

Best Practices in Engaging with Men and Boys in India

Samajdar Jodidar Programme, Maharashtra: Case Study

Samajdar Jodidar and Yuvagram



Introduction

The *Samajdar Jodidar* ('The Understanding Partner') project was implemented by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) and local partners in Maharashtra from 2010 - 2015, to address gender inequality especially in terms of poor socio-economic indicators and poor health outcomes of women, and to address domestic violence. CHSJ's long experience in working with men and boys to address violence against women led them to embark on this project. This included working with men to address women's subordinate status in society and issues that men face with respect to their own sexual and

reproductive health. The Samajdar Jodidar (SJ) project was implemented in three districts of Maharashtra, namely Beed, Pune and Solapur.

Maharashtra is the third largest state in India both in area and population; it has a literacy level of 82.91% according to the Census report of 2011 (above the national average of 74.04%); only 78% of children aged 6-17 attend school (75% girls as compared to 81% boys according to the 2011 Census); only 70% of women as compared to 88% of men aged 15-49 are literate (NFHS-3); its sex-ratio (946) surpasses the national average of 940 by a few points; son-preference exists rampantly; for the majority of households (70%), the private medical sector is the main source of health care (77% of urban households and 63% of rural households); women bear a disproportionate burden of contraception; and about half (48%) of women (especially poorer women) in Maharashtra are anaemic.¹

This is a case study of the SJ intervention in Beed district by Yuvagram Vikas Mandal. The methodology of preparing this case study included a) reviewing documents about the Samajdar Jodidar project and men and masculinities b) field visit including meetings with staff of Yuvagram, men in the community who were directly involved in the SJ project and other community members.

Yuvagram Vikas Mandal

Yuvagram Vikas Mandal was formed by HP Deshmukh, along with the local youth of village Varapgaon (Kaij Tehsil of Beed district) in 1985, in order to claim proper rehabilitation measures for the people, and particularly the Pardhi community displaced by the construction of a dam in their village. After leading a successful struggle, Yuvagram mobilised resources from the local voluntary organisations and supported the Pardhi community to improve their agricultural base through irrigation, and soil and water conservation measures. In the meantime they also expanded their work in other Pardhi hamlets and pressurised the government to implement poverty reduction programmes. Their association with the Pardhi community thus became long term, and Yuvagram initiated programmes for agriculture development, women's empowerment, strengthening village governance, income generation and so on. Now Yuvagram implements several socio-economic development programmes with INGOs, and state and central governments. Yuvagram works in three districts of Maharashtra on Integrated Watershed Development including running a Livelihood Resource Agency. They run a home for orphans, which they call a Destitute Girls' Home, a Child Labour Special Training Programme and a programme for equine welfare, where they also engage in advocacy for legislation for animal rights.

"We were a purely activist organisation from 1985 to 2000," said HP Deshmukh, the Executive Secretary of the organisation. "After that, we decided to consolidate our work and also work on different development programmes." Yuvagram works with Pardhis, Dalits and other deprived communities. However, its leadership and staff are predominantly upper-caste Marathas. The Marathas are politically and economically powerful. The Maratha caste is known for its rigid adherence to caste and gender based 'honour' which weighs heavily against women. The SJ project was a breakthrough for Yuvagram to strategically leverage its Maratha identity for working with Maratha men and to make them gender-just and egalitarian.

The SJ project was implemented in Beed district in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. It is a highly drought-prone district. It is one of India's poorest districts and provides a large number (4 lakh) of labourers (sugarcane cutters) to the sugar industry. The literacy rate is 73.53%; the sex ratio is low (912), while the child sex ratio (0-6) is even lower at 801 girls per 1000 boys.

