

# EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS AND REDEFINING MASCULINITIES

## Activity Report of Ekta

Jan - Dec 2020

Ekta started functioning from 2<sup>nd</sup> January in 2020 with a meeting with the staff team to plan for the coming three months. Pongal was celebrated at Kodimangalam centre on 14<sup>th</sup> January. Although the year started as usual, but slowly towards mid March there was a lot of apprehension about Corona virus and the gravity of the situation was felt with the nationwide lockdown from 25<sup>th</sup> March. The flow of information coming from different sources on Covid 19 paralyzed our minds, life came to a standstill. It took quite some time to recover from the initial fear and shock of the situation; slowly we tried to re establish our contact with our team. We started focusing on the capacity building of staff team through Zoom sessions.

From May onwards, there was slight relaxation in the lockdown process. Some of our staffs, staying in the nearby locality were able to come to the office in batches of two or three on rotation basis. The public transport was not operational, so the staffs coming from distant areas were unable to come to the office. They started doing activities with the adolescents and women in their nearby villages. The restrictions on movement were little relaxed in July and August but the public transport remained closed. Therefore most of our interventions from April onwards were on Covid 19 awareness, relief distribution, organizing line sessions, participation in thematic on line discussions and wherever possible holding small meetings in the communities. The banking system remained inaccessible. We could not withdraw cash to do basic expenses, which hindered some of our planned activities. After July, further relaxation in norms enabled us to do face to face interactions with adoption of due precautions. From October onwards, there was much improvement in the situation, the number of active cases in Tamil Nadu came down drastically. We could plan and implement programmes like 16 day campaign in communities and also hold regular on line interactions with our board members and advisers.

### Visitor from CWS:

Trish Murray from CWS visited Ekta on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> February. She had earlier visited Ekta in 2006, 2008 and 2013. Later Ms. Pauline in 2017 and Mr. Rob in 2018 had visited Ekta. The senior staff team felt excited and the new staff team was curious about her visit. On the first day, she met the staff team and discussed about the programme implementation. The team



introduced themselves and spoke about their personal and professional growth with EKTA. Programmes like the life skill education through sports, the railway child help desk, OBR and safety audit were shared in detail including the ongoing capacity building of women and youth leaders. The staff team was delighted to

talk to Ms. Trish and had a wonderful time with her. She had lunch with our staff team and in the late afternoon she visited the Railway Child Help Desk and interacted with the team over there.

During her visit, many NGO representatives and women leaders could not come due to local festivals and also fear about Corona infection. Two of our team members were travelling to Delhi. Ms Shanti was selected to receive C. Subramanian award from National Foundation of India (NFI) for her exemplary community development work and she was accompanied by another staff to help her in translation.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of her visit, she met some of the adolescent girls who had undergone life skill training, representatives from NGOs and academic institutions who work closely with Ekta. A team of three adolescent girls from Chellampatti panchayat met Ms Trish and shared how the life skill education has impacted them. All three felt confident and the courage to say 'No', had improved communication and negotiation skills. This has helped them to better their family relationship and in making their career choices. *"We were also able to confront our father when he physically abuses our mother. We helped our friend who was going to get married before the age of 18 by warning her parents that if they get her married we will call the Child line number 1098 and get them punished. By the help of these life skills when our friends share their problems with us we are able to give them ideas to solve their problems."*

Ms Premalatha from One Stop Centre for Women reflected on her association with Ekta, since she was a social work student. She continued her association after becoming a professor in a social work Collage and today she is one of the board members of EKTA. Ms Sivaranjani from Special Cell for Women at All Women Police Station, shared that when she visited EKTA first time, she was treated as an insider ,helped her to get connected and strengthen networking with women activists. She shared that *"we do all programmes in consultation and collaboration*

*with Ekta*". Ms Priya from AHM Trust (NGO), Theni shared that Ekta has helped in the capacity building of their staff team and also in the formation of the committee to prevent sexual harassment. AHM Trust team has actively participated in all the events of Ekta. Ms Lakshmi Gandhi from WWSS (NGO) spoke about her close association with EKTA since the inception of her NGO. She receives guidance and knowledge input for the functioning of her NGO and takes pride in being a close associate of Ekta. Dr Nagarathinam from the Dept of Communication, MK University was eager to share his experiences with Ekta. He sees the organization as a knowledge partner and collaborator. Ekta has the reputation of a women's rights organization and he feels very happy about his association through which he has been able to deepen his understanding of gender equality and social justice. One of the major events is the One Billion Rising Campaign in which his department is actively participating since 2013. The students had the opportunity to gain insight in to the issues related women and were motivated to make a short film on Gender based violence in collaboration with EKTA which has got nationwide recognition.

Following the above meetings Ms Trish visited the Sangat training venue and had interaction with some representatives from Srilanka and also Tamil Nadu.

She had discussion with the accountant about the financial situation and the accounts maintenance system. Finally, she had a brief meeting with Ms. Bimla regarding the future of Ekta. The team said good bye to Trish and wished her a safe back home journey.

## **Strengthening Women leadership**

### **a. Women's Meetings:**

The National and State media reports highlighted the increase in domestic violence and child marriages during the pandemic situation. It was stated that lack of employment, suspension of public transport system and restrictions on mobility created havoc in the lives of many women and their families. The State came up with help line numbers, but access to mobile phone and privacy was a real concern of women. However, women's organizations tried their best to reach out to women in distress situation. In this context, Ekta started organizing the meetings cum trainings with women from September in Madurai and Killai area. The primary focus of these meetings were to a) create awareness about Covid 19 and Information sharing on the government schemes; b) to impart awareness on the laws to protect women from violence and

thereby keeping them aware about the structural support available to women in distress situation.

In Madurai the meetings were held in Pappapatti and A.Pudupatti panchayats in Chellampatti block. Similarly it was organized in Kalaigner Nagar, Sisil Nagar, MGR Nagar and CREED Nagar coming under the Killai Town Panchayat. A total no of 90 women in Killai and 50 women, 30 adolescent girls participated



In preparing for the meetings, handouts were prepared and details on the available government schemes were collected from the block and district collector's office. Hand outs on Covid 19 awareness, Snake and Ladder Game, a brief note on the Prevention of child marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 and a small booklet on the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) 2005 were kept ready for distribution. The implementing team was given orientation and they did a mock session before starting the meetings in the villages. Masks, sanitizers, oxy-meter and a digital infrared thermometer were given to the implementing team.

While doing the legal awareness trainings, the participants were mostly adult women, in some places adolescent girls also participated. The participants were facilitated through a brain storming exercise to understand violence against women. They were asked to reflect whether women and girls feel safe in this pandemic situation? The response was in the negative, women shared about their increasing workload at home as the children and the men stayed confined to home, lots of quarrels, and use of abusive languages by their husbands causing mental stress for them. When asked if they share about the abuses with others, the response was a strong No. The family image and reputation was cited as the reason. It was shared that in such situation, some women go to their parent's house, very few seek police help and some had attempted suicide.

