

# Swapping the Stick for a Broom: Men Supporting Women in Local Politics in India

## EMERGE Case Study 4

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Engendering Men  
Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality

Cover photograph: Panchayat (village council) members Mrs Sangeeta Basavraj Banne, Sarpancha (Head of the Gram Panchayat) and Mrs Jagdevi Revansidh Ankalge, with Men for Gender Equity project facilitator and village animator, Gourishankar Doddyale and Shivanand Doddyale, Chapalgaonwadi village. Text on wall: *'This panchayat is free from discrimination on the basis of caste, gender or religion'*.

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# Abbreviations

CHSJ	Centre for Health and Social Justice
EMERGE	Engendering Men: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality
HMF	Halo Medical Foundation
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NREGS	Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
OBC	Other 'Backward' [ <i>sic.</i> ] Class
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SHG	Self Help Group
WGS	Women's <i>Gram Sabha</i> (women's assembly in preparation for <i>Gram Sabha</i> , the general village assembly)

# Abstract

Women's engagement, leadership and decision-making in the public sphere continues to be suppressed in much of rural India. It is controlled by cultural norms which place women as subordinate to men, and prescribe their roles as confined to the domestic sphere. . Understanding and supporting women's pathways of empowerment within and between private and public life continues to be a feminist struggle for women's rights and gender equality. This paper shares findings of case study research exploring how work with men can contribute to this process of change, and support women's participation in public and political life. The work of the *Samajhdar Jodidar* (meaning 'understanding partner') project in rural Maharashtra, provides an interesting, and important example of the role men can play in contributing to progressive social change on women's public participation.

Research with 42 men and women involved in this initiative, either directly as activists or as key stakeholders, including women local government representatives, provides some important lessons for how this kind of approach can work. Importantly the commitment to democratic accountability on gender equality spans both private and public spheres. Men first work through consciousness raising to transform their own practices within their homes and intimate relationships. This provides a platform for social action in the wider community and enables trusting relationships to be built with women to work together to drive political change. Demanding accountability from existing legal mechanisms for affirmative action on women's participation and transforming local level institutions from within have been important strategic areas.



Men for Gender Equity project village animators during a group discussion exploring their strategies for supporting women's participation in politics and public life. © J Edström, 2015

# 1 Introduction

In many countries, women—especially poor women—have less say over decisions and less control over resources in their households. And in most countries, women participate less in formal politics than men and are underrepresented in its upper echelons (World Development Report 2012: xxi).

Twenty years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was established as a progressive blueprint for measures to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in, decision-making, its commitment remains only partially fulfilled. Understanding the conditions in which women's participation and leadership in public and political life occurs, and the social, institutional and political blockages that maintain deeply embedded inequalities, continues to be an important site of research and activism within feminist struggles (Domingo *et al.* 2015). The role of men in change towards the empowerment of women in public life, however, remains conspicuously absent from research and practice.

Globally, increases in women's presence in political life have been supported through reforms in electoral architecture, namely the establishment of reservations for women through electoral quotas (Tadros 2010). Despite increasing numbers of women in elected government positions, patriarchal cultures work to exclude, subordinate and undermine women's roles and influence. These systems are upheld by gender norms grounded in men's and women's gendered roles and responsibilities, with men entitled to voice and participation in the public sphere, and women confined to reproductive roles within the home. These inequalities are filtered through class, caste and religion in the Indian context.

However, recent literature reviews by the consortium 'Engendering Men: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality' (EMERGE) and by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) find little evidence on strategies for men's progressive engagement in women's participation in public life and decision-making; where progressive examples do exist they are typically not well documented (Edström *et al.* 2015; O'Neil and Plank 2015). Those strategies that are highlighted point to the importance of: engaging male champions in formal parliamentary politics to change cultures that promote traditional masculine norms, towards those that are inclusive and gender equitable; women's participation in wider social justice movements as a form of political apprenticeship; and the engagement of men in pro-feminist community-based development and mobilisation strategies, where men and women are taking collective political action to address inequality (Hamaus *et al.* 2015). The review argues that there is a need to document and pilot programmes that go beyond men's engagement in interpersonal issues, to engagement in demanding accountability and reform of patriarchal institutions, .

Responding to these gaps, this study explores the role of men and boys in women's political participation and empowerment in public life in the context of rural Maharashtra, India. We explore the work of the *Samajhdar Jodidar* (meaning 'understanding partner') project, an initiative with the central aim of working with men to address women's subordinate status in society, and with specific strategies to support women's participation in public life and decision-making. Section two, below, gives a background of why this is important in India, a methodology on how the study was carried out, and a short description of what the specific problem is in Maharashtra. Section three then highlights some of the key changes, exploring how these are thought to have come about, including the role of the project, external factors and challenges faced, then ending by drawing some lessons. Section four concludes with some reflections on broader implications for international policy and research on women's empowerment, and on work with men and boys in development.

## 2 Background

Maharashtra is a state with a complex social, political and economic history. Early progressive commitments to the democratic empowerment of women and marginalised groups has interplayed with economic decline since the mid 1990s and despite the state having the highest per capita income, poverty levels remain high (Government of India 2014). Economic reforms focused on mechanisation and the upgrading of technology during this period have negatively affected rural unemployment rates in Maharashtra, including for rural women workers which almost doubled between 1994 and 2004 (MAITREE 2008).

Diverse and intersecting social influences also act as barriers to women's participation in public and political life in Maharashtra (and in India more widely). They include, lack of education, lack of respect for women in political positions, physical violence against women in the public and private spheres, and oppressive patriarchal and caste structures (THP and UN Women 2011). The socio-cultural context of rural Maharashtra is entrenched with caste and class hierarchies which police the lives of poor and marginalised men and women and are set within a patriarchal structure (Gala 1997). The intersections of gender and caste-based inequality act to compound the discrimination experienced by women, further restricting their rights, and access to resources and opportunities.

Gender and caste-based discrimination has been documented within public service provision (Razvi and Roth 2010) and are associated with inequality in economic and human development. Literacy rates in rural Maharashtra are 85.2 per cent for males and 68.5 per cent for females aged over seven years (Census Info India 2011). In the general population, data shows a literacy rate of 53.7 per cent for women, which for women of scheduled caste is 41.9 per cent. For 2004–2005 within rural Maharashtra, 44.8 per cent of the scheduled caste population and 23.9 per cent of the population in an Other Backward Class (OBC) live below the national poverty line (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment 2005), compared to a state average of 29.6 per cent (Government of India Planning Commission 2007).

Research from seven states, including Maharashtra, reflects how gender discrimination manifests as violence in the private lives of women: 52 per cent of women in the study reported that they had experienced some form of violence during their lifetime; and 60 per cent of men said that they had acted violently against their wife or partner at some point in their lives (Nand *et al.* 2014). Research by Bhatla *et al.* (2012) shows how these attitudes are embedded in institutions of governance with nearly 60 per cent of men and women political representatives in the *gram panchayat* agreeing that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together.