¹ *MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE CHSJ PROJECT ON ENHANCING MALE PARTICIPATION FOR IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY IN MAHARASHTRA (The Samajdar Jodidar project) by Manisha Gupte and David Kadam*

For the SJ project, Yuvagram selected a majority of their animators (community peer leaders), as well as both its facilitators, from the Maratha community who would be easily able to identify with the rest of the Marathas. They contacted the panchayat and asked for men who were engaged in community activities or social work. Two or three people from each village were suggested by the panchayat. More than seventy five people were interviewed. Twenty five animators were initially selected from this group.

Each animator was expected to work in his own village and 25 villages in the jurisdiction of two Primary Health Centres (PHCs) were selected before the selection of the animators. As the project progressed, the number of villages and animators were finally limited to twenty. Of the 20 animators, 17 were Marathas.

Moving ahead with Samajdar Jodidar ²

By involving local rural young men, the SJ project wanted to bring about changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour of men and boys on issues related to gender equality and violence against women. The project wanted to reduce gender discriminatory behaviours and norms at the family and community level, especially in parenting, partner responsibilities, intimate partner abuse, increased involvement of men in women's reproductive health-seeking behaviour and utilisation of public health facilities under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). The utilisation of public health services was to be achieved through increased dialogue with local health care providers. The **assumptions** underpinning the SJ project were based on the belief that social change is possible, in spite of the unequal gender relations in contemporary society. The **hypotheses** held by the SJ project were that there are always some men in the community who do not agree to violent patriarchal norms; that participatory training allows such men to examine their own beliefs and behaviour and to commit to personal change and social action; some mentoring support enables such men to become community activists for gender equality and emerge as alternative role models; that men's groups are needed for men to reflect on their own behaviour and for community-based action; that community education and campaigns using interactive participatory media can be a platform for action for men's groups, and for transformation of existing social norms; and finally, that social transformation needs the support of a new range of services, including interaction with government functionaries at the local level.

The **objectives** of the SJ project were

- to reduce gender discriminatory behaviour at the family level related to parenting, partner responsibilities and decision making.
- to improve knowledge, attitude and behaviour of men and boys on issues related to gender equality and violence against women in selected communities in Maharashtra;
- to increase number of women who experience the right to decision making.
- to increase male participation in reproductive health issues.
- to decrease domestic violence against women.

The project used **five key strategies** with all its partners, including Yuvagram for successful implementation. These were:

² Much of the information in this section is from *MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE CHSJ PROJECT ON ENHANCING MALE PARTICIPATION FOR IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY IN MAHARASHTRA (The Samajdar Jodidar project)* by Manisha Gupte and David Kadam

1. Community mobilisation: Each village was to form two groups of men and boys, one of unmarried young men and the second of married men. Each village would have a role model /leader called the **Animator** who would be trained on issues such as gender, human rights, masculinity, sexuality and reproductive health. The animators were expected to become role models and community educators. In their lives and everyday behaviour, they would demonstrate how they were changing their behaviour and questioning and challenging prevalent gender norms. It was expected that the animators would help to remove the silence around domestic violence (DV) and violence against women (VAW), mobilise group formations, become peer counsellors on reproductive health, generate demand for RH services, and finally to bring in new social norms based on gender equality. The active mobilisation of the community would be to enhance male participation towards the prevention of violence against women. Animators were engaged in conducting sessions with the community level groups; interacting with the health system and its functionaries, and with local institutions of governance. They were responsible for highlighting the importance of men as responsible partners in sexual and reproductive health matters. Animators were responsible for sustaining local community mobilisation by maintaining regular contact in the form of monthly village meetings, developing a shared understanding on gender issues and by supporting group members for taking action on challenging stereotypical gender roles.

Each **Facilitator** (Yuvagram had women as facilitators) was responsible for overseeing the work of 10 villages: supervising the animators and the community action plan, mobilising communities and holding regular meetings of the animators. Facilitators were responsible for networking with external institutions and functionaries, advocacy with village level institutions, and documenting field experiences or case studies of resistance and change. Since the facilitators were 'external' to the village, dependence upon them would be gradually reduced. Once the facilitators had conducted community education and awareness with men and youth according to the curriculum and methodology developed for the project, this intensive phase of the project would be expected to evolve into a 'follow-up' phase, where there would be minimal contact with the facilitator and the focus would be on locally initiated community action.

