

Majlis Legal Centre

Annual Report April 2015 - March 2016

Twenty Five years ago we set out on a journey of exploration to create a platform engaged with broadening the framework of rights, art & culture, academics, access to public spaces and other similar concerns within the diverse realms of secularism, pluralism, multiculturalism and rights discourse, keeping in context the concerns of women, children, minorities and marginalized people. We called ourselves Majlis, which means association.

The two centres formed were the Legal Centre and the Cultural Centre as the two founder members were from the fields of law and culture. While we did not set up more centres to focus on other themes, these two centres have been engaged with pioneering work in their respective fields.

The legal centre started with litigation for women's rights by engaging an all women team of lawyers. This was not a popular field of law even among human rights lawyers, but we persisted despite the odds, with a firm conviction that the trial court is an important domain where laws are contested and rights are secured. Within this space we pushed the boundaries and expanded the horizons of rights through everyday litigation. Very few have ventured to embark on this challenging journey and fewer still have been able to sustain their work for over 25 years.

This original premise that we started with has taken roots and branched off in many different directions - fellowship with women lawyers from district towns, publishing research studies and academic books some of which today are prescribed textbooks in law universities, consolidating women's rights through PILs and policy level interventions, and more recently working closely with stake holders to ensure that the laws are implemented as per the mandate of the statute.

Since our origins are rooted firmly within the women's movement, to celebrate 25 years of our journey, as a gesture of tribute and looking towards the future, we invited a few feminist stalwarts to have an interesting exchange with the next generation of feminists.

Highlights of the Legal Centre Activities during the year

- Release of the report, *Pursuing this thing called 'justice'* based on the experience of providing socio-legal support to survivors of sexual violence
- External evaluation of the RAHAT project by Farah Naqvi and Nilima Mehta.

- Providing legal advice to over 1500 victims and providing long term socio-legal support to over 1000 victims of sexual and domestic violence
- Strengthening our ties with stake holders to address issues of sexual and domestic violence and bringing in accountability by raising issues with relevant authorities.
- Providing focused training on laws, rights and legal procedures for implementers of the law including police, judiciary and child welfare committees to deal with violence against women and children.
- Policy Level Intervention - Public Interest Litigation and Campaigns
- Spreading awareness about rights to college students and local community organizations.
- Building partnerships with network organizations
- Credibility certification from external evaluators

Setback

The 2014-15 annual report of the Cultural Centre ended with: “In this context Majlis Culture Centre needs to revitalize itself through newer structure and action plan – not because it has failed but precisely because it has succeeded in its time and thus, to an extent, has exhausted its own objectives and possibilities. The coming years should be invested in re-articulating criticality, pedagogy and cultural activism.”

Then in January 2015, Ms. Madhusree Dutta, founder member and director of the cultural centre who also held the position of Executive Director and signing authority of Majlis Manch, informed the Board of Trustees of her intention to resign with effect from March, 2016.

Thereafter at all trustee meetings during the year, the Board discussed the Cultural Centre at length and made several efforts to rearticulate the work. They explored various options that ranged from getting a new director for the cultural centre to supporting a new trust that Madhusree proposed to start.

On 22nd March, 2016 (four days before the scheduled programme to celebrate 25 years of Majlis) Madhusree sent her resignation to the Board. Following this, suddenly on 24th March, 2016, without due notice, four trustees, two of who were signing authorities - Mitra Parekh, Secretary and Neera Adarkar, Treasurer also sent their resignation to the Board.

On the eve of the 25 year celebration, Madhusree circulated an open letter undermining the work of the legal centre. The sudden resignation of Madhusree and the four trustees along with the open letter with malicious accusations against the legal centre caused a great deal of humiliation and pain to the team members.

On 9th April, 2016 the entire team of the Legal Centre wrote a letter to the Board explaining our work (attached herewith). We felt the open letter showed a complete lack of understanding of our work and its context. However, with the strong support of the four trustees who continued and the new trustees who joined the Board of Trustees, as well as our partners and well wishers, all of whom expressed their faith and trust in our work, we have managed to regain our morale.

In the months that followed, with the support of our trustees, partners and well-wishers we are trying our best to reiterate the Majlis ideology and move forward.

This report concerns the activities of the Legal Centre during the financial year 2015-16.

“Transforming a victim into a survivor is a long drawn process. It is not a matter of merely changing the vocabulary, while keeping intact an oppressive system which constantly re-victimizes her, causes her extreme trauma and brings her down several notches in the social ladder from where she was, prior to the abuse. She becomes a survivor only when she emerges stronger for having walked through this intimidating system, with someone extending a helping hand, and in the process transforms the system itself, rendering it more humane. It is our hope that having responded to their needs, we helped each of them to overcome their vulnerabilities, and attain their goals and aspirations, beyond their ‘case’ and become survivors.”

Majlis Team September, 2015

The Organisational Structure

Financial Profile

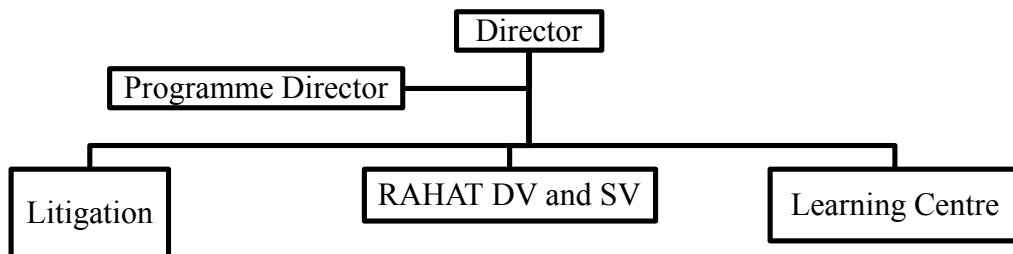
The Legal Centre receives grants from local and foreign institutions. This year we received grants from foreign institutions like International Development Research Centre, Canada and Action Aid and

from local institutions like Azim Premji Philanthropic Institution and Edelgive Foundation. In addition we also raised funds from individual donors, by providing consultations and earned interest on our fixed deposits. The audited financial statement is enclosed herewith.

Certification

At Majlis we are committed to upholding the highest standards of accountability and transparency. In March 2015 the Legal Centre was certified by **Credibility Alliance (CA)** a consortium of Voluntary Organisations committed towards enhancing Accountability and Transparency through good governance. CA aspires to build trust through improving governance and accountable practices within the Voluntary Sector. On 28th April 2016 the legal centre was awarded the **Guide Star India** Gold certificate. Guide Star India awards its Transparency Badge and Gold Seals to NGOs that meet the highest standards of transparency and public disclosure.

Legal Centre Organogram



Internal functioning

The Legal Centre continues to be an all women team of lawyers, support persons and administrative staff. Our staff strength during the year was 25. The teams are divided as per the focus of their work and are headed by a team leader. The team leaders are part of an advisory committee that decides on critical issues concerning the organisation.

Every Thursday evening the entire office meets to share their work and discuss contemporary issues. We also invite external experts to address the team on issues of critical concern. The weekly meetings have greatly helped in team building and skill development and in providing an exposure to wider concerns. On 14th August, 2015, an all day off site event was organised for the entire team where experts were invited to conduct activities for team building. Our team members also attend a number of training programmes to enhance their knowledge and increase their capacity.

