**Introduction**

The year 2019 was a significant in many ways. After a gap of 3 years the panchayat election was finally held with 50% reservation for women in the month of December. This will provide a legitimate space for interaction with the elected women representatives. The SDG framework, particularly the Goal 5 on gender equality and women empowerment has helped us to work consistently on the issue of strengthening women’s leadership and participation. The preparation for the review of Beijing Platform for action has given the required booster for work on women's rights. Ekta, as an organization that participated in the Beijing Conference and was actively engaged in the Pre and Post Beijing processes feels excited at the prospect of working on the review process. Apart from these developments, the regular activities and programs were undertaken as per the plan.

**GENDER AND GOVERNANCE**

**Women’s meetings:** The team made regular visits to the target villages and met the women leaders. During these visits the common issues and women’s issues were discussed. To address such issues the importance of gram sabha meetings and the need for women to participate in these meetings were explained. The women leaders expressed their willingness to equip themselves for strengthening their participation not only in the Gram Sabha Meeting but also in their home and other decision making spaces in the village. Keeping this in mind the Women Leadership trainings were organized.

**Women Leadership Training:**

Women Leadership Training was conducted in 4 different locations in which 200 women participated.

- The first training was organized on 08.06.2019 in Chellampatti panchayat in which 56 women participated.
- The second training was at Thumakkundu panchayat on 02/07/2019 with 30 participants

**OBJECTIVE**

- Strengthening women’s leadership in governance so that they become strategic change agents
Third one was organised at Kovilankulam on 16/07/2019 with 34 participants

Fourth training was organised at Villachery with 80 participants on 02/08/2019

The topic discussed in the women’s leadership training programme was “What is Leadership? Are women Leaders? Why don’t we see more women in the decision making spaces? How to address this gap? What is your understanding about panchayat? Are you willing to contest/participate in the electoral process?”

They also understood the importance of Gram Sabha Meetings and showed their commitment to take part in these meetings.

**Legal Literacy Training for Women:**

There were 3 Legal Literacy Training for Women in different location in which 125 women participated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20/8/2019</td>
<td>Chellampatti Block</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/11/2019</td>
<td>Thumakkundu</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/8/2019</td>
<td>Kovilankulam</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information about the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) was found very interesting for the women. They were under the impression that wife beating is a normal behavior of men and this cannot be dealt by the legal provision. They were given copies of the booklet on the

**Table:**

| Understanding of Violence against Women, Dowry (1961) and PWD Act (2005) |
| Introduction to Sexual Harassment of women at workplace prevention, protection and redressal Act, (2013) |
| Government Welfare Schemes for girl Children and Women |
PWDVA; the participants who could not get a copy requested for their copies in the next meeting. There was heated debate on the issue of dowry and the legal provision ‘taking and offering dowry is a legal offence’. Many women expressed their concern that the daughters in their family will not be able to marry if they refuse to give dowry. This was further discussed and agreed that we should start speaking loud about it, give confidence and proper education to our girls and support them when they choose a career.

The discussion on sexual harassment at work place was thought provoking. It was difficult for them to see domestic work within this legal framework. A lot more interactions need to be done to help them understand this legal provision.

Secondly information about the government welfare schemes was new to most of the women; they asked the trainers to assist them in filling up the forms and also help them in accessing the schemes.

It was interesting to note that some of the youth (college students) also participated in the meeting and urged the organizers to arrange a separate meeting with the youth.

**Grama Sabha meetings:**

During the year, 5 Gramasabha meetings were held. EKTA team members participated in all the Grama sabha meetings and encouraged the women to participate in these meetings. It is a positive sign to see women outnumbering men in participation, however there is a long way to go before they become an agency in defining development agenda.

- **26th January 2019 (70th Republic Day)** - Main focus was on the basic need issues
- **24th April Special Gram sabha meeting** for the National Panchayat Raj Day.
- **1st May** the Gram Sabha meeting was *postponed* due to the Loksabha election and the rescheduled meeting was held on **28th June**. In this meeting the income expenditure statement was shared and the need assessment of each village for the development programme was done. Women participated in large number.
On the 15th of August (The Independence Day) meeting the main focused discussion was on rain water harvesting and the new education policy 2019.

On 2nd October, The Gandhi Jeyanthi day the gram sabha meeting were held in all panchayats. The discussion was around for preparation of the upcoming elections.

It was encouraging to see the women who had gone through the leadership training had come forward to participate in the Gramsabha meetings held in their panchayats.

**Election to the Panchayats:**

Finally, the elections to the panchayats in 27 districts of Tamil Nadu were held on 27th and 30th of December, 2019 (the election for the 9 newly bifurcated new districts were postponed). Women contested in large numbers due to the provision of 50% reservation. However the election was done in a hurried manner leaving no time for preparation. Male members pushed their women to contest as they were not able to contest because of the reservation.

According to data compiled by the Tamil Nadu State Election Commission:

- 18,137 candidates have been elected unopposed as ward members of village panchayats.
- Of the 9,624 posts of panchayat president, candidates for 410 posts have been elected unopposed.
- Twenty-three candidates have been elected unopposed as ward members of panchayat unions. Many of those elected unopposed to the posts are women.
- Riya, a 30-year old trans-woman of the DMK party was elected as union councilor in Namakkal district’s Tiruchengode Panchayat Union. She is the first transwoman to win a local body election in Tamil Nadu.
- Sandhya Rani, a 21 year old college student from Krishnagiri district won the election. She feels confident about the new responsibility and says her primary focus will be on furthering education in her ward.
In this scenario the challenges that need to be addressed are many fold; to engage the women leaders to exercise their authority, to fight wide spread corruption and also to help the women withstand the pressure from families and communities in a highly communalized situation.

**GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

Legal Literacy trainings were conducted for the women leaders in the communities focusing on prevention of domestic violence, dowry and sexual harassment of women at workplace. For the NGO staff and field workers the training focus was on the SDGs with special focus on the Goal 5.

