

hindustantimes

AKSHARA

COMPREHENSIVE ACTION PLAN

TO

MAKE MUMBAI SAFER

FOR

WOMEN



COMPREHENSIVE ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY

FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF CHIEF MINISTER OF MAHARASHTRA,
MR. PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN

INTRODUCTION

It's one year later this month since the horrific gang-rape of the photojournalist in the abandoned Shakti Mill compound. This brought to light another case of gang-rape in the same premises. Every week, if not every day, there are cases of gang-rape, molestation, assault and sexual harassment of women in Mumbai. Not all these cases get recorded.

Even so, Mumbai was placed second among major cities in the country for sexual crimes such as outraging modesty (1,163 cases) and insult to women (444 cases) last year, according to the National Crime Record Bureau's (NCRB) 2013 report released in July this year. The city registered an 89.4% increase over the previous year in the crime of outraging modesty of women. The police say that the increased numbers showed that more women were coming forward to file FIRs than in the past.

Mumbai is not an exception. Maharashtra had the most cases of outraging modesty and insult to a woman's modesty, 8,132 and 2,632 cases registered respectively, in 2013, according to the NCRB report. Maharashtra witnessed a 107% rise in cases registered for outraging modesty. While it's a concern, the focus of this document is on Mumbai and making it safer.

Following the Shakti Mill cases, Hindustan Times, the city's fastest-growing newspaper, and Akshara, women's resource and advocacy centre, renewed the campaign Make Mumbai Safer for Women. Akshara's work on safe cities has led to an understanding that issues of mobility, work and justice for women are connected to their experiences of safety in public spaces.

As part of the two-month long campaign, HT-Akshara jointly conducted Safety Audits at public places such as railway stations, parks, playgrounds and streets. These brought out multi-dimensional aspects of why women feel unsafe in public places in Mumbai. Nearly 30,000 people signed an online petition asking you to take the necessary steps to ensure women's safety.

The campaign was taken further with four HT-Akshara Round Table discussions on four themes with experts and academicians drawn from associated fields. Each round table discussion yielded a number of short-term and long-term measures that the authorities could – and should – take to make the city safer for women. Akshara, with other women's organisations, had submitted a petition signed by nearly 30,000 people online to the Chief Minister on December 3, 2013, demanding women's safety through a comprehensive plan.

These suggestions and ideas are presented here in the Comprehensive Action Plan for Women's Safety in Mumbai. The Comprehensive Action Plan becomes even more significance in view of the fact that the Bombay High Court has recently directed your government to evolve one.



SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Action Plan is a compendium of all the suggestions and ideas generated throughout the HT-Akshara campaign, especially those made by experts during the four round table discussions. The round tables were organised on the following topics:

1. Infrastructure, urban planning and design
2. Policing, legal system and justice
3. Education, awareness and the popular media
4. Political commitment and approach

The Comprehensive Action Plan is based on time-tested principle in major cities of the world that women use and relate to the city differently from the way men do. This difference is fundamental and significant but our city planners, bureaucrats and politicians adopt gender neutrality in planning and governance of a city, and build in the safety aspect into the city design instead of addressing it as a cosmetic issue later. This is an important idea from the HT-Akshara round tables. We believe it should inform all aspects of planning and designing the city.

The Comprehensive Action Plan suggests that women's safety be accepted as a non-negotiable aspect of urban living by all authorities and arms of the state, and officials at all levels are sensitised to gender issues.

It recommends addressing the idea of women's safety at micro and macro levels, with due emphasis as called for.

The subject experts also suggested that the State adopt a multi-pronged approach to the issue instead of viewing it only as a law-and-order problem.

The Comprehensive Action Plan points out that, for effective and long-term change, the State should ally with non-state agencies, reputed organisations and individuals with proven track records of work in different aspects of gender equality and women's safety.

The subject-wise suggestions, in detail, are in this document.



