

Southern Region

The Southern Regional Consultation

There were 128 participants at this regional consultation held on 13-14 September at Palloti Centre in Madurai. All the southern region states - Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Pondicherry were represented.

Discussions during the inaugural session were spearheaded by a panel comprising Ashish Biswas, Senior Advisor, CHSJ, Dr G Palanithurai, Prof and Head of the Department of Political Science and Development Administration, Gandhi Gram Rural University, Dr A Shantha, Retd Prof, Department of Journalism, Madurai Kamaraj University, Prof S Raju, Former NSS Coordinator, Madurai Kamaraj University and Ms Vandana Mahajan, Gender Equality practitioner from Bangalore.

Several planning meetings had been held with all regional partners before the event and great care was taken to ensure the consultation process was inclusive. The participants at the conference were a mixed group of academicians, students, NGOs, consultants and members of the transgender community.

The two-day deliberations saw youth participants in particular deepen their interest in and understanding of the issue of masculinity. They also expressed the desire to act to bring about change.



Objectives:

- To provide an opportunity to academics, researchers, practitioners, activists of interrelated disciplines to share and learn from the experiences of each other.
- Create a safe space for discussion and dialogue on complex issues related to working with men for furthering work on human rights / social justice including partnerships with existing initiatives on gender and social justice based on a shared understanding.
- Identify new strategies and approaches to strengthen work with men and boys on gender equality

Day 1

The Southern Regional Consultation was organized by (FEM) Forum to Engage Men, India towards the 2nd Global Symposium on “Engaging Men and Boys” on 13th and 14th September 2014 at Pallotti Centre, Madurai. Students, Scholars and Faculties from academic institutions, experienced personnel from non-governmental organizations and grass-root experts from all Southern States of India and the Union Territory of Pondicherry participated in the event. The consultation was organized after a series of planning meetings with representatives from all the southern states. The programme schedule was designed based on the recommendations emerged from the planning sessions adhering to the objectives of Forum to Engage Men, India.

The event started with a brief welcome by Ms Tamilmoni from Ekta Resource Centre for women and was followed by self introduction of participants.

The inaugural session started with the introduction to the Global Symposium by Mr. Ashis Biswas, the representative from the Secretariat. Using a PPT he detailed about the Global process as well as the National process leading to the

2nd Global Symposium in November, 2014. He highlighted about the role of Regional Consultations that would sharpen and strengthen the focus for the Global Symposium.

He shared that Men Engage is an Alliance of more than 400 organisations that aims to engage men and boys for gender equality so that society becomes more caring and non-violent and gender relations become more harmonious, equitable and people lead fuller and richer lives. He also introduced the seven tracks of the Symposium.

Panel Discussion On The Need For Working With Men And Boys

The panel discussion was dedicated for knowledge building and thought provoking on the need for working with men and boys. This session was chaired by Ms Bimla Director of Ekta and the Focal Point of FEM in the southern region. While explaining the theme and mechanism of the Southern Regional Consultation, she informed that in the process of gender justice many challenges have to be overcome. Generally many fail to perceive that it is not only a problem of women but also of men. Recently, the number of suicides among men is increasing and the cause is given as familial reasons. Issues like unemployment, health and impotency are concerns and need to be addressed. She then introduced the professional expertise panel and invited them to share their views. Raju, Former NSS Coordinator of Madurai Kamaraj University spoke on the role of youth in combating violence against women. Prof. Raju shared his experience in roping men in the activities of mother and child care through an NGO he is associated with. He regrets that only a nominal percentage of men responded. Prof. Raju, Former NSS Coordinator of Madurai Kamaraj University spoke on the role of youth in combating violence against women. Prof. Raju shared his experience in roping men in the activities of mother and child care through an NGO he is associated with. He regrets that only a nominal percentage of men responded. He stressed that it is the time to

work with the youth and facilitate them to concentrate their energy not only in academic pursuance but also in other dimensions of life. He quoted Thirukkural and said that “one may be sharp in knowledge but if he does not possess the humane principle, he then cannot be considered a human being. In his concluding remarks, he appealed to the participants that the Earth is created for all and it is only man who creates changes in it and hence the men with specific focus on the youth have to be nurtured to save the society from further destruction.

