

# Looking Within

Orientation on Gender for ATI staff

Venue: New Delhi

Martha Farrell Foundation



## Context

Appropriate Technology India (ATI) is working for the economic empowerment of women in the 6 districts of Uttarakhand for the last 20 years. Presently a women empowerment programme is being conducted in Chamoli district. This programme is a rights based programmed as well as gender sensitization programme.

8 participants, 4 women and 4 men, were able to develop an understanding of gender, women rights and laws. They were equipped to work effectively and smoothly with the communities in Chamoli.

What is gender and why should we talk about it? These social workers work with the community and throughout the day they receive information about many instances of domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, acid attacks, abandonment, elopement, challenges in empowerment of women, rigid patriarchal mind-sets, etc. In order to work on these issues, it is important for them to first the nature of these issues.

### Knowing each other

The ATI staffs have been working in Chamoli district for quite some time but how well do they really know each other? The staff was asked to choose a partner with whom they interact less. In 10 mins time, they were asked to find out something unique about their partner and then express it through art. We received some beautiful illustrations of 'understanding the other'.



Once the participants were familiar with each other and felt comfortable, it was important to discuss what the expectations of the participants from this workshop were and how it could be incorporated in the 2 day workshop.

The participants wrote about their expectations and their fears.



As the workshop started, the participants started sharing the problems they face in their workspace and everyday lives. The facilitators ensured that the sharing is based on mutual trust and faith, that this should be only seen as a learning experience rather than a platform for disgracing the other.

### Farmer activity

The facilitator asked the participants to think about the people they work with and then take some time to draw a farmer giving it an identity. It was observed that most of the participants drew a male farmer who is working with machines or tools, and there was only one drawing where a female was seen ploughing the fields with hands. This showed that unconsciously we see men doing the work with the aid of technology where women are still seen as doing the primitive work, carrying the cut harvest. The female farmer can be seen afar and the male farmers are seen as taking the lead in the front.



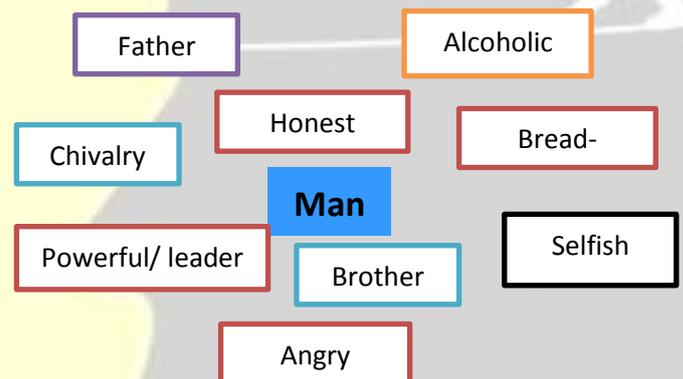
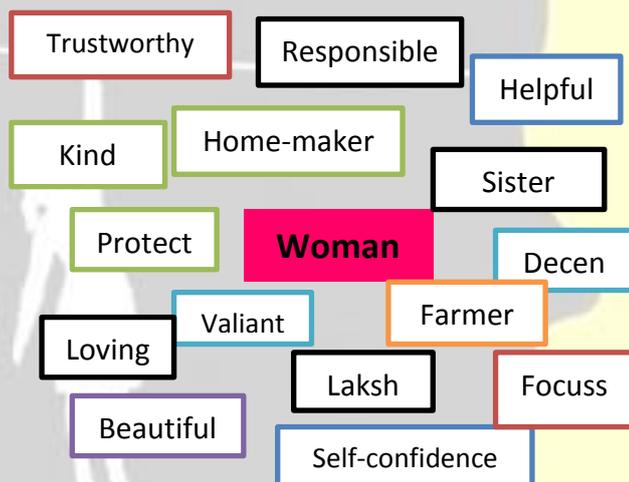
## Word Relay



As the participants were building up their energy, they were divided into 3 groups and they were given 3 different flashcard.

They had to write as many words as possible which they thought were associated with the term 'woman' and 'man'. The word collage was vast and interesting for analysis.