**Training on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

Training on Sustainable development goals was organised on 29th and 30th May at Kodimangalam training centre. 30 members representing 10 NGO’s from five districts and one College participated in this training. The objectives were

- Understand the SDGs, its targets and the monitoring indicators
- Identify the link between the field interventions and SDG goals and developing strategies for State level advocacy.

Exercises and group reflections were conducted to help participants understand what is development? What do we mean by gender based discrimination and violence against women. Further an informative session was taken on laws to protect and promote Women’s Rights.
An introduction to the 17 Goals of SDG was made. The **Goal 5 Empowerment of women and Gender Equality** was explained in detail. The targets and the indicators were explained with examples draws from the experiences of the participants. Following this the participants in smaller groups discussed about their programme plan and how they could monitor the progress using the framework of SDGs. An action Plan for 6 months was drawn. Most of the action points were around addressing violence against women and girls and creating visibility, social recognition for women.

### ACTION PLAN

- Identifying women achievers from our own villages
- Creating awareness about free legal aid
- Conducting Safety audit of public spaces
- Documenting existing Cultural practices
- Organizing training for Counselors
- Collecting information on the existing Internal Committees as per the SH Act

The above action plan was followed up at the organization level of the participants.

**FOLLOW UP AT EKTA:**

A three member team from Ekta attended 7 day training on **National Capacity Development Programme on Governance, Sustainable Development and Advocacy** at Trivandrum. This team was given the opportunity to apply their learning by facilitating the follow up training on SDG on 28.12.2019. There were 19 women representing 5 NGOs from 3 districts in this training programme. The training started with a fun game. An introduction to the 17 goals of SDG was given, a hand out in Tamil was distributed to the participants.

Following this goal 5 was taken for detailed discussion. The targets and some of the indicators were explained with examples by the training team. The participants in smaller groups did some brainstorming on the possible indicators to monitor the
implementation of the government programmes and policies to address the following issues:

- Gender inequality and empowerment of women
- Prevention of child marriage and child sexual abuse
- Recognizing women’s unpaid care work
- Participation of women in decision making process
- Sexual and reproductive health of women

The participants in their feedback mentioned that it was empowering to know that they are already engaged in tasks related to the SDG. They also expressed that there is a need for working with the youth and men in the implementation of SDG goals. This training helped them to understand about the value of women’s work contribution (Unpaid care work). Finally it was suggested that the NGOs should use the framework of SDG to assess their implementation strategies.

**Tamil Nadu State Level Consultation on Beijing +25**

The year 2020 is the 25th year of Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). So the UN agencies, the State and non-state actors have initiated processes at various levels to review the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995. A southern regional consultation was organized by NAWO and the UN Women on 13.08.19 at Bangalore, in which there were a few representatives from the southern States.

Following this, Ekta in collaboration with SRED organised a state level consultation on 9th November 2019 at ICSA, Chennai by inviting representatives from women’s rights organizations and women’s movement. There were 34 women activists from all over Tamil Nadu who participated in the consultation.

**The objectives were:**

- To create awareness about B+25 process among the grass roots level organizations in the state
- To gather experiences of women on the thematic focus of the B+25 review process, identify gaps and evolve strategic demands for advocacy with the State.
To start with, the participants were welcomed and the nostalgic memory of the members who had attended the Beijing conference in 1995 was shared. The review process was explained in detail. The group then discussed on the thematic areas of the review process and came up with a set of recommendations. It was decided that the recommendations will be shared at Asia Pacific Regional CSO Forum at Bangkok by participants who are scheduled to attend the meeting. It was also decided to have a follow up sharing meeting sometime in January, 2020.

**Recommendations:**

- Definition of poverty needs to be relooked to understand the challenges of the poor, Dalits, Tribal communities in the milieu of liberalization and Transnational Trade Agreements.
- 95% of women labor belongs to the unorganized sector. So, the social protection for the unorganized sector needs to be planned in consultation with workers’ organizations/unions. Women in both formal and informal sectors should have the right to form unions and to bargain on social protection and Workers’ Rights
- The contribution of women as unpaid care workers should be recognized, valued and accounted in the GDP of the country. Sensitization on redistribution of unpaid care work needs to be done.
- Privatization of education and health care has impacted adversely women and their labour. The economic failure which leads women to become surrogate mothers and sex workers need to be analyzed with data and the issue needs to be addressed structurally.
- Local bodies need to be strengthened and role of women in local bodies in protecting common resources, water and land should be highlighted and encouraged.
- Gender stereotypes needs to be challenged and women’s enrolment into non stereotyped skill training and technical education should be encouraged. Care holidays need to be given to both the parents. Men need to be appointed as child care workers, Primary school teachers, nurses etc.
- Traditional knowledge of women farmers should be recognized, valued and promoted.
• The pull and push factors of migration need to be analyzed and adequate budget needs to be allotted to increase both rural and urban employment

• The land distribution pattern needs to be analyzed with data and land reform needs to be implemented to encourage women in farming and to achieve food sovereignty.

• Conversion of farm lands into housing plots and to be given for lease of larger corporations need to be stopped.

• No mega development project should be implemented without Environment Impact Assessment and Public Consultation with representation of women.

• The fastest pace of urbanization needs to be given due importance for planning of affordable inclusive urban housing and urban employment opportunities.

• Encouragement and adequate support should be given for women’s political participation in all levels, from local bodies to parliament. Adequate funds to be allotted for training and other support like transportation and other required support. Reservation for women should be implemented at all levels.

• Contextual understanding of Dalit, Tribal, religious minorities, LGBT, disability, migrant women, evidence based research and policy analysis should play a major role in policy planning

• Feminist perspective should be mainstreamed in every developmental planning process. and Gender budgeting should follow that

• Understanding and preventive measures on violence against women should be extended to socio, economic, political and cultural spheres.