2. Community Education and Awareness Campaigns: Village-based groups were expected to carry out issue based campaigns (such as the 16 days of activism against gender based violence) every year. These activities were aimed to educate the community to create pressure to demand justice and collectively act upon incidents of discrimination and violence. Communication materials were prepared to create social awareness about "Men as Responsible Partners for Gender Equality", for enhancing the understanding of the animators as well as for effective community education and awareness raising.
3. Leadership in Community Action: The animators would provide leadership to village-based men's groups to plan and implement community action around gender equality and human rights.
4. Linkage with Service providers: Increased utilisation of health services (through the NRHM) and better contacts and referrals under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 was an important aspect of the SJ project. Therefore, linkages with service providers was considered an important strategy

5. Mentorship approach: Outstation experts were expected to provide mentorship and extend support as friends, philosophers and guides on the vision of the project. This strategy was expected to increase the capacity of animators and facilitators as well as that of the partner organisation.

Preparing for change

CHSJ conducted **baseline surveys (quantitative as well as qualitative)**³ prior to the interventions in order to assess men and women's perceptions regarding gender (beliefs, roles, behaviour, mobility, public-private divide), masculinity, sexuality, reproduction, contraceptive usage and so on. The key findings of the quantitative survey revealed that

- more women were uneducated than men; 8% of males and 15% of females had had no formal schooling
- the use of temporary contraception among male and female respondents was very low. Only 2% of couples (from the male survey) and 1.8% (from the female survey) used temporary contraceptives before the birth of their first child.
- there was not a single case of vasectomy among the entire sample
- men played a marginal role in parenting or in performing domestic chores
- women were not allowed to voice their opinion
- gender discrimination existed in education, gender roles related to work, avoiding pregnancy or participation in local governance
- a large proportion of study sample (including women) believed that women need to be beaten under many circumstances
- physical violence was largely identified as the only form of violence
- a large section of respondents had never heard about laws related to domestic violence/violence against women

Similarly, the key findings of the qualitative survey revealed that

- women's contribution in public life in the village was extremely marginal
- women did not realise the double burden of work inside home and outside- (agricultural), they considered this as being normal for themselves
- good women were considered those who conformed to all gender roles, respect their husbands and in-law, and took good care of family and children
- education of children was considered to be a woman's responsibility
- women faced restrictions related to their mobility, work, education and choices regarding marriage and reproduction
- women were allowed to be mobile only after reaching seniority of age (grandmothers who had high-school going grandchildren and above), but not younger women
- a woman who stood up against oppression was considered a bad woman.
- women with heavier voice, strongly built, independent ones, and those participating in public life were termed as '*purushi bai*' (manly women)
- men were the key decision makers in the family: they took all major decisions related to the finances, agriculture and property related matters - women were consulted sometimes but their opinion was not necessarily considered while making final decisions

³ **MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE CHSJ PROJECT ON ENHANCING MALE PARTICIPATION FOR IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY IN MAHARASHTRA (The *Samajdar Jodidar* project) by Manisha Gupte and David Kadam**

- women were consulted when making decisions related to child's education or health considering that they were the ones who are expected to take care of children
- women were involved in agricultural work but not involved in decision related to type of cropping and marketing of agricultural products
- knowledge of men regarding women's reproductive health was very poor; they only knew about menstruation and antenatal care (ANC)
- there was a mixed level of satisfaction rating regarding public services and roles of service providers such as the anganwadi worker (AWW), ASHA, auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), male multipurpose workers (MPW)
- women also appreciated the idea of having a male health worker (similar to the ASHA), as they saw the importance of the ASHA for themselves.