The steady flow of interns from various law universities, social work colleges, and academic institutions also form part of the broader Majlis structure. They help in research and data collection, and in turn are provided an exposure to the functioning of the justice delivery mechanisms. Due to the practical exposure we are able to provide, Majlis is a preferred location for internship among students. It is our endeavour to provide them a nuanced perspective on issues of women's rights, human rights, secularism and minority rights.

Activities During the Year

Public Events

Conference – *Our Feminist Legacies: The Personal is the Political*

100 feminists, partner organisations, friends, journalists, ex-clients were part of an interesting dialogue between iconic feminists of our times and the younger generation of feminists, on the aptly titled theme – “The Personal is the Political”. The senior panel comprised of Nayantara Sehgal, Vasanth Kannabiran, Devaki Jain, Gouri Choudhary, Chhaya Daatar and Corinne Kumar. They shared moments in their life when the personal became the political for them, about the contradictions in their own lives and their personal struggles, about building organisations and evolving new structures within the new and exciting ideology of feminism. The junior panel included Meena Seshu, Suchitra Mathur, Sumitra Mukkapati and Sakhi who talked about the legacies they have inherited and how their work builds upon those legacies. At the same time they challenged some premises upon which the earlier feminist organisations were built and the concept of iconisation which becomes a barrier in building more democratic organisations. They spoke about the way ahead for the women's movement. The open letter circulated by the founder member and executive director of Majlis, formed the backdrop for discussing feminist ethics and concerns over building feminist organisations.

Ms. Bishakha Dutta, the chair for the panel discussions, was able to steer the conversations to core concerns of feminism today and provided the right environment for a frank and open discussion on many uncomfortable issues. The inaugural panel was chaired by Justice Prabha Sridevan (former judge of the Madras High Court). Justice Suresh (former judge of the Bombay High Court and a human rights activist), Mr. Kiran Nagarkar, renowned novelist and Ms. Flavia Agnes, Director, Majlis Legal Centre.

Exhibition - *Feminist History and 25 years of Majlis.* A team of young volunteers put up an exhibition tracing landmarks of the feminist movement of each decade since the eighties and juxtaposed them with issues taken up by Majlis. These included the anti-rape and anti-dowry

campaigns and legislative reforms, the Shahbano ruling and the debate around UCC, the campaign around reproductive rights and contraceptive testing, the campaign against sex-selective abortions, communal riots in Mumbai and Gujarat and our interventions, concerns over minority rights and secularism, the bar dancer campaign and issues of sexual morality, among others. After the event, the exhibition was taken to various colleges and discussions were held with students around the themes of the exhibition.

Release of the research report “*Pursuing this thing called ‘justice’*” - based on three years of experience of providing socio-legal support to survivors of sexual violence.

Since 2011 MAJLIS Legal Centre through its programme RAHAT has provided support to victims of sexual abuse and coordinated with state agencies to ensure effective implementation of the law. During the course of our work we studied / intervened in almost 644 cases in Mumbai and conducted a study of the social and legal profile of cases as well as state responses. The findings of the study have helped to change the discourse on sexual violence in the country.

- The study highlighted that 74% victims were minor children below the age of 18 years. 51% of total rape victims were young, pubescent and adolescent girls in the age group 10-18 years. Most of them were from marginalized sections, poverty stricken backgrounds, and were ‘out of school’. Many of these young girls were pregnant at the time of reporting the crime, 31.8% were in the 11 -15 age group and 37.2% were in the 16-18 age group.
- Further disturbing trends were that family abuse (rapes within homes by family members) constituted 18% of total rapes. What was even more shocking was that rapes by fathers / step fathers alone constituted 7%, almost comparable to stranger rapes which were at 9%. The most common place of abuse was the home of either the victim or the abuser (60%) and rapes in public places constituted only 15% of the total cases. While most cases of stranger rape were reported after a single incident, family rapes were reported after the abuse had gone on over a long period of time.
- Another important finding was that in rapes by boys in the locality, neighbours and other known persons (43%), the vulnerabilities of the girls within their own families were evident. Severe physical abuse by family members, lack of basic care and nurture was a constant refrain of most victims. Incidents of family or neighbourhood abuse cannot be examined in isolation without linking this phenomenon to the vulnerabilities faced by women in general. However,

the plight of young and adolescent girls within this socio-economic background needs special attention.

- Even cases of ‘rape under promise of marriage’, where a neighbourhood boy entices a neglected girl child relegated to domestic drudgery, lures her into a sexual relationship and then discards her, needs to be located within the general vulnerabilities of the girl child.
- The incident of rape, the stigma surrounding the incident, the investigation and trial procedures which are daunting only serve to push these victims several notches down the socio-economic ladder. In the absence of a viable victim support programme, most cases ended in acquittal which made these girls appear as “liars” in the eyes of the court and neighbours, causing further humiliation, trauma and depression. What is disturbing is that the ecosystem within which these vulnerable girls are sexually abused, is absent in our rape discourse.

The study also presents the RAHAT model for survivor support and stakeholder accountability towards victims. The study is a useful resource for all those who are interested in the subject – activists, researchers, and policy makers.

The report was released on 1st August 2015 by Justice Prabha Srivdevan. Mr. Rakesh Maria, the Police Commissioner, Mumbai, and Ms. Shanta Sinha, the first chairperson of the National Child Protection Commission were also present.

The highlights of the study were reported in all major newspapers and we have presented the findings at various consultations with policy makers, in judicial and police academies, in academic institutions and consultations with NGO partners. The report is now accepted to be published by Sage Publishers.

Consultation on *Impact of Mandatory Reporting under POCSO Act*

To reflect on the impact of Mandatory Reporting and to understand gaps and challenges on the ground, **Majlis Legal Centre** and **Arpan**, an organization which works on creating awareness about sexual abuse in educational institutions, organized a day-long consultation on 20th April 2015. The key note speaker was **Prof. Shanta Sinha**, instrumental in drafting the POCSO Act as Chairperson of the National Commission for protection of child rights.

- A government survey of 12,500 children across 13 states revealed that 57% children (one in every two) had been sexually abused. Only 20% of these children admitted to being aggressively assaulted - Human Rights Watch Report, 2007.
- 48,838 cases of child rapes were reported in 10 years between 2001 to 2011.

- A mere 3% of child rapes are reported - National Crimes Record Bureau, 2011.

To address these grave concerns, The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) was enacted in 2012 to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. "Best interest of the child is paramount" is the governing principle of this Act.

One of the grave concerns - under reporting of child sexual offences, has been addressed in section 21 of the Act which stipulates - *any person, who has knowledge that an offence has been committed, has a mandatory obligation to report. Failure to report attracts punishment with imprisonment of up to six months or fine or both.*

Doctors, teachers, counsellors and social workers involved in prevention and crisis intervention have mixed reactions to this contentious section. While some have hailed it as a progressive move in the right direction and believe that it will increase reporting and protect children from further assaults, there are others who are wary. Some of their concerns are:

- Victims of sexual violence confide in counselors or teachers under an assurance of confidentiality. They are not ready to report and this creates a conflict of interest.
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act ensures confidentiality to patients, however when minor girls approach doctors for an abortion, doctors are mandated to report. The fear of being reported may force these girls to opt for illegal abortions with risk to their lives.
- NGOs working on preventive work are being affected as schools are unwilling to implement personal safety programmes or discuss cases of sexual abuse.

