

ANNUAL REPORT 2003 - 2004

Introduction

STEPS Women's Development Organisation is a registered society working for the self respect and dignity of Women. STEPS takes up the issues of women with respect to domestic violence, dowry harassment, sexual harassment, etc. Efforts of STEPS for the empowerment of Women in general and Muslim Women in particular during last year have provided a very good experience to us. During the last 13 years of its development work have taken up most challenging and risky issues for which STEPS is known for.

Objectives of the Organisation

- To Take up issues related to violence against women such as marital dispute, desertion, dowry harassment, sexual abuse, cheating, physical and psychological torture and help the victimised women to find alternatives or solutions.**
- To provide a space for the women in need, and support them in their crisis period through the short stay home.**
- To provide free legal aid and counseling to the people in need.**
- To conduct women's awareness programmes through campaigns, public meetings, seminars, workshops, poster exhibitions etc.**
- To take up local issues of the people like road facilities, Balwadis, distribution of ration cards, panchayat television, land pattas, drainage, light, transport etc and make the village women organised to get such things done.**
- To sensitize the school children and the college students on the need for gender justice.**
- To be a part of district, state and national level networks and be a part of lobbying and advocacy for gender justice.**
- To empowering the status of Muslim women in social and economic spheres**

Major Focus Issues of STEPS :

Our special focus is on raising voice consistently against atrocities on women especially Muslim Women.

- a. Issues related to violence against women. (Marital, Dowry, Sexual, Harassment, Destitute women, child rape & Domestic violence).**
- b. Free legal aid to victimised, socially neglected and economically poor women.**
- c. Provide homage for destitute women.**
- d. Women's awareness campaigns on women's status, women development and other women's related issues.**
- e. Establish functional co-ordination among the NGOs who are working for women.**
- f. Fulfilling basic needs of rural people.**
- g. Health awareness programme regarding aids, family planning, nutrition etc.**

Highlights of STEPS Activities :

STEPS activities for the year April 2003 to March 2004 can be broadly categorised as follows :

- A. Addressing the issues of Women against violence**
- B. Empowerment of Muslim Women**
- C. Awareness Creation & Capacity building of Women in general**
- D. Economic empowerment Programme**
- E. Advocacy and Lobbying with other agencies**
- F. Network Activities**
- G. New Initiatives**

A. Addressing the issues of Women against violence

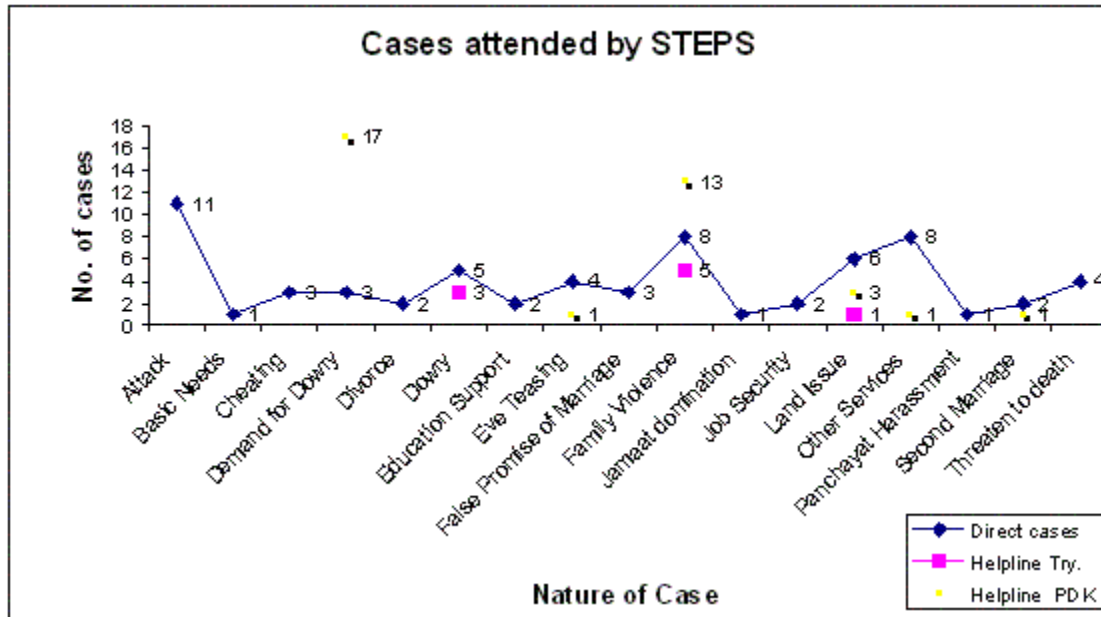
During the year April 2003 to March 2004, STEPS had taken up 143 petitions related to women issues like violence against women, human rights violation and injustice of Jammatt. Most of the cases needed legal advice and law expertise. STPES has an advocate for legal counseling, which helps STEPS to deal with such problems at the same time a file cases in court, according to the facts of the situation. Some of the highlights of the case details are as follows :