Gendered power imbalances in decision-making, roles, and responsibilities, affect women in both public and private spheres. Within the private domain, research across seven states found that 86 per cent of men and 74 per cent of women agreed that women's most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family (Nand *et al.* 2014). Within the public domain, women are restricted in their mobility and participation in paid work. Findings from research in Maharashtra show that 67.3 per cent of women are not employed, bearing the majority of household chores (CHSJ Baseline 2011). In terms of political life, in 2014 a total of 46 per cent of women's votes were polled in Maharashtra in 2009, compared to 59.8 per cent for men and women combined (Election Commission of India 2014).

The institutionalisation of women's rights on a national level represents an important development towards gender equality. Constitutional affirmative action has provided an important platform for women and marginalised groups to claim their rights and directly participate in local democracy as elected representatives. The Constitution (73rd Amendment Act), enacted in 1992, mandated the reservation of a minimum of one-third of



seats and chairpersonships for women at all levels, as well as reservation in proportion to their percentage in the population for members of scheduled castes within India's newly instituted locally elected governance bodies, the *panchayat*. The amendment also devolved power to *panchayats* on issues of economic development and social justice. In 2009, the Government of India passed a constitutional amendment to approve a 50 per cent reservation for women in *panchayats* at all tiers (Lokh Sabha Secretariat 2010).

Maharashtra, known to be a progressive state in the area of the *panchayat*, implemented the 30 per cent reservation one year in advance of the 1992 constitutional amendment. In 2007, a total 33.3 per cent of elected representatives within the *panchayat* were reported as women. Where women of scheduled caste and tribal groups are members of the *panchayat*, research shows that in Maharashtra only 10.8 per cent of respondents believed that these women were able to fully contribute to *panchayat* activities (Society of Tribal Women for Development 2008).

Although making an important contribution to women's visibility and representation in the *panchayat*, reservations have not been adequate to ensure women's leadership, participation and influence. Social barriers persist, including a lack of informal and formal education, and literacy affecting women's status and independence. Where women are exercising their right to participate in *panchayat* elections as voters and candidates incidences of murder, sexual assault, intimidation and threats have been reported in response in the media and research (Bhatla *et al.* 2012; THP and UN Women 2011; Gopal Jayal 2006). The intersection of caste and class inequality complicate the discrimination experienced by women, with women of scheduled castes reporting physical violence as well as humiliation such as their capacity to govern being constantly questioned and being forced to sit on the floor (Society of Tribal Women for Development 2008; Gopal Jayal 2006). Different lines of dependency between men and women representatives – in lower socio-economic classes and castes versus elite land owners – also restricts women's freedoms of decision-making, association and representation within the *panchayat* system differently. Co-option of the reservation system is also documented in that women and marginalised groups entitled to elected seats are pressured into a form of 'surrogate' representation, acting as namesakes for men and elite power holders (*Ibid.*; Government of India 2014; CHSJ Baseline 2011; Baskivar 2009; Society of Tribal Women for Development 2008). As Bhatliwala and Dhanraj (2004: 16) outline, women and marginalised groups 'have to negotiate a vast and dangerous minefield of class and caste politics, patronage networks, and affiliations, while the social and economic bases of their lives outside the *panchayat* remain unchanged.'

The commitment to participatory development in the Constitution's 73rd amendment (1992, outlined above) led to the establishment of the *gram sabha*, a deliberative body made up of those who are registered on the electoral rolls of the area covered by a *panchayat* and it is an important forum for social mobilisation at the local level, providing a platform for all adult voices in the village to be heard. However, challenges of elite capture in these spaces are still a major issue and research has shown that women do not often attend *gram sabha meetings*, even if many women have been able to use these spaces to enter politics (Baskivar 2009).

In response some states have made special provisions in the quorum requirements to ensure the presence of women in these meetings. Some states, including Maharashtra, have institutionalised the practice of convening a special meeting of women members of the *gram sabha* in advance of the main *gram sabha* meeting. The aim is to provide a preparatory pathway into the *gram sabha*, as opposed to substituting women's participation in the main *gram sabha* (Lokh Sabha 2010; THP and UN Women 2011). These provisions in the *gram sabha* are set against a backdrop of women contesting elections, occupying reserved positions and participating in *panchayats* in Maharashtra since the 1970s, with some examples of all-women *panchayats* initiated by women activists (Gala 1997). However, often most women *sarpanches* (meaning 'head', or 'chair', of the *panchayat*) in these bodies had

belonged to families of the rural political elite established along caste and class lines (Gopal Jayal 2006). Research by Buch (2000) shows that the profile of women in power after the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment has shifted towards women from families in lower socio-economic classes and that they were comparatively younger.

Gender issues in histories of social and political mobilisation shape an important part of the landscape of contemporary Maharashtra. The mobilisation of a large independent farmer's organisation 'Shetkari Sanghatana' played an important role in catalysing women's political participation and leadership, including the establishment of women-only *panchayats*. Gala (1997) outlines that the movement, under the leadership of Sharad Joshi, argued that claims for addressing economic injustice and rebalancing power inequalities with industrial elites needed to make gender inequality explicit if women were to benefit equitably from the resulting process of redistribution and market reform; in turn, women's property rights and political leadership became important objectives for the movement. A significant aspect of the work of this campaign was that collective action for change on women's leadership and empowerment involved both men and women (*Ibid.*; CHSJ Baseline 2011). Mohanty's research on gender and participatory democracy in *panchayat* institutions emphasises the importance of marginalised groups practicing participation in alternative societal spaces and transferring these skills into formal spaces of governance. This process can both strengthen participation and influence, enabling more meaningful engagement, in particular in the face of resistance from local elites (Mohanty 2006).

However, the wider gendered socio-political context in India has also seen the growth of men's rights groups that directly oppose the structural changes to improve the status of women (Hamaus *et al.* 2015). Chowdhury (2014) cites the criminalisation of domestic violence, enabling women to make legal claims against sexual and gender-based violence, and increasing opportunities to enter public spaces, as major drivers of the rise of men's rights groups. Save the Indian Family Foundation (SIFF), a national movement, sees these claims for women's rights as threats to family values and argues that pro-women laws are being misused with negative effects for men and women, rather than framing its opposition as an open assertion of male supremacy (Hamaus *et al.* 2015). Women's rights organisations responded with action to highlight that there are very few affected women that are able to claim justice through this law, in turn calling for further comprehensive legislation (Shades of Courage 1999). In 2005, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was passed, however barriers to implementation remain upheld by patriarchal structures (Menon 2007).

Why men react in different ways to changes in women's public and political participation is important for understanding how men can be engaged as partners in women's empowerment. Based on research in Mexico, Torres Olascoaga (2014) argues that men with more power experience a greater loss when women enter politics and hence tend to hold onto their privileges more strongly. Furthermore, scholars have argued that exploring how men and masculinities relate to multiple hierarchies of power – in terms of their privilege and vulnerability within caste and class systems in India for example – provides an opportunity for raising consciousness of the oppression they experience, providing a platform for understanding, and in turn challenging the oppression experienced by the women in their lives (Shahrokh with Edström 2015; Connell 2011; Greig 2002).

