INDIANS DEMAND EQUALITY FOR WOMEN
CLOSETHEGAP is a unique new campaign to reduce inequality in India.

It is a three-year campaign that is focused on bridging the yawning divide between the rich and the poor, and between rural Bharat and urban India. It aims to challenge inequality and press both society and government to radically change the way they treat marginalized groups, including tribals, women, Muslims and dalits.

In its first phase CLOSETHEGAP has focused on one of the most pressing problems in India – gender inequality.

The campaign has already engaged with thousands of young people, the middle class, and Indians from rural areas. It has used new technology and social media to start a conversation with Indians, asking them directly how they believe India can CLOSETHEGAP between men and women.

These people – particularly the young and those from rural India – cannot be idle bystanders to the political arguments over these issues.

Through CLOSETHEGAP they have given voice to their fears, hopes and aspirations. They have also suggested new solutions to the multitude of problems facing women in India.

This represents a powerful contribution from people who are often at the margins of the mainstream political debate about gender. Their voices have the potential to revive and reframe the sometimes stale and gridlocked discussions about women’s rights in India.

We ignore them at our peril.

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INTRODUCTION

India is a country riddled with social inequality. The top 5 per cent households possess 38 per cent of the country’s total assets, while the bottom 60 per cent own merely 13 per cent. According to World Bank, 32.7 per cent of Indians live below the poverty line, despite the country’s enormous growth in income. Muslims, dalits and tribals continue to suffer from discrimination, and endure substantially worse health and education standards.

But perhaps the most pressing inequality is that between men and women. Almost one in every two women in India experience violence in their daily life. Women own less than ten per cent of land in India. And they remain hopelessly under-represented in key institutions like the parliament, the judiciary and the police force.

Oxfam India believes that the marginalisation of women cuts across many of the disparities that continue to plague India. We believe that India must CLOSETHEGAP between men and women if it is going to realise its potential as a prosperous and egalitarian society. Empowering women who face poverty, violence and discrimination is one of the most powerful things we can do to create a fairer India.

But the political debate about how we can do this has stalled, and degenerated into sloganeering and name-calling. So Oxfam India decided to open its CLOSETHEGAP campaign by attempting to open it up to new voices. We have reached out to as many people as possible across India, and asked them how they would CLOSETHEGAP between men and women. Rather than just trying to rally people behind our policy solutions, we have asked them for their opinion.

All of this informs the key objectives of CLOSETHEGAP:

• To create a new public conversation about inequality between men and women

• To challenge both entrenched gender stereotypes and political gridlocks that stand in the way of equality between men and women, and to come up with new solutions to these problems

• To combine a wide array of different technologies to reach out to - and empower - tens of thousands of people who feel shut out, or disconnected, from the mainstream political debate about gender inequality

1IMAR, India Human Development Report 2011, Oxford University Press, p105
CLOSETHEGAP is Oxfam India’s innovative new campaign for equality. It challenges manifestations of inequality in all areas, such as property rights, health, education, the right to food and nutrition, and budgetary allocations for marginalised groups.

The campaign began by focusing on gender inequality, asking the general public the ways in which they would CLOSETHEGAP between men and women. To build conversations Oxfam India adapted a multi-platform campaign. Two phone lines were set up and promoted through community radio and signages in bus shelters, billboards, cafes, and radio cabs. This was also used to direct callers to the CLOSETHEGAP website (www.closethegap.in).

There were creative installations and conversations in public spaces such as malls and market places and face-to-face engagements with young people in colleges. The campaign also had many conversations through online portals and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

The campaign has reached up to 500,000 people through the phone lines. Through its partners, including Youth Ki Awaz, GotStaredAt, the YP Foundation, Gram Vaani and Purple Mangoes, Oxfam India touched more than half a million people. Halabol, CNN-IBN, Langoor and What’s up Bharat were among the other outreach partners for this campaign.

The people who participated in CLOSETHEGAP came from extremely varied and diverse backgrounds. Participants had countless different suggestions about how to CLOSETHEGAP between men and women but on some issues huge numbers of people spoke with one voice.

Three main strands: Attitudes to women must change – There was a strong belief that while legislative changes are important, the most crucial change of all must come from within society itself. More than 30 per cent of callers specifically said that Indian society’s attitudes towards woman must change in order to CLOSETHEGAP. Another 20 per cent said women needed to have greater awareness of their rights.

