

Engaging Youth for the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence in Khorda and Kandhamal Districts, Odisha



In 2014, Trócaire began to support a pilot programme to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in Khorda and Kandhamal districts carried out by its partner NIRNAYA and two of NIRNAYA's partners, CARD and Jagruthi. Women experience high levels of gender based violence in Khorda and Kandhamal. Government statistics indicate that in Odisha State 55% of women perceive violence as a normal part of their marriage, 45% of women have been slapped, kicked and/or beaten by their husbands, 77% of men felt their masculinity threatened if their wives did not listen to them, and 75% of women who are regularly

beaten by their partners try to commit suicide¹. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, there has been a gradual increase in the number of rapes reported in India - from 24,923 in 2012 to 33,707 in 2013. The situation in Odisha State is particularly worrying, with five rape cases being reported every day, ranking Odisha at number six in terms of Indian States where the most rape cases were reported in 2014.

The Trócaire-supported pilot programme was called "Samaswar - Mahila Hinsa Mukti Abhiyaan", which means



▲ 50 change-makers of Daringbadi

¹ Odisha government White Papers from 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012. Published on State Portal - <http://www.orissa.gov.in>



▲ Change makers are raising questions after the village level show, Padanketa village

“A violence-free world for women” and was implemented over 18 months in 20 villages in the two targeted districts. The main focus of the pilot was to engage with youth - both male and female – to become change-makers and advocates for women’s right to live a life free from violence. Youth were chosen as the primary target group based on the theory that they represent one of the best agents to initiate a change towards a gender equitable society.

Through an innovative cultural model (theatre, folklore and music), gender training and focus group discussions, the programme sought to first help youth understand the gender dynamics operating in their homes, communities and villages, recognize different forms of gender based violence and to foster deep respect towards women.

The second part of the programme sought to encourage these youth to become change-makers and advocates in their own homes and communities. This pilot programme was seen as an urgent contribution to the struggle for women’s empowerment in Khorda and Kandhamal and took an approach that sought changes not only in and for women of all ages but also in youth and in the power relations between male and female youth in the targeted age category.

Strategy and approaches

Focus group discussions

Prior to initiating the programme, **focus group discussions** were held with different categories of people from the 20 targeted villages that included married men and women and

- ▼ Focus group discussion with married women
Laxmidharpur, Tangi block, Khorda District



unmarried girls and boys. This helped to get an understanding of the issues, concerns and the belief system of the community on various dimensions of gender and violence, as well as giving the programme a concrete direction by helping choose a specific focus issue within the range of issues discussed. As violence faced by young girls in public places came up as the most pressing issue, it was decided that it should be the core issue to be addressed by the intervention. In a society where perceptions towards women are still guided by patriarchal values, it was felt that unless a strong alternative force is created, change cannot be brought about in the existing situation. Therefore, youth between the ages 16-30 were chosen as a main target group. 120 youth - both 71 male and 49 female - were selected to be “change-makers” promoting gender equity.

Gender and theatre training for youth



▲ Gender training for change-makers at Daringbadi

The 120 youth selected to be the **change-makers** for the pilot took part in **5 + 15 days of intensive gender and theatre training**. The purpose of the training was to help the youth internalise the issue of gender-based violence, increase their awareness regarding its causes and consequences and to build their capacity to facilitate information and take the message of the programme forward. A **5-day gender training course** and a **15 day theatre training course with change-makers** took place in 2 phases in each district. The training programme was residential and was attended by around 30 change-makers in each phase, totalling 60 youth per district. A baseline study was done to understand their views on gender issues. The youth were trained not only on gender issues, but also how to use folklore and drama to promote the message of gender equity and non-violence directly in their communities. This helped them to understand the intricacies of gender dynamics and plan sketches that reflect the gender disparity and violence existent at family and community level. A theatre consultant became involved with the process from the initial planning and this helped him to internalise the issue and hence provide proper guidance to take the process forward.