• State has a responsibility to prevent polarization of communities on the lines of caste and religion with an understanding that such polarization affect women to a large extent.

• The burning issue of “honour killing” due to inter caste marriages should be addressed with legislative and preventive measures.

• There has to be an ongoing sensitization from Government and civil society for media on depiction of women

• Gender responsive public services should be extended with appropriate fund allocation to enable women to participate in public discourse, employment, and politics.
- There has to be a discourse to challenge cultural practices against women like practices against widows, single women etc.
- Due to availability of materials on the internet child sexual abuse is increasing. Sensitization and strict implementation of POCSO Act should be carried out.
- The existing law on Dowry, Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment at Work Place are not touching the ground to help a woman in distress. Monitoring mechanisms are needed to make the legislative measures to touch an individual woman’s life.
- Sexual and Reproductive Health services should include all women and girls, single and married, from adolescence to old age. Men’s participation and responsibility in contraception need to be planned by health services. The Health services and health policy planning processes should recognize a woman’s Right to take decisions on her body
- Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights education should be incorporated with school education. Life skills education and counseling should be rendered at the school level.
- Health should be the Government’s responsibility and adequate allocation to be done for infrastructure, services and human resources of Public Health system.
- Due to steep increase in alcoholic deaths and resultant struggles of single women Government needs to initiate a liquor policy. The Public health system should include services on de-addiction, counseling and other mental health services. Planning welfare schemes with the profit from selling liquor needs to be changed.
- Resource allocation and implementing mechanisms to be in place for services such as accessibility with safety for all infrastructure, transportation, equal opportunities in independent living, employment equity, education equity, housing and freedom from violence. Access to health services, legal system for women with disability should find priority in development process.

It was heartening to note that the participants of this forum who went to Bangkok presented the recommendations from the consultations and most of it was included into the declaration. As a continuation of this process follow up consultations have been planned for the next year.
GENDER AND MASCULINITY

Empowerment of girls and women is absolutely essential, but it is also both unjust and impractical to expect those who are discriminated against, to take the responsibility for ending the discrimination. Therefore working with men and boys is adopted as an essential strategy to question the idea and practice of automatic male power and privilege along with female inferiority based on gender definitions.

Keeping the above understanding in mind training programmes with the students in colleges was planned.

The following concept note was shared and discussions were held with different departments:

“Gender Studies, specially the subject of male’s participation in the struggle for gender equality and gender justice, are missing from the curriculum of most University departments. Providing students with an opportunity to discuss understand and explore this theme in a comfortable and non threatening environment was felt to be an important step in learning more about the prevailing perceptions regarding the issue.”

In this backdrop, three gender sensitization workshops were organized for the students of Communication Department of Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

Content of the Workshop:

Self Awareness: The link between the person and society is key to bringing about sustainable change. Our own attitude to gender needs to be understood and addressed before looking outside and telling others.

Exercise: Revisiting Childhood and tracing the beginning of socialization as girls or boys.

Understanding Gender: Difference between biological sex and socially constructed gender, assigned roles, gender attributes and its implications.
**Exercise:** Group work listing the roles and responsibilities of women and men, feminine and masculine attributes etc.

**Power:** Understanding sources of power and how the socialization plays a role in shaping it.

**Exercise:** Group Work - Access and control over resources (Land, Labour, Capital, investment) and exploring situations when one feels powerful or powerless.

**Patriarchy:** Understanding of Patriarchy as a socio cultural concept and value which is not fixed to the body of men. Women also have patriarchal values. This concept / social norm converts the biological difference between women and men into inequality. It controls and devalues women’s labour, sexuality, reproduction, mobility and decision making so as to keep women in a secondary subservient position.

**Gender Based violence:** Exploring different forms of violence faced by women and girls in society (pre-birth onwards). Simultaneously the violence faced by boys and men in various stages of their life are reflected upon.

**Role of Boys and Men in bringing gender equality:** Helping participants understand the **male burden** of patriarchy and the benefits of gender equality for men and boys. Further they are encouraged to make personal commitments on action towards ending gender discrimination and moving towards gender equality. (Ex- being conscious of these issues in their own home, influencing friends, using media and art as a tool to raise awareness on gender equality.

The students actively participated in all the sessions, there were heated discussions on male privileges in society, dowry and dress code for women and accepting women leadership.

A beginning has been made; hope the discussion and debate will continue in future to strengthen their perspectives on cross cutting gender issues.
Orientation to College Students

A letter was sent to select colleges and visits were made to introduce the students program to the principals and staff. Introductory programs were held for the social work and sociology departments in 2 colleges (Mannar Thirumalai and Saraswathi Narayan College)

- In the month of February, 35 students from Madurai Institute of Social Sciences (MISS) were given orientation on understanding social issues and developing strategic action plans.
- In the month of August, 39 1st year MSW students from the MISS College came for similar orientation.

Internship: During the year 27 students (11 female and 16 male) from 5 colleges came for internship.

- 8 students came for one month whereas 19 students came on day order (twice a week)
- They were given orientation about the activities of Ekta, safety audit and given opportunity to participate in the programmes of the organization (Summer Camp, SDG training and OBR campaign). Two students did a safety audit at the Railway Junction and two others at the Mattuthavani Bus station.

Study Circle: There were two study circles conducted in the year 2019.

The first study circle was organised after the Loksabha election on June 22nd, 2019. The main objective was to reflect on the women’s participation in the election process. There were 32 participants including staff of NGOs, college lecturers, women activists, and lawyers.

