



IAWN

International Anglican Women's Network

South Asia

Regional Consultation

Hyderabad, India, 6 to 8 October 2015



INTRODUCTION

The International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN) held a consultation for the Network's Provincial Links in the Anglican and United Churches in South Asia and a number of other women in the region with ministries among, and for women and girls.

The overall aim of the consultation was to enable key workers in women's ministries in the Anglican and United Churches of South Asia to confer, consult, share priorities, identify stepping stones towards empowering women and improving their status in their churches and communities, and prepare a message to Church leaders.

The consultation took place at the Henry Martyn Institute (HMI), an International Centre for Research, Interfaith Relations and Reconciliation, in Hyderabad, India, where we enjoyed the care and hospitality of the Director, the Revd Dr Packiam T Samuel, the Academic Coordinator, Sribala Mylavarapu, the Hostel Manager, Sister Philomina, and all the staff of the HMI.

The participants in the consultation were:

Church of Bangladesh

Janet Sarker
Janet Bably Halder
Basanti Sangma

Church of Ceylon

Jeanne Samuel
Deekshya Illangasinghe

Church of North India

Meenakshi Das
Neerja Prasad
Moumita Biswas

Church of South India

Ramani Dyvasirvadam
Susan Thomas
Synthia Sobha Rani

Facilitator

Manisha Majumdar, Change Alliance, India

In support

Ann Skamp, IAWN Steering Group convener
Margaret Dempster, IAWN Steering Group
Terrie Robinson, Director for Women in Church & Society, Anglican Communion Office
Ilona Sabera, Research & Communications Officer, Anglican Communion Office

Inter faith contribution

Sribala Mylavarapu, Henry Martyn Institute

We were deeply disappointed that Ruqia Tabassum, Alice Garrick and Noreen Altaf from the Church of Pakistan, and Yin Yin Maw and Naw Laldenee from the Church of the Province of Myanmar were unable to attend because of visa difficulties.

We were grateful to the Moderator Bishop of the Church of South India, the Most Revd Dr Godava Dyvasirvadam, who joined us for the opening worship for our consultation and encouraged us to be a 'movement of women', rather than a 'group of women', serving as guardians of the faith, as change-makers and as bridge builders towards a new order. We were also grateful to the CSI Diocese of Medak and St George's School in Hyderabad for their kind and generous welcome and hospitality during an evening cultural reception.

In the 18 months leading to the consultation, a number of IAWN Provincial Links and contacts in South Asia contributed to the development of an agenda for the meeting based on their local experience and aspirations for the transformation of women's lives in our region. The final programme was ambitious and benefitted considerably from the skilful facilitation of Manisha Majumdar from the [Change Alliance](#)¹ in New Delhi.

Our consultation was framed each day with Morning and Evening Prayer, and we were challenged and inspired by a daily Bible study using a liberative hermeneutic seen through the experience of South Asian women. These were led by Moumita Biswas, Executive Secretary for the [All India Council of Christian Women](#) (Women Wing of the National Council of Churches in India).²

As one outcome of our consultation, we have drawn up a Message for our Church Leaders—see page 4—which we will share within our Churches and with the Anglican Consultative Council when it meets in Lusaka, Zambia, in April 2016.

Photographs from the consultation are [on-line here](#).³

IAWN acknowledges with sincere gratitude a grant from the Archbishop of Canterbury's Anglican Communion Fund and a grant from the Diocese of Texas in The Episcopal Church which made possible the Network's Regional Consultation for South Asia.

¹ www.changealliance.in

² <https://www.facebook.com/aiccw>

³ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/136981965@N03/>

The programme contents (described in further detail in this report) included:

- ⇒ **Learning from positive stories of change in our work with women and girls in South Asia**
 - Enabling women’s leadership in our communities
 - Enabling women’s leadership in the Church
 - Women affected by armed conflict and the response of the Church
- ⇒ **Addressing challenges and barriers**
 - An analysis of power as the ability to create or resist change
 - The place of advocacy in our work with women and girls
- ⇒ **The 16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women and Girls**
 - Discussion on the theme ‘Girls in school; girls out of school’
- ⇒ **Theology of Gender**
 - Why a theology of gender is important
 - An inter faith consideration of gender through the sacred texts of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam
- ⇒ **Side by Side: Faith Movement for Gender Justice**
 - Engaging with the Faith Movement for Gender Justice: opportunities & challenges in our diverse contexts
- ⇒ **Networking**
 - Introduction to the International Anglican Women’s Network (IAWN)
 - Networking and coordination: what can be achieved within and among our countries
- ⇒ **Working with men and boys**
 - Why working with men and boys is important
 - Examples from our countries: what works well and what does not work well. What else could we do?
- ⇒ **Sharing and discussion of internal challenges in our Churches**
- ⇒ **Discussion: Looking ahead**
 - Our learning during the consultation
 - What can be taken forward to help us transform the lives of women and girls in our contexts
- ⇒ **Messages from our consultation to take to Church leadership**



MESSAGE TO OUR CHURCH LEADERS AND THE ANGLICAN CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

In October 2015, the International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN) held a consultation in Hyderabad, India, for the Network's Provincial Links in the Anglican and United Churches in Sri Lanka, North India, South India and Bangladesh, and a number of other women in the region with ministries among, and for women and girls. We were sad that our sisters from the Church of Pakistan and the Anglican Church of Myanmar were unable to be with us because of visa difficulties.