The provision is also ambiguous and lacks clarity. For example - when adults reveal past experiences of child sexual abuse should they be reported, can it be done without the consent of the concerned adult, within an organisation who is mandated to report - the employee, the management or the Board and the timeframe for reporting, etc.

Since many organisations and medical professionals are bogged down with these concerns, the consultation with child rights groups and various stake holders was held to provide clarity. After deliberations, most groups conceded that mandatory reporting will ensure better crime detection but without adequate guidelines, it might be counterproductive.

Litigation – Representing women in legal proceedings

Over the years, through various initiatives, we have provided legal support and advocacy to more than 50,000 women in Mumbai and in different district towns of Maharashtra.

Currently our team represents women in litigation under the Domestic Violence Act in 10 Magistrate Courts scattered in different parts of the city, in addition to cases filed in Family Courts of Mumbai and Thane. The litigation has helped women secure reliefs such as maintenance, child custody, residence and protection from domestic violence. Appeals are filed in cases where the magistrates' orders are negative and anti-woman.

This year we provided legal consultation to over 1500 women and filed 106 new cases. In addition 280 cases carried forward from the previous year. So the total number of cases handled by our team was 386 cases. During the year we completed 215 cases. 171 cases were carried forward to the current year.

25% of our clients are Muslim women. There is a popular perception that Muslim women are not entitled to relief under the Domestic Violence Act, or that they do not have any remedy if the husband sends them a talaqnama by post or arbitrarily pronounces triple talaq. We have specialized in securing various remedies for Muslim women using the Domestic Violence Act and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights upon Divorce) Act. Many lawyers practising in criminal courts are now following the example set by us and are filing similar cases.

We have secured some significant interim and final orders during the year. Attached are two case studies that we have profiled.

RAHAT – Providing socio-legal support to victims

One of the important challenges which obstructs the effective implementation of a beneficial legislation is the lack of support to victims and the lack of awareness about provisions among stakeholders. This prevents victims from accessing the support and remedies which they are entitled to under these legal provisions. As a result, the legal journey which a victim of sexual or domestic violence embarks upon becomes daunting and instead of strengthening her, pushes her several notches down the socio-economic ladder. There is no one within the system to allay her fears, provide emotional support and legal assistance. For effective implementation of a statute, there should be monitoring and accountability at every stage, not merely through generalizations or anecdotal narratives, but through specific instances where the system fails to respond to the needs of the victim as per the mandate of the law.

While we had expertise in providing legal advocacy and litigation help to victims of domestic violence, in 2011 we started RAHAT and embarked into a new terrain, of helping victims of sexual violence to access services available under various statutes by walking the legal journey along with them, and while doing so, closely monitoring the system and rendering it responsive to her needs.

Rather than duplicating the services which the state is obliged to provide, we felt that if we walk the legal journey with the victim and work with stake holders within the system, provide focused skill training, monitor their work and bring to the notice of the higher authorities the lapses, and thereafter introduce remedial measures, our impact would be greater. We were convinced that only by engaging with this tedious and long drawn process will we be able to bring changes within the system which will benefit a large number of victims. This model would be cost effective as the efforts of a small but dedicated team of lawyers and support persons will have multiplier effect and once tested and found effective, it would open up possibility of duplicating it in other districts and eventually in other states.

Attached is a summary of activities undertaken by our RAHAT team during the year.

The RAHAT Survivor Support Programme for victims of sexual violence

The aim of this programme is to transform the victims of sexual violence into survivors by ensuring that the system does not re-victimise her. It usually takes around 1-2 years before a case reaches the stage of trial and during this period, we provide various types of support. The response is fine tuned as per the need of the victim. In some cases, the help is extended much after the legal case has ended. We have provided education support and skill development and other support to over 100 victims. One of our victims (now a survivor) whose father had raped her, will soon be completing her second year of engineering. (She has still one year left and we are looking out for various sources to provide financial support to her for this period.)

At the commencement of the reporting year, April, 2015, **215** cases were carried forward from the previous year. **302** new cases were added during the year. **173** cases ended and **344** cases were carried forward to the following year.

Out of the **173** cases, **16** cases ended with a judgement – **5** acquittals and **11** convictions. Despite all the support we provide, convictions are extremely difficult to secure. The national average is only 26% and before our intervention, the average for Mumbai was as low as 12-15%. After our programme was initiated, the trends show a slight upward incline. However, in cases where we were able to intervene, the conviction rate has vastly improved. It is around 68% and this has been the consistent trend for the last three years since our intervention programme started.

Despite our best efforts in five cases the accused were acquitted. This is because we were dealing with two acquittal prone women judges. In one, a mentally challenged minor girl who was gang raped by seven men, despite all the evidence produced before the judge, the case ended in acquittal. Such adverse rulings cause extreme demoralisation for our team members, but we persist despite it. 157 cases were closed due to other factors. Enclosed are a few cases as illustrations of the type of activities involved in providing care and support to victims while they go through their legal case.

As part of RAHAT we coordinate with organisations such as Angan, Arpan, Asha Sadan, Shraddhanand Mahilashram, St. Catherine's Home, A.D. Bawla Shelter Home, CORO, SNEHA, etc. which are involved with either community based or hospital based interventions or in providing shelter to destitute children. Significant among these is our partnership with **Childline India Foundation**. Since it is a first response crisis intervention government programme for children, they come across many cases of sexual abuse. After the initial response of providing a safe place to the child, lodging the FIR and producing the child before the child welfare committee, they refer the case to us for legal follow-up. This partnership has worked well and has been mutually beneficial.

Our success with the RAHAT model of providing support to victims of sexual violence has encouraged us to extend this programme to victims of domestic violence as well.

The RAHAT Survivor Support Programme for victims of domestic violence

When we started 25 years ago we perceived litigation in the family court as an effective mechanism through which legal services to women across caste, religion and class could be provided and through our engagement with courts, we would render the court space more sensitive towards the needs of victims. However, though we succeeded in the cases that we took up, we were not able to bring a positive change in the overall culture of family courts. In fact the progression in the intervening years has been in the reverse direction with courts turning extremely technical and lawyers occupying the central space. Often the interest of lawyers practicing in family courts are prioritized over the concerns of women and children. Litigation in family courts has become extremely commercial with lawyers charging hefty fees, far beyond the capacity of victims from vulnerable sections.

The Domestic Violence Act had tried to address these concerns by providing a government functionary to assist the victim to access the court and initiate litigation and reduce dependency upon lawyers. In 2011 we conducted a research on the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act across various districts of Maharashtra and noticed that the Act was virtually a non-starter despite huge amounts spent in training protection officers and police personnel on the provisions of this Act. The only cases that

are filed were by private lawyers charging exorbitant fees most of who were not even well versed with the provisions of this new Act.