Dr Shantha, Retd. Professor, Department of Journalism, Madurai Kamaraj University deliberated on the role of media in promoting gender equality. She observed that “socialization process started from the day of birth. Society treats birth of male baby as celebration and the case of female baby as an issue of concern and guilt. Now-a-days the socialization process is influenced by many other institutions but media is the most powerful one among them. She appreciated the writings of socially concerned journalists who touched the issues of widowhood and their role in propagating re-marriage. She expressed her concern over value erosion of media.

She stated that the media reinforces traditional notions of femininity, masculinity and culture. She dwelt on the negative impact of advertisement with examples. She also observed that the new arrival of social media like face book, twitter etc can bring in positive changes – all can play the role of communicator as well as receiver.

Dr G Palanithurai, Professor, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Tamil Nadu, deliberated on engendering governance. He observed that the approach to governance should not be from top to bottom, but it should be the reverse. He stated that the governance is not only theory, policies and budgets but should also be action oriented. He further explained that the concept of governance is not properly perceived by the elected member of legislative assemblies and

parliament as well as the bureaucracy. He also pointed out that there were many centres for women studies, but no initiatives from the centers for women studies to conduct gender audit and the operative power system. Dr Palanithurai stated that good governance does not stop with electing representatives. It is also capacitating them with

knowledge and power. It is also imperative to strengthen women's real participation in the entire process of governance. He concluded by highlighting on the concept of institutional democracy and behavioral democracy.

Ms Vandana Mahajan, a gender equality practitioner and an active member of FEM spoke on involving men and boys in the process of empowering women. She pointed out that it is time that men should volunteer and ask how they could contribute to this process. She appealed to the participants to take initiative for proper understanding on the co-relation among the concept of gender justice, peace and development. She further narrated the availability of models on a rainbow frame. For example, she explained the legal approach in controlling liquor consumption in the state of Kerala. She also suggested that by enabling men and boys to dilute their masculinities, they would better understand their role in preventing violence and supporting empowerment of women.

Constructions of masculinity that emerged from the discussions were the following:

Masculinity is a set of social and cultural norms, roles and responsibilities which is constructed through the socialization process- Participants from Andhra Pradesh

Masculinity means: Head of the family; decision maker; freedom; education and higher education; management; re-marriage; no identification- Authoritative, governing, decision making, independence of men and dependence of women – Participants from Tamil Nadu

The groups also presented the challenges of being a ‘masculine man’ and its impact on the emotional well being of men..How it leads to perpetration of violence against women with examples. The transgender participants explained how they are discriminated, isolated and discriminated when they do not conform to masculine norms.

In the late evening, there was a film screening on issues of transgender community followed by discussions.

Cultural program was organized in the evening. Participants sang songs on marginalization, gender equality, and women’s issues, they performed plays and danced.

Day - 2

On 13th September, the session started with the recap of the previous day. The participants were asked to write in a card “what touched me and what I learnt” and paste it in the white board. The sharing revealed that the participants were touched by the sharing in the previous sessions. There was increased curiosity about learning gender stereotypes and its impact. Many participants were deeply touched by the issue of trans-communities. There were statements about self changes too.

Following this Ms Bimla explained about the difference between Sameness and equality and asked the participants to critically reflect on the close give and take relationship between Masculinity and Patriarchy. This was followed by a session on “state wise sharing of initiatives taken to engage men and boys with challenges faced”.

SHARING FROM THE STATES ON THE INITIATIVES TAKEN TO ENGAGE MEN AND BOYS:

This session was chaired by Dr Sugantha from Lady Doak College. The groups presented the challenges of being a ‘masculine man’ and its impact on the emotional well being of men. How it leads to perpetration of violence against women with examples. The transgender participants shared how they are discriminated, isolated when they do not conform to dominant masculine norms.

Murali, Karnataka – He explained their activities involving youth especially college students. Approaches they follow are; “conducting workshops on Gender, Mass Orientation through IEC, organizing courses every year by including gender in the curriculum, besides conducting a course on feminist counseling for a period of one year. Also there is a course for a period of three months in which leaders of women Self Help Group and young girls are encouraged to participate.

Ms Shaonli, Karnataka – She narrated that the activities were initiated since 2007 involving men; especially the workers in factory settings. They also work with elected representatives of panchayats. She also explained their work to combat violence on women in sex work and transgender.

Mr Daniel, Andhra Pradesh – He shared his experience in promoting gender equality and human rights. The major activities undertaken in this respect are i) organizing training programmes to college student’s ii) production and screening of documentary films. He acknowledged the proactive support extended by Dr Kalpana Kannabiran towards strengthening the initiatives in Andhra Pradesh.