Together we prayed and studied the Bible. We shared our experience, our positive stories of change, and the challenges that need to be addressed in order to improve the status and leadership of women in our Churches and in our communities.

It is clear to us that the Church has a sacred duty to challenge cultural attitudes and traditions that value girls less than boys and marginalise the voices and contributions of women, and to model positive and just relationships between women and men.

We give thanks to God for progress that has already been made in our Churches but recognise that our programmes for women and girls and policies such as quota systems for the inclusion of women in church bodies, need to be matched by a Gospel-centred openness to serving together as women and men, equally created in the Divine image.

We respectfully ask our Church leaders to stand in solidarity with us, and work with us, by:

- promoting just gender relationships in congregations, in families and communities, and in all Church synods, committees and programmes
- encouraging study of the Bible and theology with a view to challenging the scriptural and theological 'legitimation' of male domination over women and revealing a liberative hermeneutic for women and girls, and all marginalised peoples
- investing in training, theological formation and capacity-building for women's leadership and participation in decision-making bodies within and beyond the Church
- drawing the work, experience and wisdom of Women's Fellowship for Christian Service and similar groups into the mainstream of the mission and ministry of the Church
- supporting work with men and boys to empower them to embrace the masculinity modelled by Jesus Christ
- including gender work as an element in Church budgets
- using the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence and other opportunities to speak out against violence against women and girls in all its forms, and to encourage local initiatives to end and prevent sexual and gender-based violence and care for survivors
- challenging the Dowry system wherever it is practised to the detriment of the well-being and potential of women and girls
- introducing positive liturgies, rites and rituals to replace cultural practices or attitudes that harm women and girls, for example, a liturgy to celebrate the birth of a girl
- seeking to engage with 'Side by Side', the global Faith Movement for Gender Justice, bringing gender issues into inter faith dialogue and joint commitments
- in the Sri Lankan context, advocating for women affected by war, families of the disappeared especially female headed households, speaking truth to power.
- advocating for gender justice nationally and internationally.

As we go forward together in faith, may the grace of God enfold us, the love of Christ uphold us, and the Spirit of truth set us free. Amen.

Learning from positive stories in our work with women and girls in South Asia

In each of our Churches, through Women's Fellowships and outreach programmes for women and girls, we are serving in a wide range of ministries such as counselling and livelihood training for AIDS-affected women and their families; health clinics; training women for participation, mission and leadership in the Church and in the community; prison ministry; sensitising women to their legal rights; education for the differently abled; and working with trans-gender people and other marginalised groups.

Enabling women's leadership in our communities

In a presentation to the group on enabling women's leadership in our communities,⁴ Neerja Prasad, President of the Church of North India Women's Fellowship for Christian Service (CNI WFCS), emphasised that women in modern India continue to be treated as second class citizens.

In spite of national measures, India has been ranked as the fourth most dangerous country in which to be born a woman, with rape and gang-rape, acid throwing, domestic violence, sexual harassment, female foeticide and infanticide, and human trafficking still casting a shadow over the safety of women and girls.

Neerja identified community building and social Integration as essential components in preparing the ground for enabling women's leadership. Six words are used and promoted by the CNI, not least in schools for girls and boys, to encourage just relationships:

**Respect; Trust; Collectivity; Freedom;
Tolerance; Concern.**

The CNI WFCS knows that education, training and advocacy are essential if women are to gain greater control over their lives. This includes vocational training, even in fields of employment which are non-traditional for women, such as cab driving and the police force.

So, for example, the Women's Fellowship of Nagpur Diocese and the All India Council of Christian Women used the annual International Women's Day to visit police

stations where they honoured the contributions of women police officers and presented them with 'Zero Tolerance to Gender-based Violence' posters. At the same time they spoke with male police officers and advocated for women-friendly police stations where those reporting domestic violence are treated respectfully and not dismissed or humiliated.

Neerja quoted from 'Creating Waves' by Korean poet and theologian, the Revd Sun Ai Park:

A stone is thrown into a calm lake
and the stone makes waves,
spreading, reaching to the far side.
Let us throw stones into the deadly calm lake
that is our world
no matter how small is the stone,
no matter how small is the wave.