In response to these identified barriers, this study sets out to explore the following research questions:

- How can men be effectively mobilised in support of gender equality and women's equal participation in public life and decision-making, within a highly patriarchal development context?
- What can we learn from these experiences for others working with men in a pro-feminist mode for gender equality in public life, or for policy makers and practitioners in development more broadly?

In order to answer these questions we engaged with the work of the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project (enhancing male participation for improving gender equality in Maharashtra), an initiative with the central aim of working with men on gender issues including addressing women's subordinate status in society and issues that men face with respect to their own health and wellbeing. The intervention takes place at the community level and as such the exploration of political participation will happen at the local, *gram panchayat* level of governance. This provides an interesting sphere to explore issues of women's participation in public and political life, alongside daily manifestations of gender inequality in public and private life. Furthermore, the *gram panchayat* system claims principles of participatory democracy and social inclusion and therefore provides an interesting site of analysis for changes in women's political participation.

## **2.1 Methodology employed in the study**

This study used a qualitative research approach to explore the impact of work with men on women's participation in public and political life. A broad analytical frame was established to focus the study on the dynamics of change related to work with men and boys on women's empowerment. The thematic topic of men's roles in women's political participation was identified through an in-depth review of the evidence on work to engage men in gender equality (Hamaus *et al.* 2015), where little evidence on effective programming in this area was found. In order to contextualise the research questions they were developed through a participatory mapping approach of the issue with implementation staff and community activists connected to the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project.

The research was undertaken in Solapur district, Maharashtra, India. With a total population of the district of some 3.8 million inhabitants (as of the 2001 census), the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project is being implemented in 20 villages of Sangola and Akkalkot sub-districts (two of four in Solapur) (CHSJ Baseline 2011). Baseline research from the *Samajhdar Jodidar* was undertaken with 23 villages (including those in the project), eight of which were in the Akkalkot sub-district the area where this case study research was undertaken. The research findings show gender inequitable beliefs regarding gender roles and practices as deeply internalised by men and women (*Ibid.*). In the baseline 31.7 per cent of men and 60.8 per cent of women expressed that men never discuss family planning. Only 44.4 per cent of men and 43.8 per cent of women believed that girls should be allowed to decide when and whom to marry. With regards to sexual and gender-based violence, 49.6 per cent of men and 60.2 per cent of women reported that there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten, and, 51.9 per cent of men and 46.6 per cent of women expressed that there is nothing wrong if a man has sex with his wife even if she is not ready for it (*Ibid.*).

This research focused on two villages in Akkalkot area, which were chosen due to the fact that they had not been exposed to prior NGO interventions, and as such offer a better context for understanding the contribution of the project itself. Based on their experience of programme implementation, programme partners identified these villages as holding norms of male supremacy, high levels of violence against women, sex determination, and sex selective abortions rates.

The research team was made up of one male and one female international researcher from the Institute of Development Studies who undertook the in-depth review and were involved in identifying the need for the case. Two further researchers were from the Centre for Health and Social Justice, who contributed substantively to the analysis and also provided important situational and contextual insights and interpretation between Marathi and English.

Qualitative methods included participatory group analysis with nine male ‘animators’, who act as men’s group leaders in the villages and are trained to engage men on gender equality issues and keep the local community mobilised to address gender inequality. Two project ‘facilitators’, whose role it is to support the animators in their roles, were also involved in this session. Focus group discussions were held with members of the project’s unmarried and married men’s groups separately, small group (or pair) interviews were held with *panchayat* members, and individual interviews with selected stakeholders. A validation workshop of preliminary project findings was held with male animators and facilitators at the end of the visit, to ensure that there was no misinterpretation or important gaps in the data and analysis. Given the short-time frame and focused nature of the study, purposive sampling was used to reach key stakeholders within the project community. See Table 2.1 for a full breakdown of research respondents by gender, type and location.

**Table 2.1 Research respondents**

Group	Location	Women	Men	Total
NGO leaders	Office		2	2
Facilitators	All		2	2
Animators	All		9	9
Group members	Village 1		6	6
	Village 2		13	13
Gram panchayat members	Village 1	3	2	5
	Village 2	2		2
Stakeholders	Village 1		1	1
	Village 2	2		2
Total				42

### **Ethical practice and study limitations**

Signed, informed consent was gained from all participants, including the option to anonymise contributions. Researchers aimed to ensure that practices were gender sensitive and informed by local cultural and social norms; this was reflected in the gendered and cultural make up of the research team. The study sample includes a higher number of men than women, which was felt to be important given the focus of the project on understanding and documenting the work of men’s groups on women’s political empowerment, an under-researched field, and including the perspectives of men. The engagement of women through key informant interviews was an opportunity to gain their perspectives on the impact and quality of the men’s work, as well as to help us understand synergies and dissonances in men’s and women’s interpretation of whether, why and how change is happening. The time for this exploratory study was very short and more in-depth and extensive research will be important to understand the extent to which changes are being seen across geographical contexts and how this relates to wider socio-economic and political influences.

## **2.2 Understanding barriers to women’s participation in Solapur district**

The qualitative research undertaken for this case study presents findings from key informant interviews with men and women who are stakeholders in the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project, and focus group discussions with programme participants. These findings help to articulate the specificities of the problem of women’s participation in public and political life within the Akkalkot area of Solapur.

**A marked gap between progressive policies on gender and their implementation.**

The findings from this study show that in rural Maharashtra, there is still a marked gap between the progressive policies on gender equality in political representation of the national and state government, and their implementation, which is often resisted and compromised at the community level. A deeply patriarchal political culture in these communities has led to the co-option of the political reservation system (of 50 per cent of seats reserved for women), where women are often registered in name but not represented in person. There is a lack of effective monitoring of policies or mechanisms to support them. For example, when women's names are used for signatures in the *gram panchayat* but they are not allowed to take part in deliberations and decision making.

**A pervasive public/private gendered divide in this rural context.**

This private/public divide is underpinned by a strictly heterosexual patriarchal system that positions women's roles as within the domestic sphere to handle child care and domestic work, whereas men are in charge of public economic, cultural and political affairs. These practices are further upheld by repressive religious norms including *pardah* (Nanda *et al.* 2015). This has implications for local governance as well as for the broader cultural, economic and social life of the community. Research participants described vividly how women's independent mobility has been very restricted and is disapproved of in the community, where women can be chastised or threatened for breaking the norms. Women have been socialised not to have confidence to participate in political life and the culture of politics has traditionally been a male centred and male dominated space. Furthermore, 'dissident' men – men who challenge stereotypes and support women's public participation – are often challenged by men and women in the community. The family as a basic social unit of patriarchal power is very much protected and these norms underlie the patriarchal system.

