's thoughts without nervousness or hesitance.

They also wish to congratulate and appreciate Ms. Tenzin Choezin for her professionalism and they believe she has efficiently empowered the shy nuns and made them more open in the days that followed without much hesitance. It has helped in making it easier for them to start their workshop straight away according to the programs as planned.

They feel that their training will have provided them an insightful understanding on seeking effective tools to seek apology and resolve some past conflicts to restore long lost relationships. They say that the workshop has contributed to their learning the strategies and the better understanding of a democratic decision making power and its cooperation. They were also taught to learn how to respect others point of view and share their own thoughts



without blaming others. These experiences were drawn from the Oral feedbacks from the participants themselves. And they are hopeful that these could be positively useful to everyone in their daily lives.

The Conflict Resolution as it concluded, all the nuns dispersed for dinner and then gathered to have a thorough instruction on the next day's outbound program. The teams were asked to decide what theme they will be planning to work on for the next day.

## Day.8

9<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

### Practical Outbound Program:



The eighth day of Buddhist Nuns Empowerment Program was the practical outbound training for the nuns. Since the four groups had decided their area of the project the evening before, we just had to give them a last minute instruction right after the breakfast and then the nuns were ready to fly.

This year, the four groups' chose- Old-aged Home, Orphanage Home, Home for physically handicapped people and on Environment Cleaning projects by LhakarSang, Family, Dolma and Dhundup group respectively.

The group has selected their team leader, Time keeper and an accountant, they were all asked to cooperatively discuss and decide a topic for social services to implement their practical outbound training.

Group Lhakarsang has decided to spend the day with the old-aged people from the old-aged home, helping them in cleaning, showering them and providing them a special lunch together. Family group has decided to go to the Orphanage Home to meet with them and talk to them with few educational kits and along the way, they have stuck charts requesting everyone to not litter everywhere and keep the environment healthy and hygiene. Group Dolma went to an Indian locality where an institute is looking after the wellbeing of physically challenged people and there they helped them in cleaning their classrooms and interacted with them and provided them with gifts and most importantly gave them the feeling of being wanted, not neglected.

For the last, Group Dolma went to a small institute run by Tibetans for physically challenged people who could be non-tibetans as well but since very few were present that moment, they provided them with health and hygiene kits and went to shop keepers selling metals and they made dustbins written Health project by their group, hosted by TWA. They kept the dustbins in the most littered road in the Tibetan community to create awareness on environment cleaning.

Upon coming back from the training, the four groups gave a small presentation on their project implementation. It was indeed very powerful to see the nuns taking decisions from grassroots level to budget planning and the success of project implementations as per their long plannings.

A participant said, “We have never been this nervous in life because we never had to take up such socially servicing responsibilities, therefore it was not only an experience for a life time but we learned to exhibit our leadership qualities and especially time management and monetary budgeting. We are more confident now.”- Tenzin Dazes

## Day.9

10<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

### Farewell:



The 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Buddhist Nuns Empowerment Program has come to an end after 9 full days of intensive trainings on various empowering sessions. On 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 2017 we wrapped up the program with the last recapitulation of the overall training and then the nuns were asked to provide us with Oral and Written feedback of the training. After lunch, we concluded the BNEP-2017 with a very warm and effective thank you speech from TWA's president and the farewell was graced by the Head of all the Administration of nunnery, Ven. Lobsang Youdon la. The afternoon session included certificate distribution, secret friend revelation and games until the special farewell dinner started which then followed a group pictures and farewell wishes.

As we have always believed in, "All is well that ends well", we are very positive that these 10 days of training organized by Tibetan Women's Association will have made a little or more difference in the lives of every participant in different ways, on different topics. We wish them all the very best in their future endeavors and shall always remember the beautiful feeling reciprocated during the training duration.



### **Conclusion:**

Tibetan Women's Association remains ever so thankful to our financial partner Science meets Dharma based in Switzerland, for supporting us financially and making TW's annual project and Nuns empowerment vision of TWA possible. We are also very thankful for all the 29 nuns who participated in the program, without their presence and participation, the 9<sup>th</sup> BNEP could have never been as successful as it became. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Authority and administrative of the Jangchub Choeling Nunnery for accepting our invitation and making our work very easy to implement with all the facilities provided from their side and also for giving the nuns opportunity to take part in it. For all the warm hospitality and helping hands, we thank all the working committee of Jangchub Choeling Nunnery, the staff nuns for the great assistance in the program in every possible ways and also Regional Tibetan Women's Association, Mundgod for the cooperation at times.

For the last, we are thankful to each and everyone connected with the 8<sup>th</sup> Buddhist Nuns Empowerment Program and for making this program a grand success.

TWA is looking forward to organize more such empowerment programs and lead the centrality of women's empowerment through various approaches by reaching out to as many Tibetan women and nuns. Prior to which, we will be thinking of a follow-up to the recent Nuns program as per the requisition from the nunnery.

.....THANK YOU.....