S. No.	Description	No. of Cases
1	Cases of women intervened by STEPS	66
2	Counseling given for family problem	32
3.	Cases attended at Help Line, Trichy.	9
4.	Cases attended at Help Line, Pudukottai	36
	Total	143

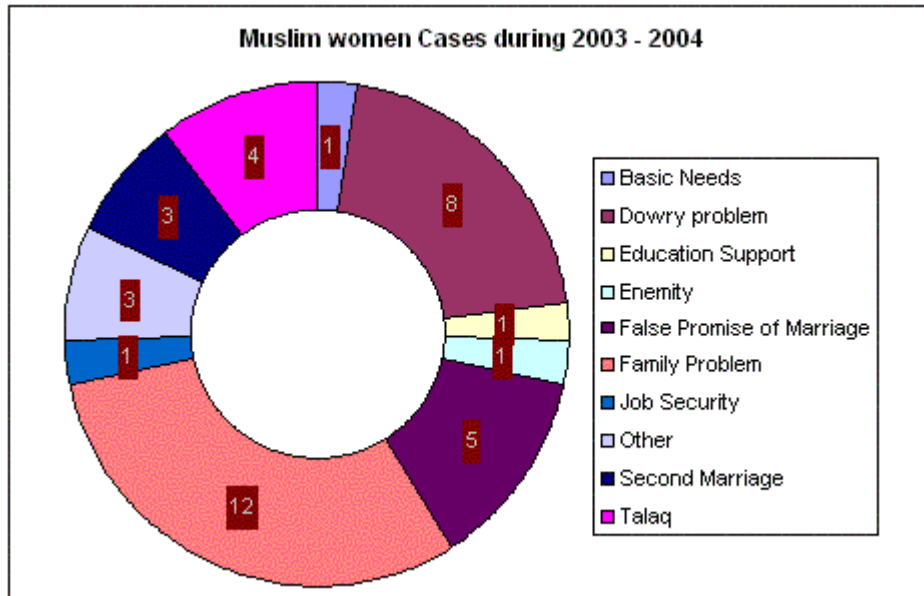
Details of Cases attended by STEPS

S. No	Case Details	No. of cases	Marital Status		Place	
			Married	Unmarried	Town	Village
1	Attack	11	9	2	3	8
2	Basic Needs	1	1	-	-	1
3	Cheating	3	3	-	1	2
4	Demand for Dowry	3	3	-	-	3
5	Divorce	2	2	-		2

6	Dowry	5	5	-	1	4
7	Education Support	2		2	-	2
8	Eve Teasing	4	3	1	1	3
9	False Promise of Marriage	3	1	2	2	1
10	Family Violence	8	7	1	3	5
11	Jamaat domination	1	1	-	-	1
12	Job Security	2	2	-	1	1
13	Land Issue	6	6	-		6
14	Other Services	8	5	3	2	6
15	Panchayat Harassment	1	1	-	-	1
16	Second Marriage	2	2	-	-	2
17	Threaten to death	4	2	2	2	2
	Total	66	53	13	16	50



Out of the 143 cases, 39 cases are given by Muslim Women. Nearly 30% of the cases are because of the dowry problem. The ironical point is that Islam is a religion which considers demanding dowry as a sin. But almost each and every woman faces this problem and suffers every day due to this.



Case studies of Women :

Dominant behaviour of Local Panchayat Leaders / Politicians :

Ms. K. Sumathi is a resident of Vattavatti village of Rajagopalapuram, Pudukottai district. She was in love with Shankar for the past 8 years. They got married in 05.09.03 against their parent's wish. Eventhough both of them belong to same caste and community, the villagers did not accept this marriage. As Shankar's parents accepted this marriage and decided to live together, Sumathi's parents got agitated and called for local panchayat, along with the support of their relatives namely Chinnaiah, Ramani, Naduthurai and Ganesan. Love marriage is not allowed in the village. Hence the local panchayat has levied Rs.10,001/- as fine for the family. As Shankar and family could not pay this money, they bowed their head to everyone in the panchayat and reduced the fine amount to Rs.5,001/-. Hence Panchayat has ordered the family not to enter into the village till they pay the fine amount. Sumathi's parents put bush and waste materials and blocked the way through which Shankar's family will enter into their house As Mr.Chinnaiah and family are government employees, they dominte the entire village. As Shankar's family could not pay this fine amount, they live outside the village for the past one month (staying in a half constructed building).

STEPS has already intervened in a problem faced by Shankar's family. One of his sisters was kidnaped and kept in Chennai. STEPS took efforts in bringing her back to Pudukottai. Eventhough Shankar's family knows STEPS they were threatened not to approach STEPS during the time for this Panchayat. If they does so, then the entire village will evict Shankar's family. Because of this threatening words of the local panchayat they did not approach us during the panchayat meeting.