**A gendered socio-cultural role-differentiation at household and community levels.**

This role-differentiation, with its underlying ideology of male supremacy and women's subordination, has multiple negative implications for health, human development and human rights. Many of these become self-reinforcing. For example, disparity in the rates of literacy between men and women, with women's literacy rates remaining relatively low means that they are not able to access information in the community, to read newspapers or *panchayat* documents, which then impacts on women's confidence to be able to take on leadership positions and reinforces the norm that illiterate women should not attend meetings. The acceptance and normalisation of violence, and domestic violence specifically, has deeply disabling effects on women's public participation and their health and confidence alike.

**Misconceptions and biases in women's health and reproduction.**

Misconceptions and biases in women's health and reproduction undermine women's ability to participate in political life and burden them disproportionately. For example, women are said to be perceived as 'untouchable' during the menstrual cycle, and thus not able to be a part of the political system during this period, nor to access healthcare. In many parts of India, cultural and religious norms drive a deep-rooted taboo that women are impure during menstruation. Furthermore, widows and women who are infertile are not allowed to attend public or cultural events, as they are considered 'unlucky'. Furthermore, participants expressed that women are continuously pressured with complex reproductive burdens, further emphasising their role within this domain. The contraceptive burden generally rests on women, including the burden of sterilisation procedures for population control (despite the far simpler and safer operation being available for men). Finally, a strong son preference is seen as leading to the selective abortion of female foetuses, for which decision-making was reported in some circumstances as being enforced by men.

**Severe gendered economic inequalities between women and men.**

Shoring up such naturalised role-differentiation are multiple economic inequalities with regard to property ownership and economic transactions, typically reserved for men. Community members we met explained that women's control of resources and their leadership is looked

down upon by the community. Furthermore, the wider economic domain is broadly controlled by men, whether in terms of access to jobs or negotiating market outlets or prices. Women who are more mobile outside of the home are seen as a threat to the traditional family unit, where women are in fact treated as the property of men.

**The degree of gender inequality is also related to caste and social class.**

For example, women in the elite social classes and castes were said to be even more controlled by men than those in the lower classes and castes. That is, men from poorer classes and castes cannot control female partners and family members as much because they cannot afford for women not to work. There was however, reportedly a marked difference between the rich and the poor in their openness to gender equality. From their perspective, *Samajhdar Jodidar* activists explained that for richer men it is seen as a challenge to their power, but for men in lower classes gender equality has more resonance with their aspirations for greater equality generally, and so may be more open to gender equality, although examples remained where it was still an aspiration to maintain traditional patriarchal standards like the elites. The implication of this intersectionality (between social class and gender ideology) is that women's participation in politics is in some ways more possible for women in marginalised groups, as elite women are under stricter controls in order to uphold the power of elite dynasties. Despite the support that women of lower caste and class experience in entering into political positions, barriers to participation and influence within the *panchayat* remain and women taking up leadership positions face resistance and backlash from elite men and women whose interests are being challenged.

Given the gaps between progressive official policies and the regressive patriarchal co-option by elite men of local implementation, along with a pervasive male supremacist cultural ideology in local communities, Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) and the Halo Medical Foundation have promoted mobilisation and consciousness raising amongst local men for gender equality and in support of women's participation and leadership, including in local politics. This has grown out of wider community health and welfare initiatives, which incorporate gender equality and social justice orientations, and have common roots in the early Gandhian movement and the primary health care movement.

## 3 Findings

In this chapter, we first describe how the problems discussed above are being addressed by local groups of men in the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project in Solapur district. We then explore 'what has changed' in women's public and political participation in connection with their activities in the local communities. We end the chapter by drawing out some important lessons which activist men, local female representatives and the research team highlighted.

### 3.1 How is the problem being addressed with men?

The *Samajhdar Jodidar* project was borne out of ten years of lessons learned from the Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women (MASVAW) campaign, an initiative started in Uttar Pradesh in 2002 that aimed to engage men in addressing gender inequality and violence driven by patriarchal norms (Roy and Das 2014). The MASVAW initiative worked through participatory learning approaches with groups of men, along with community mobilisation to create personal and collective awareness of the way 'men express their masculinity, and how this affects women's lives and social status' (*Ibid*: 30). This intervention has shown changes in the attitudes and behaviours of 'MASVAW men' towards gender equality including: addressing violence against women, equality in education, and property rights for women (Edström *et al.* 2015; Roy and Das 2014).

Building on this work, the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project's implicit theory of change assumes that within communities there are men open to challenging violent patriarchal norms and that participatory training can support them to commit to personal change and social action towards gender equality. With mentoring support, men can take on positions as alternative role models and in turn work with other men through men's groups to change their behaviour and drive community-based actions to transform discriminatory social norms and gender inequality. They assert that this process of social transformation must be supported by government officials and agencies at the local level and the development of services that are gender equitable (Gupte and Kadam 2012).

The project has been delivered in Maharashtra state since 2010 by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) alongside five implementing partners and with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This study looks specifically at the implementation of the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project by Halo Medical Foundation (HMF) in Solapur district; a project entitled the 'Men for Gender Equity' project. HMF is a comprehensive health organisation which uses health as an entry point for development work with a rights-based approach that emphasises the importance of greater community control of the health care system in order to better reach poor men and women. Building on a longer-term collaboration with individuals in CHSJ, the HMF's earlier work with HIV awareness and domestic violence projects raised the need – and became inroads – for working with men for broader social development and justice, through awareness and consciousness raising, role modelling, and community engagement strategies. Amongst other aims in health and welfare, the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project and its implementation as 'Men for Gender Equity' has a crucial objective to address gender inequity in public and political life: it aims 'to enable women to participate in decision-making processes at family and local-governance levels' (HMF, Men for Gender Equity pamphlet).

The HMF facilitators and the men's group animators elaborated their political approach to this objective in terms of the following range of six key strategies:

**Consciousness raising, to challenge men's beliefs – from the personal to the political**

This involves men working in small groups with animators to discuss gender equality, justice, and equal rights, using consciousness raising techniques. Exploring issues of gender and in/justice in their own lives, the men are supported in a safe space to challenge their own beliefs and notions of masculinity, and their investments in the current patriarchal context.

**Working on relationships to shift gender roles – sharing and caring**

This involves a step-by-step relational and incremental approach to helping men change, from private changes at home to publicly role modelling support for women. A key feature of this work is for the men to encourage women, especially partners, to take on more public leadership roles, including working with and supporting other women.

**Supporting women to make it count – privately and publicly**

Examples involve men registering marriages and joint ownership of property, encouraging women to go out to work, helping their partners set up bank accounts, sharing care work, ensuring children's equal education (school dropout of girls has also restricted their education and opportunities for political participation), and supporting women's participation in public life.

**Using the law, in collaboration with women – claiming rights to representation**

In particular, the government reservation for 50 per cent female representation at the *gram panchayat* is being used to support women to claim and exercise their rights and space in politics, holding local and block-level government accountable to this. Specific activities for this include encouraging and supporting female candidates for *gram panchayat* elections, and mobilising communities to ensure women's *gram sabha* are being held in advance of the main gram sabha (village general assembly), as well as supporting women to attend.

