

Public Meeting on *Mahila Jagrutha Vedike* – Report



Yelahanka Satellite Town, Ward 4
24 September 2016

I. Main Objectives:

To bring together multiple stakeholders from the BBMP, police, government, civil society and community to

1. Identify key issues and challenges faced by the community in relation to reporting sexual violence, with specific focus on Ward 4 – Yelahanka Satellite Ward.
2. Identify key functions and composition of the *Mahila Jagrutha Vedike*, while ensuring adequate representation from marginalised communities
3. Draw up a tentative list of volunteers for the *Mahila Jagrutha Vedike*

II. Summary of the Meeting:

This was an initial planning and consultation meeting with different individuals and groups in Ward 4, Yelahanka Satellite town to discuss the formation of a ward-level committee, called *Mahila Jagrutha Vedike* with support from the BBMP and the police in the area. The participants at the public meeting included the Corporator, women police, Citizen’s Forum, members of the Resident Welfare Association (RWA), domestic workers, civil society, Solid Waste Management (SWM) Group members and counsellors and social workers.



The meeting began with an introduction and welcome from Mr. Sathish M, Corporator for Yelahanka Satellite Ward – Ward 4. Dr. Sylvia Karpagam introduced the Ready to Report Campaign, challenges related to the issue of under-reporting of sexual violence and highlighted key points regarding the formation of the *Mahila Jagrutha Vedike*. After all the participants introduced themselves, a focused discussion was carried to jointly arrive at the following:

1. Key issues and challenges faced by women in the Ward
2. Possible solutions, with specific reference to local authorities like the police and BBMP
3. Functions and role of the *Mahila Jagrutha Vedike*

1. Key issues and challenges faced by women in the ward

Police: The issue was raised that there is a poor response by the police when complaints are made and disrespectful behavior towards women complainants. There is poor understanding of the law by the police themselves, especially different sections under which the FIR should be filed. They also unnecessarily insist that parents accompany women to lodge complaints, even if they are majors. The social stigma makes it almost impossible to file a complaint. The process of lodging a complaint is very long drawn out and no immediate actions are taken. Often the case is dealt with by multiple officials, so it is difficult to follow up on individual cases. The police responded that they were doing their best. The facilitators emphasised that this was not a fault-finding forum but a platform to forge a way forward. The issue was also raised that women police are not adequately supported at the police stations. They often do not have access to women's toilets, vehicles to transport complainants to the hospital/court and erratic timings. There are no waiting rooms in the police station for female complainants.

Health facilities: There are often many confusions about where medical examinations will be conducted. The issue was also raised that doctors sometimes refuse to conduct medical examinations unless a parent is present, even in the case of majors.

Workplace harassment: The issue of sexual harassment of domestic workers is often not discussed. Employers and RWAs often do not support domestic workers who face sexual harassment. The women themselves have a poor understanding of their rights. The harassment is linked to wages, lack of ESI and PF benefits, erratic work timings, fear of losing their jobs and poor access to any form of support or information. There are garment factories in the Yelahanka area. Women face multiple issues such as labour law violations, poor toilet facilities, long work hours etc. Women are differentiated based on age. Sexual harassment guidelines are often on paper and although women may be on these committees, it is dominated by senior male employers and the women are mainly dummy figures. When they call for a meeting of the sexual harassment committee they are asked to give reasons for this. Many women also face workplace harassment in their offices and get no support from employers.



Domestic violence: Sexual violence can often be closely linked to domestic violence but often ignored by neighbours as an ‘internal’ issue. It is often difficult for women to talk about this, leave alone make a complaint. The women themselves are often blamed for the violence.

Schools and colleges: There was discussion on harassment in colleges and schools. There are cases of PhD guides and senior faculty using their positions of power to harass women students and demanding sexual favours in return for any help or support.

Harassment on the streets: Street harassment complaints are not address properly. Victim blaming and shaming is common. Often harassment in the streets is difficult to prove and the bystanders usually do not respond.

2. Possible solutions

Police

- More women police personnel and recruitment of more women police officers.
- Awareness of jurisdictional police station phone numbers
- Generate awareness on legal procedures
- Conduct ‘open house’ with public regularly on violence against women in the community
- People are afraid of reporting sexual violence against others- police should be more sensitive and discreet
- Display of numbers of women friendly police stations at key locations.

BBMP

- More programmes for women about reporting on Violence against Women (VaW)
- Spending on toilets for women, street lights, transparency on budgets is required
- There should be counsellors at government hospitals
- Generate awareness among the community about the ward committee and some contact numbers.

The Corporator said that they had constructed four public toilets in the park for men/women walking in the park. He said that no separate budget had been allocated for women by the BBMP.

3. Functions of the *Mahila Jagrutha Vedike*:

- Should have an awareness mechanism and provide leadership at the ward level
- There should be representation from all castes (can discuss problems of women from these communities)
- Should have specific goals
- Can connect with women in other parts of the city
- Can address issues of women from all sections of society
- Awareness about government schemes (link between government and the community)
- Meetings in colleges for women
- Contact number for people to call confidentially about problems
- Awareness building about existence of the committee
- Should have good links with and contact details of relevant officials

- Training for committee members (on laws, budgets) and sensitivity about caste, etc
- Make committees mandatory and statutory bodies over a period of time.

III. Way Forward

- Fourteen volunteers based in Yelahanka have registered their interest in being part of the campaign. The police, health, and legal representatives have to be finalised.
- The larger stakeholder meeting will be held again in two months to update about the activities done till date.
- The *Mahile Jaagrutha Vedike* will be finalized in the coming weeks and a further meeting is being planned on 7 October, 2016.
- The members can decide whether they would like to continue or not after a period of two months i.e. if they can dedicate adequate time and energy to the work.
- A series of trainings will be conducted for the *Vedike* members around the issues of medical aspects of sexual violence, with focus on specific groups and communities, available resources and support systems for women facing sexual violence, laws around rape and sexual violence, ward committees – functions, roles and responsibilities of the corporator, roles and responsibilities of the police, community-led movements in Yelahanka and existing resource groups, legal aspects of sexual violence, inclusive action in communities, street plays and their importance in social mobilization, sexually transmitted diseases and health care structures and functions, non-formal sector and the ward level and the issues faced, gender sensitization.
- Standard operating practices (SOPs) will be developed by Amnesty International India with the help of experts and resource persons.
- A campaign in the Ward will be planned with the *Vedike* over next few weeks.

IV. Background

The 'Ready to Report' campaign envisions Bengaluru as a city committed to ensuring safe, dignified and prejudice-free reporting of sexual violence against women. Prior to this meeting, official permission and support was obtained from the Mayor, the Joint Director of Police, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, the Assistant



Commissioner of Police in Yelahanka, the Medical Officer (Yelahanka New Town), the MLA and the Corporator. Civil society organisations and activists in the area were contacted and given a background to the initiative. Slum areas were visited to encourage women to participate in the process. Anganwadi teachers were also given an idea of the initiative to share the message with mothers and women who were part of the Self Help Groups.