Village theatre shows followed by open discussions and other events

Village shows were organised and carried out by the youth after the training programmes. The shows were devised keeping in mind local situations. Open discussions were held after each show where anyone from the audience could express their views and concerns on the issue. Many cases came up for discussion including trafficking, domestic violence, teasing, etc. and women shared their suffering and pain. People expressed their concerns at the growing crime rate of the country and felt that there was a need to reach out to the people in a big way to create awareness on the issue. Wall paintings were made in the project villages to spread the message on various dimensions of violence. District level events gave an opportunity to spread the messages of gender equity and non-violence to a wider audience and marked the culmination of the initiative. At these events, the participating youth shared their experiences of being a part of the programme and what they had learned from it.



▲ Change-makers performing a village show on gender discrimination at Kuhudi village

Positive Changes

The pilot was an attempt to initiate a process wherein people can understand the dynamics of gender and power that operates in society. The youth, who are the harbingers of change, were trained to take the process forward and important changes in youth and in their relationship with their parents came about as a result of the programme. These include:

Changed behaviour through better understanding of gender-based violence and power dynamics that exist in a patriarchal society:

Many male youth realised during the training courses that what they associate with masculinity is not genetic but rather a social construct. They became sensitised towards the work done by women (mother/sister/wife) at home, built up their confidence to raise their voice against violence happening at home or in their village and began to participate in domestic work at home. When asked about it, these changes were attributed to a new understanding that arose through the knowledge and ideas presented during the training.

“I am the only son of my parents and have one sister. My father is a fisherman and a heavy drinker. He used to abuse and beat my mother regularly. I hated when he did that but never had the courage to stop him. After attending the gender and theatre training, I was able to understand how much sacrifice my mother makes for us. She works throughout the day and gets nothing in return except bad behaviour. I felt very bad. One day when my father was abusing my mother, I told him that if he continues to do the same, he would have to leave the house. My father was stunned listening to me. He left the house and the next day when he returned he wasn’t drunk and neither did he beat my mother. My mother kept her hand on my head and said that now she need not worry as her son is a grown up boy. Since then I have seen great change within my father’s behaviour. He no more drinks and neither abuses nor beats my mother. Rather he tries to share and talk to my mother and also takes her view before taking any decision. The changes I have experienced is due to the new

▼ Focus group discussion with married men Partama Village, Daringbadi



ideas and thoughts I came across in the training.” - Gobinda Behera, 19 year old youth of Narharisahi, Tangi Block

Increased self-confidence of female change-makers to raise their voice against violence:

Many of the younger female change-makers have learnt how to raise their voice against violence and to call for respect of their rights to freedom and independence to visit friends and other places and to have their own social life.

“I always wanted to raise my voice against any form of injustice that I come across, but couldn't as I did not know what to say and how to say it. But after attending the training programmes on gender organised by Nirnaya, I learned how to raise my voice and how to reply to the queries of people to make them understand the issue. I got the courage because I enacted the role of a change-maker in one of the village shows. Now I am able to talk to people on the issue of gender-based violence. My father, who never left me alone, also appreciated the change and now he feels confident and encourages me to work as a change-maker and be a part of various programmes. I am thankful that this programme has given me the courage to speak and resist violence happening to women.” - Swarnalata Behera, Benagadia Sahi, Sorana, Chilika, 2nd year student of Kuhudi College.

Creating a safer environment in college as more students become aware of gender-based violence:

Some college-going change-makers have been taking the initiative to talk to other college students about their own experience of change processes and to discuss issues like gender based violence.

“The environment of Kuhudi College has changed after some students became change makers for the Samaswara programme. The college has allotted a classroom for a discussion every Sunday on issues of violence faced by women. The session is facilitated by CARD team members. Other students also participate in these discussions. We are happy to see that in the past few months we have not received any complaint of eve teasing (the harassment of young women) or abusive behaviour towards girls in our college. I feel that similar initiatives need to be taken at all colleges since this gives a forum for young men and women to share their views, concerns and issues.” - Mr. Susant Kumar Pattanaik, NSS Coordinator, Kuhudi College.

Changes in change-makers' attitude and behaviour

Many of the change-makers have learnt how to deal with their anger through constructive behaviour.

“We guys used to always fight with the girls from our village because they would occupy the pond side which had some bricks for sitting. We put those bricks there so that we could sit comfortably after bathing from that side. Out of anger one day we removed those bricks. It was just before attending the gender training programme. After the programme we felt bad about our attitude and behaviour and we all decided to cement that side of the pond where the girls found it suitable to use for bathing and washing purposes. We don't fight with the girls anymore and in fact we try to help them in whatever way we can. The training has made us sensitive. I am trying to help my mother with the housework because she is an agricultural labourer and gets home tired.” - Jeetandra Behara, Kenduapalli Village.