The lake is like the world
The lake is like people's mind
The lake is like sisterhood
The lake is like human bondage
The lake is like chains of oppression
And the lake is like many others.

The stone brings awakening
the wave is a movement
and the movement spreads.

When all of us around the lake
keep throwing our little stones,
the wave will never cease
till the whole lake starts bubbling with life
till the whole lake makes its own spring
to keep its own life going.



This report, and presentations and resources from the consultation can be downloaded from the IAWN website at <http://iawn.anglicancommunion.org/resources/iawn-south-asia-consultation.aspx>

⁴ <http://bit.ly/1Lki8sl>

'Assure My Future': Church of South India campaign for the Girl Child

The Church of South India ['Assure My Future'](#)⁵ campaign aims to affirm the blessedness of the girl child, and the fact that she is created in the image of God', just as boys are, and thus precious.

The Church's interventions have included conscientising their communities, re-opening closed hostels for girls, strengthening the infrastructure in girls' schools, addressing concerns relating to missing girls, and gender-sensitivity trainings for women and men. The present focus is on girls' education, nutrition and health.

Enabling women's leadership in the Church

"She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue" Proverbs: 31:26

Janet Bably Halder made a presentation on enabling women's leadership in the Church.⁶ She described the measures put in place by the Church of Bangladesh to support women's participation in the life and ministry of the Church. For example, there is a specific ministry to look after the interests of women; a gender policy has been developed; and a quota arrangement means that a third of the membership of Church committees should comprise women.

These are positive steps but prevailing cultures continue to silence women in decision-making bodies or women may be judged harshly when they speak up and make their views known.

The Church of Bangladesh Women Ministry encourages women in a variety of activities, from leading Bible studies



⁵ <http://www.csisynod.com/girl-child.php>

⁶ <http://bit.ly/1Lki8sl>

and Sunday Schools, to visiting those who are sick, elderly or who have disabilities.

Janet identified a number of challenges to progress in increasing women's participation in leadership in the Church.

These included lack of education, insufficient financial support for capacity building among women, and the fact of being a minority faith group: "As minority we are oppressed and being women we are the most oppressed".

Women affected by armed conflict and the response of the Church in Sri Lanka

IAWN's Provincial Link in the Church of Ceylon, Jeanne Samuel, described the impacts on women and girls of the 30-year civil conflict in Sri Lanka and its legacy of war widows, sexual violence, displacement, disrupted education and trauma among children, and the continuing searches for the 'disappeared' by their families.

Women have been left vulnerable at multiple levels, facing increased impoverishment and inadequate housing, transport and employment opportunities.

In spite of great loss and hardship, Jeanne spoke of courageous women rising from the ashes – women whose experience has made them resilient, strong, articulate and sharp.

"They became the bread winner, the provider, the protector of their families. They pushed boundaries and one cannot underestimate this enormous strength that was unleashed."

Women have empowered other women through modelling leadership and through solidarity and listening. They have established lobbying groups to search for the missing and disappeared, and have made their voices heard in the international community and in human rights groups. During the war, Christian women led prayer groups and their Hindu friends joined them.

The Anglican Church in Sri Lanka was often a lone voice in challenging all actors in the conflict and appealing for the safety and protection of women and children and in challenging violence and intimidation.

At grassroot level, clergy in conflict areas risked their lives by remaining with the women and children who were

unable to move elsewhere. Clergy and laity accompanied people searching for their missing loved ones.

From a Teardrop to a Pearl

After the civil war, the Diocese of Colombo's Board of Women's Work and Reconciliation and Peace Desk organised a four-day residential conference for 40 women from the two ethnic groups in Sri Lanka to equip them as peace-builders.

Participants in the conference 'From a Teardrop to a Pearl' shared their often traumatic experiences, studied biblical tools for conflict transformation and learned new skills.

There were tears and laughter as the women grew in confidence and friendships were formed.

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. *1 Corinthians 12.26*

Jeanne's notes for her presentation on the status of women in Sri Lanka are [on-line here](#).⁷

Trigger warning: The notes include an account of sexual violence.

Enabling women's leadership: Identifying and addressing critical challenges

Even as we shared positive stories of transformation, many challenges and obstacles to women's leadership were identified.

Many of these were common across the region but there were also challenges specific to local contexts such as those associated with the dowry system and the continuing significance of caste identities in India, and the

support urgently needed for war widows, families of the disappeared, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence following the civil conflict in Sri Lanka.

Over two sessions of the consultation, critical challenges were discussed further and analysed with reference to experience in families, in communities, and in our Churches.

