



Influencers Meet 10th September 2020- Highlights

***“Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.”
-Ruth Bader Ginsburg***

As 2020 marks the completion of another year of the Influencers anchored by EdelGive Foundation, the members of the coalition connected remotely to commemorate and summarise the eventual year full of enriching experiences and lessons learnt. The Meet served a platform to listen, share and deliberate over the pressing issues encountered by women as we stand at the threshold of a new decade with endless possibilities in-store. Now more than ever, women have been disproportionately affected owing to the raging ‘shadow’ pandemic worldwide, hence making it all the more important to trigger conversation and shift the spotlight on the current state of affairs.

Sharing the common vision of women empowerment as a bridge to social transformation, the collective voice of the Influencers and with support from partners like *Ford Foundation* and *Chintu Gudiya Foundation* has:

➤ **Enabled critical work at the grassroots**

EdelGive has supported 23 projects with 15 NGO partners across 10 states in India in FY20. Over the years, through our NGO partners we have been able to create significant impact:

- **114,934** (FY20) women and girls supported in their fight towards Gender Equality
- **19,806** (4,313 in FY20) women and girls supported under financial inclusion programmes
- **25,826** (9,719 in FY20) women supported with access to rights and entitlements
- Legal support to 20,077 (8,508 in FY20) survivors of domestic and sexual violence **5,765** (2,794 in FY20) grassroots leaders developed and supported

➤ **Increased visibility in support to grow the work**

➤ **Grow programmes run by our partners spread across geographies and operating in varied contexts**

Leading the conversation was *Pradeep Nair, Regional Director, Ford Foundation*, who reiterated the importance of gender issues being at the forefront both in India and globally. Since the last 70 years, the Ford Foundation has been championing the cause of women empowerment and subsequent gender justice. Unfortunately, he adds that an issue as necessary as this one often gets pushed to the background. With stark inequalities already at work, the pandemic has further accentuated gender parity. Lack of adequate research and data makes it difficult for individuals and organisations to make funding decisions. His thoughts are also encapsulated in the Foreword of the [Influencers Annual Report 2019-2020](#)

Gender equality often does not evince explicitly visible and tangible outcomes like programmes working in the sphere of education and poverty alleviation. Concluding his address, he reinforced his hope in the flagship partnership between the Ford Foundation and EdelGive and the Influencers as a collaboration getting to the root cause of this social inequality. The coming together of grassroots partners and donors shifts the focus on system change of small and medium-sized organisations working in the space.

Taking the conversation ahead, *Aiswarya Ananthapadmanabhan, Chief Manager, Partnerships at EdelGive* explained how the initiative operates from a point of collective consciousness and solidarity and collaboration to build an ecosystem of very critical work. She highlighted that in the past year the initiative's support benefitted more than a lakh women and girls; additionally, its thought leadership, and collective voice brought more visibility and support to grow this work. It supported behavioural science research (tracing the journey from victimhood to new normal of a survivor of violence in Jan Sahas programme) and technology tools (Sankalp app) that are improving effectiveness of programmes and are available for the larger sector to adapt and use. It also mobilized significant critical funding for grassroots programmes, including for COVID and Amphan where it could boost interventions ranging from immediate food relief, running women's helplines to address women in need, and also enabling communities to access Government entitlements.

Speaking about 'ground' reality, *Sushma Iyengar, Founder of our partner organisation **Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS)***, talked about how *crises meet women and women meet crises*. Highlighting the socio-cultural of the disaster-prone region of Gujarat they operate in, she underlined how women despite being the primary caregivers are the affected the most in the face of any adversity. There is a gross violation of women's rights, and their position of women is constantly changing in society. The ravaging consequences were felt post the disaster and more so by the women. Even amongst the group of migrants who had to undergo unfathomable misery, women suffered the most. Innumerable cases of violence and harassment came to light. This large-scale internal displacement of migrants has led to a change in the village demographics. The pandemic carries within itself a larger gender crisis characterised by visible violence within the four walls of the home. Liquor shops are now trying to fill the resource gap in the staggering economy which is increasing the trouble for women.