More women in positions of power – 15 per cent of participants specifically complained about the lack of women in parliament. And many of the 24 percent of callers who raised issues around women in the workforce talked about the way women struggle to get a foot-hold, not only on corporate boards, but also in important professions like the police.

Stop violence against women – 30 per cent of all CLOSETHEGAP participants specifically raised the issue of violence against women – and demanded action to stop it. It was striking how many women callers voiced anger and helplessness in the face of domestic violence.

Callers had more concrete ideas about how to stop violence against women in the street, particularly in the aftermath of the horrifying Delhi gang-rape last year.
In the end, the report talks about recommendations and commitments of Oxfam India to close the existing gap. Spaces and opportunities for such kinds of conversations within the household and outside do not exist which does not allow for an open dialogue on these issues. CLOSETHEGAP has played a role in filling that void, and Oxfam India is committed to creating spaces for these discussions. Oxfam India is also committed to taking these public conversations to those in positions of influence and power, who can bring about change.

The recommendations also pointed out the changes which public is demanding from policy makers:

- Through affirmative action for a minimum of 33 percent representation of women in all public institutions like the Parliament, judiciary, police force, bureaucracy at all levels.
- Enactment of the Women’s Reservation Bill.
- Adequate and separate budgets for the effective implementation of all pro-women Acts must be allocated. At the same time, there is an urgent need to put in place the necessary mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of these Acts by independent bodies.
- Ensuring appropriate grievance mechanisms with provisions for penalties for pro-women legislation and policies.

CLOSETHEGAP has created a powerful new conversation about gender inequalities. Ordinary citizens on the margins of the political debate have been asked to raise their voice, and they have responded - in great numbers.

Those in power need to listen to them.
So far the campaign has reached up to 500,000 people. Oxfam India has done this through both offline and online engagement – using social media, advertising, traditional media, mobile and IVR (interactive voice response) technology, community radio and face-to-face interactions. This outreach strategy had three main pillars.

1. PHONE LINES AND COMMUNITY RADIO

The most powerful and sustained contact we’ve had with people has been through community radio and our free CLOSETHEGAP phone lines, which were advertised widely using billboards and bus shelter signage.

People were asked a simple question – “How would you CLOSETHEGAP between men and women in India?” More than 50,000 people got in contact with us to answer this question and gave their opinion.

A healthy majority of those participants – a total of 40,000 people – contacted us through calling our community radio partners – Henvalvani Community Radio and Kumaon Vaani Community Radio in Uttarakhand, Radio Dhadkhan in Madhya Pradesh, Alfaz-e-Mewat and Gurgaon ki Awaaz in Haryana and Waqt ki Awaaz in Uttar Pradesh.

An additional 10,000 people called our free CLOSETHEGAP phone lines, which opened on March 8, 2013 and ran for 5 weeks. The two lines – one in English and one in Hindi- were run by our technology partner GramVaani. They operated on a free call back basis. The lines were also promoted by Oxfam India’s community radio partners in rural areas, by our partner civil society organisations across India, and by several groups of young people in the news and advocacy space, who are finding new ways to spark interactions between technology and democracy.

The calls came in from 12 different states - Jharkhand, Delhi, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Assam. This provided a diverse and powerful portrait of community opinion across India.

“A girl has more wisdom and instinct than a boy.” - Arnab
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All the calls were recorded and many were put up on our website, providing a constant commentary on this vital issue, and building momentum behind the campaign. Callers were also automatically rung back by the Gram Vaani team, and offered the opportunity to listen back to the messages left by other participants.

While our main contact was through radio and the phone line, Oxfam India has also engaged with thousands of other people- both offline and online – using some innovative techniques.

2. ONLINE OUTREACH

Another Oxfam India partner Youth ki Awaaz held three debates around CLOSETHEGAP on its website www.youthkiawaaz.com. These were lively affairs, attracting hundreds of comments, and generating high quality, in-depth arguments. Our other partners, GotStaredAt (www.gotstared.at) and YP Foundation (www.theypfoundation.org) also engaged online with thousands of young people about the campaign.