Greater participation by men in domestic work:

Many men have learned to value and appreciate the work that women carry out within the home and a number of them have begun to help out.

“My husband is a changed person now. He helps me in my domestic work and it feels good. He understands now the need to share all the work done at home and also child-rearing. Before he used to waste all his earnings on liquor but now he asks me if I need something for the house. He is also working with Jagruthi to create awareness on issues of violence against women. I think all people should be given such training. This will help to reduce violence against women.” - Jhimita Pradhan, Damplue village.

▼ Interaction with community members after the village show in Sarumah village, Daringbadi





▲ Voice of change , Godipatana - Gender based discrimination

Challenges

Finding enough youth to participate as change-makers:

Identifying 120 youths (aged 16-30) in the target villages were a big challenge for NIRNAYA and partner organisations, CARD and Jagruthi. The youth in villages are involved usually in education or some income generating activities. In the district of Khorda in many villages youths had moved away to earn their livelihood. To address this, CARD decided to involve local college students as change makers.

Retention of youth in the programme for a period of 8-10 months:

The targeted youth were expected to attend not only approx. 20 days of residential training but also a few days a

month presenting village shows as change-makers. They were also expected to be getting together on regular intervals to discuss various issues pertaining to violence in their areas. Many parents were reluctant to allow their sons, and especially their daughters, participate in the training for the full number of days because they feared it would hamper their studies. NIRNAYA and partner organizations discussed the issue with parents at length to persuade them to allow their sons and daughters to participate. In hindsight, expecting so much time from the youth, given they are at their most productive age, was probably too high an expectation.

Maintaining the vigour of the change-makers:

After getting the training, the change-makers were required to meet a few days every month to make performances at village level. But it became apparent quite quickly that

unless regular interaction was held with them, some of the change makers rapidly lost their interest in the programme. To address this, regular meetings, discussions and other such initiatives were undertaken to keep the change-makers active, vigilant and committed towards the programme.

Short time frame and stand-alone element of the pilot:

The objective of the pilot initiative was to train youth and develop them as change-makers who would help to bring change in the attitude and perception of the community towards gender issues, and owing to the limited time frame, the focus centred on gender and theatre training and village shows and discussions. However, to bring about lasting change, many supporting initiatives are needed at various levels and over a longer time frame, such as refresher training programmes, exposure visits, capacity-building on laws and legislations, redress mechanisms, support services, etc. Such initiatives would also have helped the targeted youth to continue being change-makers and play a proactive role over time, even after the pilot ended.

Conclusion

This Trócaire supported pilot programme lasted a mere 18 months but the results have been promising. It has been able to create a spark of new thinking in the 20 targeted villages. The youth who participated have been able to see changes in their own perception, behaviour, attitudes and thinking on gender issues. Village discussions have created fora where people are now ready to talk about issues like gender discrimination, gender based violence and other

related violence happening at home, in villages and in their region. Women and girls who have suffered violence have begun to break the silence and share their stories. The village shows attracted huge crowds and elicited an amazing response. People from nearby villages have become aware of these shows and started appealing to start similar initiatives in their areas. They felt that in a time when it has become difficult to ensure that youth do not take the wrong path in life, an initiative that has actually helped to create gender sensitivity and a sense of responsibility amongst the youth is worth appreciation. These results have encouraged NIRNAYA, CARD and Jagruthi wants to further replicate this programme further.

“Many programmes related to water, food schemes and agriculture etc. were held in our village, but the stage shows presented by the youth in our village has held everyone’s attention. It felt good to see youth taking the initiative to create awareness on issues of violence against women. People of nearby villages approach these youngsters to present similar shows in their villages as well. This is very unique and it is creating a lot of awareness on the issue in our village. The initiative needs to continue, as the time seems ripe for this. We have never seen such an overwhelming response for any of the other programmes in our village. In today’s society, it is difficult to even tell a youth when they have done something wrong but this initiative has changed them so much. It is incredible.” - Persuram Pradhan, Patharbandha Village (male, aged 45)

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