

THE ROLE OF MEN IN THE INCREASING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

11th January 2013

A Call to Men- by Forum to Engage Men (FEM) for gender equality
Organised by Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) and SANGAT- South Asia

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR INVOLVING MEN

Members of Forum to Engage Men for gender equality (FEM) are deeply shocked and condemn the recent gang rape in a Delhi bus. However, we would also like to express our concern about how we address the issues of violence. Many of the measures being suggested in the media– increased police protection, clear bus windows, etc., while important, may only be addressing the symptoms when it is now imperative to address the disease – deep seated issues of gender inequalities and masculinities that allow these atrocities to happen. While we believe that swifter mechanisms of justice and better policing procedures are important, we do not subscribe to the notion that just having greater police presence will address an issue that relates to social attitudes towards women. That is say, a quantitative increase in the number of police personnel will not, if it is not accompanied by a different set of attitudes towards gender relations on the part of the police, address the root causes of the problem of sexual assault. We firmly believe that a mixture of short and long term measures is required. Short term measures might include inculcating a different set of social attitudes towards women and sexual assault among police personnel and the judiciary, practical assurances that by-standers who intervene in preventing situations of violence are not themselves implicated in police cases, and, quicker disposal of rape cases by the legal system. With respect to the long term measures – which we believe to be the most effective ways of lessening incidence of sexual assault- it is crucial that we address the ways in which we bring up our sons. For, this is at the root of men’s attitudes towards women and also at the heart of violence against women. Long term measures must include school-level education about gender equality, programmes that address the connection between violence and masculinity, and, those that problematise the notion that ‘rape is the worst thing that can happen to a woman’. For, the latter attitude is, typically, a masculine one that betrays complete lack of concern for the female victim and, implicitly, articulates issues of male honour where a man feels that he has not been able to ‘protect’ the women under his care. These are precisely the kinds of attitudes that are at the heart of gender inequality and violence against women, including sexual violence.

INTRODUCTION TO WORK WITH MEN

Over the years there has been a growing acknowledgement of the need to work with men for addressing violence against women and for promoting gender equality. This is important because otherwise the issue gets framed as a women’s issue and men’s culpability as a ‘gender’ (group) gets ignored and many men who personally may not use ‘violence’, get disassociated from this larger gendered social problem. A small but growing body of work has emerged around work with men on violence against women, women’s reproductive health and around HIV/AIDS. There is also a growing understanding that men’s relationship to power is not limited to gender (female-male) issues and needs to be situated within a more nuanced understanding of masculinities or men’s relationship and experience of power, privilege and subordination along different social axes and cultural domains. In India, the

work with men on gender issues has thus slowly drawn upon the lessons from the feminist movement as well as from the academic disciplines related to gender studies.

ONE BILLION RISING

Thousands of activists and women's groups' world over have struggled with every bit of their beings to put an end to all forms of violence against women and girls. However, the United Nations states that 1 in 3 women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. That is more than one billion women living on the planet today.

On February 14th, 2013 on V-Day's 15th Anniversary, they are inviting one billion women and those who love them to walk out, dance, rise up and demand an end to this violence and say that we refuse to stand by as more than a billion women experience violence.

OBR is a promise that we will rise up with millions of women and men around the world to say, "ENOUGH! The violence ends NOW." OBR is a global call to action. We will rise up and dance together in defiance of the injustices we and our mothers, sisters, partners, loved ones, and friends have suffered. OBR is a celebration. We will dance in streets, raise our voices, leave our offices, our homes, and our daily routines behind as we join in a powerful act of refusal to let the violence continue.

When the OBR India campaign was launched on 24th November 2012, at Jamia Milia Islamia, members of various organisations, networks and concerned individuals reiterated to stand up against violence. The OBR campaign signed by 160 countries worldwide, saw a launch in India where Dr. Abhijit Das representing the men's network FEM and MASVAW stated that men stand in unison with women and take a pledge to end violence this violence.

A CALL TO MEN AND THE NEED FOR THIS MEETING

Millions of Indian men are impacted by the hegemonic notions that men must express their power through aggressive and violent behavior. We must establish that it is not a "natural" inclination that makes men violent, but a flawed construction of masculinity that thrives due to the way society promotes patriarchy and its control over women. It is time for us, as men, to engage other men in this discussion, time for men to show that we can lead non-violent lives, and to stand up for women's right to live free from the fear of gender based discrimination.

Forum to Engage Men, along with Centre for Health and Social Justice are organising a meeting on 11th January 2013 to discuss ways to engage men in this struggle of gender equality. We call upon all concerned men and boys to come forward and reflect and question their own positions around the issue of violence and gender equality.

We would like to get in touch with men and boys from different sectors in Delhi and for this, would like to request you to nominate some men from your work area/ community whom we can invite for this meeting. Also, a list of any other men/ groups like various trade unions or universities would be highly appreciated. Please send us contact details of men whom you think are in a process of self evaluation. We would like to create a forum where they can talk, share, learn and discuss ways forward.

THE ORGANISERS

Forum to Engage Men

Forum to Engage Men (FEM) is a network of individuals and organisations working to get men from different Indian contexts involved in the fight for gender equality. The challenge ahead of us is vast, but

our past work shows that men can change and become socially accountable as caring partners and responsible citizens.

For more details, visit www.femindia.net

Centre for Health and Social Justice

The Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) is a national resource organization working on issues related to health, gender equality and social justice. An important component of its work has been engaging men and boys in combating violence and discrimination against women at both the personal and community levels. The Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) and its leadership have been working on issues related to men and gender equality for the last decade or more. Currently CHSJ is been involved in working with men and youth groups to take up and promote gender equality in UP, Maharastra, Madhya Pradesh and to change their own behavior towards women and encourage others to do so as well.

For more details, visit www.chsj.org

SANGAT- South Asia

The word "Sangat" in some South Asian languages, means a gathering or a community of like-minded people for a good and just cause. Sangat was created in April 1998 at a South Asian workshop of Gender Trainers, held at Bangladesh organised by the FAO-NGO South Asia Programme. In a way, it is the continuation of the FAO-NGO South Asia Programme which worked for 25 years and was coordinated by Kamla Bhasin during its entire lifetime. Presently Sangat is a project of Jagori, New Delhi. Sangat was born out of the realization that the space for transformatory gender work in South Asia was declining steadily. That the need to create a network of South Asian gender activists and trainers was both urgent and critical was strongly felt and articulated. The belief that understanding, peace and co-operation are essential for meaningful South Asian progress, prompted the formation of this regional alliance. In South Asia genuine development, democracy and peace are only possible if we develop a South Asian identity and perspective. Sangat's mandate has therefore been focused on developing and strengthening regional/cross border perspectives, programmes and cooperation through its activities and programmes.

For more details, visit www.sangatsouthasia.org