On account of Deepavali festival, they wanted to celebrate it in their house. During that time Chinnaiah's family has thrashed Shankar's family out of the village. The whole family of Shankar came to STEPS office on 25.10.2003 with injuries. They wanted life security and justice. We approached the Ganesh Nagar Police Station and asked them to take necessary action against Chinnaiah and family who have beaten Shankar and his family. When police personnel conducted enquiry, Chinnaiah got frightened as it will affect his employment. As he cannot exercise his dominant behaviour with requested us not to file any case against him because it will affect his government employment. Hence we took efforts and got signature from each and every person in the village that they are responsible for the life of Shankar's family. A punishment to Chinnaiah will not only affect him, it will affect the future of his wife and children. STEPS did not want to victimise his wife and children for dominant behaviour of Chinnaiah and Team. Hence, after receiving assurance from the villagers in a written form, we withdraw the case. Now Sumathi along his in-laws family is living in Vattavatti peacefully. Domination of Chinnaiah and his violent behaviour has taught a lesson to entire village and every one in the village are scare about indulging themselves in violation of human rights of any form.

Role of Jamaat – a negative instance

Roja is a Muslim Women residing at Puduvayal at Pudukottai district. She got married in her 17 years of age and her husband lived with her for 2 months and went to Gulf country. She was living with her parents for 8 years. Her husband returned from gulf and settled in India after 8 years. Roja started living with her husband. After one year

she could realise that her husband is not fit for sexual relationship. Physically he cannot give birth to a child. Hence Roja thought that she cannot live with him. Her parents approached the Jamaat for getting divorce from him. As divorce is initiated by Roja the Jamaat levied a penalty of Rs.15,000/- for her to get divorce from him. The jamaat representatives misbehaved with her and asked her to stay with him for one day. If she obeys to his demand the jamaat representative promised her that he will finish her issue in favour of her. As she did not fulfill his need, they acted against her. As the words of Jamaat was the final word, Roja's family paid the amount and got relieved of him. Roja started thinking of an independent life and she worked in a shop. As her parents and relations compelled her for remarriage, she married another person, by paying 65000/- as dowry and 50 pounds of gold jewels. Her family incurred an expense to the tune of three lakhs for the marriage. In contrast to her first husband, the second husband always want to have sexual relationship with her. After a very great effort Roja started her life with lot of hope and ambitions towards future of her children. But after two years of her marriage, there was no symptom of carrying a baby by Roja. Hence she forced her husband for medical test and she also underwent the medical test. The result of the test was very alarming that her second husband got family planning operation 15 years before Roja's marriage. Roja lost all hopes in marriage. She felt that she was again cheated by another men. Hence she boldly asked for divorce from her second husband. She approached STEPS in this stage and STEPS provided counseling to her and motivated her to live courageously. Now she recollected her energy and she is working in a shop and earns money for her parents and herself. She has become most vibrant women who can provide energy to others to live courageously. During the muslim Women's meeting, she takes up leadership role and talk to muslim women about how the jamaat is victimising the muslim women.

Atrocities of Land lords in Keeramangalam Village

Ms. Rajalakshmi, 43, W/o Chinnaiya from Keeramangalm living with her husband and five children in a hut for 28 years. She is having all living evidence like Ration card, Vote card, fifteen years House tax bill etc. Her hut was located in a playground, which

was under the ownership of 53 Srilankan refugee's colony landholders. In the present situation after 3 decades most of the refugees i.e. 78% of them were migrated from there to Ooty, Palakad and Kodaikanal tea estates. When the Government allotted this lands for refugees before that the land was owned by the Kothamangalam Jameen. Now the heirs of Kothamangalam Jameen are in political parties and they encroached this colony lands through Gundas and sell it with help of V.A.O, R.I and Menial. They flatted the lands and sell it to the Government employees like Teacher, E.B. Staffs, Postman, etc.

On account of the petition given by Rajalakshmi, the district D.M.K leader, Mr. Elango and Menial Mathavan both were prepared some illegal documents about Rajalakshmi's residence as if she is an alien to this locality and tortured her family through Gundas to vacate her house. They also threaten to fire her hut and kill her.

Then she went to Keeramangalam Police Station for life protection and submitted a petition against Mr. Elango and Mathavan. But there is no proper response from the police station.

In the critical situation, she approached STEPS support. STEPS immediately took her case and send referral letter to Keeramangalam Police Station and filed the case against Mr. Elango and Mathavan. The case was filed. Since there was no response for 20 days, STEPS refer the case in to District Superintendent Police to take immediate action with the concerned officers and accused. The opposite party asked apology for his action and gave a written statement over life security to Rajalakshmi. Through STEPS support, she is trying to get own patta in her name on the same land.

B. Empowerment of Muslim Women

1. Leadership Training

While organising the muslim women into groups as a process of bringing them into the mainstream, it becomes inevitable to provide training to muslim women. As an initial

process of self analysis, STEPS provided leadership training to muslim women of Tiruchirapalli and Pudukottai district. 55 muslim women participated in the two days training programme. This training programme was mainly focused on provoking the thoughts of muslim women about the present status in which they are living, how they are suppressed in the name of religion and customs, the need for living a respectable and dignified life. As muslim women in the initial stages cannot stay back in the evening, the sessions closed by 4.00 pm on both days. A group work was also organised and women came out with the various roles they play in the family and their role in decision making. It was really an eye opener to muslim women to know about what they are really doing in the family and the real status of muslim women in the family.