- Women have retained all domestic duties and childcare alongside paid work. They may work 18 hours a day compared to 8 hours a day for men.
- India is becoming the 'surrogacy capital of the world'. Most surrogate mothers are poor and illiterate and easily exploited.
- A recent study has shown that women in India who are more educated than their husbands are more likely to face domestic violence than women who are less educated (Weitzman/Population and Development Review).
- Women in villages are expected to work for their mother-in-law and her unmarried sons.
- Women who have been raped are outcasts. No one wants to marry them.
- The prevailing culture in families, communities and Churches is patriarchal. Women are not seen as equals.
- Women [in some Churches in the South Asia region] have been ordained, but members of congregations have sometimes refused to receive Communion from them.
- Men sharing leadership with women is a problem. This is the mindset of women as well as men.
- Steps taken to reduce the likelihood of sexual and gender-based violence have led to women and girls leading closely circumscribed lives.
- Women may have positions in parliaments and in national committees but their voices are marginalised.
- Legislation designed to safeguard or give justice to women is often not implemented.
- Discrimination against girls and women happens within families as well as in communities.
- In families, boys often receive preferential treatment in terms of food and education.
- Our Churches participate in inter faith dialogue but do not bring to it issues that have an impact on women.

⁷ <http://bit.ly/1SKPRR9>

Understanding Power

To help us work towards developing strategies for removing barriers to progress in improving the status of women in church and society, we analysed power as 'the ability to create or resist change'. First, we took part in a role play which gave us an insight into who holds power, who are the decision-makers, and how advantage and disadvantage work.

We were each handed a piece of paper with a different role written on it, and invited to step into the identity and experience of the person described. Without any discussion of our different roles, we stood in a line, shoulder to shoulder and all facing forwards. We were then asked a series of questions and instructed to take a step forward or backward depending on what we thought would be the answers of our assumed identity.

Power Role Play

The roles/identities:

- I am a Muslim housewife in a city. My husband is a construction contractor.
- I am a male Muslim construction contractor in a city.
- I am a female daily wage earner in a city.
- I am a male daily wage earner in a city.
- I am a businessman in the computer hardware sector.
- I am the wife of a businessman in the computer hardware sector.
- I am a male Dalit Christian church worker.
- I am a female Dalit Christian church worker.
- I am a Bishop.
- I am a Bishop's wife.
- I am a male rural agricultural worker.
- I am a female rural agricultural worker.
- I am a male teacher in a rural primary school.
- I am a female teacher in a rural primary school.

Questions:

In your role, if your answer is 'yes', take one step forward. If 'no', take one step backward.

- Have you completed primary education?
- Can you decide how many children you would like to have?
- Do you go out to meet friends without asking for permission?
- Can you decide to visit your parents?
- Do you have money to spend on yourself as you wish?
- Are you part of any local body/committee?
- Do you have a bank account in your name?
- Can you decide to host a feast or party?
- Can you travel overnight on your own?
- If you are sick in the morning, can you sleep for extra hours?

For the next question, if your answer is 'yes', take one step backward. If 'no', take one step forward.

- Have you ever been sexually harassed?



The final position of each person was a clear indication of who holds power, where decisions are made, and how social constructs impact on people's lives.

We then looked at a framework for analysing power which considered:

- concepts of power
- faces of power
- types of power
- spaces of power
- levels of power, and
- realms of power.

More detail is on-line at: <http://bit.ly/1NBPUuJ>.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence

The prevalence of violence against women and girls in South Asia is a prime manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women, rigid gender stereotypes, and broader cultures of violence.

Some of our Churches and ecumenical bodies already take part in the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (25 November to 10 December) and other campaigns such as [Thursdays in Black](#)⁸ and White Ribbon to engage in advocacy, and educate and empower not only women but also men to dismantle stereotypes and embrace the masculinity modelled by Jesus Christ.

For example, following the multiple rape and death of a young woman in Delhi in 2012, members of the Women Wing of the National Council of Churches in India took part in a Thursdays in Black initiative to approach taxi drivers in Kolkata to sensitise them to the risks that women face when travelling even short distances. The young woman had been ushered onto a bus and gang-raped after being dropped off by a rickshaw driver who refused to take her all the way to her home.

The international theme for this year's 16 Days is 'From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All!'

Education provides the foundation for girls' development and plays a vital role in helping women realise their potential economically, politically and socially. But in South Asian countries, as in other parts of the world, school is not always a safe place for a girl. Girls are at risk from violence on the journey to and from school and in the classroom itself.

Even though South Asia has seen significant achievements in strengthening education systems and getting more children to school, there are still millions of children in the region who are out of school.