Dr. Suganda Ramamoorthi, Associate Prof. of Economics, Lady Doak College, Madurai gave an overview of women’s political participation in India and Dr. Manimekalai, Director and Head, Dept of Women’s Studies, Bharathidasan University, Thiruchirappalli presented an analysis of the manifestos of different political parties.
The following observations were made:

- **At the National level** a total of 724 women candidates contested with Congress fielding the maximum women at 54 followed closely by BJP at 53.
- Out of 542 elected MPs, 78 are women with Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal leading at 11 each.
- With over 14 per cent female MPs, the 17th Lok Sabha will have the highest number of women members since 1952.
- **In Tamil Nadu**, across the state’s 39 constituencies, only 66 candidates are women and one is a trans-woman, out of a total of 845 candidates. Total number of independent candidates was 557, of which only 27 were women making it 4.84%.
- Nam Tamilar party (NTK) fielded 50% women candidates. While AIADMK fielded one, DMK fielded two and both BJP and Congress fielded one female candidate respectively.
- It is important to note that in a state that consistently sees more women voters than men, as women voters outnumber men in 190 Assembly constituencies against the total 234 constituencies, there are fewer representatives from their own gender to raise their issues.
- Thus women make up to be 7.81% of all the candidates fighting for a Lok Sabha seat this year.

This reflection process helped the participants to realize the need to support women candidature and also to lobby with the political parties to recognize the agency of women.

**The second study circle** was organised on 12.09.2019 on the topic “Challenges to Peace in the Current Scenario” at EKTA premises. There were 25 participants from NGOs and colleges in this meeting. Ms. Lucy and Ms. Yasmeen from IWPG (International Women’s Peace Group), South Korea were the special guest.

The participants were asked to share their perception about peace.
Some of them are as follows:

- Peace is happiness. Where there is happiness there will be peace
- Peace is the future of this world
- Country without war is the need of the hour
- World peace begins with Inner peace
- Peace is with us. We should teach the children to live peacefully
- Where there is love there is peace. Where there is no peace there will be violence.
- Giving up of ego and develop a love for others can bring peace
- Eradication of poverty developing livelihood for all will bring peace

Following this, an introduction to the work of IWPG was given and the participants were urged to join as IWPG members. Next all participants addressed the challenges to peace.

Following this, the participants reflected on the challenges to peace:

- Religious fundamentalism
- Caste discrimination
- Politics disparity
- Gender Inequality
- Partiality in Education
- Increasing poverty and denial of rights
- Environmental degradation
- Lack of social security and safety

The next session went with the strategies to promote peace in our places.

- We shall observe International Peace Day
- Conducting debates and seminars among the students
- Joint initiatives with IWPG
- Promoting peace through street plays and puppet show
- Conducting social awareness events like marathon, balloon blow, mime show etc
- Conducting games for peace building
Conducting peace programs by contacting Panchayats, Sports clubs, childline, religious leaders, government officials, cine actors’ fans clubs, SHGs, women’s clubs, PHCs etc.

Signature campaigns, exhibition on peace

The participants felt happy and took information on peace building activities from the IWPG members.

**EMPOWERMENT OF GIRL CHILDREN:**

In a patriarchal society discrimination on the basis of sex starts at the earlier stages of life. Greater equality for the girl child and the adolescent girls are necessary first steps to ensure that women have equal rights later in life. Disparities in the way girls and boys are raised and treated are at the root of many sexual and reproductive health problems and developmental challenges. Girls experience new restriction and find their freedom of movement being controlled. Socially constructed gender roles gives girls little say about their won aspirations and hopes. Therefore, it is important to address the above by giving due attention to the vulnerabilities pressures and risks faced by the adolescence.

**Training for Adolescent Girls**

Ekta has designed a programme called "**WE WILL SPEAK OUT**" for the adolescent girls in the communities. This year the programme was implemented in 8 locations in Cuddalore District and Madurai District. A total of 234 girls regularly participated in this programme. This programme has support from Hi-Tech Arai.

The programme team went to the field and build rapport with the villagers so that the adolescent girls of that village attended the meeting. As the meetings were mostly conducted in the open spaces the parents initially hesitated to send their children out of fear. So the team oriented the parents about the programme convinced them, thus the girls were able to attend the training.

In the beginning of each training in the village there were many ice breaking games to help the girls overcome their fear and reluctance. During the sessions appropriate
games, group work and chart work were used for greater involvement of the participants.

Sometimes the parents came to the training as observers. They complemented the training team for clarifying matters related to menstruation, bodily changes and savings as they had difficulty in explaining the same to the girls. They also share that the girls are now feeling confident and concentrate on their studies in addition to taking care of their health and hygiene. It was interesting to know in the sharing that there was less fight between the girls and the parents.

Feedback of the students

* “I never knew that bodily changes happen to everyone. I thought it was just my body changing. Thank you for making me understand this process.”
* “I understood that the blood that is coming during period is not bad blood.”
* “I got to know about the menstrual cycle.”
* “I learnt to use and dispose napkins in a clear way.”
* “Through role play I got to know about good touch and bad touch.”
* “I understood the importance of communication.”
* “I spoke out my problem to my friends openly after attending the training and it made me feel good about myself.”
* “I learnt that during mental stress I should go and tell out my feelings to a trustworthy person so that I feel stressed out.”
* “I learnt the forms and importance of savings.”
* “Knowing about the women leaders I feel that I can also become a leader one day.”
* “I realize the importance of setting a goal for my achievements; I have made some plans on this.”
* “This training has given me information that will be helpful in my daily life.”
* “If we have the chance to attend such trainings on a continuous basis it would be very useful to us.”
* The children assure that they will share their leanings among their peer groups and motivate them to join in the future training programme.
Children’s Club

There are five children’s clubs in Killai area and a newly formed group in Kodimangalam area. The children are given orientation to leadership, exposed to child rights programs. They are encouraged to participate in the Gramasabha meetings to put forth their demands. During this period, apart from the regular meetings, a small delegation participated in a programme organised by the Forum to Promote Child Participation (FPCP). It was a State level consultation held on 28th and 29th May at YMCA, Chennai. The programme focused on end child marriage had 76 participants from 13 districts representing 28 NGOs. Some children who were victims of child marriage shared their experiences. Following this the group or the participants discussed in detail about the role of family members, Schools, Community Leaders/Panchayat leaders and the State in preventing this harmful practice that deprives the child of childhood.