After this, the provisions in the PWDV Act were discussed in detail. This is a civil act, no compulsion to go to a police station.

- a. Definition of Violence and Abuse (physical, sexual, verbal & emotional and economic),
- b. Complaint mechanism- Protection Officer through filing a domestic incidence report (DIR)

- c. Redressal available- Protection Order, Residence Order (right to reside in the same house),
- d. Monetary Relief, Compensation Order etc...

During the course of interaction, stories of denial of property to widowed women, discrimination and neglect of female child was shared. The need to have follow-up of these meetings was expressed. Finally the booklet on the PWDVA was given to each participant.

### **Case Study:**

*Kamali (name changed) is 28 years old and she has attended school till 5<sup>th</sup> standard. Her husband is 36 years old and has studied up to 10<sup>th</sup> std. They have 2 children; a boy and a girl. From her very young age, Lakshmi was working in snacks shop (Murukku making shop) in Andhra Pradesh with her parents and the brother. After her father's death, the family moved back to their native village.*

*She was married at the age of 17. Kamali and her husband lived happily for four and half years. During this period they were engaged in agricultural activities on a piece of leased land and bought a house in the name of her husband by selling her gold jewels. Suddenly her husband died due to heart attack. After the death of her husband, she was very much confused about how to take care of her children. After few months, Kamali started to work with a nearby garment making company along with other women from her locality. Her monthly income was 12000. She felt confident about taking care of her children with her income. She called her mother-in-law to stay with her and help her in taking care of the children when she went for work. But her mother-in-law scolded her and suspected that she was doing sex work instead of garment job. She was also compelled to move out of the house which was in her husband's name. On this issue, there used to be fight among them. In due course, Kamali asked for a share in her husband's property. The mother-in-law and their sons refused to give her any share and beat her brutally. She felt helpless and tried to commit suicide by hanging. Fortunately the neighbor's saved her life through hospitalization.*

*Committing suicide is a punishable offense then so a case was filed against her. (Recently it has been decriminalized). She shared her police station experiences in women's meeting. After a long struggle she got her house back with the support of police. But family does not agree to give her a share in her husband's property. With police intervention, now they have agreed to give share to her son when he becomes 18.*

*Kamali's mother and brother have been very supportive. With her mother's support in taking care of children, she is able to engage in construction work, farming and NRGES work etc... She also knows driving (2wheeler and 3wheeler). Her life has been a long struggle; she hopes to give good education to her children so that they do not suffer like her. She also feels that it is very important for women to know their rights and keep themselves updated about the laws to protect women's rights.*

### **Follow up Meeting:**

The follow up meetings were organized in Nov, Dec in which after a review of the 1st meeting, Prevention of child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 was taken for discussion.

To start with the question was raised 'who is a child'? It was heartening to note that most of the participants were aware about 18 years as the age of the child. There was some discussion around child marriage and the legal age of marriage for boys and girls, but there was common understanding about the age of a child and the need for them to attend school. .

In response to the question of 'why child marriages are happening?', it was shared that often there is familial compulsion to give in marriage to maintain the close relationship among families , girls are seen as economic burden on the family due to the prevailing dowry problem, the protection of girls from sexual abuse becomes a concern. It was also shared that to prevent love marriages families opt for early marriages.

The next discussion was then why should we prevent child marriages? The responses received mainly from the young participants saying that it hinders education of girls. The parents reflected that the physical and mental growth of young girls is incomplete and they could become easy target of violence. The early motherhood will be a real burden.

Following this, the provisions of the Child marriage prevention Act was presented. Under this Act, there is provision to implicate a long list of persons including the parents, the village elders, panchayat, the marriage hall owners, the priest and also the guest. The purpose is to create awareness about the adverse effect of child marriage and also to prevent such social practices by fixing accountability at the family, community and the state at large.

In the follow up meetings the planning for the 16 days Campaign was done with the members.

### **Case study:**

*Asha(name changed) is 35 years old. She has attended school till 5<sup>th</sup> standard. Her husband Krishnan is 55 years old. He has attended school till 8th standard. Both of them are engaged in farming and also run a tea shop.*

*Krishnan is a divorcee. His wife divorced him because they had no children. He remarried in 2000 to Asha, who was then just 15 years old. Asha now realizes that "her marriage was a child marriage". After her marriage she lived with in-laws. It was a struggle for her to adjust to the new situation. Within a few months of their marriage, they moved to a separate house. She didn't know cooking. Her husband would beat her for it. She was afraid of her husband. She did not have enough money to buy things of her choice. She felt miserable as on one side she was blamed by her mother about not knowing how to run the family with the money given by her husband and on the other scolding from her mother- in law for not having a baby after two years of marriage. Finally her mother consulted a doctor. The doctor said that, the growth of uterus and age of husband may be the reason for late conception. Doctor suggested continuous*

*treatment. The first baby girl was born after 4 years. Again she was scolded by both her mother and mother-in law for not knowing how to take care of her child. She didn't have any voice in family matters and husband always obey his parents decision. It creates lots of problems in family. She had no one, to share her agony. After the second baby girl was born, she had an idea to do family planning but her husband and mother –in-law refused and they wanted a baby boy as the family heir. The 3<sup>rd</sup> baby was also a girl. To her relief, the 4<sup>th</sup> baby was a boy and then the family allowed her to do family planning operation. Her husband and his family denied her basic rights in all the matters.*

*Asha's elder daughter is now 17 years and studying in 12<sup>th</sup> standard. She loves to play kabbadi and aspires to become a police officer. The second daughter is 16 year, studying in 11<sup>th</sup> standard and also wants to become a police officer. The third daughter is studying in 10<sup>th</sup> standard and wants to become a doctor. Both sisters are interested in Silambattam. The boy is 5 year old, going to 1st standard. Now Asha is mature and feels confident about her daughters. Often she shares her stories with them and motivates them to focus on their studies and career.*

## **b. Vocational Training (Tailoring)**

The tailoring classes at Nambikkai Center, Killai continued and during this period 25 women in the age group of 18-25 years, got trained in tailoring. Of the 25 students, 5 are continuing this year. They have learned to stitch chudidhar and blouse. 10 of the students have bought machine and started to stitch in home. Remaining students also in the process of getting machine and use their skill for livelihood option. Some of visit the tailoring class to clarify doubts with the tailoring teacher.

The tailoring teacher along with the programme team was actively engaged in making masks and distribution of dry ration as part of Covid19 relief work undertaken by Ekta. She also has the special responsibility to organize Muslim women in the area.