Girls who miss out on education or who leave school too soon are less likely to develop themselves and their families and communities. They are less likely to have any say in what happens to their lives and their bodies. They are more likely to live in poverty, be trafficked and prostituted, be exposed to HIV and sexually transmitted infections, be coerced into early marriage, have pregnancies at an early age, and to die or suffer serious physical injury during childbirth.

In Sri Lanka there is no disparity between girls and boys going to school, however there is a lot of adult illiteracy in remote parts of the country. The burning issue for education in Sri Lanka is that during the many years of war, children were deprived of an education for several years. So 'catch up' classes would benefit all children.

Strategies for transformation

In our discussion of how girls' access to schooling and their safety could be improved, we considered the values and challenges in families, in communities and in our Churches that have an impact on these.

We then thought about strategies which might lead to the transformation of negative attitudes and practice.

- The Bible and sacred texts of other faith traditions have stories that empower and give voice to women and girls.
- Use a contextual paradigm of mission and evangelism.
- We can work with families and wider communities to ensure that girls are 'invested in' and can complete their education, and are safe as they travel to and from school.
- Our Churches are significant contributors to education, providing schools, colleges, universities and theological seminaries.
So we have opportunities to teach and embed values that recognise and promote the equal God-given dignity of girls and boys, young women and young men.
- Our schools and all our educational institutions can practice zero tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Church leaders and the whole faith community have a role to play in advocating for compliance of the universal right to education and for national policy - adequately resourced - for the prevention and elimination of violence against girls in school.

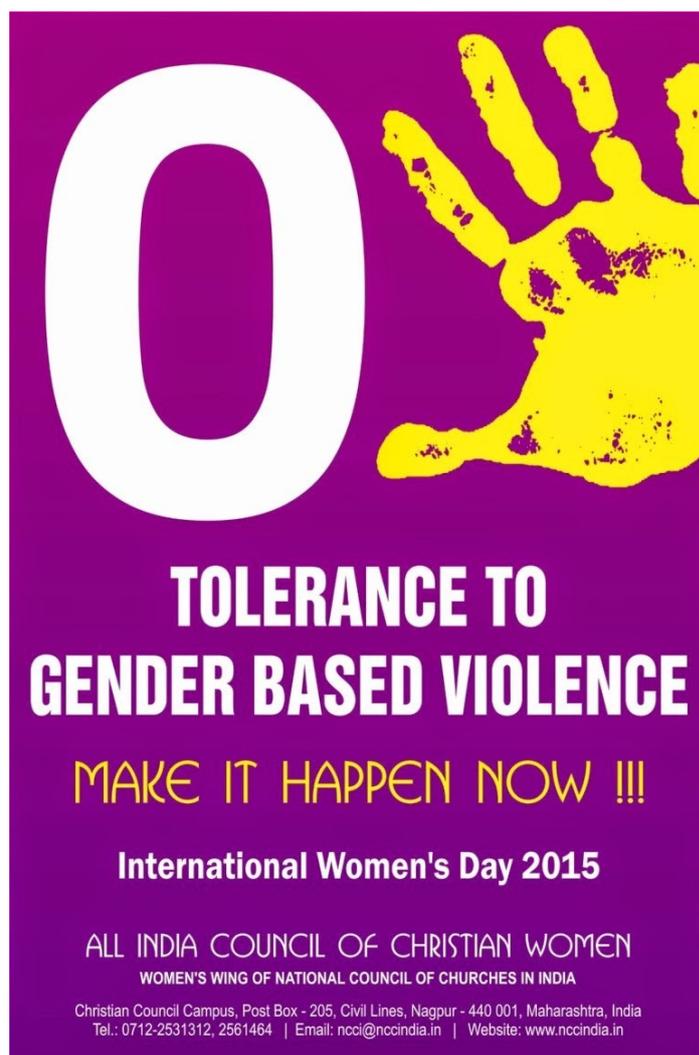
The new Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning) and 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) provide fresh impetus for this.

⁸ <http://bit.ly/1SrNMdw>

In February 2015, the All India Council of Christian Women launched '[365 Days Zero Tolerance to Gender based Violence: Make It Happen Now!](#)' in response to increasing violence against women and girls in India.⁹

The Campaign aims to:

- create awareness, conscientize and educate communities, individuals, Church and lay leaders to work towards eradicating gender-based violence
- nurture spirituality of justice, peace, healing and reconciliation, and reflect faith into action to eradicate gender-based violence through various training programs, advocacy work, etc
- engage in vigorous advocacy for Zero Tolerance to any form of gender-based violence at home, work place, communities, and even churches and faith-based organizations
- educate people about Child Protection Policies, Sexual Harassment and Gender Justice Policies, and implement such policies in churches and organisations/institutions
- mainstream gender justice
- strive to eradicate poverty which fuels feminisation of violence especially violence against women, children and people from vulnerable communities
- act as pressure agency on government for implementation of laws and just legal system that prevents violation of human rights of women and children
- work towards rehabilitating and healing survivors and victims of gender-based violence
- promote gender studies and gender justice education in curriculums and social ethics in schools and colleges.