### **Awareness raising and campaigning – building support for women’s public roles**

A wide range of activities is being used, from canvassing for female candidates in local elections – convincing community members, women and men, to vote and support women within elections – to broader community events to address and raise awareness on issues such as domestic violence or sex-selective abortion. Community education and awareness raising campaigns are also held on issues of discrimination and injustice, and men’s role in gender equality. These processes support the building of trust with women in the public sphere, and also challenge inequitable beliefs and practices in the wider community.

### **Engaging the powerful to support women in politics – speaking out to power**

In connection with activities to support specific women in elections or attendance at meetings, members sometimes intervene to support women in politics with conflict resolution, for example where male members of *gram panchayat* have excluded or intimidated female representatives. Some men involved with *Samajhdar Jodidar* also serve on local conflict resolution committees and use their positions to seek gender justice in particular cases of abuse or conflict which come up. Many others are challenging abusive opposition to gender equality of men within the community and in community meetings and the village general *gram sabha*.

## **3.2 What has changed and how?**

The feedback from the more than 40 participants encountered was overwhelmingly positive, confirming that the approach works. The results of the programme over the last few years have clearly been impressive in the villages involved and changes include that:

1. Many men appear to have changed towards more gender equitable beliefs and practices within the home, and are involved to support women entering and participating in political and public life.
2. More women are claiming their space in politics and are more able to be effective in this space.
3. There seems to be more effective implementation of affirmative action for women and marginalised groups in politics of national (reservation) and state level systems (WGS) at the village level.
4. The quality and outcomes of the political process appear more sensitive and responsive to community needs, including the specific needs of women and children.
5. More women are taking on public roles outside the home, including leadership roles.
6. Greater gender equality within the household is supporting women’s leadership within the public domain.

### **Men getting involved in supporting women’s participation in politics**

*Things started changing when the project came in and started educating men on women’s rights, violence and participation in the gram panchayat, and wider social issues including transport.*

(Mrs Sangeeta Banne, *sarpanch*, Chapalgaonwadi Village).

Some of the most powerful accounts of the difference made by the *Samajhdar Jodidar* approach came directly from members of the *gram panchayat* in the two villages visited. The *sarpanch* of Boregaon village, Mrs Ambika Umakant Gadve, described how group members also ‘accompany us to the *gram sabha* meetings, asking us to sit in chairs whilst men are sitting on the floor’. They were also described as helpful in sometimes correcting mistakes or clarifying issues in meetings, and the women met felt that there is generally a better attitude amongst men in the village now, even though men in rich families were often said to oppose women going for election.

Sangeeta Banne was not ready to contest the election when it came around in 2010, but the men’s group contacted her, supported her and continued convincing her to contest. She was challenged by being asked for money to secure people’s votes, but with the support of the



group she was able to convince the villagers to vote without having to do this. Importantly, the men's group organised groups of women, encouraging them to vote. Although the *Samajhdar Jodidar* men's groups were only just forming at the time, bringing men and women together through the groups' actions meant that they were mobilised and the men's groups in particular were able to do one-to-one campaigning in the community.

The animators described their approach to supporting female candidates in some detail. The groups first support women to understand the process of the *gram sabha* and *gram panchayat* and they work with literate women to come forward and contest the election. Then, to support women to contest elections they build their confidence, for example practicing their speeches on the stage, and preparing them to reject and challenge pushback and accusations by the opposition party. If it is a reserved seat there will be a contest with other women, but if it is open then they will be against men.

### **Responding to male backlash to increase women's participation in local politics**

A major issue, which is also well documented in the literature on women's participation in *panchayat* institutions, is the blocking of women's meaningful participation through co-option by local elites of women's reservation policies to appoint their own wives or family members, if only in name (and for signatures) rather than as actual representatives.

Changing these practices was not easy. When Sangeeta Banne became *sarpanch*, she raised the issue that women have equal rights and should be able to share whatever issues are important to them, but male members threatened to beat and harass the women if they came out to raise their voice. When men who had lost the election became more aggressive towards women, the group members met with these men, and those within the *gram panchayat* that were making threats to convince them that this was wrong.

Indeed, one female *sarpanch* claimed to have faced violent threats from men, blocking the *panchayat* door and chasing her with sticks, when she came to claim her elected position. She also faced violent threats at home and the opposition men would even chase her in vehicles. *Samajhdar Jodidar* men's group members and facilitators then got involved in resolving the conflict. At the time, a member of the opposition party was the chairperson of the village conflict resolution committee, so it would not help her at the time. Now, a *Samajhdar Jodidar* group member is chairing the committee and they are very supportive. There were many other examples of specific and practical support, including encouraging women to stand for election, whilst mobilising to build awareness and canvas community members for their support in the elections. A male *panchayat* member interviewed explained how after the elections *Samajhdar Jodidar* group members took action within *panchayat* meetings to ensure women the space for women to speak remained open: 'there were men not allowing the women to speak, but the group members stood up to help the women speak.'

### **Claiming women's rights and demanding accountability for affirmative action policies**

*Male partners can help inform us on the issues, but they don't decide which issues we discuss. Without male support women can't progress. There was a lot of corruption by the male village leaders before.*

(Mrs Ambica Umakant Gadve, *sarpanch*, Boregaon village).

According to one of the female *sarpanch*, when the men's group decided they would support her and other women in the community to contest the election, the animators and one male *panchayat* representative (who is also a member of the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project) met every voting member and explained why a new elected body would be important and that the previous *panchayat* was not bringing development to the community. Reportedly, open elections had not been held for several decades and the reservation policy appeared to have been handled through more or less internal appointment of family members for the purposes of obtaining the necessary signatures. When contesting for the position of *sarpanch* she

explained that a member of the opposition forged a caste-based identity certificate to claim the Other Backward Class reservation for a woman from their community to take the seat. With the support of the group members, she challenged this at the high court in Mumbai. She eventually won the case, but it was a long and hard journey, which meant that her effective term has been much shorter and she now only has nine months left, she was only able to claim her seat one and a half years into her term.

Aside from catalysing competition by women and marginalised groups in local elections and supporting female candidates in a number of ways, the men's groups also mobilise to support women in attending the women's *gram sabha* and the general *gram sabha* in order to strengthen their voices and participation in village-wide debates and deliberations. Men's group members explained that they work with their partners to encourage them to go to the assembly and become active in mobilising other women to participate in these meetings. Male animators explained that from this women had started initiatives such working with the female community health worker who is mandated to attend *gram sabha* meeting to accompany women. This worked to support women's mobility and also as a way of highlighting women's leadership in the community.

The men's group animators also explained that they talk to men who are dominant in the *gram sabha* informally to convince them not to act in this way, explaining the rights women hold to raise their voices and participate in this space. Women *panchayat* members and a community health worker explained that the animators from *Samajhdar Jodidar* work as allies with women in the general *gram sabha*, supporting the issues that the women raise in this public forum and showing their commitment to women's leadership. The men's groups explained they meet with women on the issues in advance of the general *gram sabha* to help analyse the gender and power dynamics at play and to strategise on what opposition might be raised.