After interacting with the stake holders to understand the lacunae in implementation of the Act, we had meetings with heads of each concerned department (including the judiciary) to discuss gaps in implementation. The final outcome of our three years research was the publication of the **Maharashtra State Handbook** in 2014, which contains Guidelines, Best Practices and Reporting and Monitoring formats for each stakeholder.

Soon after the release of this book, the Maharashtra government appointed **216** permanent POs (one PO for two talukas). The POs have a clear mandate to provide every possible support which a victim may need both at pre-litigation and post-litigation stage, including filling of the domestic incident report (DIR), accompanying women to court and initiating legal procedure. For the first two years we worked closely with the newly appointed POs in Mumbai by providing training. We familiarised them with filling the DIR, compiling relevant documents, initiating legal procedures and providing additional support to victims. However we realized training has to be tested against the actual follow up cases in order to assess impact.

Despite the huge infrastructure that has been created for efficient implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, the constant complaints from other NGOs is that POs do not provide support, they merely refer victims to private lawyers. Further, the general perception is that free legal aid is inefficient and panel lawyers lack skill and knowledge about the provisions of the DV Act.

It is against this background, we started RAHAT DV to provide socio-legal support to victims of domestic violence. Following the model evolved in dealing with rape cases, of making the system accountable, we decided to extend this model of providing support to victims by working along with the stake holders, monitoring them and bringing in the component of state accountability.

Today the RAHAT DV programme is poised at a critical juncture of making the system work for victims of domestic violence as per the mandate of the statute.

An Evaluation of our project on Sexual and Domestic Violence by Farah Naqvi and Nilima Mehta was conducted in September 20, 2015. Extract of the Report **Walking The Legal Talk** :

“Did Majlis achieve its objectives? While the original project design was framed in the language of ‘creating policy protocols and guidelines’, the programme on the ground achieved far more than that. It has demonstrated the efficacy of a comprehensive, yet conceptually simple, series of interventions that can help address violence against women

and children, using extant laws, within the framework of the legal justice system in India. The interventions have been relevant and undertaken with compassion, energy and commitment. An enormous amount of detailed work has been done, catalyzing a critical conversation towards legal justice for women and children within the state system in Maharashtra. A positive impact was visible on the ground among stakeholders.”

Training Implementers of the Law

Having worked closely with the system and identifying the gaps, the next logical progression was to provide training to implementers to plug the gaps. Though initially our trainings used to be sporadic, over the last three years the training unit (Learning Centre) has grown in status and today it has become as important as litigation and RAHAT initiatives.

To bridge the gap between the legislative intent of the statute and the knowledge and perception of the implementers, we have been providing focused technical trainings to various stakeholders at the state and local level - the Police, the Protection Officers, Public Prosecutors, Judicial Officers, Child Welfare Committees and partner NGOs so that they gain a clearer understanding of their duties and responsibilities towards victims and their role in providing support as mandated by the statute. We are hopeful that this will ensure better implementation of a statute so that the positive impact of the legislation reaches victims from marginalized sections. Training modules are prepared and resource material is compiled based on statutory provisions, procedural rules and relevant case law. To make the process interactive, group exercises, quiz, and audio-visual material is used.

After the training, we provide a **helpline number** so that doubts and confusions which may crop up in the course of performing their duties subsequent to the training can be clarified. This has proved to be extremely useful in helping to reinforce the message imparted during the training.

Police Officers

During the year we trained around 800 police officers on implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the recent amendments to rape laws. The trainings were conducted at various levels.

Region-wise trainings to Mumbai Police (in association with the Crimes Against Women Cell, Crime Branch, on the issue of domestic violence.) When victims of domestic violence approach the police for help they are usually referred to counselling to the Special Cell. Further, after the enactment

of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), instead of providing support and referral, the police inform victims of domestic violence to approach the court directly with the help of private lawyers.

The trainings helped clarify the role of police under PWDVA as well as under section 498A IPC. We used the constitutional bench judgement in *Lalita Kumari* which has clarified when and how the police should record cases u/s 498A. There is no reference to counselling in this judgement and it provides a timeframe within which the FIR must be lodged. The training brought great deal of clarity to the police who felt they would be able to respond to victims in an effective manner.

Trainings to newly appointed women officers: We were specially invited to conduct two day training to 100 newly appointed women probation officers on all relevant statutes concerning women and children to provide them a sound base regarding the statutes concerning violence against women and children.

Training Senior Crime Police Inspectors of the Mumbai Police based on the Standard Operating Procedures and Check List developed by Majlis to help police deal with cases of sexual violence.

Training Police Officers in Navi Mumbai: When we met the Police Commissioner of Navi Mumbai to initiate the RAHAT programme, as a first step we were invited to conduct intensive trainings to the police officers in the district. Navi Mumbai is a relatively smaller district as compared to Mumbai and hence the number of trainings which were required were few. As a first step, we conducted two trainings for 100 officers. The trainings provided a firm grounding for initiating the RAHAT programme in Navi Mumbai.

Training Police Officers in Chattisgarh (in association with Department of Women and Child Development and UNICEF): Following our success in Maharashtra, we were invited to conduct similar trainings on the provisions of the POCSO Act and Juvenile Justice Act in six districts of Chattisgarh with special focus on the role of Police in cases of sexual violence and rights of minor offenders. These trainings covered a wide range issues relevant to the local realities.

Protection Officers

Though the PO has a central pivotal role under the Domestic Violence Act, initially, other stake holders, including the police and magistrates were not aware of the role and responsibilities of the Protection Officers and were not even aware as to where the office of the PO is located. At the other end, most POs were not aware of their statutory duties and obligations under the Act. They were not

exposed to legal processes and lacked confidence to take victims to courts and initiate legal proceedings. So in order to increase their capacity and build their confidence we started providing regular trainings to Protection Officers in Maharashtra.

Monthly Trainings: Monthly training sessions were conducted for POs from Mumbai City and Suburban divisions on various aspects of their work including applications for urgent orders, networking with other stake holders, documentation and fine tuning strategies. We also visited their office every week to discuss cases and assess their work and address the problems they faced. Frequent meetings with the District Women and Child Development (DWCD) Officer were held to assess the impact of our training. As a follow up networking meetings between NGOs and all stakeholders under the DV Act were organized to ensure better coordination for effective implementation of the Act.

Training newly appointed POs at YASHADA, Pune: The newly appointed POs were provided a 45-day training to orient them with their new tasks. Majlis was invited by the WCD Dept. to help to structure these trainings and we were also invited as resource persons. It was important to orient these officers about their mandate and roles and responsibilities under the Act, the data entry process and reporting formats.

Division wise trainings in Maharashtra: We also interacted with POs at each of the six divisional zones to grasp the challenges faced by POs in rural areas where the ground realities are different and more challenging. We helped to evolve norms and formats for quarterly reporting to the divisional supervisors. By introducing some simple changes into their existing formats, we have been able to capture accurate data regarding cases filed by POs in each district.

Public Prosecutors

Public Prosecutors are an important link in criminal prosecution as they have to conduct the trial and lead evidence before the court to prove the offence beyond reasonable doubt. Many lack experience and are not well versed with the latest pro-prosecution case law and guidelines issued by superior courts, while defense lawyers are able to provide judges with a list of latest cases in support of their contentions. So we were keen to provide these officers necessary training on statutory and procedural aspects of the new legislations, guidelines issued and best practices approved by our High Court which would help them to improve conviction rates.