For the 16 days this year, the Anglican Communion has joined the Lutheran World Federation, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, the World YWCA and other bodies as a faith-based coalition to focus on ending violence against girls and young women in education. See [here](#) for details.¹⁰

Side by Side: Faith Movement for Gender Justice

“To reflect before God on gender ... is to think about what it means that we are male and female. It is to ask what it would mean to experience our being gendered as gift rather than danger, a source of life and hope rather than oppression or fear, as something to be received gratefully from God, rather than experienced as a source of strife.”

*Susan Durber*¹¹

healing and redemption of all creation.

⁹ <http://bit.ly/1j69FST>

¹⁰ Add URL for 16 Days website

From ancient times, there has been a profound belief that God created humankind in the divine image; ‘in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1.27). It is time to lift up a theology that brings fullness of life to women and men.

Scripture and the traditions of our Christian faith, and those of other faith traditions, have often been misused to feed into a theology which devalues women, perpetuates

¹¹ From ‘Of the Same Flesh: Exploring a theology of gender, Christian Aid 2014

silence around violence and other injustices against women, sees women as inferior beings whose word isn't worth very much and who are not fit for authoritative roles.

"When child rights efforts are grounded in the protective aspects of religious beliefs and practices in a community that encourages and enriches the spiritual and religious life of each child, the impact can be far-reaching."

UNICEF¹³

'Affirming her rights: Sacred texts and the girl child'

Sribala Mylavarapu, Academic Coordinator at the Henry Martyn Institute, led us through a review of the sacred texts of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity to show how they challenge social constructs of the girl child as a burden and a liability.¹²

Sribala showed how positive scriptural values have been picked up in national legislation and international conventions concerned with just relationships, the elimination of harmful traditional practices, and the rights of children. The implementation of such instruments require political will and informed and empowered communities.

Terrie Robinson, Director for Women in Church & Society at the Anglican Communion Office explained that theological reflection on gender is an essential element in a new movement that has been gaining momentum since March this year when Christian Aid facilitated an international workshop in London on gender. The workshop led a number of Churches and Christian-based organisations to instigate an international 'Faith Movement for Gender Justice', which is becoming known as 'Side by Side'.

As a working definition, Side by Side understands gender justice to refer to "a world where everybody, women and men, boys and girls are valued equally; are able to share

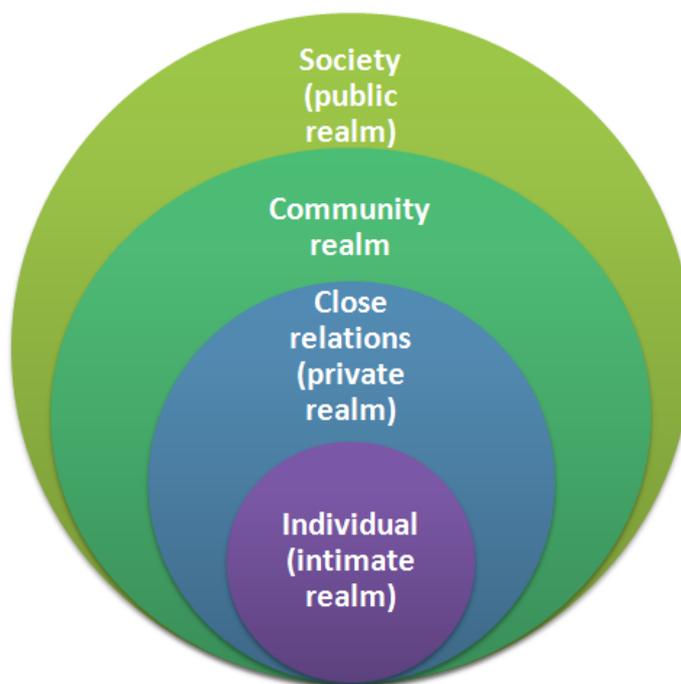
Tackling Gender Justice

Societal level

Interventions to build political will and legal and institutional capacity to end gender inequality; gender responsive policies, and services which respond to gender specific needs.

Individual level

Interventions which focus on influencing an individual's self-confidence, knowledge or self-awareness; these empower people to seek and claim their rights including through increased voice and agency.



Community level

Interventions which aim to change social and cultural norms, values and practices which condone or reinforce gender inequality at the community level;

Household level

Interventions which target relationships within the family, within marriage, within sexual relationships; to promote equal decision-making power and more equitable division of household roles, responsibilities & resources

Source: DFID PPA Gender Learning Group Theory of Change. 2015.