As a consequence, the wings of young aspirational girls and women have been clipped. However, as there a silver lining in every crisis, people and the society, in general, are showing an inclination to change at the cost of the crisis. Breaking away from the tenacious grip of age-old stubborn customs and traditions will also, in turn, inspire change in policy and behaviour patterns. *"We shall overcome because we are women!", she concluded.*

Through her short film, 'Listen to Her', *Actor, Director and Activist, Nandita Das* reinforced a vital message of women being harrowed with their lives in the pandemic. The movie portrays how one woman conscious and aware of her privileges is helpless as she is unable to help another woman in need. The film echoes the normalisation of space spaces for women, especially at the time when women are harrowed with their own lives and overturned with work.



Naghma Mulla, President and COO, EdelGive Foundation asked Nandita about what is her thought behind using her craft to trigger conversations especially amid a pandemic which has brought about the good, bad and the ugly out in the open. . To which Nandita attributed her working at the grassroots and amalgamation of her experiences to instils empathy in the audience.

Entrusted with the responsibility of Women Power Line, *Ms. Anju Gupta, IPS, ADG, UP Police* elaborates on the different methods to reach out to the victims of violence immediately. In today's day and age of technological advancement, cyber crimes are constantly rising creating a need for the intervention by the police. She left us with two valuable lessons. Firstly, it is time for the empowerment of the victims and secondly, a systemic change in the way programmes and policies centred on women are implemented.

Adding to the multitude of challenges faced by women, Aparna Uppaluri, Programme Officer, Ford Foundation talked about how the lockdown severely affected women's access to reproductive healthcare. With the lockdown blurring the lines between the public and private, a sense of fear prevails. Services like contraception and unwanted pregnancies have been totally compromised in an already crumbling healthcare system. Looking at violence unfolding between only the victim and the perpetrator is a narrow way to look at the root cause of the problem. Response at a policy and behavioural level is a way for inherent change. Giving a voice and visibility to women along blended with a change in societal norms could be another way out from the issue.

Arathi Shetty, Non-Executive Director, Allcargo Logistics said that the pandemic had not spared anyone. It has affected women from all sections of society have been affected in different ways. She feels that the reverse migration is pulling us back into the vicious trap of age-old evils like slavery, flesh trade and borrowing money. The economy she added could only be revived with the collective support from everyone. She also spearheads CSR initiatives through the Avashya Foundation with a focus on supporting programmes for Natural Disaster Relief, Education, Health Care, Women Empowerment, Sports and Environmental Sustainability.

Svati Chakravarty Bhatkal, film-maker Rubaru Roshni stated that while there have been a lot of cases of violence against women during the lockdown, women against violence is also a phenomenon observed. She talked about the survivors of Gauravi- a one-stop emergency centre for women in Bhopal. These women banded together to provide emergency ration support. As access to a mobile phone was not readily available for a woman, counselling support was also offered to spread strength and hope.

Sushmita Kacholia noted that women despite being the primary caregiver do tend to fade into the background. Beyond her gender-ascribed roles, a woman is often forgotten. She voices her concern about women deserving equal time, space and effort from those around them.

Bala Deshpande, MD-MegaDelta Capital Advisors highlighted the woefully limited resources available to women to tackle a pandemic of this magnitude.

Ankita Luharia, Senior Portfolio Manager, Women Empowerment presented stories from our partner organisations and how they derive power from a coalition like this one. In addition, the unflinching support from the communities can break the system of oppression and shift the realities in gender work leading to an equitable society. This openness and opportunities provided by the coalition have enabled the representation of marginalised women coming from varied backgrounds. She highlights her key learnings from the programmes:

- 1. Engagement of the youth in civic, political and community life** - Increased visibility of pressing issues amongst the public.
- 2. Power of Solidarity Networks-** Women are now leading different groups and hold the agency to communicate and negotiate dialogues with those in power.
- 3. Access to information and opportunities-** Increased participation of women in decision making.

Ahmad Bari Senior Portfolio Manager, Women Empowerment appreciated the knowledge as well the courage bestowed by the collective over the years. The collective efforts of people working on the field, NGOs and the collective has resulted in the experience of understanding women's issues better.

To conclude, the Influencers broadly discussed the following:

1. How the pandemic has disproportionately affected the lives of women.
2. The rising cases on violence against in the domestic sphere
3. How communities at the grassroots have worked extensively through these difficult months despite putting their routine yearly plans on a halt to address the immediate concerns.

In addition to the rapid relief work undertaken by our partner organisations, the government has stepped up by employing emergency helplines to help out any woman in distress.