2. Education Programme

To provide education to muslim women and children of muslim women STEPS is conducting literacy programme in two levels –

- a) Providing evening tuition to the children's of Muslim Women
- b) Educating the muslim women to read and write.

a) STEPS has organised Evening Tuition Centre for the children of Muslim Women in Pudukottai and Trichy district.

The details of the tuition centre are as follows

S. No.	Name of the Place	District	No. of students
1.	Vallathirakottai	Pudukottai	43
2.	Annavasal	Pudukottai	30
3.	Puduvayal	Pudukottai	17
4.	Tiruchirapalli	Tiruchirapalli	24

Four girls have been appointed to give evening tuition for the children of muslim

women from 1st standard to 10th standard. Teaching materials were given for each tuition centre. The evening tuition is conducted between 4.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. every day. Periodic tests have been conducted in each centre. In some centers along with the Muslim Children, some children of other religion also come for the tuition. As STEPS did not want to segregate the children based on religion we allow some children also to get benefited by the tuition centre. But attention is given to provide this training for the disadvantaged muslim children.

b) Training to Muslim Women to read and write

Self Help Group for Muslim Women has been organised by STEPS. Near 1600 women are members of the Self Help Groups. Nearly 40% of the Muslim women does not know to read and write. Hence staff members are educating the muslim women to write their name and put their signature during the group meeting. 50% of the illiterate muslim women have learned to put their signature. Efforts are being made to educate them to read and write in the vernacular language namely Tamil Language.

3. Survey for socio economic status of muslim Women

A survey is being conducted by STEPS in Tamilnadu to find the socio economic status of muslim women. Five animators were engaged in the survey work and consolidation of the survey report at the central level is under process. The process of survey also provided a good experience to the team members. Approaching a muslim women in her residence for any reason is not so easy. They have their own restrictions to speak to outsiders whether they are male or female, Hindu or muslim. Muslim women have their own reservations and misconception about the people who approach them. Our team members took lot of efforts to make the women understand us in a right perception, and co-operate with us. The final analysis / results of the survey would help us to plan our activities accordingly.

4. Free Legal Aid and Counseling

While addressing the issues of women especially muslim women, it is essential for us to provide counseling to the women. Some times the women coming to STEPS with family problem need counseling, some women require legal action to be followed after counseling. Some times interaction with the family members itself solves the problem of misunderstanding between the family members. Hence one family counselor and one legal adviser has been appointed by STEPS to fulfill this requirement. The family counselor of STEPS has given counseling to 32 women. 70% of the problems of women who came for counseling has been completed by counseling itself. Only 30% of the problems required legal advice also. Some times the misconception of the women about the law in Islam make them to assume lot of unimaginable problems and come for the counseling. For Example, one divorced muslim women from Aranthangi, Pudukottai district came for counseling with the fear that his ex-husband may legally claim her son , and separate her from her son. Hence she wanted to know the Islamic law and Indian law in general, whether the male children should live their father or mother after divorce. As per Islam, father has every right to claim his son and mother has the right to have the female child. Counseling was given to her that as the one year old can not live with out the mother, she can keep the child with her, and we can take it as an issue if the ex-husband is creating any problem in this regard. For this case the family counselor and legal adviser both involved themselves to counsel the muslim women. Cases of this sort are being recorded in the counseling register, confidentially.

5. Workshop on Empowerment of Muslim Women

A workshop was organised in Trichy between 18th and 19th of February for muslim women in Tamil Nadu on empowerment of muslim women. Muslim Women from 10 districts of Tamil Nadu participated in the meeting. People from Non-government organisation, staff members of NGOs, muslim women and children participated in the workshop to discuss about the status of muslim women, the need for the actions to be taken for the muslim women. It was a programme, where no resource was invited. The muslim women themselves were motivated to take part in discussing about their present status. Ms. D. Sharifa and staff members of STEPS facilitated the women to think in

right dimension to decide about the intervention required by the muslim women. A group meeting was also organised for the muslim women to decide the status of muslim women and problems they face by the male chauvinistic religious authorities Islam community. A set of recommendations was framed by the muslim women themselves for the elimination of the problems of muslim women, they form some new strategies also. At the end of the workshop the women themselves felt the need for a muslim women forum at the state level to address the issues of muslim women. Hence State Level muslim women jamaat committee was formed at the end of the workshop and it was decided to organise the committee meeting on every month. It will take another six months for bring a full shape to the forum.

6. Public Hearing among Muslim Women

A Public Hearing was organised in STEPS office to share the problems of muslim women on 27th of February 2004. All members of State level Muslim Women Jamaat Committee addressed the issues discussed by the muslim women. Parisa Begam and Asara Beevi from Mukkanamalaipatti village, Pudukottai district expressed their problem to the jamaat committee meeting. Sara from Vathalakundu, Dindigul district asked for educational support to her children. The jamaat committee took appropriate decisions and directed the respective field staff to necessary action in the local area based on the needs of the people.