¹² <http://bit.ly/1Lki8sl>

¹³ www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_60392.html

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equitably in the distribution of power, knowledge and resources; and are free from cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression, and from violence and repression, based on gender.”

Tackling gender justice means that interventions have to be made at multiple levels: societal, individual, community and household.

A priority of the Faith Movement for Gender Justice is to build the capacity of faith leaders to engage at these different levels in order to advance gender equality. A series of regional workshops and national consultations with faith leaders are planned over the next two years. The workshops will provide space for clergy and lay leaders to discuss and understand gender issues and equip them to seek a coordinated approach in their own region and take a lead in acting on gender justice at every level.

The first of these Regional Workshops will take place in Brazil in October 2015 (for Latin America and the Caribbean), Nairobi in November 2015 (for East Africa) and Harare early in 2016 (for Southern Africa). Further workshops are envisaged for West Africa, and Europe. In all these regions, Christians are in a majority.

We discussed what factors the Faith Movement for Gender Justice will have to take into account in South Asia and when planning a Regional Workshop for the region.

Our comments will inform the Movement’s Inception Group as it shapes plans for the future.

Faith Movement for Gender Justice: Engaging with South Asia

- In South Asian countries, identity is primarily religious.
- The approach should be inter faith.
- Different faiths; different challenges.
- Regarding gender justice, we have been going backwards, not forwards.
- Most faith leaders are men.
- Inter faith dialogue has been shifting to issue-based dialogue, for example on peace, but without a gender component.
- Inter faith events are happening but with few practical outcomes.
- It is important to excite commitment to next steps and have a strategy drafted.
- Draw on stories of women enabling inter faith relationship.
- Identify male gender champions.
- Look at the example of the [School of Peace](#)¹⁴ which brings together young people with different faith perspectives.
- The Indian government is not supportive of inter faith dialogue.

Advocacy for Gender Justice



We looked at how to go about advocacy that would lead to cultural and structural changes for a gender just society. See [here](#)¹⁵ for guidelines.

Advocacy may take the form of a mass movement/campaign. It can also happen at the individual level.

For example one of our group had advocated for a young female contract worker who had been assaulted at her place of work in a government office.

She accompanied the young woman to the police station but this only led to her being fired from her job.

Further accompaniment and advocacy with the support of the worker’s union led to her being reinstated and the perpetrator of the assault being penalised.

¹⁴ www.daga.org/icf/sop.html

¹⁵ <http://bit.ly/1MUIWBM>

We considered some important steps, for example:

- Do your homework. Research the subject before acting.
- Consider whether there is a way of approaching a person, group or government department to negotiate change without having to move to a mass campaign.
- Media is an important tool; plan to use it.
- Identify a range of stakeholders. Who are your allies?
- Network with others.
- Identify indicators of success of the advocacy campaign.
- Plan a range of actions/interventions at community, societal, household and individual level.

- Ask church leaders to similarly join together, and influence their peers, and the congregations and families among whom they minister, by speaking up for, and modelling just relationship between women and men.
- Seek the support and blessing of church leadership for women's ministries within the church and beyond. This may mean making space for women in the church and recognising their authoritative contributions. It may mean including gender work as an element in church budgets.
- Look for opportune moments. The sermon slot? Marriage preparation? Diocesan meeting? Village meetings?

Networking

Networking with others is important when seeking social transformation and just gender relationships. We can do more together than on our own. Others have skills and experience and knowledge that we do not have.

Ann Skamp from the Anglican Church of Australia who is Steering Group convener of the International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN) described the Network's goals and priorities.

IAWN connects women around the Anglican Communion who share news, experience and resources. The Network aims to bring the voice of women, and their priorities, to the Instruments of Communion, especially the Anglican Consultative Council.



An IAWN Provincial Link in each of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, designated by her Primate, has a particular responsibility to network with women in her own Province and communicate with IAWN's Steering Group.

IAWN's Steering Group will take our 'Message to Church Leadership' to the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Lusaka, Zambia, in April 2016.

IAWN has a website at www.iawn.anglicancommunion.org and a Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/IntAngWomen,

We considered the networking that we already do in relation to women's and girls' issues and discussed how we could strengthen inter-country networking in the South Asia region.

Our participants from the Church of Ceylon in Sri Lanka felt that vibrancy was missing from women's networking within their country and that civil society could do more to strengthen in-country networking. Also, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) could strengthen inter-country networking. The participants themselves would like to network more effectively with the Mothers' Union and with inter faith groups. Sri Lanka has a small-scale Ministry of Women's Affairs.

In the Church of Bangladesh, the Women's Fellowship networks with the YWCA and with Breaking the Silence, a child rights-based organization working against sexual abuse of children in the country.