And Oxfam India’s social media accounts exploded with activity as people debated the issues. Our “likes” on Facebook soared from a base of 3,000 to more than 25,000 and many of these people used the site as a platform for spirited debates. Our Twitter account jumped to three thousand followers. Our social media outreach was closely integrated with the rest of our campaign elements – all the social media outlets not only encouraged people to call the CLOSETHEGAP phone lines but also carried content from the lines, providing a powerful, continuous commentary and building momentum behind the campaign.

3. FACE-TO-FACE

Our partners, the youth facilitators Purple Mangoes, (www.purplemangoes.com) held 10 public events in New Delhi where they engaged with 1,000 people – largely youth - at shopping malls, colleges and other social hubs in New Delhi.

These Purple Mangoes events were often very moving. Young people spoke openly and powerfully – often for the first time- about the gap between men and women in India, and how that manifests itself in their lives. Purple Mangoes used theatrical and facilitation techniques – such as expression walls and group circles, to draw responses from participants. Young women marked on a map of New Delhi where they felt unsafe. Again, these events were also closely integrated with the other campaign components – Purple Mangoes constructed a cardboard “phone booth” – a safe and private space where people could use their mobile phones to call the CLOSETHEGAP phone lines.

“We used the medium of storytelling...the aim was to create spaces where people could listen and learn; take back thoughts to reflect on, and not so much on debating. Young people shared personal stories about their struggles, understanding and confusions around gender. They listened to other people’s experiences which helped them look at the issue from multiple perspectives.”
- Purple Mangoes CLOSETHEGAP report
Here's a list of where the Purple Mangoes events were held in New Delhi:

1. Select City Walk (2 events)
2. Whats Up Bharat
3. PVR Saket market
4. Janki Devi Memorial College
5. New Friends Colony
6. Delhi School of Social Work
7. IIT Outdoors
8. IIT Indoors
9. Law Centre, Delhi University

Finally, CLOSETHEGAP achieved substantial mainstream media coverage from national news sources, including CNN-IBN, The Hindu, The Hindustan Times, and All India Radio. Our media partner- CNN-IBN’s “Citizen Journalist” program – not only covered CLOSETHEGAP on the show but promoted it online as well, driving more people to the campaign.

OUR SUPPORTERS

"Just like a man can drive till 12am, so can a woman!" - Paul
The people who participated in CLOSETHEGAP came from extremely varied and diverse backgrounds. As you would expect, the response was a blizzard of different ideas, demands, suggestions and complaints. Participants had countless different suggestions about how to CLOSETHEGAP between men and women.

But on some issues huge numbers of people spoke with one voice. Similar demands for change emerged again and again, from the mouths of both women and men, regardless of age or background.

This section will provide a brief description of these arguments, and illuminate the key themes that have emerged from all the conversations- both offline and online.

Here is a rough breakdown of the main issues raised by callers to CLOSETHEGAP phone lines:

**ISSUES DISCUSSED DURING THE CAMPAIGN**

- Violence against women - 30%
- Women and work - 24%
- Women & Health - 10%
- Women and their political participation - 15%
- Suggestions on how to close the gap - 21%

The single issue which was raised most frequently was the scourge of violence against women. 30 per cent of callers specifically raised this problem and demanded change. 24 per cent of callers raised issues around women in the workforce – including the lack of women in the institutions of state power – while another 15 per cent specifically raised problems with women’s political representation.

We’ll return to those issues later in this report. But underlying all of these demands and complaints was a deeper call for a more profound change.
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We’ll return to those issues later in this report. But underlying all of these demands and complaints was a deeper call for a more profound change.

“Every damn culture begins at home” - Kundan

“I’ve heard men saying, “My wife is the Home Minister” why?” - Abhijeet
A majority of participants in CLOSETHEGAP – no matter what their specific complaint or argument- talked about the corrosive attitudes towards women in India.

There was a strong belief that while legislative changes are important, the most crucial change of all must come from within society itself.

In other words, until citizens throughout India are willing to discard outdated and damaging attitudes about women and their place in society, full equality will be impossible to achieve.

**HOW CAN WE CLOSE THE GAP**

- Change in the societal norms - 31%
- Self employment - 5%
- Education - 13%
- 9% - Government initiatives
- 22% - Stricter implementation of Government schemes, policies & laws
- 20% - Awareness about rights and entitlements

More than 30 per cent of callers specifically said that Indian society’s attitudes towards woman must change in order to CLOSETHEGAP. Another 20 per cent said women needed to have greater awareness of their rights.