The baseline survey helped the **initiation and induction phase** in which partners were oriented on the project (September 2010), a mentor was identified for each of the SJ project areas including Yuvagram and they were appraised about their role *vis-a-vis* the partner organisation they were designated to. The initial visits and inputs by the mentor deepened the curiosity of the animators as well as their interest, awareness and sensitivity about gender relations.

Training was an important part of the SJ programme and over the years, animators and facilitators were given training in several rounds using resource material and curriculum prepared for the project. They received training on issues such as gender, masculinity, violence and health, sexuality, reproductive health, and men's role in women's reproductive health.

A **gender profile** of the project villages was also prepared.

Community level group formation took off with groups of married men and unmarried men formed in the 20 villages where Yuvagram decided to initiate discussions on different issues related to gender based discrimination and violence. Each village had one group of married men and another group of unmarried men – so 40 groups of men came together. The understanding was that unmarried men and married men would have different issues to discuss. Also, younger men, especially those who were not married, felt awkward to discuss issues related to sexuality, reproductive health and contraception with older men in the same group, some of whom were their fathers or uncles.



Community interventions and campaigns were soon initiated on themes focusing on gender-based discrimination, dowry system, girls' education, violence against women (VAW) and sex selective abortions. Innovative activities were undertaken during the campaigns that were part of the global 16 days of activism against VAW. Six posters on the declining sex ratio, an activity book for children formed the campaign material; and booklets on the concept and approach of the project and on communication skills, a flip book on gender and discrimination, a game on men and masculinity and a poster exhibition on reproductive health were created as communication material. These interventions resulted in creating an atmosphere in which people started approaching animators and amongst themselves started discussing the issues raised during campaigns.

Gains of the Programme

HP Deshmukh said that the organisation had worked largely with women from 1985 to 2005 on HIV/AIDS, building women's self help groups (SHGs) and women's livelihoods. While they noticed changes in women's lives, they also felt that there weren't as many changes that there should have been. Also, it was disturbing to see that men resisted or blocked changes that women were bringing in their own lives and in society. Therefore, in Yuvagram they were thinking about how to make men active participants in bringing about gender equality and the SJ project provided that opportunity.

The animators explained that they learnt about gender and gender issues because of the programme. "Male supremacy is so entrenched amongst the Maratha caste. I realised that my father expected my

mother to wait on him hand and foot. He would not even pick up his own *rotis* and put them on his plate. He had to be served!” said one animator.

They added that the Maratha community had a strong sense of male entitlement. Women were in *purdah* and experienced many restrictions. Women were restricted and oppressed and the prevalent view was that they were there to serve men.

“The idea of the strong man is entrenched within Marathas”, said Deshmukh. “The man is the provider and protector.” He pointed out that there have been huge numbers of male farmers committing suicide in Maharashtra and of them, a large percentage, approximately 80 %, are Marathas. “Men have to redefine themselves for their own good,” he concluded. The conceptualisation of gender in SJ is largely within the binary of men and women.

The animators identified certain important changes that were a consequence of the SJ programme:

Within men and family: The project Samajdar Jodidar sought to create an understanding male partner in a heterosexual marital relationship. There is, therefore, a valorisation of the marital bond. The animators talked about reflecting on their own behaviour. One man talked about how he stopped being verbally abusive towards his wife. Of course, he also said that one always has to be careful because it is easy to slip back into abusive ways. Another man said that he had stopped beating his wife and children.



The animators said that they had started sharing the housework as part of the SJ project and that it was now integrated into their daily routine and family life. They said that it was not just animators but members of the men's group too, who had started doing a share of the housework and thus challenging the patriarchal **gender division of labour**. Men were now sweeping their homes, fetching water and fuel wood, getting their children dressed, taking them for immunisation and taking them to school. Many reported greater friendliness and closeness with their wives. They were happy that they were no longer distant and formidable figures in their children's lives. In our meetings in Lakha and Ganji, we met members of men's groups who said that they now did their share of the housework. They also said that there was greater happiness in their families and the texture of family life had changed for the better.