We had submitted an application as soon as the newer amendments were introduced and had been following it up since then. Finally permission was granted to conduct division wise trainings for

Special Public Prosecutors designated to the Special Courts dealing with sexual offence against women and children across the six divisions of Maharashtra.

So far we have conducted the trainings for Mumbai and Pune division. During the training we shared the highlights of our report to dispel the anti-women biases which prevent prosecutors from providing quality legal representation to victims and shared with them the guidelines for special courts which have been approved by the High Court. Since the public prosecutors are not usually included in any training programme organized by the state, they were highly appreciative of our efforts to provide them the trainings to enhance their skills.

Judicial Officers

POCSO training to all sessions judges at the Judicial Academy, Utthan: We were invited as resource persons to the Maharashtra Judicial Academy for a special training for the specially designated POCSO judges in sessions courts in Maharashtra. Speaking through our own study, we were able to bring to their notice the biases against women that operate in the minds of the judges and also shared the recent case law which would aid the process of conviction. The guidelines for special courts dealing with sexual offences concerning women and children which were submitted by us to the High Court were circulated at this meeting by the Academy to all the participants.

Permission to train magistrates on the Domestic Violence Act: Due to the complaint that we made to the Chief Justice, Bombay High Court listing out the problems faced by women while accessing the courts across Mumbai and some other districts, we have been given permission to conduct trainings to all magistrates in every district of Maharashtra. We feel highly honoured by this and we are sure that it will yield positive results not only in urban areas, but also in far flung rural districts. However, we realize that this is a huge challenge as each district has around 60-80 magistrates and Maharashtra has around 33 districts. Since we do not have the resources to conduct this, we have decided to create a training module and train a core group of trainers from our district lawyer network so that a pool of trainers are available to conduct the trainings in various districts of Maharashtra during the near year.

Child Welfare Committee (CWC)

Training to CWC Members: The CWC is a quasi-judicial body which is assigned to perform a specific role under the POCSO Act to ensure the safety of a violated child and is entrusted with the responsibility of placing the child in a safe environment. Since various CWC units in the state have been hauled up by the High Court for either not performing their role as per the mandate of the POCSO Act or for overstepping their brief, the Mumbai Suburban CWC invited us to conduct a training for

their entire unit to gain better understanding of the specific role assigned to them under the POCSO Act which proved to be extremely useful for the members and helped to clarify doubts.

Role of Support person as per POCSO: This training was conducted in collaboration with the Mumbai Suburban CWC Unit and was attended by NGOs providing support to victims of sexual abuse, the district child protection unit (DCPU) members who have a mandate to provide support and protection to victims of sexual violence, and to members of CWC to explain their role and responsibility under the POCSO Act.

Trainings to District Child Protection Units (DCPU) in Uttar Pradesh: This is a special unit under the district women and child development officer to provide protection to a violated child. They have been assigned a special role under the POCSO Act. We were invited by our associate organization, Aangan, to conduct training on POCSO Act for DCPUs in Uttar Pradesh.

Training of Childline Coordinators and partners - Western region Two day training on the role of various stakeholders under POCSO Act, the role of support persons and how to effectively respond to a case of child sexual abuse, including strategies and best practices.

Women Lawyers Training and Handholding Programme: We conduct a practical course for independent lawyers to help them represent women under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.

Ensuring Stake holder Accountability through Monitoring

District wise monitoring of the Manodhairya scheme: We are able to scrutinize the district-wise data regarding the claims of compensations sanctioned and paid as well as those which are rejected by the committee constituted under the District Collector and also examine why the compensation has been rejected or withheld. Due to this the scheme introduced in Maharashtra compensation is paid after lodging the FIR and it does not depend upon conviction. As it is a recent provision, it is essential to closely monitor the same in order to ensure that there are no financial irregularities and compensation reaches the concerned victim.

Monitoring of Protection Officers in Maharashtra: Review meetings are held with POs in Amravati, Nagpur, Aurangabad, Konkan, Nashik and Pune divisions. Our task is to scrutinize reports, give feedback, answer queries, clear the confusions and guide the concerned officers as and when they need help. We are also part of the District Monitoring Committee for Domestic Violence at the District Collector's Office in Mumbai.

Delays in securing orders under the PWDVA There is a statutory mandate to expeditiously dispose off the cases. Despite this at times, the cases kept pending even for a year before an interim order is passed. When appeals are filed in the district or high court, no time frame have been stipulated. To address the situation in various magistrate's courts in Mumbai we led a delegation of representatives to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate and pointed out the courts where there are inordinate delays which causes extreme hardships to victims. Since then we notice a marked difference in some of these courts. Regarding delays at the appeal stage, we wrote letters to the Registrar High Court citing court room no. name of judge, case no. Though we are yet to receive a formal reply, this seems to have worked and we can see a more efficient system in place now.

Monitoring lapses by Police – A condition stipulated by us for providing training to police was that when lapses are brought to the notice of the higher officials, action would be initiated against the errant officer. In the course of providing support to victims, lapses by police are brought to our notice and we reported them to the higher authorities. So far 30 such incidents were reported to the Joint Commissioner with specific details about the lapses, including the name of the officer, name of police station, case no. date of the incident etc. and departmental enquiries have been initiated and a few have been suspended. This has sent a clear message down to each police station that strict action will be taken in case of such lapses. It is this final link in this entire chain of providing training and monitoring the stake holders which has brought about changes in the attitudes of the police towards rape victims. The feedback that we receive from our partner NGOs who follow up cases of sexual abuse affirms this change. It has taken us three years of sustained and dedicated engagement, but the net results that we are able to see are truly worth the efforts.

Policy Level Interventions

Public Interest Litigation

Women have to pay court fee stamp for their sons. A judge from the district towns who is appointed as a principle judge of the Family Court has changed the established norm whereby women and their children are exempted from payment of court fees, and has made it mandatory for the woman to pay court fees when she is claiming maintenance for her minor son. We tried to argue this out before the concerned judge that the exemption is extended to minor sons too, as minor sons do not have an independent status and the mother is responsible for maintaining her minor son, the judge remained adamant. To set right this wrong, we have filed a PIL on this issue have made the Registrar and

Principal Judge of Family Court, as well as the Department of Women and Children, Government of Maharashtra and the Law and Judiciary Department parties to the proceedings. This is pending before the High Court. We are expecting a positive outcome soon.

Guidelines regarding Joint Counselling by police and NGOs sitting in police stations: When a woman who faces acute domestic violence approaches a police station to file a case, the usual ploy adopted by the police is to call the husband, and conduct ‘joint counselling’ and send the woman back to her matrimonial home rather than initiate legal proceedings against the husband. Many times, after such “reconciliation” the woman is subjected to further violence and there have been instances where, out of sheer depression, the woman has committed suicide. The Domestic Violence Act provides an easy access to the court through the service providers or the PO and provides for ‘post litigation counselling’ after the initial ad-interim order is passed securing her rights such as protection and maintenance. The terms arrived at during such counseling are binding on the husband and are enforceable. This protects the woman’s rights and stops the violence while keeping her marriage intact if she so desires.

