



Imagining Ourselves, a project by the International Museum of Women - Sadaf Siddique

The International Museum of Women (IMOW) is a global cultural and educational institution whose mission is to value the lives of women around the world. With the aim of helping to change attitudes and practices adverse to women's well being, the IMOW seeks to amplify the voices and contributions of women, explore contemporary gender issues and inspire action through history, art and cultural exchange. The International Museum of Women is the first institution of its kind to exhibit the global history of women.

IMOW is currently spear heading an exciting new project called *Imagining Ourselves, A Global Generation of Women* (www.imow.org). The project reaches out to a new generation of women – the one billion women in their twenties and thirties – answering the question, “What defines your generation?” Through an interactive online exhibition, a series of global gatherings and a new book, *Imagining Ourselves* is a platform for young women to create positive change in their lives, communities and the world.

Imagining Ourselves grew out of Paula Goldman's vision of a new generation of young women poised to contribute vital leadership to the world. The project was conceived and is being led by Paula Goldman, a Ph.D. candidate in Social Anthropology at Harvard University who hold's as Master's degree from the Woodrow Wilson School of International Affairs at Princeton University. Born in Singapore, and raised around the world, Ms. Goldman has been using popular media and art as a tool for social change and a way of building bridges between groups in conflict.

The project began in the fall of 2001, where during a casual conversation, Paula Goldman realized that she was able to recount dozens of stories of young women from all over the world who were making courageous moves in their lives and contributing vital leadership to their communities. Many had started their own nonprofit organizations or were quickly climbing the corporate ladder. Others had made exciting innovations in the art world or were charting new ground in their families or personal lives.

She realized that all of these stories were connected by a positive, empowered spirit of women that enables them to engage fully with the world and to pursue goals and lifestyles that may not have been possible several decades ago. She started small, gathering a few friends and composed a short call for submissions asking women to send in their artwork and writings. She then approached the IMOW and asked them to partner on the project. Forming an International advisory committee they translated the call for submissions into

multiple languages. The response was overwhelming. 3000 replies from around the globe, with 800 formal entries from 105 countries

IYPN and IMOW are working in collaboration to bring Young Indian professionals in the community to join in this global dialogue. In the last week of April 2006, we will host a discussion on “Women, Power & Money” at the Marathi Vishwa Community Center, NJ. We hope to work together to articulate women’s experiences in the corporate world, handling money and finances, balancing jobs and personal life. IMOW and IYPN will take on projects related to creating awareness around issues that impact women’s choices and beliefs.

Imagining Ourselves has the support of women leaders and notable participants from around the world including Olympic gold medal winners Oksana Baiul and Cathy Freeman; best-selling novelist Zadie Smith; author and attorney Karenni Gore-Schiff; Queen Rania of Jordan; and singer song writer Ani de Franco.

Imagining Ourselves will launch on International Women’s day, March 8, 2006 in six continents, in fourteen countries and in four languages. The project, began with an international call for artistic submissions, from young women to answer the question, “What defines your generation?” Heading the editorial team, Paula Goldman has spent the past two years compiling visual, electronic and written work from women worldwide. The results are a stunning compilation of photography, audio files, painting, collage, poetry and essays.

The project will feature a published anthology with an introduction by the world-renowned author, Isabel Allende; an online exhibit with multilingual, interactive options and online educational curricula targeted for high schools and universities. The project also includes global gatherings around the world [including the launch, community and on the ground events] featuring prominent women participants.

There are more than one billion women between the ages of twenty and forty located in 193 countries speaking six thousand languages. Women between the ages of twenty and forty living anywhere on the globe today, are part of the most educated, most well-traveled, most professionally empowered, most international generation of women ever to have existed on the planet.

However, globally women and girls still comprise 70 per cent of people living in poverty, problems such as human trafficking and domestic violence are as serious for women today as they have ever been, or perhaps more so. With the aim of promoting gender equality and empowering women, *Imagining Ourselves* hopes to create a platform that spotlights the extraordinary contributions of these young women to their families, communities, economies and societies and aims to unite young women through dialogue and ultimately inspire them to action.

Having introduced the vision of the project, allow me to introduce myself and talk about my experience with *Imagining Ourselves*. My name is Sadaf Siddique and I have a Masters in Mass Communications from Sophia Polytechnic, Bombay and am currently working at the IMOW. My work includes global outreach, editorial assistance and contributing to

discussion forums, resources for action, educational outreach and curricula available for educators.

As a trained media professional I have worked in both print and visual media. Most of my earlier work has focused on projects related to women. I hope to use the media to facilitate change in the inequitable conditions of women in India, especially within the Muslim community. I strongly believe that the media is the most useful and influential tool to empower people about their rights.

Growing up in India, I had to battle gender stereotypes, patriarchal values and parochial mindsets. Everything from choosing my college courses, to wanting to work was ground for battle with my family. My dreams of digging deep into investigative news stories were squashed by logistical concerns of getting back home before dark. I would ask for an inch of freedom and we would negotiate it down to a centimeter.

I am sure many Indian women face the same struggles. We do however, fight back. We learn to negotiate our spaces and become masters at juggling data reports, deadlines and dinner. For someone breaking out of the traditional mold and being the first working woman in my family, it has not been easy. What I lacked most of all was a knowledge that there were many other women facing the same dilemmas. While I knew such women must be out there, there was no way to connect through each other's experiences.

The Museum's hope for *Imagining Ourselves* is to create that space. It hopes to connect women in their twenties and thirties in every corner of the globe and seeks to unite and mobilize young women to make a difference, to increase the visibility of their leadership, and connect advocacy organizations with a wider public.

India is a key country for the *Imagining Ourselves* project. With the recent spotlight on India's economic growth and prosperity, it is important not to forget those who remain at the margins. By increasing women's participation in economic, social and cultural spheres, Indian women can serve as catalysts for their own empowerment.

Since the first call for submissions, the IMOW has selected approximately 300 entries from more than 3000 responses received from 105 countries. We invite you to contribute to this exciting project. For more information visit <http://www.imaginingourselves.org/>

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