"It was not just about housework," said Sandipan Ghatge, who worked as an animator in the programme. Ghatge was older than most of the animators, who were largely in their 30s. He explained that he ran a grocery store but whenever he had to be away for any other work – be it to do with the shop, domestic responsibilities or anything else – he had to close his shop. He said that it was only when the discussion around housework began that he thought he and his wife could share the responsibility of running the shop. "My wife runs the shop if I am not available," he announced proudly. "This has been good for business and also broken deeply held notions about men's and women's work that each of us has," he added.

Men said that their knowledge of both men and women's **sexual and reproductive health** had increased. They were able to talk more freely with their wives about such matters including use of contraceptives. The animators explained that a set of eight books that had been used during trainings and in the course of the programme were useful in learning about bodies of men and women and other matters related to sexual and reproductive health. Many men reported using condoms. The animators also said that more men were using condoms during sex with their wives. In a change from norms of son-preference, there were reports of partners deciding that the wife would undergo tubectomy after the birth of two or more daughters. Little headway could be made however in husbands taking responsibility for undergoing vasectomies, which remained a challenge in the project.

Men had also begun to participate in childbirth. Couples had discussed doing away with the practice of the wife going to her natal home for childbirth, which automatically distanced the husband from the process. Husbands had begun to accompany their wives for ante natal and post natal check ups and also looking after their wives. Some men apparently asked to be present during childbirth.



In the community: Men began to share housework and look after children and provided examples within their communities of how social norms and established ways of life can be transformed. This led to discussions on change and many men resolved to change the title deeds of their homes to include the name of their wife along with their own name. This would make the married women of the community joint owners of their marital homes. In the SJ villages of Yuvagram, many men had done this 'joint ownership'. Yuvagram reported that in certain villages it had been accomplished for all households. Efforts by women's groups had led to the Government Resolution 1094/3625/10-08-1994⁴ in Maharashtra, declaring that every married woman has the right to an equal share in her husband's property. The SJ programme was able to implement this government order.

In this connection, it is important to understand that significant changes have also become possible because of government policy. Since many state benefits now come directly to an individual's bank account, many women have opened bank accounts. Their families have not resisted because they see that it is linked to benefits. The families, especially the men, see this as a positive sign, where the state is delivering on promises made to women. Women are also getting over their fear of different institutional spaces.

4

<http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/bestpractices/Ghar%20Doghaanche%20Abhiyan%20Joint%20ownership%20of%20housing%20by%20husband%20and%20wife%20in%20Maharashtra.pdf>

Men reported that discrimination between girls and boys had stopped in matters like food and education. There were examples cited of girls who had left their villages and gone to study elsewhere – girls had gone to Beed or even as far as Pune. Some had gone to study science or engineering.

In Lakha, people had demanded a bus to take girls to school because the high school was some distance away. The government introduced a bus service and girls used it to go to school. This prevented dropouts because of distance. The idea of girls finishing their schooling has now caught on. So, although the government withdrew the bus service, families are now spending money on 'tomtom' (small three-wheel vehicle) fares for girls to go to school.

Three girls from the village of Kumbefal, studying in Class X, were to be married off. The men's group staved off the marriages of all the three girls. The three of them carried on with their schooling and went to university too, and did not marry till they had completed their undergraduate degrees, the animator said.

Two years after the end of the SJ project, men say that they are committed to the idea of gender equality. Their opposition to underage marriage (below 18 years for girls; below 21 for boys / men) is one of the proofs of such commitment. Men, who had been animators or members of the group, keep close watch on weddings in their villages and resist marriages where the bride and / or groom are underage.