Fun games and exercises were used to engage children. Awareness about UN CRC and the Right to Education Act was given. At the end all participants took an oath to prevent child marriage. The children from Ekta participated actively in the process and have come back with renewed energy to share information with their peer groups, parents and also to take action as and when needed.

Summer Camp

Summer camp was organized for 6 days from 13th to 18th May, 2019 at Kodimangalam centre, Madurai. The theme was ‘Go Green’. 60 children attended the camp. The topics were environmental awareness, natural resource management, tree plantation, water management, and plastic recycling. Activities were given to draw village map and finding the natural resources in their villages, listing out the tree name and its utility. They were encouraged to develop art from waste.

The children were facilitated through the creative session to identify their hidden talents and improved their communication skills. Games and activity sessions were
quite engaging for the children. Parents were invited to the concluding session where the children shared their experiences of the camp and certificates were distributed.

**Community RO plants** – 15 community RO plants with support from TATA Group are in operation. There are 5 women entrepreneurs from among the 15 plants. Most of the operators are women.

**NAMBIKKAI CENTRE:**

The centre is running effectively. There are 28 inmates now. They are given support to meet their aspiration on education. All the students who wrote public exams have passed. One of our girls who passed 12th has joined the Aravind Eye Hospital for her training. Others are continuing their studies. Medical check-up, music, dance, and sports are regular feature at Nambikkai.

The Tailoring and computer classes continue at Nambikkai. This year there were 18 students in the tailoring class and 8 have completed computer class.

Many girls have gone through schools in district and state level sports events. Ms. Pooja got the district level Kabadi runner-up award.

**Weekend Creative Camp**

Weekend Creative Camps are organised at regular basis on Sunday for children at Nambikkai Centre. Sometimes the children from nearby Village come and join in these camps. Activities like drawing, art from waste (Flower making), poem writing and essay writing are conducted. Selected few poems from these were sent to the magazines for publication.

**Home Management Committee Meeting**

As per the stipulated norms of the state for the child care institutions at Nambikkai Centre the home management committee meetings were held regularly. The objective of the meeting is to monitor the functioning of the child care centre and also to provide need based support. The representatives from the district child protection unit, Child welfare
committee, the local school teachers, health officers, police, parents and child participate in these meetings. During the year there were three such meetings.

**GOAL PROGRAM**

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, the program is 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 in this year. There were some variations in targeted number of children and programs.

- **Goal Traditional** is a programme done in schools for 8th standard students. This is a course for 10 months with 80 sessions. This programme comes to an end with a graduation session where certificates are given with a special guest.
- **Goal Essential** is done in Colleges for the 1st year students. This programme has 17 sessions. This programme comes to an end with a graduation session where certificates are given with a special guest.
- **Goal Camp** is organised in Communities, Schools and Colleges for five days with focus on the netball game.
- **Goal Event** is organised in Communities, Schools and Colleges for three days with only life skill sessions.

**Observation of special days**

**National Girl Child Day (24th Jan)** was started by the Women and Child Development Ministry since 2008 to celebrate as the national observance. To mark this occasion, various advertisements are run by the government on the TV channels and radio stations and through the message of ‘save the girl child’.

In our country female literacy rate is still 53.87% and one third of the younger girls are malnourished, reproductive age group women are anemic and suffering from various other disease just because of the gender discrimination that limits their access to the health care services.
It is celebrated to increase awareness among people about inequalities faced by girl child in the society like inequality in education, nutrition, legal rights, medical care, protection, honor killing and child marriage and so on.  

Theme for 2019 was “Empowering girls for a brighter tomorrow”. It was also celebrated at the Railway junction.

**Anti Child Labour Day (12th June)**

This day was observed by Child Help Desk team on 16th June in railway station by conducting signature campaign. The school team observed the day on 19th June in Kasthuri Bai Gandhi Corporation Girls High School. 185 students from 7th - 9th std participated. Awareness about Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act was given and the 1098 child helpline no was shared.

**International Girl Child Day**

EKTA observes International Girl Child Day for the past eight years. This year the programme on was organized on 11th October at Velliveethiyar Corporation Girls Higher Secondary School, Madurai. There were 384 students from 6th - 8th standard participated in the special event. The special address was given by Ms. Anita, Counselor, Ekta Railway Child Help Desk. She shared the importance of protecting the rights of Girl Children. The participants were explained about the problems faced by the girl children like abuse, violence and sexual harassment. The children were insisted to give first priority to their education since it helps them for their bright future. The children were encouraged to pursue their aspirations. Some of the stories of women who came through a lot of struggles in their lives were shared. And they were encouraged to move forward in their lives.

**World Water Day**

On 22nd March 2019 The World Water Day was observed in Muthalaikulum panchayat at Chellampatti block in which 40 women participated. Mime show on importance of water was shown. This was followed by discussion about addressing the prevalent water problem in the State. Preventing wastage of water, rainwater harvesting, and tree plantation were some of the solutions shared by the participants.
In the railway junction, the team also had displayed a chart and held discussion with the passengers on the above topic.

**Railway Child Help Desk (CHDK)**

Ekta undertook the Railway Child help line program last year. The program was formally inaugurated on 25th April, 2018. A dedicated team of 12 members are part of this program. It is a 24x7 program, so the team works on shift basis. Till December 31st 393 Children have been rescued in both runaway and missing cases. Out of which 344 are boys, 48 are girls and 1 Transgender.

CHDK celebrated its one year completion on 25.04.2019 at Southern Railway Station, Madurai. Railway officials, representatives from Childline nodal and friends and supporters of the Childline participated in this event.

