



TURNING THE TIDE

A ROUND TABLE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

Ending violence against women and girls is a path to a stronger and more prosperous India. It is critical to defend a fundamental human right: safety. Evidence shows it is also a bold step and a precursor to creating a more equitable, prosperous country. It can dismantle harmful gender norms, keep children in school, help lift families out of poverty, and unlock women's participation and contribution across various public spheres from economy to politics. Yet today, violence against women and girls in India is both more frequent and more extreme.

The good news is that there is a whole field of organisations working to end violence against women and girls, and decades of high-quality research backs up their approaches. These organisations show what is possible if we act strategically. It requires work across every layer of society, from our people to our institutions. What's most important is to prevent and respond to violence and to create a set of structures, systems, and norms that enable this goal.

Indiaspora, along with Dalberg, recently brought together leaders from pioneering organizations working to end violence against women and girls, alongside leaders from different spheres of life, to explore the issue. We want to extend our thanks to Dr Lakshmi Lingam, a veteran with decades of experience in advocating, researching, working on the frontlines for women's rights; Harish Mavani, a pioneer in engaging men and boys with his organization Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) to shift perceptions on masculinity; Lora Prabhu, who leads the Center for Equity and Inclusion (CEQUIN) that uses innovative approaches like sports and social media to shape norms among youth; Anuradha Rajan from the South Asia Women's Foundation, a women's fund that mobilizes trust-based funding for grassroots organizations; and Shailja Mehta, a leader at Dasra with years of experience in mobilizing philanthropic capital. We also extend our sincere thanks to the leaders from the corporate, philanthropic, and development world, who joined this important discussion and demonstrated their commitment to making a difference in the lives of women and girls.

The need for comprehensive, long-term and well-funded action is urgent. As one panellist put it, "*once you see it, you cannot unsee it*". The only way to address this issue is for "*our solutions to outpace the problems*". The panel explored a range of mutually-reinforcing solutions.

- **Using innovative entry points to shape identity and sense of self of young girls and boys, and thereby shift norms, attitudes and behaviors.** MAVA, for example, leverages theater and films to engage young boys to create space for a healthy dialogue on masculinity. Similarly, CEQUIN uses football as a way to build confidence and leadership in young girls. In Lora's words, "it is magical to see girls feeling comfortable in who they are, and in their bodies".
- **Strengthening community response and institutions—from health to police to justice—to provide high-quality support to survivors of violence.** Investments in community-based response centers and referral networks are critical for providing integrated medical and psycho-social care, shelter and safety, and legal and financial assistance for survivors. Dr. Lakshmi Lingam shared the success of the "gender akka" model, where trained women

from local communities act as the first point of referral for survivors in some southern Indian states. She also spoke about the critical need for gender sensitization in our institutions—medical institutions, police, justice system—to provide survivor-centric response.

- **Bring more, consistent and flexible funding that this sector needs.** A resounding take-away from the discussion was the critical need for more and better funding. Shailja Mehta, with her extensive experience in mobilizing philanthropic capital, noted that funding for gender equality remains one of the hardest to secure. She stressed that “India has a unique opportunity to move the needle on SDG5 [Gender Equality] globally” by investing in the empowerment of its women and girls. However, just more funding is not enough—it needs to be trust-based, consistent and flexible funding that acknowledges the complexity of shifting deeply entrenched gender norms. As Anuradha Rajan underscored, “You can’t just pluck GBV out.”

The discussion underscored that the solutions exist, but now the time is to act. We extend our deepest gratitude to all the panelists and participants who contributed to this inspiring conversation and hope that more voices join in. Together, we can create a safer India for all women and girls.