Animators reported an **end to dowry** in many places. Members of men's groups also said that instances of marriages without dowry were going down. An animator narrated that he convinced his family not to ask for dowry when they were negotiating his brother's marriage. He explained that it was a tough idea to carry forward because many people, within their extended family and in the community, assumed that the groom's family was not asking for dowry because the groom had some 'defect'.

The animators and the members of the group said that instances of **husbands beating wives** had gone down. They based their assessment on a) many men had given up drinking b) they know what is going on in their villages c) women have not complained.

An animator narrated a story of how he stood by a woman when she was being beaten by her husband. The man was beating his wife in the street but no onlooker was intervening. The animator decided to ask the man to stop. Soon after this, the couple started living apart. The woman also went to court. She wanted a divorce. However, her husband told her that she would not be able to get a single person to testify on her behalf. The animator agreed to be a witness for the woman. The husband was quite amazed to learn that the animator would bear witness against him. He apologised to his wife and the wife decided not to go ahead with the divorce and the two are together now.

An appreciation of sexual and reproductive health issues had led to **erosion of son preference**. The number of **sex selective abortions (SSA)** had also **decreased**, reported the animators and villagers. The members of men's groups said that because of the SJ programme, people in the community were more vigilant against SSA. ASHA workers and other health personnel too became aware of the provisions of the PCPNDT Act and thus opportunities to abort female foetuses went down.

The animators said that they had used project materials that were very useful. There were posters with strong messages like 'break your silence against violence against women', 'don't blame clothes for street harassment' and 'men are responsible for sexual harassment'. These posters made the animators and group members challenge their deeply ingrained ideas. They were also useful aids for initiating discussions. A poster saying 'my mother is the head of the family' made them think deeply about patriarchal values and how easily we say they are 'natural'.

In some places, the head of the local government structure (panchayat), namely, the sarpanch is a woman. Yet, meetings of the gram sabha, which is the general body of all adult villagers, were hardly attended by women. The SJ project made an effort to encourage **women to attend gram sabha** meetings.

Maintaining the Gains

The animators admit that there have been changes in the behaviour of several men. They feel that the SJ project was able to make identifiable gains because there were some specific milestones identified. They point out that a powerful beginning was made in the communities where they were working. They are sustaining the gains through a Sadhan Kendra or resource centre that reaches out to 10 villages. Training support is provided to the villages by Yuvagram, CORO and CHSJ. They have prepared a play that raises issues relevant to gender equality and this play is performed in different locations during festivals and other local celebrations so that discussions that were initiated in communities during the SJ project are kept alive.

The SJ project had an emphasis on collective learning. Other than the fortnightly group meetings in the community where Yuvagram worked, there was a training programme for animators every three months. The regular interactions with the Mentor were also very enriching. The animators felt supported by the Mentor and feel that their analytical abilities improved. Also, every year, there was a Conference of all the animators in the programme – from all five organisations. The animators say that although the groups no longer meet on a regular basis the group members often discuss political or social issues with each other when they meet informally in twos and threes.

As has been pointed out in an earlier section, group members are clear about the positive outcomes of the project, for example, acceptance of the idea of marriage without dowry, ensuring that girls complete their schooling and are encouraged to study beyond the school level, erosion in son preference, men sharing the housework. They are vigilant about stopping underage marriages and have community meetings when it is necessary to stop such occurrences.

Conclusion

The rationale for working with men for gender equality is that a) men have to understand the nature and manifestations of patriarchy b) they have to examine their own male privilege c) men have to become effective agents and allies in creating a gender equal world. It is important to appreciate the gains made by Samajdar Jodidar in changing social norms and male behaviour. It is heartening to see that many of those who were part of this programme are trying to consolidate the gains from this programme. Active collaboration on programmes with women's groups and others to promote gender equality will undoubtedly further the good beginnings that have been made.

Written by Anchita Ghatak

Published by: Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ)

Year of Publication: 2017

Layout and Design: CHSJ Creative Communication

Financial Support: Sonke Gender Justice

CHSJ 2017, *All Rights Reserved*