However, the 144 service provider NGOs in police stations across Maharashtra (stake holders under the DV Act) who receive remuneration from the state and hence are ‘State’ as well as the police refuse to use this provision and try to settle the matter at their end because of their own fears and inhibitions about courts and legal processes. Our concern was that there were no guidelines in place to monitor this practice, though the Act provides guidelines for all other stake holders. So the department of Women and Child Development issued a circular prohibiting all pre-litigation counseling by state and non-state agencies. We expected that our position would be opposed by the police (who avoid registering complaints even in cases of acute domestic violence) and the judiciary (who are keen to prevent over burdening the courts).

When this issue was taken up by the High Court we were summoned to file our affidavit regarding the same. We received opposition from the social workers of the Special Cell and by some Mumbai based women’s groups, most of whom are not designated as service providers. However, our detailed affidavit has helped the Bombay High Court to frame guidelines. In its order, the High Court has stipulated that **in cases of extreme physical violence, no joint counselling can be done without first securing a protection order from the court.** (We have written several articles including a detailed one in EPW where we have clarified our position.)

PIL seeking directions to police against registering rape cases: A PIL is filed in the High Court by a person from men’s rights group, seeking directions that the police should not register rape cases

without first verifying the facts since around 75% cases are false. The judge hearing this case seems to have no clear understanding of the provisions of rape law and the POCSO Act. If such directions are issued, it will undermine the gains of our work of the last three years. So when we read the news report about this, we filed intervener application, along with a detailed affidavit, providing statistics and research studies for low conviction rates under the rape law and have pleaded that any direction which the High Court issues to the police would be a violation of the statutory provisions. The PIL is pending in the Bombay High Court.

Campaigns

Child Maintenance and Access Guidelines: In order to counter anti-women guidelines which were submitted by certain “men’s rights groups” we were asked to submit alternate guidelines keeping in mind the best interest of the child and the vulnerability of women in custodial battles. We also held consultations with several women’s rights and child rights organizations to get their views and opinions. Thereafter, we were invited by the High Court to present these guidelines at a convergence meeting of family court judges, marriage counsellors and advocates. Thereafter we were included in the core team to finalise the guidelines along with family court judges. Due to this we have been able to ensure that during the framing of guidelines, women’s interests are not compromised. The guidelines are awaiting final approval from the High Court.

Guidelines for functioning of special courts for vulnerable witnesses: We had been regularly sending reports to the High Court on the lapses by Special Courts while handling cases of vulnerable victims. The High Court took serious note of these and invited us to submit draft guidelines for the “Functioning of special courts trying cases of sexual offences against women and children”. The guidelines have been approved by the Juvenile Justice Committee and the Administrative Committee of the High Court.

POCSO Courts to be child friendly spaces: In the course of our work in sessions courts we observe that despite the legislative mandate under POCSO Act that these courts must be child friendly, the layout of the courts set up under this statute is like any other normal criminal court. We have brought it to the notice of the principal judge, district and sessions court as well as the concerned POCSO court judges and also written to the Registrar High Courts. We also visited the special child friendly courts that have been set up in two districts – Saket and Karkardoma which have one way glass, a different seating arrangement, a waiting room, etc where as initially our courts did not have even a screen to

shield the victim from the direct gaze of the accused and young children barely 4-5 years used to be seated on the railing of the witness box so that the judge seated on the high podium can see the child and hear her depositions. After consistent efforts a few changes have been made and a larger court room with a waiting space was allocated. We also intervened in a PIL before the High Court regarding funds for court infrastructure and brought the deplorable situation in these courts to the notice of the High Court judge hearing the PIL. Thereafter, some funds have been sanctioned to set up a model POCSO Court in the sessions court at Fort and further renovations have been made.

Rights of Muslim Women, Problems with Hindu Law and Questioning UCC: In a ruling which determined the right of a Hindu woman to ancestral property, the Supreme Court raised the issue of rights of Muslim women and the need to enact a uniform civil code. Since this issue would have a communal bias, we started writing articles questioning the lacunae within Hindu law and also explaining the rights of Muslim women. More recently we have started approaching colleges and have been delivering lectures on the problems faced by Hindu women under the Hindu laws and customs in order to create awareness about the complexities about enacting a uniform civil code.

Cases of sexual abuse of women within the Church: Since cases of sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests were brought to the notice of a few Christian women activists, Majlis got involved in providing legal advocacy and also in following up the cases with church authorities. Thereafter a small group of Christian women, including nuns has been formed to draft a policy regarding sexual abuse by Church Personnel and norms to be followed in such cases, which is in the process of being finalised.

Strengthening Community Initiatives

Para Legal Understanding for Social Workers –We have evolved a three month course for community level social workers to demystify laws and to explain the simple procedures to be followed in cases of sexual and domestic violence. The course provides practical guidance and exposure to government agencies who are mandated to provide support to the victim. We had conducted the course for around 10 NGOs which work in slum communities during the last three years. This year we conducted the course for NGOs – SHARE in Vakola and Sahasee in Bhandup.

Legal awareness and Legal Aid Camps: We have partnered with various NGOs who are working with communities and have been providing them with legal advice and also delivering regular legal awareness at programmes organized by them in their communities. Some of the organisations we coordinated with were ACT, Arpan, Archdiocese of Bombay Women’s Commission, Awaaz E

Niswan, Centre for Social Action, Committee for Housing Rights (CRH), Jagruti Kendra, MAVIM, Mahila Mukti Manch, Nivara Haq, Prem Dhan, Saved Pearl, World Vision, Teach for India, YWCA.

Jan Sunvayi On 21st December, 2015 more than 100 women attended a 'Jan Sunvayi' organised by Maharashtra State Commission for Women and Majlis Legal Centre. Women victims got a unique opportunity to present problems they faced while accessing the state machinery directly to government officials from various state departments such as Medical, Police, Protection Officers and Legal Aid lawyers. Several community based organizations attended the event along with their clients and articulated their concerns. It was an empowering experience for them to air their grievances directly to the concerned officers. At the end we compiled a report of all the difficulties experienced by women and submitted them to the concerned officers and followed it up so that several of these grievances could be satisfactorily addressed.

Convergence Meeting of Stakeholders We noticed a total lack of convergence among stakeholders with respect to handling cases of Domestic violence. In order to bridge the gap, we organized several convergence meetings, focussing on challenges we faced when working with different stakeholders. These meetings gave stakeholders an opportunity to interact with each other, understand their constraints and resolve their problems. The next step was to involve community based groups in these interactions so on 2nd February 2016 more than 125 participants from various local NGOs attended a convergent meeting where the police, legal aid, medical and shelter homes from the Mumbai Suburban district participated in a convergence meeting to discuss issues faced under the PWDV Act. The meeting began with an introduction to the DV Act, MOHIM Cell and the DV Handbook, brought out by Majlis. Thereafter the NGOs spoke about the difficulties they experience on the ground and the officers addressed their grievances. The importance of this meeting was that the NGOs could address their concerns face to face with the concerned officers.