7. State Level Conference on Muslim women

The first State Level Muslim Women's Conference was organised in Trichy in March 2000. This was the first time the issues of Muslim women was seen as issues with reference to violation of human rights. This conference mainly emphasised on 'RIGHTS OF MINORITIES ARE ALSO HUMAN RIGHTS'. This conference has passed several resolutions / recommendations, which was sent to the Chief Minister, Waqf Board Chair Person of Tamil Nadu, State and national Human Rights commission, Minorities Commission, Women Commission. To emphasis on these recommendations and the present scenario of Muslim Women, the Second State Level

Muslim women's Conference was organised in Pudukottai on 5th March, 2004 at Silver Hall.

Ms. Syeda Hameed, Former member of National Women Commission, New Delhi and Ms. Sughra Mehdi, professor, Jamia Milliah University, New Delhi were the chief guests for the conference.

Ms. D. Sharifa, Director, STEPS Women's Development Organisation gave the introduction of the conference. Ms. D. Rasitha, Member of STEPS Welcome the gathering. Ms. Lucy Xavier, Ms. Subathra delivered Inaugural address and special address to the Muslim Women. Ms. Meharunisa gave her address over the rights of women in Islam, A. Parvin Banu of STEPS gave vote of Thanks.

Members of Tamil Nadu Muslim Women's Jamaat Committee which is formed by STEPS and the victimised women shared their problems in the Conference. The sharing of the Muslim Women was very emotional which highlighted the actual scenario and the role taken by Jamaat in taking decisions against women. The pathetic situation of depressed widow, separated and divorced women with their children because of dowry and the practice of 'talaq' were elaborated in details. The solution to the causes of the problems of women has become the recommendations of the conference.

While delivering presidential address, Ms. Syeeda Hameed has aptly said that this group of muslim women are very emotional and each and every muslim women have understood the cause of the conference and it is very well reflected from their faces. Infact these muslim women are very advanced in their thoughts, while Muslim women forum, New Delhi is taking efforts to stop the habit of providing dowry, this group of people at Pudukottai are taking oath that they will not attend a marriage if dowry is received. She said that she is actually learning a lot from this group. If any revolution to Muslim Women are happening in India it must be because of this group of Muslim women in Tamil Nadu.

Ms. D. Sharifa translated the speech of Ms. Syeeda Hameed from Urudu language to

Tamil.

C. Economic empowerment Programme

For bringing socially disadvantaged Muslim Women into the mainstream STEPS established opportunities for economic empowerment. STEPS is encouraging women to save money for themselves irrespective of the age of the women. Once the money becomes sizeable amount, the amount is being deposited in Fixed Deposit in the name of the women. Establishment of a Muslim Women Bank is in process. Now STEPS is engaged in the formation of Self Help Groups for Muslim Women in Tamil Nadu, especially in Tiruchirapalli and Pudukottai. The main objective of the Muslim Woman Bank is to support the women with micro finance for income generating activities. This provides a via media for mobilizing the Muslim women and this also paves way for coming out of their shells. STEPS has started providing small amount of loan for the muslim women to start petty business at home. They stay at home and earn through activities like stitching, rolling beedi, making fire crackers or similar home based works. In general, through self help groups women collectively sit together and discuss freely. Through the Self Help Group STEPS give orientation on women education, health, social status and regarding small-scale business particularly for women. This has become a via media for the Muslim women to sit and interact collectively and learn about them. In this groups they widely speak about the news they heard or saw which will surely create a slighter change in their way of living.

Details of Self Help Groups Formed by STEPS in Tamil Nadu :

S. No.	Name of the District	No. of Muslim Women Groups	No. of Muslim Women
1.	Tiruchirapalli	10	160
2.	Pudukottai	31	482
3.	Thirunelveli	16	267
4.	Madurai	6	100

5.	Dindigul	2	22
6.	Kanyakumari	14	260
7.	Sivagangai	16	245
	Total	95	1536

STEPS is slowly expanding its activities for muslim women to other districts of Tamil Nadu, through other solidarity organisations. They are organising the muslim women and take up the cases of muslim women. STEPS is watching the process of the organisation with the muslim women. After two years, STEPS is planning work in these areas directly.

D. Awareness Creation & Capacity Building of Women in general

i. Training to Students of Lady Doak College

Students of Lady Doak College, from Women Studies department regularly visit STEPS to learn about the work of STEPS and various problems of women addressed by STEPS. This year too, a group of students from Women Studies came to STEPS in two batches as an exposure programme.

A Training Programme was organised on 30.08.03 at Annavasal, Pudukottai district. Discussion was made on the impact of Globalisation and Market Economy - deterioration of ancient art, artistic skills of the village people, and competition from the products of the multi national companies for the hand made product. Students also shared their views. Orientation was given to students to avoid the consumption of the products of multi-national companies in India and encourage them to buy Indian products. The 90 students were participated in the programme. Discussion was also made on the impact of Globalisation on women and the villagers in the rural areas.

An Awareness Programme was organised for the students on 31.08.2003 at Annavasal, to discuss about "Women and Violence". Eighty three girl students participated in the programme. The Basic Human Rights of Women, discrimination of women in the male

chauvinistic society, women and violence were discussed in detail. Analysis of Societal structure was made in the group discussion. Some women victims shared their problem and discussion was made about the way in which the rights of women are being violated. Loopholes in Indian Law was also explained in detail. Finally the students shared their opinion about the understanding about human rights and the different ways of violation of human rights of women.