## **Participation in Gram Sabha Meetings**

After the election to the panchayats in end December 2019, the first Grama Sabha meeting was held on 26<sup>th</sup> January. The field staff team from Killai and Madurai participated in the Gram Sabha meeting. The Nambikkai team participated in the meeting held at Thillaividangan in which over 100 people participated. In Madurai, the team



participated in the meeting at Kovilangulam Panchayat in which around 150 men and women participated. In both meetings the newly elected members were introduced. Each ward members presented a list of the basic amenities that has to done for their wards. The panchayat clerk reported on the completed activities, the budget allocation and the pending works that has to be undertaken immediately. Resolutions to this effect was recorded and signed by the participants.

Our team facilitated discussions in the Grama Sabha and also explained about the need to request the state to with draw the proposed public exam for 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> standard students. A resolution to this effect was passed and signed by the participants. Subsequently the State revoked its proposal on 4<sup>th</sup> Feb due to widespread protest by parents and educationists.

Due to the pandemic, regular grama sabha meeting was not conducted on 15<sup>th</sup> August. However, in a special event the panchayats honored the sanitary workers in recognition of their dedicated services during the Covid 19 pandemic situation. A medal and a shawl was given to the workers. Ms. Shanti attended the function as the representative of Ekta, in Kodikulam and Mr.Kathiresan in kovilankulam panchayat.

Due to the pandemic situation, the GramaSabha meetings remain suspended.

## **Campaigns and Networking**

### **Beijing +25 follow up**

The follow up meeting to share about the outcome of the CSO meeting was organized by Ekta on 21st January at ICSA, Chennai. There were 27 participants in this meeting. Ms Geetha Narayanan, who participated in the CSO Forum gave a detailed presentation about the process of negotiation at Bangkok and the video was screened. Ms. Manohari, another participant of the CSO Forum shared her experiences. All the documents were shared. The group felt good that their views were presented and most of the points were integrated in to the final document of the forum. Information about the CSW64 was shared and Ekta, as an ECOSOC accredited NGO offered to facilitate the registration of interested members.





Ekta facilitated the registration of participants in the CSW 64. Tickets were booked and all arrangements were made but unfortunately due to the Covid 19 pandemic in the last minute the much awaited B+25 review process was cancelled.

Prajnya Trust, based in Chennai organized a virtual meet on 4<sup>th</sup> Sept to celebrate 25 Years of the Beijing Platform for Action: “BEIJING MEMORIES, A Celebration”. A handful of women, who had travelled to Beijing, participated in this conversation and shared their nostalgic memories of travelling together, being part of the large gathering of women from diverse back grounds, the struggle with the language, food and shopping experiences. They shared their engagement in thematic sessions where they could highlight issues and concerns and more importantly the feeling of being part of the Beijing Platform for Action were valued most. The need to have such interactive sessions periodically in order to strengthen the sisterhood of women was expressed by all. Finally a video on the opening ceremony of Beijing was viewed and with renewed energy and enthusiasm the participants signed out.

### **State level Consultation on SDG**

SDG Watch Tamil Nadu is a state level multi-stakeholder platform initiated by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working for protecting and promoting the rights of the socially marginalized communities. It was launched in Chennai on 25 September 2017. It has seven thematic groups (children, women, migrant labor, urban poor, coastal communities, Dalits and local government) that reflect all the 17 goals. Ekta anchors Goal 5 in this process.

In 2018, a status report on SDGs in Tamil Nadu was prepared comparing official data with the global goals and Tamil Nadu’s Vision 2023. In addition a report on SDG 5 with respect to Tamil Nadu was prepared. In 2019, the SDG scorecards of 10 communities for all 17 goals were made using primary data.

The annual convention is the flagship event, the culmination of the studies and on-ground processes of the year. This year on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> November the two days online annual convention was held. The objectives were to explore the status of the socially excluded communities with respect to Health and Wellbeing (goal-3), Education (goal- 4), Labor and livelihoods (goal-8), and Justice Institutions (goal- 16) in the context of the pandemic, and the community, state, and civil society responses. Ekta was part of the panel in goal- 4 and presented the following case study from its field area.

*“Susy is a 12years old girl studying in VI std in a Panchayat Union Middle School in Killai. She lost her mother at the age of 7. Her father remarried within a few months of her mother’s death and the couple now has a 2 year old child. After the birth of child, she was treated as an unwanted child in the family.*”

*They lived in one of the tribal villages in Cuddalore district from the state of Tamil Nadu. Susy is an average student, but goes to school regularly because of the assured meal and spending time with friends and teachers. She is liked by all teachers and friends. In the month of March, due to the pandemic situation the schools were closed, she felt very sad and lonely*

*Her parents were at home with no income. She was asked to take care of her 2 year old step sister. She also became the target of their frustrations. Months rolled by and slowly situation improved from worse to better from the month of September. Her father went to Rameswaram with a few other men to catch a special kind of fish which they call "Poochi". This fetch them Rs. 300 to 500 per day. He comes home once in 10 days and hence, the family was able to survive.*

*In September, the schools started distribution of books to the children and they were asked to watch the Kalvi channel in TV which broadcasts the syllabus lessons. Since her family did not have a TV at home, she used to go to a neighbor's houses to watch TV. One day, a 13 or 14 year old boy living in their street, called her to come to his house and watch TV. When she entered the house, he switched on the TV channel and sat near her. Within a few minutes he started touching her private parts. Susy got scared and ran out of the house. With tears in her eyes and having no one to tell her problem, she started walking, On the way, she met the field organizer from Ekta and with much difficulty shared her problem. She was comforted by the field worker and was asked to come to the Nambikkai centre to watch Kalvi channel. The NGO probed the issue, confronted the young boy and had a meeting in the village to explain about POCSO Act and 1098. In addition, a 3 member dedicated team was allocated the task of taking care of the educational needs of these under privileged, vulnerable children living in that area."*

## **One Billion Rising:**

Since 2013 Ekta is organizing the One Billion Rising Campaign (OBR) in Madurai, TN in collaboration with academic institutions and NGO's with support from Jagori, New Delhi.

In 2020, after a couple of planning meetings it was decided to have multiple launches in different locations to spread the spirit of this campaign. Accordingly there were six launches, In the planning meetings there were updates from the participating organizations on the focus issues in the 16 days activism (25<sup>th</sup> Nov- 10<sup>th</sup> Dec), South Asian women's day celebration (Nov 30). It was found that domestic violence and lack of safety for women and girls remain the main concern even after 15 years of the law to protect women from Domestic Violence. Therefore it was decided to give more attention to create awareness on the available legal provisions as well as to have a fact check on the implementation process of such laws. A seminar to reflect on the current socio political situation in the country was organized in which greater emphasis was given on understanding of the Constitution and promotion of

democratic values as means to protect the rights of the vulnerable, marginalized communities. A poster on the Fundamental Rights and Duties enshrined in the Indian Constitution was released and distributed.