**Feminist Capacity Building Training (SANGAT)**

The 12th Sangat training was organized from 24th January to 2nd February at the Pallotti in Centre, Madurai. There were 12 participants from Sri Lanka and 15 participants from Tamil Nadu in this program. NGO representatives working in the field, academicians, lawyers and college /Research Scholars who had passion to work on women empowerment participated in this training. Experienced resource persons from Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka were invited to facilitate sessions. They had input sessions as well as practical sessions. An exposure trip to Gandhi gram was organized as many of the Sri Lankan participants wanted to know about the possible economic activities for the resettlement of women in the conflict affected areas.

**Review of Tamil Sangat trainings**

The review of the Tamil sangat course was held from 27th to 29th of July 2019 at YMCA, Batticoloa. Ms. Vasuki, Ms. Sarala, Ms. Hasanah, Ms. Anuradha, Ms. Zainab and Ms. Bimla participated in this review process.

To start with there was discussion on the number of trainings conducted in Tamil. After much exploration it was found that there have been 12 trainings so far. The next training will be the 13th one in the series.
The content, process and the reference materials of the training was examined and modifications were suggested. Simultaneously, the concerns were raised and discussed. It was observed that from the beginning, the core component of conceptual clarity on gender, patriarchy, feminism have been maintained. Exposure to field based programmes and counselling and self-care were integrated in to this training. In due course, topics like gender budgeting, LGBTQAI, working with men and boys, transitional justice and SDGs also have been incorporated. The concerns were mainly around the resource team and also the participants.

The feedback process of the training was taken for detailed discussion. It was observed that a questionnaire format as well as oral feed-back was obtained from the participants apart from the daily recap process. Finally, an action plan was developed for the next Sangath course scheduled for February 2020.

**Capacity Building of Grass Root Women Leaders**

For the past 3 years, Ekta has been doing the capacity building training for the grass root women leaders from Sri Lanka through the partnership of Neelam Thiruchelvam Trust (NTT). This year, the training was organized from 6th to 19th October 2019 in Madurai. There were 10 participants from Sri Lanka and 4 from Tamil Nadu. Experienced resource persons were invited to facilitate the learning sessions. Thought provoking issue based short films and videos were shown to the participants. All the resource persons adopted participatory methodology in their course.

The participants were helped to understand Gender, Patriarchy, Feminism, Equality, Gender based discrimination and Women’s Rights as Human Rights. Exposure visits were organized to some of the economic activity centres of NGOs.

After all sessions and exposure visits the participants gave their feedback as follows:

- Our understanding of gender as a social construct got strengthened, the examples and the videos were very helpful.

- The session on health and sexual rights of women gave more clarity which can be easily taken to our field. Body mapping can be done with boys and create awareness on their health also
Though the session on VAW we came to know the importance of compiling the socio-economic data of the village. This will help us in making clear plans on intervention.

We came to know about organic farming. We felt the need to introduce this in our places and also to preserve the local variety seeds which are slowly disappearing.

We learnt about the issues of transgender/ LGBTQIA. We feel confident to start working with them in future.

The use of documentary films in the training has motivated us to collect such materials and use them to sensitize men and boys. We hope this will help us to get community support to address VAW.

**NAWO meeting/ ILO**

NAWO organized a round table on the "New Instruments on Ending Violence and Harassment in the world of work" on the 8th of June 2019 in Bengaluru. This program was jointly organized by NAWO, Frederich Ebert stiftung (FES) and National Center for Labour (NCL). Ms. Bimla was invited to this consultation for her inputs.

This was organized in view of ILO in its Annual general conference, holding a final discussion about adopting an ILO convention on gender based violence and harassment in the world of work (Standard-Settings, Second discussion) and the 2nd discussion at work place will be organized on the 10th June 2019 at the ILO Head Quarters, Geneva, Switzerland. Since NAWO has been involved in ending violence at all levels, it was appropriate to hold such discussion in the world of work. The outcome of this discussion shall be shared with the workers delegates and the Advisers who are representing various unions and they would lobby for a better document.

**Shelter Home Study**

Ekta is a part of the network by name “Lam-lynthi Chittara Nerallu” and as a part of this a five state study “On women’s experiences of shelter” in India was initiated. Ekta did this study in Tamil Nadu with main focus on the southern districts. It has successfully completed this research study.
Recommendations are given below

On Policy:

- Develop a clearly defined policy guideline on shelter homes at the National level which is then translated to the states level. The policy framework should have a rights-based approach to shelter.

- Develop a state specific comprehensive policy for homeless including rehabilitation and reintegration components into it.

- Shelter homes are just temporary measures. There should be alternative spaces available like low-cost group housing for women. This may be included in to the State housing policy.

- Allocate adequate resources within the government budget for shelter homes for women. Disbursement of funds should be done regularly without any break. This could improve the quality of services provided.

- Strengthen multi-agency coordination of state agencies, shelter homes and other service providers (District Legal Service Agency, One Stop Centre, Health Facilities, Vocational Training Centres and Women’s Organizations).

On access to Shelter:

- Establish adequate number of well-funded shelter homes (swadhar and reception homes) in each district for women survivors of violence with medical, psychological and other counselling support services.

- Establish linguistically and culturally accessible services for women migrant workers, who are often victims of gender-based violence.

On public awareness:

- *Using social media platforms and mainstream media* create awareness on the growing instances of violence against women as a violation of their human rights and also on women’s right to a violence-free home.
Shorter version of laws to protect the rights of women that are mobile friendly may be developed and disseminated.

The sensor board of media and films should make it mandatory to give a warning scroll saying that violence against women is a punishable act (like the cigarette and alcohol warning) whenever violence against women scenes are depicted in films and TV serial.

Efforts should be made on community awareness and advocacy initiatives that include a variety of programs to improve community response, reduce domestic violence, increase public attention, and inform victims of their options.

