



The Influencer Meet

June 20th 2019, Edelweiss House

Our promise to you when you joined the Influencers family was to **inform** (share information with that could be used as tools for understanding and evangelising women's rights issues and solutions), **engage** you (in conversations and opportunities to co-learn), and in doing so curate participation avenues for you to positively **influence** the landscape of women's empowerment in India. The *Influencers* plenary at EDGE 2018 in October, the official launch of the initiative on January 31, 2019 and now, the second meeting of the Influencers, convened on June 20; have all been convened to meet this *inform-engage-influence* promise of the initiative.

The half-day meet covered the importance of re-scripting the theory of violence against women to a narrative positioning the women at the centre - *women* against violence. The group also discussed the power of target groups demanding and driving the social change they wish to see through the description of the *Right to Pee* movement. A review of the *Sankalp* Experiment demonstrated how all one needs to do to shift the needle in favour of the disempowered is: have the intent and willingness to do what they can, by using the resources in their control. EdelGive Foundation and the Influencers also discussed the progress made thus far, and the way forward of the initiative.

Eminent representatives of the Influencers who joined the meet included Zia Mody, Vrinda Rajgarhia, Svati Chakravarty Bhatkal, Satyajit Bhatkal, Samir Patil, Niranjana Rajadhyaksha, Dheeraj Vasishth, Atul Sharma and Vinay Raizada from Team Sankalp and Vidya Shah (CEO, EdelGive). Special invitees included Aparna Uppaluri from Ford Foundation and Mumtaz Shaikh from CORO India. Nagma Mulla, COO, EdelGive Foundation moderated the day's sessions and representatives from the EdelGive team were also present.

“Recap and Reflections” **- Vidya Shah, CEO, EdelGive Foundation**

The meeting opened on a reflecting note by EdelGive Foundation CEO, Vidya Shah, of women’s participation in the general elections, referring to it as a **momentous moment for women’s participation in the political processes**. The 2019 elections witnessed an equal female-voter turnout for men and women, and saw a historically high number of women standing for office (222) and being elected (78). This can be attributed to years of women’s rights related work – ranging from collectivisation through SHGs and advocacy for political representation.

It was discussed that concentrated resources and efforts are the needed to address vulnerabilities of women, however, **women’s rights is a neglected arena in Indian philanthropy** with only a miniscule proportion of funds channelized to for the work. Often most critical work around issues of women are supported by foreign institutions influencing the frameworks and defining the issue. This has led to **narrow conceptions of the problem** which only focuses on the problem without contextualising it within its culture and environment.

Ford Foundation and EdelGive Foundation are partners in a collaborative endeavour called the **Coalition for Women Empowerment** which is committed to drive more funding and visibility to support rights based work. In addition to financial investments into programmes the partnership aims to build knowledge capital and facilitate need-based, capacity building for NGOs.

It is crucial to build local networks and cross partnerships for enabling grassroots led rights work for realising women’s empowerment. One such attempt was a **two-day convening jointly facilitated by Ford Foundation and EdelGive** along with 15 grassroots partners of Coalition.

The partnership is about about peer-sharing and cross-exposure opportunities for NGOs from different geographies with similar work. **The NGOs get opportunities to explore and access** each other to learn from the experience of other grassroots partners’ work and bring back learnings they would be able to implement.

The strengths of funders like Ford who have a legacy of work accumulated over decades, especially frameworks, in the arena of violence against women; can complement EdelGive Foundation’s approach of coalescing diverse funding, intermediary and NGO partners for a common agenda. The meet was structured to encompass and lend voice to this diversity – **Ford’s perspective as women’s rights funding experts in the sector, CORO’s practitioner perspective and the embodiment of what *Influencers* stands for in Team Sankalp.**

“Flipping the narrative-Women against Violence”

- Aparna Uppaluri, Ford Foundation

The discussion commenced with an acknowledgment of **civil society being a shared space for every member to access active democratic participation**. However, funders have skewed the power dynamics, while **those who experience inequality should be in driving seat to influence the narrative to address the problem.**”

With collaboration embedded in its strategy and approach, EdelGive demonstrates humility in learning from its partners and generosity in sharing the learnings. The roles of philanthropy is changing and increasingly becoming unilateral in approach while addressing complex issues like inclusion, freedom from discrimination and violence cannot be confounded with linear strategies. **It requires multiple layers of strategies to counter continuums of violence against women.**

It was emphasised that there are hierarchies in prioritisation of rights – political, social, cultural and economic – which result in silo-isation of issues. The western liberal approach focused more on the act of violence without considering context of it. Therefore, the approaches are largely interventionist which serves to **address the ‘act’ of violence** and renders women as **‘invisible’**.

The development sector with all its stakeholders should focus on the **holistic development of the women rather than episodic solutions**. The ‘problem’ needs to be reframed broadening the conception of violence. Women need to take the centre stage in transformative process of ending violence. **The invisibilisation of women can possibly be overcome by re-naming the issue as Women against Violence and simultaneously reframing of the issue with internationality as approach considering continuums of violence.**

There are important frameworks that highlight the invisibilisation of women from public spaces and world of work. Recently, International Labour Organisation held the convention in Geneva to developed one such framework for **‘violence and harassment’ against women within the ‘workplace’** with the definitions of workplace being expanded to include home where domestic abuse occurs, as well as the streets where large numbers of women eke their livelihood. It offers a good reference to us considering we are one of the poorest performing countries in gender development.