Many of these people pinpointed the home as the main bastion of pervasive sexism. And large numbers of participants felt that these attitudes, cultivated at home, are the genesis of broader social ills - from harassment, to discrimination in the workplace and even sexual violence against women.

“Women don’t exist to please men. They have more of a purpose to their lives. The constant judgments on their morality, the struggle that they face for everyday privileges that are awarded to the stronger sex so effortlessly need to go if we want our women to have an equal footing.”

-Anonymous participant

"Most of Indians think women should be submissive to men" - Rithvik
Several young women spoke about the strong resentment they harbour when they faced double standards at home – for example, they are told they are responsible for completing housework while their brothers are allowed to study or play. Or when they are reprimanded for having friends of the opposite sex, while their brothers face no such censure. Or when they watched their father belittle or bully their mother and prevent her from leaving the home.

If there was consensus on one point in this whole engagement process, it was this – daughters and mothers must be treated with respect and equality at home before women can be treated without discrimination in broader society.

“If we talk and educate our children at home, they’ll have respect for women”
-Anonymous participant

Several participants also spoke about the tendency of families to doubt the potential of their daughters, and to withhold them from school or further education. This view is backed by hard data – despite good overall school participation rates, women and girls still make up two thirds of illiterate 15-24 year olds and 62 per cent of out-of-school children.

Even women from well-off families sometimes struggle to forge a rewarding professional life in the face of pressure from their families.

“I have heard from my young female colleagues that they are being discouraged from working. Many of these women belong to good, well-educated families where the parents are working in big multinationals, yet they still carry narrow mindsets. Women also need to act stronger because the future lies with them and it is important for them to break the shackles and strengthen their determination to pursue a professional life, and not just settle with domestic chores.”
- Bhupinder Singh, New Tehri, Uttarakhand, CLOSETHEGAP caller

Some participants also raised the poor treatment of many daughters-in-law in a domestic environment. Many of these people noted that men are by no means the only perpetrators in this regard, and that many women are equally guilty of demanding their daughters-in-law (or their siblings/children) conform to outdated and subservient roles in the home.

“Every damn culture begins at home. If we’re fathering a child, we should ensure we become a responsible father. If the father mother aren’t respecting the Girl child, how would the brother do it? If the daughter-in-law is mistreated (directly, indirectly, verbally, physically, you know all those ‘taunts’) how can we create a generation of awesome men who really really respect women?
- Kundan Kundan · March 13, 2013, Youth Ki Awaaz debate

There was also a realisation that women in rural areas put in huge amounts of manual labour which is not recognized, on land which they do not own. Women constitute 40 per cent of the agricultural workforce – and more than half in poor states like Bihar and U.P. They also put in more than twice the hours put in by men. But they own less than 10 per cent of the land in India. In 2004-06 they received on average only 6 per cent of total direct agricultural credit. Several callers raised this issue, pointing out that women often work hard without gaining any financial independence or security. Instead, she remains dependent on her husband or broader family.
“Men and women complement each other in farming work. Women perform the manual task of harvesting the yield, while men use mechanized equipment to collect the yield and carry it back to the godowns. We should acknowledge the manual labour put in by women members of the family. Women actually take care of more than 50 per cent of the entire work of farming.”

-Krishna Kumar Mahto from Narra Panchayat, Chandrapura Block, Bokaro district, phone call to community radio
http://voice.gramvaani.org/vapp/mnews/10/show/detail/41139/

Participants and callers asked why women so rarely claim the land rights due to them under law. Most believed that again, the answer lay in cultural attitudes – women are not expected to make a claim because sons are still seen as the next generation’s natural inheritors and family leaders. Men are still expected to provide financially for dependent parents – but the corollary of this is that women are almost entirely shut out from land and property ownership.

“Women Reservation Bill may not impact the gender discourse.” - Ishita
The second issue raised by CLOSETHEGAP callers and participants was power – and how women in India struggle to gain, and hold on to it. Many callers, particularly young people, expressed frustration at the under-representation of women in many of the crucial institutions of power in India, such as the Parliament and the judiciary. 15 per cent of participants specifically complained about the lack of women in parliament. And many of the 24 per cent of callers who raised issues around women in the workforce talked about the way women struggle to get a foot-hold, not only on corporate boards, but also in important professions like the police.