#### **Enabling a gender-sensitive political process that is responsive to community needs**

*Participation has increased and we can now raise our issues and men listen. For example, issues of cleanliness and drinking water have been improved, by us... The decision was pushed by the women in the gram panchayat... In the women's gram sabha they used to discuss school midday meals and the self-help groups. Then, they started to demand more, including that women should get employment through the NREGS [National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme] and water and better roads too. Now, one road is under construction and 80 to 90 women got one month's employment under the NREGS, getting about Rs. 150 each.*

(Mrs Ambica Umakant Gadve, sarpanch, Boregaon village)

A central motivation for men involved in the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project was to see a process of social change in their communities that transformed inequalities of gender, caste and class towards a broader achievement of social justice. The greater and more effective participation by women in public decision-making has made for more democratic and participatory deliberation at the community level in the villages involved. Mainly this relates to the mobilisation of women and men to claim accountability for the participation of women and marginalised groups within local spaces of governance, the *gram panchayat* and *sabha*. The women's *gram sabha* acts as an important space to build skills and confidence to increase their voice and influence in public decision-making forums and committees.

There is also said to be greater gender equality in community involvement for monitoring services through committees and village meetings, such as women and supportive men being involved in the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC) and the conflict resolution committee. The men feel that they are getting on these committees with a more egalitarian mindset than in the past, and group members are also encouraging women to participate in the committees.

These changes are perceived to have led to better outcomes in terms of meeting the broader range of needs in the community, including those of women and children. Opening transport services with free bus passes for school going girl children, the opening of a local health clinic, and water and sanitation, were thought of as good for the whole community. Furthermore, *Samahjdar Jodidar* men's group members argued that educating women's self-help groups on their rights and issues of gender, health and justice has meant that they have started raising important issues at the *gram sabha*, such as toilets and sanitation, government welfare schemes, violence against women, or banning of alcohol use in the village. Women were said to raise these issues because they are most affected by them. However, women in the research emphasised the importance of men's involvement and that campaigning should be a shared agenda and responsibility and not the sole burden of women or marginalised as women's issues. Men's participation in raising issues of concern to the wider community was said to be equally important and their support was said to have strengthened healthcare campaigns and they played an important role in getting older people's access to the government welfare scheme at block level.

However, the relationship between women's representation and changes in service and provision requires further research in order to fully understand the drivers of change, the extent to which responsive governance meets women's practical needs and strategic interests. This is an important consideration and was also highlighted as an under-developed area of research by ODI in their systematic review of women's voice and leadership in decision-making (Domingo 2015).

#### **More support for women taking on public roles**

*After the election, the group comes to support us and supports the women. Yes, group members sensitised male gram panchayat members on women's rights, in terms of the work, as well as about gender-based discrimination and equality. In one week they sensitised us on involvement of women in cultural events and social functions.*  
(Mr Shivanand Vittal Patil, *panchayat* member).

The work also covers a more general approach to supporting women's participation and leadership in other public roles, such as during important cultural festivals and flag-hoisting ceremonies, not to mention support for women's independent economic activities through supporting women's self-help groups, participation in educational committees or gender sensitive health promotion work.

#### **Greater sharing within households supporting women's participation in public**

At the heart – and start – of the *Samahjdar Jodidar* approach is practicing what you preach and starting at home by making the political gender equality agenda personal, as well as vice versa. The *sarpanch* of Boregaon village, Mrs Ambika, partly outlined what this looks like at the family level: 'There is not a drastic change [in our relationship with partners], but they promote and support us – the relationship is opened and free. They will do some housework like bringing water, helping with the kids, cutting vegetables *et cetera*.' It has improved since the programme started. Where men are participating in domestic chores, their partners are more able to go out into the community and they are able to share with other women that this is the way that things can be.

One group member's female partner estimated that perhaps 75 per cent of men within the men's group have changed their domestic roles to contribute more, and animators estimated that 20–25 per cent of other men in the communities have changed their practices of work within the home. It is important to stress that the changes are often small and incremental. This is as important for women's pathways to political and economic empowerment. Some women whose husbands had the means to support them were able to set up small shops in their homes which involved engaging in public in markets and financial services. However, barriers to paid work remain and women and men in the research emphasised the importance of further support for women to access jobs and livelihood opportunities.

Whilst the group members almost invariably face initial resistance and challenges to their masculinity from family and community members alike (discussed further below), they said over time their identity and respect in the community had increased, as they became role models and agents of progressive change. This perspective was also shared by men and women *panchayat* members who saw the facilitators and animators as important figures in the community for driving social and gender justice. Group members claimed they are recognised for being able to translate issues of concern to the wider community in the forums and committees they are engaged and to raise these in the *gram sabha*.

Exemplifying many of the accounts encountered, a female partner of a male group member in Chapalgaonwadi village explained how when her husband joined the men's group, he started communicating more effectively with her and sharing information about his income and expenditure so that they could make shared decisions for the family. Using their example, she argued that men's participation in domestic work has increased and more are now fetching water and sweeping the house and doing other chores. She also explained that they are more likely to be open about economic transactions and that she has founded four women's self help groups, which she feels her husband has enabled her to do. However, she added that 'the change has not happened overnight', explaining that it was after one year that they started doing domestic chores together and communication increased.

### **3.2.1 External factors and ongoing challenges**

Part of the art of community mobilisation for social change is managing the fine balance of elaborating strategies within a broader changing context where other factors also influence the changes you are seeking, as well as dealing with the shifting or recurring challenges in working for change.

Increased gender equality in education, as well as access to television, the internet and social media, were all mentioned repeatedly as important external or contextual trends, which to some extent facilitate changes in attitudes and ideas that influence the work. For example, girls' education has changed radically, where boys were given the priority before, now girls are being sent to primary and secondary schools. There is also a marked increase of girls attending higher education. This has been facilitated by changes in attitudes of parents and improvements in transport facilities increasing security and mobility for girls and young women, although it was argued these can be strengthened further. Some of these changes are enabled by women's stronger voices in local politics and over time these shifts can contribute to further increasing women's access to the public domain. Other trends noted, like rising Hindu nationalist ideologies pervading the media, can have the opposite influence to the extent that they may reinforce traditional patriarchal values.

Although there were no other comparable projects in the villages at the outset, the programme was not established in a vacuum. The members of the men's group in Chapalgaonwadi village explained that their interest in this work began prior to the *Samajhdar Jodidar* project, as there was an interest in change toward gender equality. They described HMF's programme as providing a crucial platform for them to come together, take action and agree on ways of taking work on gender equality forward. With a desire to break stereotypes, they conducted cooking competitions for men, but there was backlash from other men in the community claiming that they 'shouldn't be teaching men to be doing women's work', in the words of one participant.

We heard repeatedly that women still face challenges and backlash in taking on these public roles, as well as multiple accounts of resistance and backlash faced by the men.