The main OBR event was held on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at Gandhi Museum, Madurai. Around 1000 participants, representing 15 NGOs and social movements, 5 Colleges and a University



along with individuals participated in this event. Due to the imposed restrictions on public gathering, the event was confined to the Gandhi Museum campus. To mark the beginning, a small rally was organized from the entrance to the open stadium. The members shouted slogans demanding actions on violence against

women and girls. Senior Advocate Mr. Gandhi-who is also a member of District Complaints Committee (POSH), and Ms. Buvaneshwari - Inspector at all women police station Tallakulam were the special guests. Both the guests took the lead in releasing the Balloons in the air as a mark of breaking the chains of violence and demanding gender justice. The press release was given to media. The All India Radio did live coverage of the event for an hour and interviewed participants from the audience to understand why they are participating in this event.

The speakers shared their experiences of addressing violence against women and encouraged both women and men to come together to root out this social evil from our society, The Help Line numbers, the Police App in support of women were shared.

The participating groups performed cultural events and at the end the participants came together and took oath as follows

- Not to discriminate, - not to exert violence, -not to keep quite while witnessing violence against women and girls, - demand justice for victims of violence, - to amplify the voice of marginalized women and create a platform for their voice to be heard. To conclude, the participants danced to the tune of OBR anthem.

The following feedback was received from the participants in the OBR event:

- “This campaign is an opportunity for the women and girls to participate and express their issues and concerns.”- a professor
- “I came to know about different forms of violence faced by women, I enjoyed the cultural event.” –a college student
- “I came to know about the one stop centre, the helpline number like ‘181’ ‘1098’.”- a participant
- “I got to know the history of OBR.” – a participant
- “All over the world women are facing the same problems. So I realized this is not an individual problem but a social problem.” –a woman from the community
- “I realized the need to create awareness and sensitize boys and men.” –Male student from the university
- “I came to know how to approach when women face abuse and violence.”- a student
- “I realize that men have a role to address violence against women.” –a male participant
- “I came to know that this programme is been happening for the past 8 years and hope to participate in the upcoming years.” – a student
- “Thanks for giving me an opportunity to speak in the radio programme.” –a student
- “Gathering in the programme gave me confidence and hence I feel good that I could participate in this programme.” – a College Teacher
- “I was under the impression that this event happens only in foreign countries but I saw this happening in Tamil Nadu.”- a foreign tourist visiting Gandhi Museum

### Planning meeting and launch events for OBR-2021

- The theme of OBR 2021 is RISING GARDEN. The thematic details were circulated to all members.
- On 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020, OBR was launched in ISM/ WDRC campus, in which 50 members participated, The OBR song was played and a skit on emotional violence faced by women was enacted. This was well received by the participants and they



committed to spread the message and prepare for the main common event on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2021.

- The first planning meeting was held virtually (Zoom) on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at Ekta.



There were 45 participants from various Organisations and Colleges attended in this programme. In this session discussed about the events to be conducted by the participants and their organisation on February 14, 2021. The participants gave various suggestions. Community garden photos may be uploaded in south Asian sites ,conduct drawing competition among students on the topic of rising garden,

prepare seed balls, conduct a discussion about rising garden among college students etc...

## 16 Days Campaign

This is one of the ongoing campaigns to address the issue of Violence against Women. This campaign is undertaken from 25<sup>th</sup> of November (Day on Violence against Women) till 10<sup>th</sup> December (International Human Rights Day). The purpose is to highlight the discrimination and violence faced by women

and girls in our society and also to stress that any form of violence against women and girls is a violation of their human rights. In Tamil Nadu Ekta initiated this campaign in 1994 in schools, colleges and communities. . Poster making,



writing of poems, articles and speech competitions were organized in schools and colleges on the theme how to combat violence against women.

This year due to the pandemic, the 16 day campaign was launched on 25<sup>th</sup> Nov through zoom at EKTA office. . Ms. Bimla shared the History of 16 Days Activism Campaign. A short video clipping was shared on the past 16 day's campaign activities. Following this, the details of the

plan for this year's campaign was shared. The participating members were invited to join the Campaign at their conveniences.



Dr. Rani, Psychologist from Child Guidance Centre, was happy that she was able to be a part of this campaign. She expressed that many School going children are not aware about the abuse that are happening to them. She wanted to create more awareness for those children who

face violence but are not aware of that violence. She also quoted a few examples there the rights are violated. She also suggested that, children must know their rights for protecting them from violence.

Ms. Amutha Shanthi- Thiyagam Women Trust spoke about the violence that handicap women are facing in the Village areas. She suggested it would be great if we could create awareness among the village students with disabilities. Ms. Abilasha from IIHS shared about the violence faced by the sanitary workers. She wanted to help women with their livelihood and create awareness about the importance of menstrual hygiene.

Ms. Pavalam shared that this year the focus is on workers from the informal sector. We need to provide them need based support. She also shared how covid 19 has very badly affected the women workers in informal sector. Ms. Pavalam concluded by saying that we need to consolidate the helpline numbers and widely circulate.

Ms. Analakshmi spoke about the issues of fisher folk. She shared that all speak about adolescents and the old age people but no one speaks about the problems of women over 50 years of age. They need physical and mental support too.

Ms. Sandhyarani shared changes must start from family. Every parent must treat all children equally without any comparison on the basis of gender.

Ms. Premalatha from one stop centre, Ms Veeshali from PCVC shared the helpline numbers for the protection of women and children.

Following the launch, the campaign team moved to the villages. Prior to the launch, in preparation for the campaign, a list of panchayat that could be reached out was prepared. The panchayat presidents, ward members were contacted. A total of 11 panchayats in Thirupramkundram and Chellampatti block in Madurai District and 3 panchayats in Chidambaram were finalized. This year alongside hand bill distribution, hand print campaign and awareness classes about violence faced by women were encouraged to share their challenging experiences in the pandemic situation. They shared about intimate partner violence, increasing workload, unemployment and emotional distress. Around 1500 members actively participated in this campaign.

The schools and colleges remain closed, so couldn't implement campaign activities with students.

### **The 13<sup>th</sup> Feminist Capacity Building Course on Gender, Sustainable Livelihoods, Human Rights and Peace**

Ekta has partnered with SANGAT for the past 9 years to organize the Tamil course for the feminists from Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. (The earlier 3 trainings were not organized by Ekta; therefore, we say that Ekta has conducted 9 trainings so far). Developing and strengthening regional/cross border perspectives, programmes and cooperation has always been expressed through Sangat's favorite slogan "I am not a wall that divides. I am a crack in that wall". In July, 2019 there was a review of the content, process and follow up of the previous Sangat trainings at Srilanka. Based on the outcome of the review, a few changes were made in the content and

process of the training.