“The Sankalp Experiment”

-Team Sankalp

Team Sankalp is a group of friends who are technology professionals, who informally came together in the aftermath of a spate of sexual violence incidents reported in India. **The intent was to look at how technology could prevent such incidents.** The idea slowly morphed to increasing the effectiveness of NGOs already working in the field. In association with EdelGive Foundation, they have been working with Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives (AALI), a feminist legal advocacy and resource group in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and Jan Sahas based in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, that focuses on advocacy and legal assistance to members of socially excluded communities for in developing mobile applications that will serve to automate the organisation’s current case data capture, recording and reporting processes.

Three members of Team Sankalp - Dheeraj Vasishth, Vinay Raizada and Atul Sharma – shared about what brought them together, the learning they amassed while working with AALI and Jan Sahas and their mission and plan of action, going forward. This group of Influencers acknowledged that as mechanical engineers they hadn’t been part of conversations on definitions of violence and structuring frameworks. The group leveraged

the intent and skills in their control to contribute towards addressing violence against women and girls. The team explained that **journey has been one of learning** evolving their understanding of the issues while they bring in their expertise to support the grassroots partners with technology. In addition to support operation in the field, such interventions generate data and evidence for informing wider environment and policy advocacy.

The **importance of data in informing interventions** was further emphasised in the context of obstetric violence at leads to maternal deaths but aren’t often recorded or attributed to as the cause of death. The [Dead Women Talking](#) report and initiative is a civil society initiative led by CommonHealth that aims to look at maternal mortality in India from a social determinants and human rights perspective. The initiative was an effort to bring attention to the circumstances in which women die during pregnancy, delivery and post-partum, and focus attention on health systems factors and social determinants. This process has led to the development of a social autopsy tool and a collaborative civil society effort across several states to document maternal deaths.

CORO India's Right to Pee Campaign - Mumtaz Shaikh, Program Manager, CORO

Mumtaz Shaikh, the chief architect of Right to Pee Campaign represented one the grassroots partners of the Coalition for Women Empowerment, Committee of Resource Organisations for Literacy (CORO).

The **Right to Pee campaign started as part of grassroots leadership programme in 2011** for enabling rights of working women in public spaces for accessing safe public toilets. The campaign emerged from the realisation that this was an area that was leading to several issues for women.

Through the Right to Pee campaign, many women came to protest marches and gatherings on account of no access to toilets or having to pay money to use public toilet. The leaders of the campaign and other women visited Government offices to call out the issues but were mocked by officials who made statements like *“NGOs make an issue out of anything”*, and questions like ***“Women do not step out, why do we need public toilets for them?”*** These interactions with duty bearers made the leaders of the campaign reflect on invisibilisation of women in the making of a city and neglecting their contribution in the local economy. **In the journey of campaign 33 grassroots organisations in Mumbai joined to fight for the cause.** They organised multiple actions and mobilized to get signatures from over 50,000 individuals showing solidarity for the cause. In the journey large number of women from working class including men joined the movement. The journey reflected the denial, ignorance and normalization of issues related to women in public spaces. In many people's view it was okay not having safe and dignified toilets with basic amenities in the public toilets for women!

Using Right to Information as tool of advocacy, leaders of the Campaign found that there were 2850 urinals for men and none for women in Mumbai. The Mumbai development plan had no provision for the same. Moreover, even if there was a toilet, the dignity of women was grossly violated. The facilities lacked in bare minimum and logical necessities of dustbin, soap, water, a functional lock. When these issues were made explicit to duty bearers, it was met with responses of frivolity, bias and ignorance around women's needs. Even today, with the *Swacch Bharat Abhiyaan* driving awareness and action around accessibility of toilets, its implementation towards meeting women's basic needs still indicates that its mission statement is not being completely met.

Since the campaign there has been a rise in the number of public toilets for women, to 3000 and men to 7000. The campaign was successful without using any funds or major resources other than people's immense level of efforts.

With the persistent efforts, innovative strategies and the use of media **the campaign's noteworthy achievement is to have engineered the inclusion of a completely new chapter as gender budget in Mumbai's development plan in the year 2014. This made possible the allocation of funds to build public toilets in the city.** To bring it to the desired effect, the leaders of the campaign refused accepting awards from the ministers and other reputed officers and utilized the power of media in their favour and emerged victorious in their tumultuous journey.

The campaign has envisioned for a model toilet having all amenities and a place for nursing which has recently been realised with one unit built in at Gateway of India. The leaders are hopeful of many such units in the city. The journey of Right to Pee campaign and its leaders continues with the movement now beginning to cover the issues of women's sanitation in the slum pockets of the city. Women here largely rely on community toilets which are either non-maintained or inadequate. These toilets also see women and children being the target of sexual violence and violations of women's basic dignity. The campaign has also begun taking root in other cities like Bengaluru.

I-Witness, a field visit to Ibtada-Alwar, Rajasthan

As EdelGive believes that experience and conversation can be the best avenues to witness and understand positive shifts in behaviour, grassroots leadership, sensitivity of communities to women and girl rights etc; it has conceived ***I-Witness*** – a series of field visits for the Influencers. The first of these visits is planned to **NGO partner Ibtada in Alwar (Rajasthan) on 26th and 27th July 2019.**

Conclusion

The core of the Influencers initiative is that every individual with the intent and capacity to effect change can leverage them to positively influence the context of violence, affecting women and girls. The Influencers meets are a testimony of such commitment where individuals from different walks of life, professional and personal strengths, financial and non-financial resources come together on a common platform to learn from each other. The platform is one of knowledge sharing, exploring collaboration and holding oneself and the group accountable to the mission for which the group has come together. EdelGive Foundation is committed to curate more such opportunities for peer-sharing, engagement and action in accordance with the Influencer journey each member undertakes.