#### **Challenges and backlash faced by the men**

The process of consciousness raising with men for change has faced blockages with regard to men's own conflicted *investment in male privilege*. Fears amongst the men were expressed in relation to divesting of this, for example, if women learn about laws and policies

on gender equality and anti-violence, those men will not be able to retain the life that they have now. One group member explained that at first he did not agree with what he heard in the training, but the group-based practical sessions – for example depicting the differential workload on women and men – helped him understand gender based discrimination and its impact on women. Further barriers to change arise where men's ideas of their performance of dominant masculine norms are threatened – for example, due to taunting about their masculinity by men and women in the families and communities. This backlash is often expressed by men's female partners many of whom at first resist men's attempts to change their practices and behaviour. Ongoing peer support and group work helps men striving for change and their female partners can mitigate this problem, as one interviewed partner explained that she in fact finds her changed man more attractive than before.

There have also been challenges in work to engage particular social groups. The normative heterosexual gendered position in the communities also puts limitations on how far the groups can challenge gender roles and identities. In fact, they tried to open communications with and work with transgender persons, but this was not accepted within the wider community, so it was not possible to bring them into the groups. Group members have also found it difficult to work with men in higher caste and the wealthy elite, as they feel their acceptance of gender equality is very limited. The established leadership in the villages were not interested in the programme at the outset and the status of the men's group members was fairly low, challenging their ability to transform the wider social context. However, their status has gradually increased by their work and their interventions are now also aiming to reach upper caste men and women through engaging with them by sitting on the public committees that are traditionally dominated by the cultural and economic elite.

Another challenge has involved attempts by established elite men at co-opting the process. The political leaders at block and district levels had reportedly asked facilitators to select animators that were from within their own political parties, to reduce the chances of the animators coming up as a new alternative to their leadership in the village. As a precautionary measure, the selection criteria for animators were set to include: willingness to give time to the project; belonging to lower middle class and poor families; and not being in leadership positions when chosen as animators. Men who are working directly with women in contesting elected seats have also faced violence and threats by men from opposition parties.

#### **Backlash faced by women in their participation in politics and public life**

Women experience violent backlash and face threats when entering the *panchayat*, both against them and their families. Furthermore, when some women first attended the *gram panchayat* they were neglected and received abusive comments from men, which would dampen their attendance. The group members discussed with those women and their husbands and encouraged them to support their wives in the *gram panchayat* meeting. They also spoke to the men that were preventing women from being there in order to ensure they would be able to attend. When the work started, some of the elected women thought that the male animators were just like other politicians and would forget about working for gender equality once they were in power. In response, the men's groups worked to build trust with the women involved, for example supporting them to attend the annual meeting at the Halo Medical Foundation where they were able to meet key government stakeholders.

These specific examples are of course underpinned by a broader patriarchal culture disapproving of women's public leadership and different forms of backlash outside of the *gram panchayat* itself. At the domestic level, opposition from women's mothers-in-law was extremely common. This resistance can be related to Kandiyoti's (1988: 278) analysis of 'classic patriarchy', where women are 'subordinate not only to all the men but also to the more senior women, especially their mother-in-law' in the household. Within the structure of the Indian joint family, positions of power are established between women in relation to proximity to the male head of household (the patriarch). The emancipation of women is

therefore complicated by this relationship in that daughters-in-law can be perceived as directly challenging the power of the older mother-in-law.

Further resistance was experienced by women, when they started becoming engaged in public life, other men would comment on their incapacity to come out and govern the village. It was also raised that people in the wider community have started questioning the purpose of increases in women's mobility if they are not working. Women are demanding jobs, and also training in vocational and business management skills, but they argued that the job market in the agricultural (at village level), industrial and informal business sectors (in Solapur) is heavily male dominated. Perceptions of women being promiscuous if they go outside of the home remain in some communities. Group members explained how they and their wives were prepared to receive these negative comments, and they have developed strategies to demonstrate publicly that they have trust, such as women accompanying male group members for motorbike transportation to other towns.

### **3.3 What can we learn?**

It is clear that a number of findings about effective interventions with men found in the recent EMERGE literature review (Edström *et al.* 2015) are reinforced here. First, effective approaches do well by utilising existing policy frameworks as an opportunity and as the legitimate basis for claims, for rights and justice. Second, the review finding that working within institutional settings provides for a structured and rooted way of changing the broader social contracts underpinning gender relations also finds resonance in this approach to working within the institutions of local self-governance in India. Third, the finding that 'community interventions engaging men in interpersonal gender issues, such as within the home, have ... been shown to be an important entry point for more political and public pro-feminist engagement' (Edström *et al.* 2015: 3) is a key lesson that can be drawn from this study. With regard to the paucity of evidence on the effectiveness of specific strategies for working with men for women's greater public and political participation, which was lamented in the same review (Hamaus *et al.* 2015), this study contributes some evidence that deliberate work with men on gender equality and social justice can indeed support women's participation in political and public life, even in a highly patriarchal context, if at a small scale.

A participatory analysis with *Samahjdar Jodidar* animators distilled key lessons about their work with men and about how change towards gender equality and social justice happens:

#### **Transforming gender roles starts at home – within the private domain**

To change traditional social and cultural ideas about masculinity, the male attachment to supremacy, as well as divesting from male privilege critical consciousness, is crucial. Political change for gender equality (or women's equal participation) requires personal change in individual men. Importantly this involves men and women shifting gender roles, which requires men improving their relationships with women towards equality and cooperation on unpaid domestic work, reproductive responsibilities, paid work and household decision-making. In committing to, and practicing these transformations men are engaging in breaking down fundamental barriers to women's participation in public and political life.

#### **Be the change you seek within private and public life**

This was articulated as a key transition between personal and political change, where the lived experience of dismantling patriarchy by group members and their families and the perceived benefits of this catalyses a commitment to wider social change. This commitment is expressed in the forms of peer-to-peer engagement, mobilisation of men and women in the wider community, and participation in community committees and institutions as progressive men, working towards gender equality. Importantly the women partners of *Samahjdar Jodidar* members also took on the role of peer mentor to other women in the community, building their interest and confidence in public and political engagement. Participants explained that one has to be a role model and bring change in their own behaviour so that others can learn from your practice and get encouragement to change. Even men who have

opposed gender equality initiatives have been seen to become involved in group meetings by seeing improvements in the relationships and happiness of group members' families.

#### **Collective action for social and gender justice can support political change**

Raising the awareness of individuals is never enough, there is need for organisation and unity. Peer support and collaboration between likeminded men is needed for men to change, and explicit collaboration with women is crucial. Shared analysis of issues of inequality within the community, their implications for men, women, boys and girls, and the intersections of gender, caste and class can build shared commitment to a political struggle for social and gender justice.

#### **Anchor claims for gender justice in existing laws and policies and demand accountability**

This enables work towards gender equality in political participation to be claimed as a right from duty-bearers and enables demands for accountability. Monitoring of existing laws and policies is critical for ensuring effective implementation. Men's groups can then work with women to monitor and prevent the misuse of laws, showing solidarity and collectively taking political action in ensuring accountability for gender equality.