In 2020, the training was organized from 19<sup>th</sup> February to 1<sup>st</sup> March at the Pallotti Centre, Madurai. There were 17 participants from Sri Lanka and 15 participants from Tamil Nadu representing community based NGOs lawyers and

research scholars who had passion to work on women empowerment in this training. There were thematic input sessions to help participants deepen their understanding about Patriarchy, Gender, Sexuality, Feminism and impact of Globalization on socio cultural systems.

Field exposures were organized to familiarize participants on the implementation models focusing on women empowerment. Cultural events, film screening and case studies were widely used.

**At the end of the programme, the following feedback was received from the participants:**

- Understood about gender and sexuality and how social structure affects gender and sexuality.
- Got to know the issues of transgender
- I felt happy to note that feminism is not a new concept, it has always been there in our history
- Understood about unpaid care work and how to make the society aware about it
- Understanding sexuality session helped me to understand my own body
- Learnt reasons behind why war happens and who are all responsible learnt how war affects human rights
- Feminist response to violence, militarization and fundamentalism, this session inspired me to contribute towards a nonviolent society
- This training changed my way of thinking and perception about life

**South Asian Women's Day:**

- In this programme the History of South Asian Women's Day. South Asian Women's Day is celebrated each year on 30<sup>th</sup> November. On this day, *Sangat – A South Asian Feminist Network*, its partners, and other civil society organizations across the South Asian regions, as an act of cross-border solidarity, come together to raise their voices for peace, justice, human rights and democracy, and celebrate the women working for this across the region
- This year, South Asian Women's Day was organized in ISM/ WDRC, Madurai with 50 Participants. Ms. Manohari Doss spoke about the activities they have been doing and the difficulties of handicap women, farmers and Transgender. The meeting came to an end





by having a small candle light ceremony and taking a small oath to come together and support any women when they face any kind of violence.

## **Empowerment of Girl Children**

### ***Special Days Celebration***

#### **National Girl child day:**

The National **Girl Child Day** is celebrated in India every year on 24<sup>th</sup> January. It was started by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Government of India in 2008, with the purpose to spread awareness among people about all the inequalities girls face in the Indian society.

#### **The overall objectives of the programme:**

- To spread awareness among people about all the inequalities faced by girls in the country.
- To promote awareness about the rights of a girl child.
- To increase awareness on the importance of girl child education, health, and nutrition.

This year the National Girl Child Day was organized at Government Girls Higher Secondary School, Checkkanurani, in which around 250 students from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> standard participated.

The team at the Railway Junction conducted a rally with placards showing messages on the importance of Girl Child. A poster was displayed and handbills were distributed. In Nambikkai this special day was celebrated with children's cultural programme.



#### **The International Day of the Girl Child**

International Girl Child Day started being celebrated on October 11 every year with one purpose - to empower women, especially in areas where they have been neglected. It started to try and address the inequality faced by girls. The theme for this year, "My voice, our equal



future”, re- imagines a better world inspired and led by adolescent girls, as part of the global Generation Equality movement.

The International day of girl was usually celebrated in october11but in this year it was Sunday, the celebration was celebrated on 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> October.

- On 12<sup>th</sup> October at Nambikkai, centre, Killai celebration there were 86 participants coming from the nearby villages.
- On 13<sup>th</sup> at Thanakkankulam 30 adolescent girls actively participated in the event.
- On the 14<sup>th</sup> event at Kodikkulam panchayat, 24 adolescent girls participated.

The staff team explained about the importance of international girl child day celebration and discussed about the rights of the adolescents. All the participants enthusiastically participated and interacted during the celebration. Around 140 members were participated in this programme. Through this programme the girl children and their parents became aware about the importance of this day, particularly about the importance of education, and health care of girl children.

### World Children’s Day

World Children’s Day was first established in 1954 as universal Children’s and is celebrated on 20 November each year to promote international togetherness, awareness among children worldwide, and improving children’s welfare. Since 1990, World Children’s Day also commemorates the anniversary of the date when the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration and the Convention on children’s rights. The



entire world has been struggling due to the corona virus pandemic. As normal life came to a

standstill, several people including children felt mental stress. From attending classes online to not going out for play, children also struggle due to the outbreak and battled issue. The world children's day 2020 theme was time to focus on impact of climate change, COVID-19 on our young ones.

- In Nambikkai centre, Killai celebrated the World Children's Day on 20<sup>th</sup> November. 52 Children's were participated.
- Dr. Shanthi and Mr. Thirugnanasambandam (CWC members) visited Nambikkai centre. On that day Dr. Shanthi spoke about Covid -19 awareness and health matters. Mr. Thirugnanasambandam spoke about Covid -19 awareness and child marriage.
- Musical chair, running, frog race competitions were held and prizes were given to all participating children.
- Seeds were distributed to all the participants for promoting kitchen garden.

### **Residential Care for Girl Children @ Nambikkai Centre**

There are 28 girls are residing at Nambikkai Centre. The inmates are given special care focusing on their overall development. They are encouraged to participate in sports, vocational training and pursue their education. This year, due to the pandemic on March 23<sup>rd</sup> the Centre was closed and the inmates were sent home. By then the examinations for 12<sup>th</sup> standard was over, for 11<sup>th</sup> standard examination for one subject was incomplete and 10<sup>th</sup> standard examinations were not held. Due to the extended lock down situation, there was no examination for the 10<sup>th</sup> standard but all the children were promoted to the next class. The exam for 11<sup>th</sup> standard one paper was conducted with much difficulty at a later date. All our children who appeared for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> have passed.

Because of covid pandemic the centre remains closed till September, the staff team is in constant touch with the children to know about the family situation and accordingly relief support is given to them. Regular follow up is made by the team over phone. The local staff team is coming on rotation basis with mask and other precautionary measures to distribute water and also to complete their programme follow up and reporting. The team is also making masks and supplying it to the nearby communities. Awareness about hand wash and dos and don'ts in covid19 is part of the regular awareness programme. The children of our children's club have taken rally in their villages to create awareness. From September month, the centre was given dry ration kit to Nambikkai students. It contains 19 items such as rice, groceries etc... The dry ration kit distribution still continues.

On October 15 onwards, children from nearby places came to centre for attending class. They were belongs to 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Every day different subjects were taken. During this period lots of activities were given to the students like news paper reading, conducting games and other creative works.

### **Home Management committee**

The home management committee did not take place because the children were not available in the centre due to the Covid-19 lockdown. The officers just visited the organization and renewed the registration for next five years by verifying the documents in EKTA Nambikkai Centre.