The process

This training programme was conducted in such a way that the rights of women were explained to them in detail and the students were asked to explain the different forms of violence they face or in existence in the society. This process has enabled them to visualise the threats and the ways in which the women are victimised by the menfolk and society. Eventhough the students are very well aware of the issues discussed in the training programme, the brainstorming session made them to internalise the problems and make them to think of the remedy for the problem.

Training on Globalisation and market economy was really eye opener for the college students who are really go by the attractive labels and flavours. When they were given orientation on the impact of globalisation on rural community, they started looking at this issue as a problem of our country.

Outcome

- The training programme made the students aware of the basic rights of women.
- They have realised that domestic violence is not the fate of the women but an offence and the offender should be punished.
- Students got an exposure about the effects of globalisation in affecting the consumption of domestic goods in the villagers too.
- Students see themselves not merely a consumer of any product, they have stated that they are consumers of Indian product.

- They also got the spirit that they too have active role to play in the society to fight against the social evils.

ii) Campaign Programme

Poster Exhibition :

Campaigning on Current Issues, Globalisation, New Economic Policy, Women and Violence was made by display of posters and charts at Government Arts College, in the event of seminar on “Empowerment of women – Changing trends in India” which was jointly organised by Government Arts College and UGC. The exhibition was conducted for two days and the thoughts and theme of exhibition was gone through nearly 2000 students who noticed the exhibition during these days. It is not that only these 2000 students got the message but through spread effect the message has gone to 2000 families.

- Seminar on Emerging FACISM and threat to women

At Wakf Board College, Madurai

Ms.Sharifa, in a seminar on Women Empowerment conducted by Wakf Board College of Women, Madurai, addressed the students about Fascism and its adverse effect on Gujarat Tragedy. She also explained the present status of muslim women, their educational status, economic position, violence to women in all forms and the session went on in a very participatory way. Students also participated in discussing about the incidents in which violation of rights is happening in their personal experience. This Seminar was a very good forum to discuss this topic which directly addressed to the future citizens – the youth, energetic and vibrant citizens of India who are in misconception about the society in which they are living. This seminar has inculcated development thoughts in the minds of the students and educated them about their rights, both as a women and as a muslim women.

At Mettupatti Village

A public meeting was organised in Mettupatti Village on 19.10.03, to give awareness to women on FACISM and its impact in the life of women. Nearly 100 men and women participated in the programme. It was a gathering of people belonging to all religion. Ms. Backialakshmi, Director, SWEED, Thenkasi has been invited to deliver her speech on FACISM. Thirunelveli is a place known for communal violence. Hence she explained about the extent of violence among the people because of the love, faith, creed, and gratitude over one religion, caste, community country, language etc. To enforce the supremacy of their religion, caste, community country, language etc. people indulge in violence. Ms. D. Sharifa, in her speech explained about the Gujarat Issues, how FACISM had taken away the lives of innocent women and children. Hence she enforced that it is not wrong to have believe in the country, religion and caste to which we belong to. But the faith and believe should not go to the extend of inhuman attitude towards people of other country / religion. No religion has preached or encouraged inhuman behaviour or violence. Universally all religion enforces on love, peace and harmony. The local panchayat leaders were also invited for the programme. The Panchayat president delivered his vote of thanks for our efforts in conducting the meeting. Eventhough people were aware of the incidents in Gujarat and Thirunelveli through media, they did not give much importance for the issue. When we described the impact of the incidents - lives of innocent children without parents, Elders without any support, youth who have become disabled and their struggle for survival - people took it as a dangerous issue.

Campaigning on Ownership Rights and Empowerment of Women

Campaigning on ownership rights and empowerment of women was conducted on 24.12.2003 at Vallathirakottai, Pudukottai district. 40 Women members of SHGs in Vallathirakottai area participated in the meeting. Ms. D. Sharifa, two staff members of STEPS along with victimised women participated in the meeting. Mr. Gunasekaran, Lawyer was invited to deliver his speech on ownership rights of women. 100 Women got the opportunity to learn about ownership rights.

Impact of the programme

- **This method of Campaigning programme have really conveyed the message to women directly.**
- **Women had an opportunity to interact with the victim who have succeeded in her life.**
- **A more practical way of interaction motivated the women to participate in the programme more lively.**

E. Advocacy and Lobbying with other agencies

i) With Police Department

STEPS is working with the Police department in all possible ways. As a resource person, the Chief Functionary, Ms. D. Sharifa is providing Gender Sensitization Training to the police officials. This training helps the Police Personnel to deal with women petitioners in Police Station with an eye on Human Rights.

While addressing the petitions of the Muslim Women, generally the police officials neglect the petition considering the Jammaat as an authority to address their issue. STEPS orient the officials and explain the position of Muslim women and the need for addressing the issues of muslim women outside the jamaat. Two staff members of STEPS has become a part of Friends of Police, who are entrusted the task of attending the cases and do minimum role of a police person.