As a follow up of this study, Ekta has decided to do some interactive activities in the shelter homes that were visited for the purpose of this study.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

One Billion Rising

Since 2013 Ekta is organizing OBR in Madurai, TN in collaboration with Jagori, New Delhi. In 2018, there were five launches and 3 planning meetings for the main public event on 14th Feb 2019.

Ekta in collaboration with 16 NGOs, Advocates, Individuals, 1 University and 7 colleges organized the One Billion Rising in Madurai. Around 650 members participated and made the event a grand success.

OBR launch for 2020

The OBR was launched in Madurai at Western Park, on 5th November 2019 during the Ekta Foundation Day. 31 members from 7 Organizations participated. The second Launch was in Kasturibai Gandhi Corporation Girls Higher Secondary School, Madurai on 13 November 2019 nearly 94 participants participated in the launch. The children took up a quiz on violence against women. The third OBR Launch was at Vellivethiyar Corporation Girls Higher Secondary School, Madurai on 15th November 2019 with 140 participants. The children discussed about the different forms of abuse and violence faced by women and girls. And also read out the Pledge Card. The fourth OBR Launch
was at Pomudiyar Corporation Girls Higher Secondary School, Madurai on 28th November 2019 with 94 participants. The girls enjoyed by playing a game focusing on prevention of violence. On 12th November 2019 the 5th launch was done at CSI Girls Higher Secondary School, Madurai with 62 participants. The girls did Silambam (Folk Art on self defence) as an activity in the Launch. An introduction to the campaign like why where and when it was started was given. And information about the culmination of this campaign on February 14th 2020 was shared.

16 Days Activism Campaign On Violence Against Women

This is one of the ongoing campaigns to combat Violence against Women. This campaign is undertaken from 25th of November (Day on Violence against Women) till 10th 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 and colleges. Poster making, writing of poems, articles and speech competitions were organized in schools and colleges on the theme how to combat violence against women. The poems written by college students were compiled as a booklet- “We are eager to fly”. It was the entry point for EKTA to initiate its interventions with students.

This year we have observed the 16 days through various activities like rally, poster display, handbills distribution, street corner meetings, signature campaign etc in villages, schools, colleges and in the railway station. The main issue highlighted in the 16 days campaign were about different forms of violence against Women and girls including cyber crime. Sharing of information on International day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, HIV AIDS, and Women’s Human Rights. Through this process the women were able to understand the problems faced by them which was so far normalized by the socio-cultural practices and spoke out their problems on caste and religious issues. The male participants realized the situation of women; different forms of violence faced by them and expressed their commitment to support women. This was done through a specially designed poster which had a caption “We are men who supports women empowerment and opposes violence against women and girls.” A total of 1600 women, men, boys and girls participated in this programme.


**Women’s Day**

This year EKTA observed the International Women’s Day on 30.03.2019 at hotel Royal Court, Madurai. There were 54 women from various sectors participated in the event. The special speakers were Ms. Bimla, Director, EKTA, Ms. Revathy, Director, Gandhigram Trust, Ms. Kameswari, Women’s Collective and Ms. Ramanie, Advocate.

The discussions were around:

- Importance of Women’s Day
- Understanding of Balance for Better
- Problems faced by Women labors in organized and unorganized sectors and
- Need for awareness about existing laws to end Violence against women.

Following this session all participants shared their experiences of women’s day programs observed in other places. The need to focus on the issues of persons with disability and trans-gender was insisted by many participants in the program.

The program ended after screening the documentary video on OBR programs.

**Foundation Day**

On the journey towards gender just society, EKTA touched its 29th milestone. To review the path behind these years and sharing of experience a get together was organized on 5th of November 2019 at Hotel Western Park, Madurai. Friends, staff of EKTA both past and present, NGO leaders, academicians who were co-travellers with EKTA from 1990 to 2019 participated in this get together.

After welcoming the participants Ms. Bimla, Director of EKTA shared her memories. She shared that coming from a different cultural background. In the beginning of her career of working with women she faced some difficulties, however in due course the women helped her to get adapted to the new situation. This has strengthen her commitment to work with women.

Following this participating friends introduced themselves and shared their experiences with EKTA.
A small video was screened that had congratulatory messages from friends and well-wishers EKTA. The get together came to an end with the launch of ONE BILLION RISING (OBR).

**General Body Meeting**

The Annual General Body meeting was held on 29th June at Ekta office premises. Apart from the statutory requirements, detailed discussion was held on the program activities. The staff team presented their work and the members gave the following suggestions.

The overall programme of EKTA was appreciated by the GB members it was also urged to strengthen networking of the state, national and South Asian level using the opportunity of SDG’s and the Beiging review process.

**Ms. Premalatha:** G B Member – GOAL program is a successful program. Goal team uniform is bright and attractive. This uniform reaches out children easily. The confidence level of children has been increasing. It helps the children in decision making to sustain their life and it emerges the leadership qualities. It also enhances the characters of dull and poor students. Children are enjoying the life skill education classes. Moreover she volunteered herself to render her help for this program at anytime.

**Ms. Manohari Doss:** Appreciated GOAL Team’s involvement. She expressed that it is an opportunity for the children for their physical and mental problems who have come from the vulnerable community. It may decrease the dropout rates in schools since it motivates the interest of children on education.

**Mr. Deva Manoharan:** He invited EKTA to initiate such programs in schools near Antenna Trust at Kadachanendal, Madurai.

**Mr. Gnana Surabi Mani:** He expressed his interests in participating as during GOAL launch programs at schools.

**Ms. Revathy Perumal:** It is a unique program since it empowers the girl children through sports. Also we need to plan to cover more number of students.

**Ms. Jeena Sekar:** It is a meaningful program. We shall create awareness about social media among schools children since it is a need of this hour.
Ms. Jesu Rethinam Christy: Need planning to work with boys at schools since we are working in coeducation schools. We shall send thanks letter to every school and college of GOAL program.