- On 1<sup>st</sup> August, Sub Judge of Chidambaram court visited Nambikkai Centre for assuring the safety of children during covid-19.
- On 8<sup>th</sup> September, Ms. Anantha jothi Junior Administrative assistant visited Nambikkai Centre for assuring the safety of children during covid-19.
- On 16<sup>th</sup> October, Dr. Shanthi CWC Member visited Nambikkai Centre. And spoke about covid 19 to Goal team.
- On 20<sup>th</sup> November, Dr. Shanthi, Mr. T. Thirugnanasambandam CWC Member visited Nambikkai Centre and take a class about child marriage and Child education. Also talk about awareness of covid -19 to members of children's club.
- On 6<sup>th</sup> December, Mr. Sathish, DCP Office Cuddalore visited and interacted with staffs of Nambikkai centre, he checked the neatness of the centre.

### **Children's camps are organized on a regular basis to promote interaction among children from the nearby villages**

A children camp was organized on 2<sup>nd</sup> October at Nambikkai centre as a part of the Gandhi Jeyanthi celebration in which 63 children participated. The importance of this day and the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation were explained in detail.

This was followed by cultural events - Singing, drawing, essay competitions were held and prizes were given to all participating children. After the event, the children had group games and left the centre with happy feelings.

### **Children's Clubs are facilitated to familiarize the children with election process and to promote their leadership:**

There are five Children's Clubs in Killai area where children from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> standard are members. The election to these clubs is held on yearly basis. The 8<sup>th</sup> std children compete in

the election for lead position and the 7<sup>th</sup> std children are chosen for the assistant leadership position.

After election, the elected members are felicitated and trainings on child rights and child leadership are organised. They are encouraged to participate in the Gram sabha meetings and put forth their issues and concerns.



**Kalaigner Nagar club** has strength of 32 members (22 girls, 9 boys). The members removed the Karuvela plants (prosopis juliflora) around their village and created awareness on safe waste disposal (use of dust bin). They have also taken initiatives to keep the school campus clean and tidy.

**MGR Nagar club** has a strength of 45 ( 30girls and 15 boys).The members took a procession around MGR Nagar, Sisil and Thalapathy Nagar to create awareness among the people to prevent open defecation and use toilets, cut the karuvela trees and to put the wastes in the dust bin kept by the Killai town panchayat. They submitted a petition to the panchayat president to lay roads for their villages and also to put street lights.

**Ponnanthittu club** has a membership of 56 (30 boys and 26 girls) the members are engaged in growing vegetables in their school, in maintaining the plants regularly by weeding and watering the plants. The members motivated the children in the school not to waste food (mid- day meals). Instruction was given to all the children in the school not to buy snacks sold outside the school campus because it was not hygienically prepared. The members joined together, got the help from their elders at home and cut the Karuvelam plants (Prosopis juliflora) around their school.

**Killai MC Club** has strength of 34 (boys 15, girls 19). The members have put a kitchen garden in their school. They got brinjal, tomato and chilies. These vegetables were given to the cook to prepare for their mid day meal.

**Nanjai Club:** has a strength of 36 (21 girls, boys 15) There was stagnant water near the water tap and children found it difficult to wash their plates. Hence, the children's club members

joined together and cleaned the area, put mud over it and leveled the ground so that water doesn't get stagnated there.

### **Programme with the adolescent girls in Schools (Goal Programme)**

- EKTA partners with the NAZ Foundation (India) Trust, New Delhi in implementing the GOAL program in schools and colleges. This program is now called Young People's Initiative (YPI). In 2019 - 20, the program was implemented in three colleges and 4 Schools in Madurai and 3 Schools and one community site at Killai. It was planned to reach out to a total of 1260 children through this program. We have reached 1286 children by March 2020.
- However in the challenging Covid 19 pandemic situation, with the imposed lock down the programme plan for beyond March got disrupted. Ekta was very concerned to reach out to the adolescent girls in the communities (schools remain closed indefinitely) to understand their situation and provide them some learning and sharing opportunities. We wanted to evolve strategies to address their mental stress and also self- development by giving emphasis on health and nutrition, water, sanitation and personal hygiene so that they have adequate knowledge and information about Covid-19 prevention.
- Ekta team made a list of the panchayats that could be reached and contacted the panchayat presidents, ward members through our women leaders to know the number of children in their villages / panchayats. The women leaders who have been associated with us for the past few years helped us in identifying the girls, venue and supported with logistics and facilitated participation of the adolescent girls in the programme. Through many rounds of consultation, 12 locations were selected with around 20 adolescent girls in each location. The regular syllabus was revised and a reference guide was prepared for the participants.
- The goal team also provides many sessions online with the peer leaders from different schools who have participated in the programme in the previous academic year. The peer leaders are the chosen representatives of the class. Recap sessions are held on different topics along with awareness on Covid prevention. Thus, the outcome of this session is that these leaders understand the topics and implement them in their life.
- The Goal team is having practice sessions on life skills and netball skills for its team members internally for its team members through zoom. In addition, the Delhi NAZ team is doing daily sessions on capacity building of the coaches. There was an unspent

amount of one lakh eighty thousand in the previous budget of NAZ. They permitted us to use it for the covid19 relief work. So we did a survey and identified around 300 elderly persons, particularly women in our field area near Nambikkai centre and distributed dry ration, soaps and mask to these needy people. The team was happily engaged in the distribution activities and felt proud about their role.

## Counseling

Ekta has been providing counseling since its inception to needy women who are suffering with physical and psychological difficulties. During the pandemic period, women faced several problems like violence from intimate partner, increased domestic work load, unemployment and mental stress etc... Many sought counseling support .

On 18<sup>th</sup> May counseling support was given to Nallammal. She is a very hard working woman who lives with her husband, son and granddaughter in the house built by her. The son is an alcoholic and has been deserted by his wife. The couple has a daughter who is living with Nallamma. The son often beat her mother and his daughter. He also has relationship with many women. In the night, he comes home with women and if questioned uses abusive language and starts beating. The house belongs to Nallammal but the son forcibly throws her and the daughter out of the house. She was scared of her son. She came to the office seeking help to file a complaint against his son. The counselor spoke with the local police station and sought their intervention. She was helped to prepare a petition for the police station. The next day, the son was called to the police station, she was given strong warning and an undertaking was received from him stating that he will not trouble them henceforth. The police also told him that if they receive another complaint from his mother, he will be arrested and put in jail. Her case is being followed on a regular basis

On 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020 Muneeswari was given counseling to address her marital problem, She had a love marriage. She was married on June 2013 to Sethu, who was an auto driver. They have lived together for 7 years and have 2 children (daughter aged 6 and son 4 years). Sethupathi has the habit of drinking alcohol. He uses abusive language and suspects his wife. This happened again and again. Unable to handle the situation, Muneeswari came to her mother's house with children. Sethupathi approached her and asked to sign in divorce paper for marrying another woman. But she was not ready for that. So Sethupathi forcibly took away

the children and kept them with him in his house. Muneeswari was feeling helpless and approached Ekta for support.

