



Prevention of Gender Based Violence and Sexual Abuse in Tibetan Settlements and Schools: Interventions in Partnership with the Central Tibetan Administration

Context

The Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) has a long standing partnership with the Women Empowerment Desk (WED), Department of Finance, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamshala to address the issue of gender in schools, colleges and settlements. The partnership of WED and Martha Farrell Foundation was designed to address the Prevention of Gender Based Violence and Sexual Abuse in settlements and schools.

The partnership has led to the formulation, ratification and implementation of guidelines for prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) that are holistic, convergent in nature and keep the victim / survivor of SGBV at the centre. The guidelines have been framed and institutionalized with a view of establishing and strengthening this mechanism. These guidelines clearly outline strategies to bring tangible results in preventing and responding to SGBV for the Tibetan community in exile in India. It is the first ever document to do so.

Capacity building of relevant stakeholders were conducted to build comprehensive understanding of SGBV, on the issue, response mechanisms and awareness of Indian legal system and the ability to access it. Relevant committees including Internal Committees were formed that were responsible for redressal of sexual harassment at workplace in Tibetan schools, colleges, settlements and Central Tibetan Administration including enabling a robust internal system for prevention of SGBV, that has the ability to: support survivors to access the Indian legal system for justice; provide for their rehabilitation, medical care and mental well-being; ensure that all internal committees of redressal are functioning properly and fairly; ensure regular capacity-building and sensitization of all stakeholders.

Background

The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) headquartered in McLeod Ganj, Dharamshala was established to represent the people of the entire Tibet Autonomous Region including the area that is referred to as "Historic Tibet". The CTA is responsible for the welfare of the Tibetan people living in exile in India, who number around 100,000. It runs schools, health services, cultural activities and economic development projects for the Tibetan community.

It recognises the importance of gender equality and empowerment of women for an all-round development of the Tibetan community. Its efforts include encouraging a larger



number of women to take up leadership roles in their communities. One of the ways in which they have done this is by organising and facilitating a series of trainings designed to build leadership among Tibetan women through its Women Empowerment Desk.

The Women's Empowerment Desk of Department of Home released the first ever guideline for Tibetan community to create a Sexual Assault Free Tibetan Society on 12th August 2014 at Sikyong's Hall. The guideline took a holistic and collaborative approach in addressing issues of sexual violence and other vulnerabilities by taking into consideration an inter section of the Tibetan society, while keeping in mind cultures and existing practices in the community.

CTA takes seriously all concerns on sexual exploitation, abuse and complaints brought to its attention. The Women Empowerment Desk (WED) of the CTA further places human dignity and justice from sex and gender based violence at the the core of its functioning. CTA and WED are committed to enabling a gender-just and gender-inclusive society for all Tibetans in exile in India. To further this commitment, CTA and WED have been working with Martha Farrell Foundation to enable a pro-active and accessible mechanism for the prevention and redressal of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) for the Tibetan community in India.

Partnership

Stakeholder Consultations:

The partnership involved the development of a Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) guidelines for the Tibetan community. The SGBV guideline was developed within the context of the law of the land after intensive deliberations with stakeholders from the Tibetan community.

A stakeholder consultation was facilitated by Central Tibetan Administration in collaboration with Martha Farrell Foundation on 20th – 21st February 2019 in Dharamshala with a purpose of further analysing the need for and providing inputs for a more comprehensive guideline that would not only create awareness on issues of sex and gender based violence but would also ensure a redressal mechanism that would be contextual, effective and accessible for the Tibetan community.

The select group of stakeholders made up of teachers, parents, civil society practitioners and government officials who had extensive experience of having worked in both the community and the policy making levels successfully identified critical areas of intervention for addressing issues of sexual and gender based violence within the Tibetan Community in India.