They would like to find a way to network with men and boys but are unsure about which organisations could enable this. They would also like to develop a Women's Fellowship exchange programme in the South Asia region,

for example, between the Church of Bangladesh and the Church of North India Diocese of Kolkata.

In the Church of South India, the Women's Fellowship networks with similar groups within other Church traditions and among the CSI dioceses. It has a relationship with Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS); the ecumenical microfinance organisation ECLOF International; the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA); and the All India Council of Christian Women. It is also in touch with a number of non-governmental organisations and with the Indian Government facility which provides for women's empowerment projects.

The Church of South India Women's Fellowship would like to strengthen networking with the Church of North India Women's Fellowship, the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI), the Lion's Club, the YWCA, and the International Anglican Women's Network. Networking could lead to exposure and exchange programmes, improved communications, and partnerships—including prayer partnerships—with women's groups within the dioceses, within the country and overseas.

In the Church of North India, diocesan groups network with each other. The Women's Fellowship connects with the YWCA, the YMCA, the NCCI and the aid and development agency OXFAM, and is in touch with the District Legal Services Authority which offers free legal services.

The Church of North India, the Church of South India and the Mar Thoma Church network on women's issues. Networking could be strengthened with International Justice Mission, a global organisation seeking to protect the poor from violence in the developing world, the World



¹⁶ www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm

¹⁷ <http://bit.ly/1l6Zl99>

Council of Churches, the Mothers' Union and Religions for Peace.

The CNI Women's Fellowship would value exchange programmes with other South Asian Churches, for example with women in Nepal, and networking with the women of the Church of Pakistan. Widows might benefit from networking.

Networking with other groups could help women in the South Asian Churches to bring their voices and concerns to initiatives associated with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),¹⁶ to [Universal Periodic Review](#)¹⁷ processes, and to government discussions and consultations.

Working with Men and Boys

We acknowledged that engaging with men and boys is essential; both men and women need to be empowered if social transformation is to be achieved and sustained.

Manisha Majumdar of the Change Alliance took us through some guidelines for working with men and boys.¹⁸

These included identifying both needs for the work and tools already available, such as the '[Bell Bajao!](#)' (Ring the Bell!)¹⁹ campaign in India. Bell Bajao! is a cultural and media campaign that seeks to reduce domestic violence and to highlight the role that men and boys can play in reducing violence.

We looked at some strategic steps for engaging with men in our communities, such as finding ways for women and men to talk together in community groups.

Men can be encouraged to create a safe family and community environment for their sisters, daughters and wives. Peer pressure among men can be powerful; men can be allies and agents of change.

Stereotypes associated with gender can be tackled and removed, for example, so that girls as well as boys can ride bicycles, and men can share some of the household tasks normally assigned to women and move towards taking collective decisions in the household.

¹⁸ <http://bit.ly/1MCpDMZ>

¹⁹ www.bellbajao.org

Taking it home

As our consultation drew to a close we undertook to continue networking and sharing with each other.

We each wrote down our personal commitment to take forward particular actions using what we have learned from each other.

These commitments were placed in sealed envelopes and will be mailed to us in six months' time as a reminder of our undertakings.

Prayer of Commitment

Sisters, let us stand and affirm what we have discovered of God's will in the company of each other.

That we worship one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whose image we are made, to whose service we are summoned, by whose presence we are renewed.

All: This we believe.

That it is central to the mission of Christ to participate, by word and action, in the struggles of the poor for justice, to share justly the earth's land and resources, to rejoice in the diversity of human culture, to preserve human life in all its beauty and frailty, to witness to the love of God for all people of the earth, and to invite all to share in this experience.

All: This we believe.

That through the power of the Holy Spirit, the persecuted shall be lifted up and the wicked will fall; the hesitant prayers and hidden actions of God's people shall change the course of human history; the ancient words of the scripture shall startle us with fresh insight.

All: This we believe.

That God has called the Church into being to be the servant of God's reign, to be a sign of God's new order, to celebrate in the streets and fields of every land the liturgy of heaven.

All: This we believe.

That Christ, fully aware of our differences, prays that we might be one so that the world may believe.

All: This we believe, and to this we are committed for the love of God, in the way of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

Message to our Church Leaders

Our own ministries need the support and blessing of our Church leaders. The work we do in Christ's name would be greatly strengthened if the prevailing cultural environment were one of just gender relationships instead of deeply entrenched patriarchy.

We decided to send a message from our consultation to our Church leaders and, via the International Anglican Women's Network, to the Anglican Consultative Council when it meets in April 2016. The text of our message is in this report on page 4.



This report, and presentations and resources from the consultation can be downloaded from the IAWN website at <http://iawn.anglicancommunion.org/resources/iawn-south-asia-consultation.aspx>



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