PANEL OF EXPERTS AT THE HT-AKSHARA ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

1. INFRASTRUCTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN

- i) Mr. PK Das, architect, urban planner and open spaces campaigner
- ii) Ms. Neera Adarkar, architect, urban planner and women's rights campaigner
- iii) Ms. Ritu Dewan, economist, urban studies and gender resource expert
- iv) Dr. Amita Bhide, chairperson, Centre for Urban Policy and Governance, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)
- v) Mr. Ashok Datar, urban transport analyst

2. POLICING, LEGAL SYSTEM AND JUSTICE

- i) Dr. Anjali Dave, Centre for Equity for Women, Children and Families, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
- ii) Dr. Vijay Raghavan, Centre for Criminology and Justice, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
- iii) Ms. Flavia Agnes, lawyer, women's rights campaigner and co-founder of Majlis
- iv) Ms. Padma Deosthali, analyst at Centre for Equity into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT)
- v) Ms. Hasina Khan, women's and minorities' rights activist

3. EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND THE POPULAR MEDIA

- i) Mr. Prasoon Joshi, national creative director of McCann Erikson, award-winning film lyricist and poet
- ii) Mr. Rahul Bose, actor and social issues activist
- iii) Mr. KV Sridhar, Pops, national creative director, Leo Burnett and social issues advertiser
- iv) Ms. Farida Lambay, educationist, co-founder of education NGO Pratham, and member of the national-level advisory council to implement the RTE Act
- v) Ms. Simantini Dhuru, documentary filmmaker, environmentalist, consultant-member of NCERT, worked with Avehi-Abacus project in 905 civic schools in Mumbai
- vi) Father Frazer Mascarenhas, principal, St Xavier's College, Mumbai

4. POLITICS, POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND APPROACH

- i) Mr. Milind Deora, Congress, then Member of Parliament, Mumbai South
- ii) Mr. Vinod Tawde, BJP, Leader of Opposition, Maharashtra legislative council
- iii) Ms. Neelam Gorhe, Shiv Sena, Member of Maharashtra legislative council
- iv) Ms. Vidya Chavan, NCP, Member of Maharashtra legislative council

All the round-table discussions were co-moderated by Dr. Nandita Shah and Nandita Gandhi, founders and co-directors of Akshara and Smruti Koppikar, Editor (Special Assignments), Hindustan Times.



SUBJECT-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 4 ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

1. INFRASTRUCTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN

Including urban planning, urban design, housing, toilets, provision and management of public infrastructure and services

- 1.1 Include women's concerns and voices in the Development Plan for Mumbai 2014-34 currently under preparation by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).
- 1.2 Develop guidelines for a pre-project gender assessment of all infrastructure and development projects and set up a mechanism to issue "gender clearances" for these projects.
- 1.3 Inter-connect public spaces and encourage mixed-use of open spaces. Evidence shows that exclusive and single-use zones tend to become unsafe, especially after dark. Re-evaluate the concept of safety in pay-to-use spaces such as gardens and radio cabs because the private contractors do not have public accountability on safety issues.
- 1.4 Determine a universal and enhanced signage system in four languages and standardise it for all public places in the city. Maps should have detailed and legible directions.
- 1.5 Regulate hawkker zones, especially near railway stations, in such a way that hawkers populate an area but do not render it unsafe.
- 1.6 There is a need to develop the luminescence index for different public areas in the city. This will mandate the minimum lighting needed for that area.
- 1.7 Make street lighting important in all areas and increase the level of lighting in certain key areas to create the climate of safety. Additionally, conduct an annual audit on street lighting and luminescence across the city with participation of local citizen's and women's groups.
- 1.8 Pay particular attention to access roads/paths to all railway stations and bus stops in terms of approach roads, better lit walk-ways and bus stops, and enhanced visibility. Also, train drivers and conductors to respond to women in distress about sexual harassment.
- 1.9 Have more women trains; introduce special and affordable passes for women using the BEST bus services; re-design buses and trains in a way that women find them comfortable (for example, lower the height of the holding strap or handles given that average Indian women are shorter than men).
- 1.10 Provide well-lit and hygienic toilets for all, especially for women, in public places. Pay special attention to maintain toilets in slums and lower-middle class areas where the maximum numbers of sexual crimes occur
- 1.11 a) For BEST buses: train conductors to handle sexual harassment within buses; provide for flagging down buses at night in between bus stops; install CCTVs inside buses and damage-proof posters with helpline numbers.
b) For suburban trains: introduce more Women's Special trains during peak hours; ensure clean and well-lit stations and accesses to stations; patrol by railway police on platforms; rigorous implementation of trained police in women's compartments at nights; and gender training of all railway policemen and women.
c) For taxis, autos and radio/fleet cabs: gender training for all drivers of taxis and autos; creation of a data-base of all taxi and auto drivers with bio-metric identification; install CCTVs at all major taxi and auto stands especially near stations; police patrolling at night near taxi and auto stands; well-publicised toll free helpline numbers for complaints; licensed hawkers near taxi and auto stands.