Through the counseling process, the counselor had a couple of sittings with both parties. Sethupathi was very whimsical and often changed his decisions. One point he would urge his wife to come and live with him and in a few minutes he will change his mind and ask the counselor to arrange for separation. Muneeswari was quite clear from the beginning about her decision not to go back with her husband. Considering the situation, Sethu was advised to go for psychiatric counseling which he refused very bluntly. However he was asked to think over and a time gap of one month was given for the next session. After one month Sethupathi came with his parents and signed a document for mutual separation and sought permission to visit the children in public place once a month. Now Muneeswari lives with her two children in a rented house and works in a couple of houses for her livelihood.

Apart from these cases there were many cases of tele counseling during the year.

## **Interaction with College Students:**

### ***a. Orientation to Students***

- On 3rd January, 40 students from College of Nursing, Madurai Medical College came for a field exposure visit. They were given orientation on work related to women empowerment. It was an interactive session. At the end the visitors shared that they feel proud about this visit which was very useful and helped them to understand social issues through a gender lens.

- On 27<sup>th</sup> February, 35 students from Madurai Institute of Social Sciences (MISS) studying I and II BSW were given orientation on understanding of gender based discrimination and violence and developing strategic intervention plans.

- On 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 22 students from College Manner Thirumalai Naicker College came for an observation visit. They were given orientation about the activities of Ekta through an interactive session.

### ***b. Internship:***

- The internship students who had joined in December 2019 continued with their internship. They were actively engaged in the OBR Campaign apart from their regular assignments. Two girls from MISS College went for a field visit to the village to interact with women to have a better understanding about their problems. They also shared information with women on the legal provisions available for protection of women from Domestic violence (PWDVA).



- From Mannar College, 4 male students came for internship. They developed a questionnaire to administer with their peer groups to find out about the awareness on Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act. It was found that there was zero understanding about this legal provision. So the internship students prepared handouts and organized awareness about the definition of Sexual Harassment and also the workplace specified in this Act.
- From Lady Doak College two student interns did presentation of their chart work on Menstruation. They also participated in the capacity building training programme along with the Goal team.
- All the intern students were engaged in documentation work- like collating newspaper news on violence against women and girls. They also were encouraged to prepare charts for awareness creation on topics like ***Good Touch and Bad Touch***.

### **Railway Child Help Desk (CHDK)**

The Childline program was started in Madurai Railway Junction from April 2018. It is a 24x7 programme with a 12 member team. The rescued child is given care and protection, counseling, and with a Memo from RPF the child is handed over to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC). Awareness meetings are organized for the RPF and other government officials at Railways and also with the auto/ taxi drivers, scavengers and porters etc. Important days like Girl Child Day, World Water Day, and Anti- Child Labor Day etc are observed in the railway station.

During this period, 57 children were rescued (46 boys and 11 girls). Most of the rescued children were in the group of 13-18 and were from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. One boy who was working as a bonded immigrant worker was rescued in the beginning of lockdown is still with the child care centre of CWC. His parents in Bihar are unreachable. The Railway Junction remained closed and no trains were running. In such a situation the team was engaged in awareness creation and follow up work alongside the periodic relief work.

*Rashtriya Poshan Maah* was observed during the month of September 2020. This is a special campaign launched in



2018 to create awareness on the PM's overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment. The objective is to address malnutrition amongst young children, and women and to ensure health and nutrition for everyone.

The railway child help desk, took up activities focusing on creating awareness on the need for nutritional food for children and the promotion of kitchen garden.

*Child line Se-Dosti* is a weeklong National campaign organized by Child line India Foundation all over India to enhance public awareness regarding child protection and their responsibilities towards ensuring the same. This year, the *Childline se Dosti* week was observed from 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020. During this weeklong campaign, activities like tying of bandhan , signature campaign, balloon and hand bill distribution and radio talk show were organized. The total Number of beneficiaries was 1046.

### **General Body Meeting**

The annual general body meeting of EKTA was scheduled to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2020. Due to COVID19 lockdown, the face to face meeting could not be held and it was adjourned to a date to be fixed latter.

The Annual General Body meeting was held on 28<sup>th</sup> December at Ekta office premises. Apart from the statutory requirements, detailed discussion was held on the program activities. Goal programme, Railway child Help Desk, Nambikkai Centre shared their activities in detail.

The overall programme of EKTA was appreciated by the GB members.

### **COVID -19 Interventions**

The poor are always an afterthought in India. It seems strange, given that it is a country where millions of people live in extreme poverty, but that are how things have always been. And, it wasn't any different on 25<sup>th</sup> March, when the Indian government announced a nationwide lockdown for a period of 21-days to curb the spread of corona virus.

The decision, though necessary, did not take into consideration the issues of many marginalized sections of the society like daily wage labourers, the homeless population, beggars, slum-dwellers and several low-income groups as well as the senior citizens who live alone. Also, as we pass through the lockdown phases it is becoming increasingly evident that the true challenge for such people won't be to evade the corona virus but just to get enough food to stay alive. In fact, economists like Jean Dreze claims that the recession we are dreading in future is already here for such informal section workers.

Besides the COVID 19 outbreak and fear of getting infected, the negative impact of lockdown on the life and livelihood of the poor and marginalized people are hunger and poverty. So far, many NGOs have shown great enterprise and tried to ease the distress of marginalized individuals during the lockdown.

To start with , Ekta with the support of NAZ, New Delhi, identified 371 poor and needy people for distributing a dry ration kit for support in Killai in Cuddalore district and in Madurai district,. The beneficiaries were selected based on the following criteria:

- Senior Citizens, Single Women / Men
- Physically Handicapped / Mentally ill
- Economically deprived families with more number of children to feed
- Families who do not hold family card and hence unable to get the beneficiary measures from the government.
- Daily wage earners who have no work now for the past 2 months.

Ekta team took stock of the situation after the initial distribution and spoke to its donors to use a portion of the funds allocated for field programmes for Covid prevention and relief work. We thank all our donors for being understanding. Thus we continued with our dry ration supply to the neediest ones in School and in communities. Alongside we developed awareness materials, stickers for public distribution. At Nambikkai the team is engaged in making masks for public distribution. In Madurai the masks and sanitizers are procured locally for distribution. This is a very unpredictable situation.

Apart from these initiatives we are regularly participating in the discussions held at the State and National level women's rights organizations, National Commission for Women and the ministry of women and child. We are also constantly in communication with the women helpline, one stop centre and other services to address violence against women. We are hearing that there is hike in cases of women with burn injuries in the hospital. This is a serious concern and we are probing on this.