"Why should what is in my pants decide what job I pick up, and why must the society have a say in what profession I belong to. We need equal number of police officers, we need equal representation and we need so much more.”
- Disha, March 13, 2013  Y outh Ki Aawaz debate

There was almost universal consensus that the number of women in India’s Parliament - with only 61 of 542 MPs being women – is a disgrace. Again, callers and participants believed that social convention was the main culprit. It’s worth noting here that one survey has found that up to 63 per cent of people in India indicated that they believe men make superior political leaders to women. So women who want to enter parliament not only often face barriers put up by their family and social circles – they also have to clear a massive electoral hurdle as well.

Participants argued that the number of women in the Parliament must be increased drastically – not as a symbolic gesture, but as a vital step towards pushing through legislation that chips away at the almost monolithic social oppression women face. After all, while men can draft laws that help women, an almost entirely male parliament cannot fully share or understand women’s aspirations, struggles and priorities.

[“women Mukhiyas are puppets in the hands of their husbands”- Avi]
“How can the 80 or 90 per cent (who are) men sitting in the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha even think of issues women face like sexual harassment, rape, stalking - women need equal say in governance and politics. If we have such an inequality I don’t think we will ever pass the right bills.”
- Rashmi, New Delhi, CLOSETHEGAP caller

Still, there was no consensus on how to boost numbers. The Reservation Bill currently before Parliament stirred particularly fierce debate online, and drew mixed responses from many participants. Some argued that many female legislators also hold antiquated ideas about the role of women, and that their sex alone does not guarantee sound, women-friendly policies.

“Many times politicians and other leaders still keep making sexist remarks on women related crimes. A similar patriarchal thinking also dominates the mindset of our women politicians who although pay the obligatory lip-service when any crime against women comes to light but in reality, they are no different than their male counterparts sitting unbothered in Lok Sabhas and other political bodies.”
- Aanchal, March 28, 2013, Youth Ki Awaaz debate

Many participants conceded that point - but still argued that while reservations are not perfect, they are a necessary first step towards eliminating the barriers facing women who want to enter parliament, and ensuring a more representative democracy.

“Seeing is believing”- if women do not assume leadership positions, associating leadership with women will become increasingly difficult. The 50% reservations for women in Panchayati Raj have made it increasingly acceptable to conceive of women as active participants in the public arena. Many studies have shown how female enrollment shot up in primary schools in villages; the recognition of women functioning outside traditional roles is a big push for feminism and has amazing positive spillover effects. The success of reservations are conditional to many imponderables and neither are they a panacea for the case of female empowerment nor will they make the political system immediately more conducive for women, but will serve to change mindsets in the long run.”
- Ishita Trivedi, March 29, 2013, Youth Ki Awaaz debate

Several people also argued the Government should take tougher measures to prevent the existing reservations system in the Panchayat being abused. Some callers in rural areas talked about how women in the Panchayat were ignored or marginalized by male members of the group.

“This move has brought positive changes in many villages. However, the drawback has been in areas where male members of the family have given the women representative a back seat. The Government should also put a check on this.”
- Kundan Pandey, March 13, 2013, Youth Ki Awaaz debate

Others told stories about men openly replacing their wives in the Panchayat, in direct violation of the law.

“Female police are needed so that women feel safe” - Paritosh
“Some women in my region face discrimination in Panchayat offices from their own husbands. Women mukhiya are replaced by their husbands in the Panchayat offices, and they are not allowed to deal with office procedures or meetings, because their husbands don’t have liberal views about women taking part in rural politics.”
- Asha Kumari, Chandrapura, Jharkhand

“Are we satisfied by mere filling up of seats or do we want to see a consequential change? Women in position of power are mostly through family dynasties or through male political patronage”
- Shruti, March 28, 2013,
Youth Ki Awaaz debate

Still, many participants clearly felt that if these practices can be stamped out then local government could hold the key – both as a means of empowering women at a local level, but also as a broader demonstration of the transformative potential local women hold as change makers. Some argued that when women with solid grass-roots credentials win power they can not only become local catalysts for women-friendly policies, but also powerful symbols that challenge entrenched gender stereotypes.