2. POLICING, LEGAL SYSTEM AND JUSTICE

- 2.1 Uniform and gender sensitive protocols to provide care for the survivor, medico-legal documentation, and evidence collection.
- 2.2 Functional one-stop crisis centres for survivors of sexual crimes and harassment. These centres should be staffed with experts from different fields and the focus should be on the survivor instead of merely pursuing justice for the crime.
- 2.3 Establish and ensure that all hospitals follow a standard protocol when treating survivors of sexual crimes (for example, some hospitals and doctors have done away with the two-finger test for rape survivors while others still conduct it). Also, emergency contraception should be administered, especially in cases where survivor is a minor.
- 2.4 Survivors of a sexual crime should be given the choice of not contacting the police immediately. The emphasis and focus should be on a holistic medico-socio-legal approach to the person and not a police approach to the case. Have women constables at the complaints and help desk at all police stations.
- 2.5 The health system must provide healing spaces; socio-legal services are a must at hospitals, prisons and courts. First-line psychological support should be provided, if not by doctors then by a qualified person.
- 2.6 Protocols of investigating crimes against women should be taught in police training schools. Periodic re-fresher courses must be held for serving officers and also attendant staff in police stations and courts.
- 2.7 From a forensic perspective, establish and ensure meticulous application of the protocol of medico-legal documentation. The methods of training doctors to deal with sexual crimes should improve. Re-vamp the forensic system.
- 2.8 The police must set up specialised units to familiarise citizens with these issues preferably with the help of local citizens and women's groups. Also, the police must have a working knowledge of other professionals dealing with crimes/violence against women, such as lawyers and doctors.
- 2.9 Rape law and other relevant laws should be taught in police academies and violence against women cases be treated as important.
- 2.10 Create a database in police back-offices on violence against women to show habitual offenders, sensitive areas and case progress with scaled or tiered access to help in speedy detection and prosecution of crimes against women.
- 2.11 The police must not discriminate against the marginalised and minority women from Muslim, Dalit, Adivasi, SC and ST communities; also, the police should not dispose of cases with the "help of community leaders".
- 2.12 The emergency helplines should function at all times with consistent responses. Enhance the working of the 103 Helpline with more women constables, better recording and monitoring systems. The police do not respond to repeated calls and often castigate complainants.
- 2.13 Create a monitoring machinery to track all complaints and cases of sexual crimes on a regular basis. All FIRs of sexual crimes should be visible on the police website.
- 2.14 In cases of sexual crimes against women and children, trials should be conducted in separate designated spaces and not in regular open courts which adds to the survivor's distress. Start special courts for sexual harassment and rape cases on the lines of juvenile courts.
- 2.15 Appoint trained social workers in courts, police stations and prisons to play the role of an informed guide and counsellor to survivors. This will ensure that survivors get all the information they require at various stages of the case.
- 2.16 The State should increase the honorarium of government counsels and increase the judge-to-population ratio so that these cases are decided fast.
- 2.17 Acknowledge and address complaints of sexual harassment made by police women, women judges and women in judicial offices through rigorous internal systems in the police and judiciary.
- 2.18 Acknowledge rights of people in custody and address sexual harassment of the accused in police and judicial custodies.