The words that stood out the most for women were:



### Discussion points:

#### 1. Label: Trustworthy

*Reason: "Women are more trustworthy than men". "Men can't be left with the children alone as we don't know what they might do with them".*

*Question by a fellow participant, "So the girls, who are raped, were they all raped by their fathers?"*

#### 2. Label: Responsible

*Reason: "we know that the responsibility of the women is to look after the house and family, and men's responsibility is to earn and run the household?"*

#### 3. Label: Homemaker

*Reason: "it's true that women are homemakers and the society expects them to play this role. Men are not expected to be homemakers. If only they are unemployed they can be homemakers, but they are looked down upon"*

**4. Label: Beautiful**

*Reason: "it means good physical features, tall, fair, beautiful eyes, long lustrous hair and knows how to dress up decently, such as pink clothes, saree, suit with a dupatta, not jeans".*

*"But men should have a dark complexion, tall, 6 pack abs, broad chest, etc."*

**5. Label: Alcoholic**

*Reason: "almost all men are alcoholic. But these days we have also seen that in 100 women, there will be a woman who drinks. But men drink to relax at the end of a hardworking day. Men feel harassed when their wives stop them from drinking excessively during weddings or parties. Women should understand that we need to have fun sometimes as well".*

**6. Label: Powerful and leader**

*Reason: "men have all the power with them, whether they accept this or not. They impose their authority on us and say what's wrong in being in power. This power is also shared between the elderly parents"*

Looking closely at some of these responses, there was a clear indication of the fact the male participants who were present in the workshop belonged to that category of men who enjoy power but also wants to be politically correct and equal. The opinion presented by the female participants projected the ongoing fight between the community and among themselves. These discussions and opinions were a proof that women still have to fight for their basic rights as human beings and their role in the society is to get married, have babies till they have a son and look after the house.

**Gender History:**

Each participant was given a case sheet where they had to think about the times when they were experiencing their childhood being a boy and a girl. It was also a good exercise of capturing the instances when they experienced some kind of discrimination or inequality.

The male participants took time to open up for discussion. They had never been asked to talk about it. Earlier when they used to talk about sensitive issues, they would receive mischief comments or laugh that would discourage them again reinforcing patriarchy that men should not be talking about 'womanly issues'. Understanding the seriousness of the issue, the participants spoke to one another (male) with great anticipation to break all taboos and experience was great.

## What is a Legal Aid Centre (LAC)? What does it do?

Advocate Soumya Bhowmik was invited to take this session on setting up a Legal Aid Center. Before jumping on to commencement of the services, it is important to know what the role of the LAC is. Mr. Bhowmik first gave a case where the participants were asked to play the role of a victim (whose crops has been damaged) and others are officers at LAC.



The role plays cleared that LAC will not provide support in giving advises, information on schemes and laws, but the LAC will not redress any case until they have a lawyer appointed. LAC should only provide support (aid) and not solve cases on their own. This information helped the participants to sit and think of the clear objectives and what are the first steps LAC should take at the beginning.

Information related to laws should only be noted from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha tv channels. News on social media and print media are incomplete and should not be relied on for providing justice to the victims.

The training was finished by jotting all the issues that men face and issues that woman face.

There were similarities of issue in clothing, wearing nail polish, facing the burden of the family, society, cutting hair, education, etc.

Keeping these issues in mind, it became clearer that men's involvement is equally important as women's involvement. If we are talking about empowering women, we have to involve the men, without those women cannot be emancipated.



The participants felt a change in themselves and one by one they all shared. The feedback are as following:

1. The environment of the training was different than what they had experienced before. There was an open dialogue and everyone's experience was different and it felt important.
2. The style of the training was interactive which could be a smooth medium of breaking the silence with the community.
3. Clear and open discussion on gender and sex was most important. This helped in removing the stereotypes among us. This is the first step of change. We feel confident in talking about this with men and women from the community.

4. The word relay activity told us what we think unconsciously about man and woman but in reality we choose to be politically correct. We have understood ourselves as well.
5. We feel really good that our fear and expectation were taken seriously from the very beginning and we were made to feel like relaxed. That is why we were able to express our problems so openly without the fear of being judged or talked about when we go back to our community. We feel like a team now and we trust each other.
6. Based on the sex difference, we have been only focussing on the women for their issues; we have pushed the men away. We never thought of including them in the conversations and never pondered that they too face violence every day. We have learned to be more gender inclusive.