#### **Analyse and catalyse gender equity in spaces for political participation**

The gendered roles and investments of men within the public domain means that groups such as *Samahjdar Jodidar* can play an important role in working with women to analyse and identify spaces of engagement in informal and formal community decision-making. In doing so, men need to speak out to power inequalities and involve those men who oppose gender equality: understand their perspective and challenge it.

#### **See political change as gradual, in slowly ascending cycles**

Constant demands and pressure on the *gram panchayat* and *gram sabha* and on men and women is needed for women's full participation to take root. Activists must recognise both political and personal cycles as being interconnected and as works in progress, for progress. To sustain the group there is a need for continued interaction with group members outside of group meetings, as well as ownership by community members of the activities. For continued communication between men on their changing conceptions of masculinities, group animators should enable members to express their opinion freely and engage in open dialogue with women in the community, to continuously inform how they engage on issues of gender justice.

## 4 Conclusion

Despite representing a rare example of an unusual degree of deliberate engagement by men in the feminist struggle for women's greater public participation and representation in politics, this study indicates that the approach can work. The findings show how progressive laws and policies on gender equality in public and political life – such as India's 50 per cent reservation for women in *panchayats* at all tiers of government – can be critical for providing a legitimate foundation for claims for accountability on women's rights and gender equality. Progressive men's groups can provide a platform for mobilising men to work with women on demanding accountability for the implementation of gender specific affirmative action policies, and to provide a space for men to change (at the personal and intimate level in their relationships) in order to build transformative leadership skills in both men and women to take up progressive public roles that both embody and drive a gender equality agenda. Initiatives such as this are well placed to support formal and informal political education, which is needed to advance women and men's understanding of socio-political issues around equal rights to participation and leadership.

Pathways of empowerment for women in public and political life must transform oppression and inequality in private as well public domains. Where families and partners are supportive of women's public engagement and leadership, very real physical and mental barriers are broken down and their confidence and self belief is also strengthened. Men as gender equality activists and role models can play a crucial role in holding other men to account on this, including on sharing household responsibilities which enables women to participate fully in their new roles in public and political spheres.

Facilitating the formation of mechanisms to support gender equality within the political system, for example the establishment of women's *gram sabha*, is important for providing a space for women to deliberate issues and a platform from which to raise their voices. In order to ensure this does not reinforce gender binaries it is important that women are also empowered to raise these issues in shared spaces. This can be facilitated by engaging men as gender equality activists and as allies for a social justice agenda that makes visible the intersections of gender, class and caste struggles and builds solidarity to address patriarchal oppression. These men can also play a role in engaging men both in the wider community and with men in positions of power to offer support.

The establishment of accountability mechanisms for the monitoring of service provision in sectors such as health, education, work and justice provides alternative platforms for gender equality activists to demand accountability on issues of equity. The fostering of civic engagement through the mobilisation of men as social activists within the community has meant that work towards gender equality can be embedded across sectors. The entry point in this project of strengthening government health services has supported this process.

Sustaining and strengthening these processes on men's engagement in supporting women's political rights can be supported through spaces for interaction across communities and contexts. Developing new ideas and relationships with different activists working in different and similar ways, such as those working with MASVAW in Uttar Pradesh (Edström *et al.* 2015) could help to build and strengthen the process. Learning exchanges between activist groups within and between programmes for men's engagement can be a platform for supporting this. In an under-documented and under-researched field this is important for evolving strategies further.



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# Annex 1 List of participants

## Research team:

- Satish Kumar Singh, CHSJ
- Shakti Jamdade, CHSJ
- Jerker Edström, IDS
- Thea Shahrokh, IDS

## Halo Medical Foundation staff involved in the study:

- Dr. Shashikant Ahankari, President of HMF
- Shailendra, trainer on the HMF Campus
- Mangal Mahadev Govinde – Anganwadi worker, Chapalgaonwadi
- Basavraj Nare, facilitator on the Men for Gender Equity project
- Gourishankar Doddyale, Facilitator on the Men for Gender Equity project

## Men's group animators:

- Sambhaji Kharat: Kolekarwadi village
- Shivanand Doddyale: Chapalgaonwadi village
- Kurane Yakub Amuchand: Mottyal village
- Babasaheb Nangnath Mane: Bavkarwadi village
- Dilip Masa Dupargude: Kolibet village
- Vikram Ram Sonkamble: Badole kd village
- Dnyaneshwar Patil: Kalegaon village
- Manikchand Dhanshetty: Boregaon village
- Shivanand Sonkamble: Sangvi bk village

## Unmarried young men and adolescents group, Borgaon village (FGD):

- Shreshail D. Gadve
- Shiraj Ashtagjr
- Sandeep Mane
- Somnath Swami
- Mahadev Gadve
- Parmeshwar Shinde

## Male *gram panchayat* members in Borgaon village:

- Shivanand Vittal Patil
- Bhujang Dharmna Chiklande

## Female *gram panchayat* members in Borgaon Village:

- Ambika Umakant Gadve, *Sarpancha* (Head of the *gram panchayat*)
- Parvati Manadev Bansode
- Suramdevi Khandekar

## Individual key informant interviewees:

- Umakant Mallinath Gadve: husband of *Sarpancha* in Boregaon village
- Mangal Mahadev Govinde, Anganwadi worker since 1991, Chapalgaonwadi village
- Priyanka Chanbasappa Doddyale: female partner of men's group member, Chapalgaonwadi village

## Female *gram panchayat* members in Chapalgaonwadi Village:

- Sangeeta Basavraj Banne, *Sarpancha* (Head of the *gram panchayat*)
- Jagdevi Revansidh Ankalge

### **Men's Group members in Chapalgaonwadi village (FGD)**

- Sagar Apparao Govinde
- Shrikant Baburao Idgale
- Saheblal Maktum Nadaaf
- Avinash Mallimath Matge
- Nagnath Mahadev Saudagar
- Chandrashekhhar Revansidh Banne
- Mahesh Bhimashankar Pattanshetti
- Gangadhar Manik Karande
- Revasinddh Shivlingapaa Nimane
- Shivanand Basavnappa Pattanshetty
- Parmeshwar Revansiddha Nagansure
- Virpakshappa Satappa Doddyale
- Sachin Parshetty

Engendering Men: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality' (EMERGE) is a two-year project to build an openly accessible basis of evidence, lessons and guidance for working with boys and men to promote gender equality, by early 2016. Supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) Leadership for Change Programme, a consortium of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Promundo-US and Sonke Gender Justice Network collaborates in reviewing and analysing existing evidence, in documenting lessons from the field and in developing guidance for improved learning, policy and practice.

Institute of Development Studies: [www.ids.ac.uk/](http://www.ids.ac.uk/), Promundo-US: <http://promundoglobal.org/>,  
Sonke Gender Justice: [www.genderjustice.org.za/](http://www.genderjustice.org.za/)

Learn more about EMERGE, our work, our findings and our free resources on: <http://menandboys.ids.ac.uk/>



This publication is available on the Men, Boys and Gender Equality website at:  
<http://menandboys.ids.ac.uk/evidence>