

## **Annexure 2: Reflections by Harish Sadani, the Chief Functionary of MAVA**

In the past 2 decades, there has been noteworthy development to explore the male engagement – by numerous women’s groups and women study centres across the country talking about interrogating masculinity and including it as a part of Gender Studies. There are now men’s groups like Equal Community Foundation in Pune and Media Action with Youth and Adolescents (MAYA) in Trichur, that are working with boys and young men on gender and masculinities. In the last 2 years, there have been Regional and National Level Conferences and Conclaves highlighting the involvement of Men to prevent gender-based violence. International bodies, including International Centre for Research in Women (ICRW) and MenEngage, have been deliberating on Male-Engagement as a key aspect in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals that were agreed upon last year and signed by several countries, committing themselves for a 15 year period till 2030. The UN Women has started a long-term new initiative called ‘He for She’ to encourage the involvement of men from various spheres including educational institutions. These developments are heartening as they have the potential to change the world, albeit after many battles, big and small, local, regional and international.

When I co-founded MAVA and took the mantle as a young trained social work professional, there was no talk, deliberation or perspective that would look at men as not just perpetrators, but as allies, partners in fight for gender justice. As a social worker one is cautious of the possibility that people can be politically correct without really believing in it. MAVA has taken care to see that youth, after acquiring a certain level of knowledge and perspective, do not just speak politically correct language but ‘walk the talk’.

During various workshops and sessions facilitated by Project team, I have observed how young people want to share their long-hidden turmoil and doubts and the release they feel when they find a listening mentor. There is so much churning and enthusiasm to break out of traditional mould. I have seen the slow shift in attitudes and perception of young men when they learn to accept a woman’s ‘No’, contributing to house-work, not bothering about peoples comments, breaking religious myths and coming out of the defined framework of masculinity and patriarchy, to find their real selves.

I am glad that the MAVA projects in rural and urban areas catered to a felt and unmet need of countless young people. I have seen with great satisfaction the gradual cultural transformation among the diverse group of mentees and the sensitivity they have developed. Their enthusiasm to share through social media is worth emulating. But, it is still a long drawn battle and more need to join in, for us to be really successful.

MAVA's work with young men in colleges has been acknowledged by some key institutions in the state. They have been inviting MAVA to take workshops, seminars, guest lectures and to develop gender sensitivity among men modules in curricula, place senior students for summer internships whereby fresh perspective on gender, covering the interrogation of Masculinity that is at the roots of gender-based discrimination in Indian Society, is imparted.

Through MAVA's strategy to invest time and effort on equipping student social workers placed for field-work and thereby promoting deliberation and scholarship on issues of gender, masculinity and sexuality, the outcomes have been far-reaching. The rich insights among not just student social workers but also among faculty supervising and guiding the students have helped to advocate MAVA's cause on male engagement in several other Universities not only in Maharashtra but even in other parts of the country like Haryana (Ashoka University - Haryana, Delhi University, TISS Hyderabad). However, even today a large number of schools of social work in India do not give sufficient importance to pro-active role to be played by male social workers in changing the social environment. The para-professionals who lend much strength to community development work in villages and slums also need inputs and we are sure this would add much value to our work. There is much scope for working on this too in future.

Sex Education to school children, is still not imparted in many states including Maharashtra. In the absence of any sexuality education to the vast number of boys, the primary sources of information on sexuality are the internet, pornographic films and books, MAVA's youth program of providing gender, relationship, and sexuality training in a holistic manner would lead to healthier families and neighbourhoods and an egalitarian society.

With various national and international organizations taking note of MAVA's work among youths and encouraging its team members and programs through awards, grants and platforms, MAVA is poised to spread and deepen its impact in coming years. The acknowledgement also suggests the need for wider spread of the youth program I feel similar initiatives that cover an integrated sexuality education among teenagers need to be taken up by national bodies such as NSS, NCERT and UGC and spread across the

country. While we are devoting time for future generations, the present gaps cannot be wished away. The need to reach out to many young people who feel helpless, frustrated and dejected with the rigid norms of behaviors for men and women cannot be denied. MAVA's Youth Helpline which had reflected the need to connect to this invisible group requires nurturing.

This documentation could not have come at a more opportune moment of MAVA's history as we enter the 25th year in 2018. Reading through the case studies of mentors and mentees brought back many memories of our trials, anxieties, joys and excitement, our ups and downs together. The intense sharing and bonding built during our journey together and the unstinting support from all the mentors whether now active or not so active today, has made MAVA what it is today. The documentation process also brought out once again what mentors and mentees have mentioned to me from time to time the need to take the MAVA program to villages, towns, and cities in India, to younger children, to girls, and agencies to sharpen some areas of work, to rejuvenate "needed programs", and to spread to new locales.. Some of the mentors have offered to conduct trainings, some want to do more street plays and campaigns, some wish to take the MAVA agenda through social media.

MAVA processes need to be shared in a more systematic manner so that other developmental practitioners can adapt them in their own regions, and add many more insights to this field. There are several options in front of us. One is the publication of Training Manuals, and bringing out CDs highlighting street-play scripts and participatory exercises evolved by past mentors. Residential Workshops for more developmental practitioners working with youths in rural and urban areas is another way of furthering and sustaining the impact. Whichever path we decide will need continued support from all individuals and organisations as the challenge continues to be reaching out to a large youth population in India, who can be a strong force in the process of social transformation.

My greatest insight has been that the male youth can be agents of change and partners in the movement for a healthy, gender-equal society. The investments we make in people and processes are finally the most sustainable.