Mr Noble, Chennai – He narrated the details of his experience in working with youth and slum children. Through activities like orientation on life skills and on the job skill training about 3000 youth are so far covered and they are sensitized on the concept of women empowerment, he claimed.

Ms Geetha, Chennai – She narrated her experience of mainstreaming gender in to HIV/AIDS programs by a resource support organization covering the state. There was a research done on to find out about the stereotypes existed in the areas of gender and sexuality among adolescent population. Capacity building modules were created to address the issues of stereotypes relevant to gender and sexuality. Life skills were also included in the training module. She also explained how it was scaled up as a state level intervention.

Ms. Mary, Pondicherry – She narrated that through the NGO ‘Anbalaya’ they carry out activities among working women especially widows’, women headed and women in broken families. The Skill cum Resource Centre has emerged as an active place for empowering women through soft skill development. She pointed out that absence / unwillingness of men in the families of women member in JLG is the reason for failure. The significance of involving men in empowering women of JLG child above are witnessed among the target families, she also developed a curriculum for strengthening girls and to address gender issues for family members and the community at large.

Mr Santhosh, Kerala – He explained about his experiences of giving gender training to students in colleges, men and women in rural and urban communities. He also shared his experiences of using documentary films to initiate discussion on gender. Centre for Social Education and Sakhi are the pioneering institution in this respect. He recollected the deliberations of South Asian Seminar on Gender and Masculinity held in the year 2001 which emphasized on the realization and the influence of masculinity over gender.

Dr Kumaran, He explained how the notions of gender affect the milieu of the university. It leads to insecurities among women and men. He has addressed students on problems of having a “masculine image” how it makes men vulnerable.

How leaving masculine traits would build self esteem and healthy personality for men Ms Bimla shared briefly about Ekta's experiences of working with men and boys. She shared that in the past 15 years Ekta has been organizing workshops, seminars with various stake holders to facilitate and strengthen understanding about the need for working with men and boys to address Gender Based violence and promote equality and justice. In the year 2000 the White Ribbon Campaign was launched by Ekta in Tamil Nadu and since then learning events have been organized at various levels. A PPT was shown on its intervention in colleges called "Students for Change" that helps the young adults to understand the negative impact of violence on self, family and communities and to work towards promotion of gender equality. The focus is from violence to supportive role of men and boys.

DEVELOPING ACTION PLANS

Finally the participants were asked to develop action plans to strengthen initiatives in their respective states. The action plans were presented in the plenary. It was welcoming to see how participants came forward to work on their attitudes regarding gender stereotypes and masculinities. There were statements to address these issues within the family and work place. Many of them had decided to take the learning to their peers. There were statements saying there would be more attempts to mainstream gender in the programs they work with

Before the closing ceremony the participants were asked to give their feedback and many commented positively on the logistic arrangement, conducting of the events in a participatory way, distribution of resource materials, screening of documentary film, and the warmth shown by EKTA Team and Facilitators participants told.

Samples of feedback

“I was delighted to be part of the southern regional consultation of FEM. My conviction to work with men for gender justice and to find more meaningful strategies to achieve the same has become stronger! I am thinking what can be done at

Chennai level too! Once again many thanks to you and your adorable team” --
Geetha Narayanan

“It was a learning experience for all of us. The consultation generated plenty of debate on the way back to Bangalore. We are meeting this afternoon to discuss our doubts, questions, new understandings and how we can contribute in taking the engagement process further. I have spoken with a youth group (male group) called U help, and they were keen on the video screening. They said that they would send about 15 volunteers. I am also in touch with other youth organizations, however have not yet received any confirmation. I feel the need for a psychological perspective too in the engagement and will try to have a male gender trainer with a good understanding of psychology especially with regard to the male psyche during and after the screening. This would help lessen the ambiguity and help furthering our insights, I feel. Will keep you updated on any further developments.”-- Surendra

“It was heartening to find such a well attended and well planned programme where over 100 participants from all the areas of southern India participated. It was great that many of them dealt directly with youth or were teachers themselves. Thus the ripple effect would be all the greater. Talking to several participants, I realized that for many this was the first time they had encountered the concept of Masculinity. The interest to question self and to take the overall process forward was remarkably strong. It has been an impressive beginning. Let us now see how far the initiative goes” --. (Mr Ashish Biswas)