Our team members have motivated children to make charts with covid19 awareness messages. Our regular accounting process is on and reporting on the activities of the above different units id underway. Once the public transport becomes functional we want to visit the women in communities to help them in planning for their future livelihood and also to strengthen their understanding of their legal rights to personal safety and livelihood.

## Staff Capacity Building

**The In-house capacity building training** for the staff team was emphasized during the lock down period. Topics like Communication, Team Building, Child Rights and Juvenile Justice Act, Understanding Child Psychology were given priority. The team members were asked to prepare and make presentation, which was reviewed by the peer group. Additional inputs were given by Ms Tamilmoni and Ms Bimla.

Ms Nihar participated in a series of webinars on how research can be used as an important tool for influencing development processes organized by the OXFAM India

The Goal team, Railway team, Nambikkai team, and the Ekta staff team conducted many discussions on relevant topics. It is very useful as each one is given a chance to improve their presentation skills and also expertise on the topics. The team also participated in the online discussions and trainings organized by the donor agencies (Railway and Goal Team)

## Webinar and online Surveys/ Research

Ekta conducted a Webinar on the topic of **Sexual Harassment at work place** on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2020. In this Webinar around 60 participants were participated. Ms. Bimla started the session and presented a presentation on this topic. Participants of the webinar gave various suggestions.

- Through this webinar participants were aware about what are the issues happening in work place and they known about local complaint committee and internal complaint committee. Participants shared their experiences. They were actively participated in the webinar.
- Ekta conducted a Webinar on the topic of **SDG** on 17<sup>th</sup> December. 31 participants were participated in this. Ms.Bimla facilitated the programme.
- Dr.Venkataraman (senior consultant, WHO & UNESCO India) take a session about Overview of SDG's with reference of VNR.
- Dr. Virgil.D. Sami (Executive Director, Arunodaya Centre) spoke about Situation of Girl Child in Education.
- Ms.A.Gandimathi (Director, Law Trust) take a session about Access to justice for Women in Pandemic Situation.

- Ms.Jesu Rethinam (Director, Sneha) presented on livelihood of Coastal Women in COVID -19 Pandemic situations.
- The webinar discussed about the Sustainable Development Goals are a collection 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a “blue print to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all”. The SDG were set in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030.
- Through this webinar the participants got information about SDG .The members were actively participated.
- Ekta team participated in an online rapid survey of access of rural women Jan Dhan account holders to cash benefits. *(The national lockdown impacted the lives of millions of migrant workers, informal sector labours, daily wage workers and numerous others with almost nothing to sustain with. The central government was quick to announce a financial relief package to deal with this massively looming crisis with one assurance providing cash benefits for 3 months to the Jan Dhan account holders.)*
- As a part of the Steering group member in the National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations initiated by OXFAM India, Ekta team contributed to the consolidation of the Tamil Nadu fact sheet.

## Foundation Day

On its journey towards gender just society, Ekta has reached its 30<sup>th</sup> year. To reflect and review the journey of all these years a get together was organized on 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2020 at Ekta office through Zoom. Friends, staff of Ekta both past and present, NGO leaders, academicians who were co-travellers with Ekta from 1990 to 2020 participated in this get together. 53 people joined in this event. The programme was facilitated by Ms. Gandimathi and Ms. Ranjani.



After welcoming the participants Ms. Bimla, Director of EKTA shared her memories. She shared that in the beginning of her carrier of working with women she faced difficulties, however in due course the women helped her to get adapted to the new situation. This has strengthened her commitment to work with women.

This was followed by self introduction of the participating members with sharing their experiences with Ekta. A short video on the milestones of EKTA was shown.

While appreciating and valuing the association with Ekta the following suggestions were made by the participating members.

- Continue the process of sharing of information through study circles and documentation briefs on the current development issues.
- Continue State and Regional level consultations to strengthen understanding of broader processes like the Beijing and SDG etc that helps in micro- macro linkages to address women's rights issues.
- Organize capacity building trainings for women's groups to help them in effective engagement with men and boys to address gender biased violence.

Finally friends shared happy moments and how they have valued their association with Ekta. Such positive feed- back became the energiser for the organization to continue its actions in future.

## Annual get together

The year-end get together was organized on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Ekta team members from Madurai office, Railway Child line, Nambikkai Centre along with some old staff, GB members and representative from NGO's participated in this program. The participating members were asked to share their memorable experiences of 2020 along with their future plan. It was

inspiring to note that despite the difficulties and constraint imposed through the lockdown, each participating member had found a way out to continue their interventions. They were engaged in tele-counseling, providing relief in the form of dry ration



and some of them had organized on line sessions. The reflection was that the lock- down restrictions are hurdles but it can't kill the spirit of people willing to serve.

The senior staff team inspired the younger team members by sharing their experiences and the opportunities they had for personal growth in the organization. Ms. Bimla requested all staff to continue their work with commitment for gender equality and empowerment for women.

### **Looking Ahead:**

The year 2020 was a very challenging year. The pandemic situation exposed the social inequalities and the deficits in accessing the support that has been provided to women and children through various legislations, policies and schemes. Child abuse and domestic violence increased during the pandemic, and there was a livelihood, education and health crisis in the areas we work. Attending Gram Sabha (village council) meetings and placing demands was difficult due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Yet Ekta rose to the challenge as an advocacy, support and grass roots organization working towards empowerment of women and girls. Firstly, the staff at all levels equipped themselves with use of digital technology to conduct e-meetings, and communicated entitlements, protection measures (from abuse) and help lines, health safety etc to grass roots women and children. Secondly, to reach a larger audience EKTA held e-meetings for NGOs on gender-based violence, SDGs, women's leadership and livelihood at South Asian, National and State levels

In the coming year it would be useful for Ekta to:

- Strengthen and sustain women leaders in the communities ; engage them effectively in the electoral process
- Pilot e-literacy amongst women and girls (8<sup>th</sup> class and above) for strengthening livelihoods, claiming entitlements and addressing gender-based violence.
- Organize on line or face to face programs with NGOs, colleges and women's studies centers to disseminate above e-strategies
- Lobby with the government (as part of next assembly elections) for bridging digital divide between rich and poor, women/girls and men/boys and public and private sector, while at the same time curtailing its abuse
- Evolve curriculum and methodologies for training over zoom and other platforms on gender-based violence, leadership, and livelihoods in case the pandemic continues and face to face training is not possible.

- Give priority to social protection of poor women and families, for example promoting public health and life insurance of women and families

At the same time, Ekta would feed the Tamil Nadu and national situation into alternative CEDAW reports and shadow report on Voluntary National Reports