“Firstly at the grassroots level, women should be encouraged to be the sarpanch of their villages and participate actively in these elections. Education and awareness for women plays a huge role here. Also men folk should be convinced of the vast benefits a women head in the village can bring. This will further help women to come forward in the election process. Then at the district or taluka level women participation will gradually increase and in turn increase women MLAs and MPs.”
- Tarak Trivedi, March 28, 2013,
Youth Ki Awaaz debate

“Even smallest of steps matter.” - Aanchal
Women in India continue to be plagued by violence – and unsurprisingly, this threat haunts the minds of thousands of people who Oxfam India reached through CLOSETHEGAP. 30 per cent of all CLOSETHEGAP participants specifically raised the issue of violence against women – and demanded action to stop it. Many CLOSETHEGAP participants painted a familiar and dispiriting picture of the everyday violence – and the threat of violence – that women face. One in every two women in India experience domestic violence in their daily life. This violence takes many forms – sexual assault, domestic violence, public abuse, trafficking and honour killings. Many women – particularly callers from New Delhi – also spoke about the threat of violence at the hands of strangers. They talked about the fear they felt when going out, and how that fear shapes and limits their lives.

“"I cannot go for a night out because the guys of our country are sexually frustrated.”
- Anonymous participant at a Purple Mangoes event

“I once went out to meet a friend, and while I was on my way back I was harassed by a group of boys. It was in the middle of a busy road! But they still tried to molest me.”
- Anwesha, Bengaluru, CLOSETHE GAP caller

**TYPES OF VIOLENCE**

- Domestic Violence 39%
- Physical Violence 31%
- Sexual Violence 15%
- Mental Violence 15%

It was striking how many women callers voiced anger and helplessness in the face of domestic violence. Perhaps understandably, there were relatively few concrete suggestions about how to stop domestic violence - most participants simply expressed horror that so many men behave so brutally, and demanded the violence cease.

“I feel safe only in my bedroom”
- Anonymous participant at a Purple Mangoes event

[“I was harrassed in the middle of a busy road!” - Anwesha]
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STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

TYPES OF VIOLENCE

- Domestic Violence 39%
- Sexual Violence 15%
- Physical Violence 31%
- Mental Violence 15%

“A woman should be able to sustain even if she gets divorced.”
- Akash
“Men will only stop hurting women when everything in our culture tells them that it is not OK. At the moment, we are helpless. We can ask men to stop but they will not listen because everything else – their friends, their fathers, their grandfathers, the TV – tells them, or winks at them, that it’s OK. Because most men think that sometimes they have to thrash their wife to get her obedient, or whatever. If this doesn’t change, then… nothing.”
- Anonymous participant at a Purple Mangoes event

Callers had more concrete ideas about how to stop violence against women in the street, particularly in the aftermath of the horrifying Delhi gang-rape last year. One of the most common complaints focused on the police force itself. Many participants listed similar complaints – the police force is corrupt, far too quick to dismiss complaints of assaults, and far too slow to act. There was an urgent call for cultural change.

Some argued that the only way to improve police attitudes towards women would be to lift the women’s participation rate in the police force from the doldrums of 5 per cent. This could help create a police force that was more empathetic and able to deal more proactively with crimes against women. More broadly it would also help to dismantle broader outdated assumptions that women do not have the capacity to take on traditionally male jobs, such as police officer.

“I am a woman. Since the time I began making aims for my life, which were innumerable, capricious and seldom serious, never once did I say “I want to be a police officer”. I never had the desire to be a policewoman, so thinking of whether the society would/would not have allowed me is a little imaginary.”
Tanaya, March 13, 2013, Youth Ki Awaaz debate

There was no consensus how to lift the number of women in the force, but many participants suggested a range of possible incentives, including better pay and changes to training regimes.

“Special compensation policies/performance based incentives specially for police women would attract more applicants; and training in special centers dedicated for police women along with an appropriate training period according to the physical capacity of women.”
Hitarth Saini, March 13, 2013, Youth Ki Awaaz debate

There was also some debate about the virtues of separate compartments for women on public transport, such as on the Metro, and now on Delhi buses too. Many participants regretted that segregation was necessity, and some attacked it outright. But many others gave the policies a full-throated endorsement, and called for these women-only areas to be expanded to more public transport options.