Although it is true that where sexual and gender-based violence persist, women and girls are usually disproportionately affected, participants present at the consultation also listed



down those in the community that are most vulnerable to being victims of sexual and gender based violence. The list follows:

- Children – boys, girls and others in schools, who are especially vulnerable to child sexual abuse
- Children living in residential homes, hostels
- Women, men and others in Tibetan settlements in India
- Old persons in old age homes
- Nurses employed in hospitals inside and outside the Tibetan settlements
- Women, who are single or have newly migrated from Tibet
- Working women, especially women employed in the corporate sector
- Children and people with disabilities, who reside in schools or care homes for people with disabilities
- Married women, women in live-in relationships and women in relationships
- Women and men employed in the Tibetan army
- Nuns and monks
- Tibetan students in universities and colleges
- People of all genders

Sexual and gender-based violence has devastating, long-term effects on the lives of victims, their families and communities, and also impedes development progress.

The critical issues that the SGBV guidelines should address therefore would be:

- Sexual Violence, including rape, molestation and sexual harassment at workplace
- Intimate partner violence and domestic violence
- Trafficking, especially when migrating from Tibet, through Nepal
- Child sexual abuse
- Gender discrimination against girls, women and people of non-binary gender and sexual orientation
- Bullying and everyday sexual harassment in public places, schools and colleges

Though the current available practices and mechanisms within the settlement and CTA to address the prevention and redressal of sexual gender based violence was mapped at the consultation; it was clear at the outset that these are only designed to support women and girls. The current practices were divided into formal and informal mechanisms and the challenges towards prevention of SGBV were discussed. Some of these were:

- Lack of awareness about the applicability of Indian constitution and laws
- Silence and taboo surrounding SGBV
- Fear of stigma and gossip if reported
- Denial of the existence of SGBV within the community

- Fear of Indian authorities and lack of response from them; often accompanied with judgemental attitude on their part which stereotypes Tibetans and their lifestyle and makes the authorities insensitive towards their needs
- Language barrier, which deters Tibetans from accessing the India law enforcement system
- Lack of convergence of various school level redressal mechanism for end-to-end prevention and redressal of SGBV
- Lack of formal and informal mechanisms for prevention of SGBV within the Tibetan Community
- Lack of capacity among civil society to handle cases
- Current mechanisms only support women and girls

Therefore, in order to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the guidelines, the guidelines should clearly identify and prepare stakeholders crucial for the prevention and redressal of cases of sexual and gender based violence in their own locations. These would be: :

- Settlement Officers
- Camp leaders
- NGO Partners
- Women's Empowerment Desk
- Teachers and principals of schools and colleges
- The Civil Court
- Wardens in short stay homes
- Caretakers at old age homes
- Indian state officials from the district administrations and the police

Capacity Building

With a very robust foundation in participatory research and training methodology, MFF's approach to all assessment and capacity building initiatives are based on foundations of participant centric learning which has a strong focus on experiential, motivational and problem solving learning.

For MFF, capacity building is a continuous and ongoing process, which is contextual and builds on the needs and knowledge of the individuals and organisations involved. In the individual context, capacity building includes changes at the level of knowledge, awareness and skills of the individual, building on her/his own existing knowledge, awareness and skill level. It also includes enhancing the organizational capacity of the participants.

In MFF, the use of Participatory Training Approach in all the training sessions not only provides the basis for community participation but also helps participants at the training sessions to easily internalise the knowledge and skill which works in changing behavior and attitude. The approach has been a proven success in helping individuals, the community

and organisations to adopt and implement innovative and sustainable strategies for effective development and empowerment processes.

MFF conducted 2 Training of Trainers preparing more than 60 Gender facilitators, who will be conducting trainings in the Tibetan language using locally relevant information and examples within the community.

Institutionalising Sensitive and Accessible Prevention and Redressal Mechanisms

SGBV committees were formed and institutionalized as prescribed in the Guidelines at the Settlement level, colleges, schools and all departments of the CTA. The SGBV guideline outlined clearly who should be included in the committee and what their roles & responsibility would be. Committee members were trained so that they understand their roles and responsibilities better.

MFF supported WED to develop survivor informed protocols to handle the complaints recorded on helpline, reporting system etc. An effective, sensitive and meaningful operational system was developed to handle the complaints coming through the helpline, establishing linkages to various departments, civil societies and partners for providing the psychological, social, medical and legal support to SGBV survivors including to activate the stakeholders in case there is an urgent need of their involvement in certain situations. A Standard Operating Processes (SOPs) will be developed based on the nature of complaint taking into account the law of the land.