Ms. Epsi Bai: She suggested that the GOAL team should have the knowledge about New Educational Policy and share the information.

Ms. Premalatha: She also appreciated the staff team for the efforts taken in rescuing 249 children so far. She also suggested that the reasons for elopement of the children and their case studies shall be documented. Such case studies can be used in GOAL program at schools for creating awareness.

Year End Get together
On 30th December 2019 EKTA had a reflective meeting. All EKTA staff members from Madurai office, Railway Childline, Nambikkai Centre, Killai were part of this. Some old staff and GB members including representative from NGO’s also joined in this program. The participating members were asked to share their memorable experiences they had in 2019 along with the concern about future. The senior staff team inspired the younger team members by sharing their experiences and the opportunities they had for growth in the organization. Ms. Bimla requested all staff to take additional responsibilities and to work hard for empowerment for women.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- The weekly staff meeting to share the activities undertaken by each member serves as the ongoing monitoring process of the organization.
- Peer monitoring is encouraged to strengthen the capacity of the staff team. Each team presents their programme plan and others give their suggestion. On completion of the task it is reviewed and feed back is given. Such feed- back is considered while assessing the training needs and exposure of the team members.
- During the General Body meeting, the programme activities are presented by the staff team, the board members review the activities and give suggestions for improvement.
Ms Ranjani Murthy and Geetha Narayanan have engaged with the team in helping them in monitoring the impact of the programme intervention.

In 2020, a structured self-evaluation will be done to reflect on the overall impact of the organization.

Staff Capacity Building/Exposure:

- Weekly review meetings were held on a regular basis.
- On 11th Jan, State level consultation on strengthening the Child Help Desk (CHDK) in Chennai.
- On 12th & 13th Feb, Ms Anita attended the training on Psycho-social intervention for children in contact with railway station at Child Line Chennai.
- On 6th March Ms. Shanthi received C.S. Voluntary Sector Worker Award (2018-2019) at National Foundation of India (NFI), New Delhi. The award carries a cash award of one lakh (paid in two installments) and a citation.
- On 13th April a training on POCSO Act was organized for the railway Childline staff and the team members working with children and adolescents in the schools, communities at Ekta office. Dr. Jim Jesudas, former Child Welfare Committee (CWC) chairperson was the resource person. He shared the legal provisions with live examples from his experiences and engaged the team actively through interactions.
- On 23rd April to 1st May, Ms Kavitha and Mr Sangu Satish accompanied the Goal children’s team to participate in the One Nation Netball Cup (ONNC) at Thyagaraj Stadium, Delhi.
- On 28th and 29th May, Ms Gomathi and Ms Kavitha along with children representatives attended the State Level Adolescent Consultation on “End Child Marriage” at Chennai.
- From 17th November to 23rd November, Ms. Suganya along with Ms. Vanathi and Ms. Nihar attended the “National Capacity Development Programme On Governance, Sustainable Development and Advocacy” at Bodhigram, Adoor, Kerala.
Staff Turn Over:

- Ms Gomathi, who had worked with us for the past 5 years got married and relocated, so had to leave.
- Mr Sangu Satish who also had worked with us for over 6 years had to leave as he got a better economic opportunity.
- Ms Tamilmoni, a senior team member due to her health reason took the option to work as a part time consultant.

Visitors to Ekta

There were many visitors during the year from NGO’s, Social movements, and academic institutions including students.

- On 23rd January Ms. Sindhura came on a visit to monitor the implementation of the Goal programme supported by NAZ Visit.
- Mr. Radakrishnan and Mr. Ganesh Babu from Hi tech Arai Pvt. Ltd on 9th March visited EKTA to understand the implementation of the adolescent girls programme in communities.
- Ms. Roopika from Child Line India Foundation (CIF) on 3rd April visited EKTA to monitor the functioning of Railway child line.
- Ms. Suriyakala and Mr. Suresh from (CIF, Chennai) visited on 10th September visited to monitor the CHDK.
- Ms. Bishakha Bhanja, Regional Manager at Water Aid and Ms. Bandana Pattanaik, International Coordinator of Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW) at Bangkok visited Ekta on 6th November and had interaction with team.

Reflection:

It gives some comfort to note that in a very challenging socio political situation, Ekta was able to continue its work on gender equality with different stake holders. The credit goes to the team at implementation, our board members and donors. We have also succeeded in creating effective linkages from community level to South Asia level.

We have strengthened our networking with the One Stop Centre and Special Cell for women initiated by the Tata Institute for Social Sciences (TISS) in a women police
station with collaboration of the National Commission for Women (NCW) has helped us to refer women who come for counseling support.

Our effort to bring the collaborative strength of women and men committing themselves to promote women’s rights is visible through the willingness of groups and individuals to participate in campaigns like One Billion Rising, 16 day campaign against gender based violence.

It is heartening to meet occasionally young people (both male and female) in the streets, as workers in various work settings sharing with pride about their learning experiences with Ekta (Life skill and gender sensitization training)

However the challenges are many: A young team is now very actively engaged in the life skill education process; it will be a real challenge to sustain their enthusiasm and energy.

The women leadership in communities is under constant pressure from the family, community and also the state; how to effectively motive and sustain their leadership?

The shrinking of public spaces for healthy debate and discussion and the decline in funding for gender equality and rights based work. We have been utmost careful in handling the finance to have a check on the expenditure pattern on each programme. We feel happy that we have managed well in this regard.

The challenge also is how to quantify the quantitative impact of our work in a scenario which requires visible and tangible outcomes.
Glimpses through our programme

Study Circle

Children’s Club

Summer Camp

Orientation to College Students

Gender sensitization workshops
Training on SDG

Women’s Meeting

Gramsabha

Ms. Pooja District Level Kabadi Runner-up Award
Women's Day

One Billion Rising

SANGAT
Training for Adolescent

Weekend Creative Camp

Observation of Special Days

Foundation Days