One of the staff member has become one of the Core Team member in Police Station. The responsibility of the Core Team member is patrolling the place where anti social activities such as child labour and abuse of children are taking place. At the end of this training programme there was a Gender Planning Session at the individual and District level. Since the entire Tamilnadu Police force is undergoing such training, it is up to the women's organization that are entrusted with the responsibility, to impart this training effectively and enable the police to look at women's problem with concern.

STEPS is attending the family counseling sessions in the Help Line. STEPS staff members at Trichy is attending the counseling in Cantonment police station and Town

police station on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. Staff members at Pudukottai are attending the Counseling on Tuesday and Friday at All Women Police Station, Pudukottai. Sometimes, some of the cases came to the help line may be referred STEPS for further action. We insist that neither politicians nor religious leaders get involved in these Help line processes. It becomes easier for women to come there and lodge complaint when such people are kept out from involving in these cases.

ii) With Government Department

From 2001 onwards STEPS is one of the committee members of Government Hospital evaluation council. Being a committee member STEPS is able to discuss and clarify issues.

Staff of STEPS regularly visit the hospitals to ensure human rights of the patients. We are also able to question the harassment of women patients.

STEPS is one of the senate member of the District Rural Development Agency in Pudukkottai District. This has made it possible to monitor plans for rural areas and to fight for basic amenities.

The Chief Functionary of STEPS has been appointed as a resource person for Women Development Corporation to train NGOs on Gender Issues.

iii) With Panchayats

STEPS strongly stands up for women's right in political participation. STEPS has encouraged women to contest in local Panchayat elections and has given them adequate training. Out of five candidates, supported by STEPS two women councilors have won in the election and they Render good service to their respective villagers with the motivation from STEPS.

iv) With Academic Institutions

The Chief Functionary of STEPS has been elected as one of the members of Vigilance Committee to take up the cases of Sexual harassment at work place in Wakf Board College, Madurai.

STEPS has a good relationship with student community in Pudukkottai right from the beginning. Student volunteers also support STEPS in its campaign work. As a result of such rapport, STEPS has guided students to take up research with gender perspective. In the academic of year 2003 – 2004, two M.Phil students from Trichy studied the following topics with guidance from STEPS:

- 1. Violence against women and the role of STEPS in combating such violence.**
- 2. Empowering Muslim Women in Tamilnadu and the role of STEPS.**
- 3. Involvement of STEPS in eradication of child labour in Pudukkottai District.**

Nearly 100 students of Women Studies, Lady Doak College is visiting STEPS every year and learn about the activities of STEPS the process involved in the activities, and strategies to work with the grass root level community. This year two batches of people visited STEPS and attended seminar.

Every year STEPS conducts an Essay competition for school and college students. This year STEPS has conducted Essay Competition among College students on ‘Muslim Women and Islam’.

ICUF has invited STEPS to send victimised women to share their experience in the meeting organised for the social science students. Ms. Kala who is a victim and staff of STEPS attended the programme and shared her experience. Students interacted with her about the changes that has taken place in her life after the intervention of STEPS. Ms. Kala shared her experience which was a very useful information for the students.

The college students started presenting the activities of STEPS in their regular curriculum activities.

The Director of STEPS Ms. D. Sharifa, has been invited as a resource person for the

following colleges / educational institutions to provide guest lecture about empowerment of women.

- St. Joseph's College, has invited the director of STEPS to participate in the Function organised by the Arumbugal youth club. She delivered lecture on the role of youth in future India.**
- Ms. D. Sharifa provided guest lecture on Gender in Asian College of Journalism at Chennai.**
- Ms. D. Sharifa was requested to present an essay on 'Islam and status of Muslim women' at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli.**

v) With Media

Media – both press and satellite channels cover the activities of STEPS. STEPS is maintaining a very good rapport with reporters at the state level and national level. The issues of Muslim Women, construction of Mosque for Jamaat were highlighted in leading Tamil Magazines in a most positive way which has paved way for international coverage of the issues. Even the BBC reporters visited STEPS and documented its Mosque venture and placed it in Internet.

Persons from Visual Media Ms. Sabia Khan from New Delhi, has documented the interventions of STEPS with Muslim Women, on behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs.

vi) With other NGO's

STEPS is networking with other NGOs at local, regional, state and national level. After the intervention of STEPS, the perception of NGOs in looking at the problems of Muslim Women has changed. STEPS is organising periodic meetings with the muslim women in different districts of Tamil Nadu. Expressing solidarity in other's struggle and receiving support and solidarity from others in STEPS's ventures is a continuous process, which helps in mutual contribution.

Centre for Rural Health and Social Education, Thirupattur, Tamilnadu has awarded Silver Jubilee Meritorious Service Award to Ms. D. Sharifa for the dedicated and untiring service for the poor and underprivileged masses of our community.

vii)With Jamaat

While addressing the issues of Muslim Women, it has become a necessity for us to lobby with the jamaat representatives for clarification and justice. As per Islam, the role of Jamaat is very significant. Most of the Jamaat are misusing their authority and commit injustice to Muslim Women. Hence the experience of STEPS with Jamaat is both positive and negative.