Job Mela Pursuing our objective of providing a multipronged support, we had another innovative programme during the year for enhancing the skills of the women and for job placement. We organized a 'job mela' connecting women with several companies like T-Series, Shopper's Stop and many more through Breaking Barriers – Job Mela on 22nd September 2015. The event was attended by 50 women, five NGOs providing vocational training and five potential employers.

Maa Beti Mela In continuation with this novel initiative started last year, this year too we organised the Mela. 100 of us - our team, supporters and clients came together to celebrate courage. The women who work with at Majlis come from different walks of life, across class and facing various marginalization's. What acts as a leveler is the violence and abuse they face. These women are an

inspiration to us - their courage to stand up against violence and the spark of determination to fight against all odds to rebuild their broken lives. To celebrate their determination and courage our young team at Majlis celebrate the Maa-Beti Mela, an opportunity and space to meet them without the shroud of Court dates, statements and negotiations. For them to bond with others who are on a similar journey. But most importantly to spend an evening of relaxation and fun. This year the programme was supported by Shoppers Stop.

Collaborations and Networks

We Action Group

We realized that it is important to engage with groups working on the ground to raise local issues as a collective. Since September, 2015, we started holding meetings with individual organization. As the groups started coming together regularly on a monthly basis, it was decided to name this initiative, ***We Action Group***. It is a broad forum which comprises of organisations like Majlis Legal Centre, Aastha Parivaar, Alert India, Apanalaya, Bhartiya Stree Shakti, CORO, CRH, CSSC, Help Age India, Jeevandhara Trust, 1298 Helpline, Kshamata, LEARN, MAVVA, Ratna Charitable Trust, Silver Innings, Watch Foundation and YWCA, among others. During the year we actively initiated programmes to address concerns of NGOs where the system was not responding to the needs of women from their communities. When instances of discriminatory attitudes of judges and police officials were brought to the notice of the group, we wrote letters to judges, police officials, etc. giving examples of specific instances of violation of rights or denial of access to justice. We also brought the POs and district officer of WCD on this common platform so that groups could address the problems faced by them directly to the concerned officers.

International Women's Day As the groups started coming together on a common platform, it was decided to hold a public demonstration as part of the Women's Day celebrations during March 2016. This turned out to be a huge success with around 350 participants attending the event which was held at Chembur junction on 15th March, 2016. The day began with a Human Chain on the highway at Chembur where the participants displayed banners and raised slogans in support of social causes, linked to the theme of the programme – ***Say NO to Violence***. Singing protest songs, the participants proceeded to gather and imprint their handprints in colorful paints on a banner in show of solidarity towards social causes, and to publicly raise their collective voice against violence. Eminent feminists Chhaya Datar, Flavia Agnes and Sugandi Francis addressed the gathering with inspirational messages.

Majlis is also part of Aman Network and the PWDVA Advocacy and Campaign Group and attends the annual meetings organised by the network and raises issues which we feel are important.

Majlis was the Knowledge Partner to the Harvard University South Asia Institute (SAI) project on addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equitability. The project aimed at capacity building by bringing together local organisations and experts that work on these issues to provide concrete and usable training, to jointly evolve strategies for strengthening the field, to showcase best practices and assist with scaling, deepening and maximizing impact.

Reaching out to the Student Community

Expression and Know Your Rights

In collaboration with Mumbai University, Women's Development Unit, each year we reach out to the student community. "Expression" is a college programme that allows students to participate in debates, and other non verbal communications such as posters, plays, etc. contemporary issues in a non-confrontational manner. The participatory mode adopted and the element of completion inherent in this format, helps to bring in student participation. The participants are judged by a selection panel comprising of a faculty member, a member from Majlis and an external NGO member. This also helps as a network building exercise.

This year we reached out to more than 1000 students across 30 colleges. The theme was 'Violence Behind Closed Doors'. Students expressed themselves in various ways about issues like child sexual abuse, rapes by family members and domestic violence across class and caste boundaries. The formal college environment does not provide the scope to discuss these issues openly and this forum provided the necessary platform for them to air their views and concerns.

We also conducted day long workshops around the theme, Know Your Rights in over 15 colleges. The presentations covered basic rights of women victims of domestic and sexual violence, approaching the police, rights of women at the police station and the law on preventing sexual harassment at the workplace.

Law and social Work For four consecutive years, we have been conducting a course for part time MBA students of social entrepreneurship to expose them to various laws and government schemes which are meant to provide relief to people at the margins – women, children, the aged, minorities, and the poor. This course has helped students to develop a rights perspective in addition to exposure to social entrepreneurship.

Publications and Posters

Apart from litigation, public campaigns and coordinating with NGOs, we have also felt the need to produce material to reach out to a wider audience and to policy makers. One of the ways in which we have been able to do this is by writing columns in popular newspapers. Publishing research papers on important issues and contributing to the academic knowledge base and influencing policy, has been another important area of intervention. At the third level we have produced material for students to disseminate legal knowledge and information about rights.

Know your rights handbook for students To disseminate information about legal rights and to dispel popular misconceptions about the law, we made a handbook on the basic rights of women, their rights in case of domestic violence, sexual violence and sexual harassment at the workplace and circulated the same among students in more than 50 colleges through our programmes. We have also designed posters to help spread awareness about Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act.

Legal Rights Handbook for Women This handbook was produced for the Maharashtra State Women's Commission to provide a basic exposure to the various laws enacted to protect women's rights, in a simple language so that awareness about rights can be provided to a large number of women. The booklet includes rights within marriage, sexual violence, domestic violence, labour laws, rights at the workplace, maternity benefits, rights, reproductive rights, sexuality and sexual orientation, Right to Information Act, Right to Education, human rights, legal aid services, and information about various government schemes. The booklet first written in English was translated into Marathi and Hindi and was widely circulated.

Standard Operating Procedure for the Police In order to ensure effective response, we developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and conducted a series of training with the Crime Police Inspectors to familiarise them with the SOP, as they are the most crucial link and are directly involved in dealing with such cases.

Posters on DV in Police Stations We prepared posters explaining the role of the police and PO in providing support to victims of domestic violence which are prominently displayed in all police stations in Mumbai.

Ummeed –We celebrate the courage and determination of women who have stood up against violence and whatever the outcome, have come out stronger at the other end. Every month we write case studies

of women's experience of engaging with the system to access their rights. Through this sharing, we hope to inspire others to take the first step. This year we wrote 15 case studies.

Shelter Homes Resource Directory Shelter Homes were conceived to provide a safe space to women and children. In India, shelter homes are run by Government, religious and charitable organisations, NGO's etc. to cater to different vulnerabilities. During the course of our work we felt a dire need to find safe homes for vulnerable victims, especially those who felt unsafe in their own homes. We undertook the task of visiting Shelter Homes in and around Mumbai, Thane and Navi Mumbai to unravel the complexities that define them and verify for ourselves the services they provide. This resource directory is an attempt to present the details in a concise and relevant manner. Apart from basic details of address, contact numbers, office timings we also tried to map important aspects like the process of admission, criteria for selection, age group admitted and capacity of the shelter. We have also documented services provided by them like education, vocational training, counselling, employment opportunities and other services to aid in the rehabilitation of victims. We hope that this directory becomes a useful ready reference for stakeholders like Police, Doctors, NGOs working with victims of violence, so as to ensure everyone has access to a safe space.