“Regarding the segregation of women in metro i.e. a separate ladies coach: if you have ever travelled in Delhi buses as a girl and have never been harassed, I am shocked! The separate coach is not a privilege it is a necessity”
- Anonymous participant at a Purple mangoes event

The message was clear. If women continue to face horrifying levels of violence on the streets, buses and trains they share with men, then they must be given new spaces without men.
“Men will only stop hurting women when everything in our culture tells them that it is not OK. At the moment, we are helpless. We can ask men to stop but they will not listen because everything else – their friends, their fathers, their grandfathers, the TV – tells them, or winks at them, that it’s OK. Because most men think that sometimes they have to thrash their wife to get her obedient, or whatever. If this doesn’t change, then… nothing.”
- Anonymous participant at a Purple Mangoes event

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The message was clear. If women continue to face horrifying levels of violence on the streets, buses and trains they share with men, then they must be given new spaces—without men.

“If you educate a woman you educate a family.” - Neha
MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMITMENTS FROM OXFAM INDIA

One of our main observations from CLOSETHEGAP was the glaring absence of similar conversations in the public domain.

The existing Indian culture, with strong tones of respect and adherence to written and unwritten norms of conduct and behaviour, is not always conducive for such conversations between parents and children, husband and wife, within and outside households or in public and private spaces.

Though women have been given equal rights and entitlements under the Constitution of India, often social norms have held back the development of women on all major indicators of education, health, nutrition, employment, entrepreneurship and politics, as well as the equal enjoyment of all rights like men. This is evident in the fact that India comes in 136th of 186 countries in the Human Development Index, and is the second worst performing nation in South Asia in terms of gender equality.

It is imperative that Indian society asks itself why women are treated like this. It must interrogate its own social thinking, attitudes and behaviours, which act as barriers to women’s empowerment and equality in both private and public spaces.

Such conversations can only happen when there is an open and non-confrontational space where difficult questions are welcomed, instead of spurned or attacked.

CLOSETHEGAP has played a role in filling that void, and Oxfam India is committed to creating spaces for these discussions. Oxfam India is also committed to taking these public conversations to those in positions of influence and power, who can bring about change.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Women need to be more visible by their presence in the public sphere. This would be possible through affirmative action for a minimum of 33 percent representation of women in all public institutions like the Parliament, judiciary, police force, bureaucracy at all levels. It is a known fact that a critical mass (which has long been accepted as 30 to 33 percent) in any institution is the starting point for influencing its functioning through the viewpoint of a marginalized group. Therefore, for women to be able to overcome the barriers that hamper their empowerment it is essential that women make up at least 33 percent of these powerful institutions. Currently women are often concentrated in the lower rungs of public institutions, so it is vital that women are represented in the upper echelons as well.

The Women’s Reservation Bill which would bring the much needed critical mass of women in Parliament and State Legislatures has had a somewhat chequered history so far. But if women are to be equally involved in making policies which affect them it is essential that the Women’s Reservation Bill is passed as soon as possible.

Violence against women has been one of the biggest barriers to women’s development. India as a signatory to the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has provided many progressive laws to stop violence against women, like Dowry Prohibition Act, Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, The Sexual Harassment of Women At Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. But these acts have not been effectively implemented. One of the primary reasons for this is because there is not a dedicated budget for their implementation. Adequate and separate budgets for the effective implementation of all pro-women Acts must be allocated. At the same time, there is an urgent need to put in place the necessary mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of these Acts by independent bodies.

It is also imperative to ensure appropriate grievance mechanisms with provisions for penalties for pro-women legislation and policies. This is one way to enhance the accountability of state institutions which have a mandate - and a responsibility – to ensure women’s empowerment.
CLOSETHEGAP has created a powerful new conversation about gender, the place of women in India, and what can be done to tear down the attitudes that allow millions of women to be treated as second-class citizens in India.

Ordinary citizens on the margins of the political debate have been asked to raise their voice, and they have responded - in great numbers.

Some of what they said is surprising. Their priorities may not fit neatly in any political schemes. And their ideas are not a panacea.

But their testaments and their demands are powerful, and compelling. They have demanded change.

Those in power need to listen to them.

“[The woman herself should understand that she is not weak youngster]” - Jasbir
CONCLUSION

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