Working with the Jamaat has been a complex process. It involves arguments, disagreements as well as working together on certain issues. They now gave time and space to express our views and a dialogue can be held to a minimum level, which was once never dreamt of. In some instances, Jamaat have sent women to us – so that they can discuss their problems.

SAAYA Network

SAAYA Network has been initiated in the year 2000. The main objective of SAAYA Network is to bring the Muslim women to the mainstream whose existence itself is under pressure. They lack minimum rights to live in the society. The members of SAAYA Network from seven districts of Tamil Nadu are making efforts to provide awareness to Muslim Women on their rights, provide Training, and encourage the Muslim Women to educate their children.

In 2003, a Muslim Women Conference was organised in Ramnad, in Syed Ammal College, Madurai. It was a very big gathering of Muslim Women which provoked the thoughts of Muslim Women and their present status in the society. One of the recommendations of the conference is that a women representative should be available in the Jamaat to enquire the cases coming to the Jamaat. Collective effort was made by

all the SAAYA partners in sending the signed copy of the request for Jamaat representation to women to Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and Chair person of Wakf Board. This effort has brought the needs of the Muslim Women and the problems faced by them to light. SAAYA is getting lot of experience and learning while doing interventions for the Muslim Women.

New Initiatives

Mosque for Women

The concept of a separate Mosque for Women was thought of during the State level Muslim women's Conference conducted by SAAYA network at Ramanathapuram. The Muthavalli Mr. Sarbudeen of Parambur Jamaat took the initiative in providing the land for the women mosque in Parambur itself. One of the leading Tamil Magazine published this news. As a result of this, this issue got international importance which yield both positive and negative effects. Some supporters congratulated the efforts of STEPS and motivate our Team. On the other hand, Ulamas from India has visited Parambur village and threatened the people and the women not to give land for the women mosque. Actually the need for the women mosque has emerged from the public and the victimised muslim women still enforce the need the mosque – a space for the women to share their problem freely. Now the community in Parambur is not willing to give land for the construction of Mosque. STEPS has planned to construct the Mosque in some other place.

Muslim Women Jamaat

The Muslim Women members of STEPS from Tamil Nadu have felt the need for organising a Committee for the redressal of problems of muslim women. The experience of most of diversified, departed and widow muslim women with reference to Jamaat are not very encouraging. Each woman are victimised by the jamaat representatives in favour of powerful male chauvinism. Islam has given the most powerful position to Jamaat. But some of the Jamaat instead of providing justice to

both men and women, they take a biased role in favour of men. Hence to take favourable stand for muslim women, it became inevitable to form a Muslim Women Jamaat Committee at the Tamil Nadu state level. Two muslim women from 10 districts of Tamilnadu form this committee. They meet once in every month and discuss about the issues of muslim women from their place. Now STEPS is in the process of enhancement of capacity of the Jamaat Committee members by providing training and discussion on Islam and matters of importance to Muslim women.

List of Visitors

Date	Name of the Visitor	Purpose
24.07.03	Ms. Kalamani, CWS, Secunderabad	Meeting with Parambur Jamaat People.
14.08.2003	Mr. E.B. Paul, Norwegian Human Rights Fund	Pre Sanction study of the project.
15.10.03	Mr. Shanu, Reporter, Kumudham Magazine	Interview with Rasitha Begam
30.10.03	Mr. Jaccob, Chethana, Bangalore	Mid – Term facilitation / evaluation
05.11.03 to 07.11.03	Ms. Kalamani, CWS, Bangalore	Documentation of STEPS
01.12.03	Ms. Jayarani, Reporter, Ananda Vikadan	Interview with STEPS Team about its new venture into Women Mosque
10.12.03 & 11.12.03	Mr. K. Murali, Human Rights Project, Centre for World Solidarity, Secunderabad	Planning for the partners visit to STEPS during January 2004.

08.01.04 to 10.01.04	Visit of Partners of Centre for World Solidarity from 8 states of India	Exposure to Partner Organisation
16.01.04	Ms. Sadhik Biswas & Mr. Anwar, BBC.	Documentation of STEPS
01.02.04 to 02.02.04	Ms. Helena and Ms. Emma, Swallows, Swedan	Study the activities of STEPS
15.02.04 to 20.02.04	Ms. Emma, Swallows, Swedan	Study the activities of STEPS
27.02.04 & 28.02.04	Ms. Sabia Khan & Team,	Video documentation of STEPS for 'The Self Portrait' – a documentary film produced for External Publicity division of Ministry of External Affairs.
04.03.04 & 05.03.04	Dr. Syeda Hameed, Former member, National Commission for Women, New Delhi, and Prof. Sughra Mehdi, Urdu Jamia Millia University. New Delhi	Second State Level Muslim Women's Conference, Pudukottai
13.03.04 &	Ms. Lakshmi, Writer, Mumbai	Documentation of life history of Ms. D. Sharifa.

14.03.03		
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Future Plan

- **Construction of Muslim Women Mosque within three years.**
- **Strengthening the state level muslim women forum as a movement to fight for their rights.**
- **Motivate the Muslim women to take part in politics and bring them to the mainstream.**
- **Work for the common Nikkah Nama (Marriage document) to be followed in India.**