Articles in Academic Journals and Position Papers The following important articles were published during the year.

“Protection of Women from Domestic Violence” in the special issue *Review of Women's Studies* in EPW Vol. L/44, October 31, 2015 <http://www.epw.in/review-womens-studies/protection-women-domestic-violence.html>

“Sexual Violence – Interface between the public and the private” in *State of Urban Poor Report, 2015 - Gender and Urban Poverty*, a publication of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India and Om Prakash Mathur. OUP, February, 2016

Presented a position paper on violence against women and children, at the “Gender Equality and Child Rights – Sharing knowledge & developing an agenda for action” conclave (28-30 January, 2016) organised by the National Gender Centre held at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Administrative Academy (LBSNAA), Mussoorie.

Chapter titled “Personal Laws” in Choudhry Sujit, Madhav Khosla and Pratap Bhanu Mehta (edit) *The Oxford Handbook of The Indian Constitution* (OUP, March, 2016 pg.903 -920)

“Section 498A, marital rape and adverse propaganda” - EPW Vol.L/23 June 6, 2015 pp. 12-15

Common code, uncommon challenges - Does the debate on the Uniform Civil Code in India uphold a majoritarian value system? An essay published in Majumdar Aunohgita (ed.) The Marriage Issue Himal South Asia (Nepal) January, 2016 <http://himalmag.com/common-code-uncommon-challenges/>

Articles in newspapers and TV interviews dealing with the various and nuanced aspects of sexual and domestic violence, personal laws, medical ethics, uniform civil code, etc. were published in newspapers to bring our concerns into the public domain. We were also invited to participate in talk shows and discussions around these concerns on television.

Other Events

Interaction with International Scholars of Legal Pluralism

On 13th December, about 15 legal scholars and academicians from all over the world met lawyers from Majlis as part of the Legal Pluralism Conference 2015 organised by the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay. We spoke about the issue of Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the Indian context and discussed the evolution of the religion based family laws and stressed that the focus should be uniformity of rights and not uniformity of law. Speaking about the vulnerabilities women faced when seeking rights, she explained that easy and affordable access to justice as a major concern to women from marginalised sections.

Interaction with other NGOs at the National Level

The senior team leaders participated in several meetings organised by other NGOs – PLD (Delhi) on turning victims into survivors, Vimochana – on the issue of shelter for deserted and single women, Aman network – an initiative by a Kolkata based NGO Swayam to address issues of violence against women, the national consultation of OXFAM for their partner organisations to discuss problems of counselling centres, where we were invited to present our Domestic Violence Handbook. We also provided a two day training and exposure to a Kolkata based NGO Jeevika which also provides support to victims of sexual and domestic violence.

In October, 2015, Flavia delivered the prestigious Rokaiya Bano Memorial Lecture at JNU around the theme, Evolving a survivor centric approach to sexual violence

Senior leadership of Majlis was selected by U.S. Department of State for their **International Visitor's Leadership Program (IVLP)** a premier professional exchange program that seeks to build mutual

understanding between the U.S. and other nations for current and emerging foreign leaders. This was a 3 weeks exposure visit to the US to see their programs on Gender Based Violence.

In December, 2015, Flavia was a keynote speaker at the Australian National University at Canberra at a seminar titled, Islam, Gender Relations and Women's agency: An India-Indonesia Perspective.

In January, 2016 at the Hyderabad Lit Fest, Flavia spoke in two sessions - Violence Against Women and Media and Minority identity. She also delivered the Savitribai Phule Memorial Annual Lecture at the School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad.

Flavia was also profiled in the publication, "Lives of Women (Volume 2)" published by Sophia College and the Sophia Center for Women's Development.

On 8th March, 2016, Flavia Agnes was honoured by the City Council of Milan, Italy where a tree was dedicated in her honour at the Garden of the Righteous. Six women from across the world who have shown extra ordinary courage to fight against violence were chosen for the event.

This year Majlis leadership was invited to be part of the **Dasra Social Impact (DSI) Leadership Program**. Crafted for the needs of founders, executive directors and senior management it delivers the insight, vision and skills to help expand their potential and the impact of their social enterprise. A one year programme spans across 4 modules – Strategy & Leadership, HR, Branding & Communications, Sustainability & Legacy

Concluding Comments

This has been a year of highs and lows. Our endeavour is to work towards consolidating the gains and at the same time strengthen the organisational base and enhance the skills of the entire team and work on outreach so that we are able to bring before the public the multifaceted activities of the organisation towards strengthening women's rights and making access to justice a reality to women at the margins.

DISCLOSURES

Details of staff and their range of salary as on 31st March 2016 (Gross salary + benefits)

Per month	Male	Female	Total
Less than 5000	-	-	-
5000 – less than 10000	-	1	1
10000 – less than 25000	-	8	8
25000 – less than 50000	-	13	13
50000 – 100000	-	4	4
Greater than 100000	-	-	-
Total		26	26

	Gross Monthly Remuneration	Designation
Flavia Agnes	Rs. 1,00,000/-	Director
Highest paid		
Highest	Rs. 1,00,000/-	Program Director
Second	Rs. 65,000/-	Program Manager
Third	Rs. 50,000/-	Program Manager
Lowest paid		
Lowest	Rs. 8,000/-	Peon
Second	Rs. 10,000/-	Admin Asst.
Third	Rs. 15,000/-	Programme Asst.

Remuneration to Trustees: No remuneration has been paid to Trustees.

Audited Accounts and Balance Sheet: Our audited accounts and balance sheet is shared with the public through our website.

Annual Report: The annual report is prepared after completion of the financial year.

Relation between Board members: No members of our board are related to one another by blood or marriage.

Board rotation policy: We have a rotation policy and members retiring or outgoing are eligible to be re-elected to the Board.

Board meetings & AGM held in the year 2015 - 2016

No	Nature of meeting	Date	Members present	Total Strength
1.	Board Meeting	30 th November, 2015	6	8

2	Board Meeting	20 th June, 2015	7	7
3	Board Meeting	11 th July, 2015	4	7
4	AGM	27 th September, 2015	7	7
5	Board Meeting	16 th December, 2015	7	8
6	Board Meeting	28 th February, 2016	7	8

Board members as on 31st March 2016.

No	Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Position	Amt paid	Type
1	Mitra Parikh	59	Female	Professor	Secretary	Nil	Nil
2	Neera Adarkar	67	Female	Architect	Treasurer	Nil	Nil
3	Justice Suresh H.	87	Male	Retired Judge	Trustee	Nil	Nil
4	Bishakha Datta	53	Female	Writer & Filmmaker	Trustee	Nil	Nil
5	Shoba Ghosh	58	Female	Professor	Trustee	Nil	Nil
6	Nilima Sheikh	71	Female	Artist	Trustee	Nil	Nil
7	Vidya Bal	78	Female	Social Worker	Trustee	Nil	Nil
8	Prabha Sridevan	68	Female	Retired Judge	Trustee	Nil	Nil

International travel by staff / volunteers / Board members at the expense of the organization

No one travelled abroad at the expense of the organization during the year 2015 -2016.

Air travel by staff / volunteers and Board members at the expense of the organization

No air travel was done at the expense of the organization during the year 2015 -2016.