3. EDUCATION, AWARENESS AND THE POPULAR MEDIA

- 3.1 Public/government and private social service campaigns, like the polio or ant-AIDS stigma campaigns, that will persuade people that it is “uncool” to show disrespect to women, to look down upon gender inequality and disrespectful attitude towards women.
- 3.2 Governments must allocate budgets every year to run campaigns that encourage gender equity in various life situations, and discourage attacks and crimes against women.
- 3.3 Advertisers and filmmakers should have a voluntary body to examine and review their respective mediums to see if they pass the gender equality meter. Evolve such a meter within each industry.
- 3.4 Discourage the use of cuss words and the cultural sanctions given to casual cuss words or certain folk songs that underscore deep seated biases against women.
- 3.5 Encourage the creation of better and more gender-sensitive content in advertisements and films. Advertisements can be put on public platforms/social media/newspapers to ask people to rate them on a gender equality index.
- 3.6 Evolve a Common Minimum Programme on gender sensitivity that runs across all kinds of schools – civic and government schools, private ones, elite and high-class schools. Train teachers in all schools on this module.
- 3.7 Schools and colleges should start a separate subject on gender issues in all streams and also incorporate basic principles of this into all other subjects. Do this through games and activities-based learning but segregated activities for boys and girls must be stopped.
- 3.8 Schools and colleges must have gender-based assignments, at least one each semester, to promote better understanding of the subject. Gender awareness and violence against women should be taught to all students beginning in the middle or high school.
- 3.9 Responsible and interestingly-pitched sex education must be made mandatory in schools of all kinds with qualified teachers teaching the subject and willing to take questions.
- 3.10 There has to be an all-round improvement in public schools and extension of RTE till Class 12. These two factors, non-negotiable to improve access to education, are essential prerequisites for gender equity and justice.
- 3.11 Conduct an audit of all school textbooks for gender insensitive and stereotypical matter. The government should ensure that textbook writers and boards understand the issue and take the necessary corrective steps. Well-tested gender-sensitive alternatives should be accepted into the system
- 3.12 Establish platforms like Bal Suraksha Samitis where young girls and boys can talk, either to a counsellor or parent, about gender issues. The agents of change are not only the formal institutions anymore; there should be an effort to use all the platforms available to “teach” this issue.



4. POLITICS, POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND APPROACH

- 4.1 Make gender issues and women safety political and election issues so that they are added to the water-meter-gutter or bijli-sadak-pani issues, and become part of the political discourse.
- 4.2 Political parties should consider the profile and work of a potential candidate on issues of security of women, along with other factors that are considered such as “winability”, while giving tickets. Party leaders must actively reprimand and discourage all anti-women and misogynist talk by partymen on all platforms.
- 4.3 MPs, MLAs and corporators in a constituency should be encouraged to earmark a part of their MPLAD or MLA or corporators fund to setting up and running women’s help centres.
- 4.4 Sensitised politicians must involve themselves in an intensified public service outreach campaign by the government on gender sensitivity that shifts the burden of shame to the perpetrator of crimes against women.
- 4.5 The disciplinary committees in political parties should take up sexual harassment, brought up by their women leaders and workers, as an issue because parties are not obliged to set up formal committees against sexual harassment under the Vishakha guidelines.
- 4.6 Strong presence of women in party committees, especially ticket distribution committee, to ensure that no harassment happens or favours sought as quid pro quo for election tickets.
- 4.7 Local-level elected representatives should be encouraged to conduct Safety Audits in their constituencies with cooperation from non-governmental organizations. MPs should do regular reviews.
- 4.8 Maharashtra government should consider including sex education in its school syllabus under a new nomenclature ‘adolescent education programme’ so that the sphere of the subject could be broadened to include life skills education, gender issues and defence training.
- 4.9 Expert groups or study groups to be created by the government or political parties which track and study the issue of violence against women, and continuously advise the government of the day on policy-making.
- 4.10 Strengthen the existing poor institutional mechanisms that deal with violence against women. Constantly and continuously reinforce gender-friendly and gender-sensitive messages from all public platforms instead of doing lip-service to the issues only on certain days.



CONCLUSION

Women use and benefit from the city in ways that are different from those of men. This aspect must be woven into every field of planning and managing the city -- from gender-assessments of major and minor infrastructure projects to ensuring crisis centres and protocols at police stations and courts, to conducting extensive media and education campaigns and re-engineering the politics, and more.

HT has been highlighting the issue of unsafe areas in the city with the understanding that the city, however safe compared to many other cities, can be made more secure for its women.

Akshara's work on creating a safe city has led to the understanding that the issue of women's safety is a multi-dimensional subject with inter-connections between design, use, monitoring of public places and implementation of laws.

The Comprehensive Action Plan lists in detail the macro and micro level measures that can be taken, based on recommendations and suggestions put forward by four different panels of experts. It is hoped that the Comprehensive Action Plan will be adopted and actionalised, sooner rather than later to make Mumbai safer for its women.

