Worldwide, women continue to contribute to social, economic, cultural and political achievement. And we have much to celebrate today. But progress towards gender parity has slowed in many places. The World Economic Forum predicted in 2014 that it would take until 2095 to achieve global gender parity. Then one year later in 2015, they estimated that a slowdown in the already glacial pace of progress meant the gender gap wouldn't close entirely until 2133.

Everyone – men and women – can pledge to take a concrete step to help achieve gender parity more quickly – whether to help women and girls achieve their ambitions, call for gender-balanced leadership, respect and value difference, develop more inclusive and flexible cultures or root out workplace bias. Each of us can be a leader within our own spheres of influence and commit to take pragmatic action to accelerate gender parity.

Globally with individuals pledging to more from talk to purposeful action – and with men and women joining forces – we can collectively help women advance equal to their numbers and realize the limitless potential they offer economies the world over. We have urgent work to do. Are you ready to accelerate gender parity?

From the Director’s Desk…

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National Convention of "Human Rights Clubs"

National Convention of the “Human Rights Clubs in Schools” was held between 21-23 February 2016 at DBNJ Ramanathapur, Hyderabad. The Human Rights clubs is part of PARA’s “Human Rights Education” Programme in cooperation with the UN sponsored “Institute of Human Rights Education (IHRE)”. PARA has so far federated 759 Human Rights Clubs in 587 Schools involving 32420 students in the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The National Convention was held to elect the state committees of the federation of human rights clubs and also the national committee.

The programme took off with the inaugural session on the morning of 21-2-2016. The Convention was inaugurated by Fr. M.C. George, the Director of BoscoNet, New Delhi. The chief guest was Ms. Vasanthi Devi Former V.C. of Manonmniam University and chair person of Tamilnadu Women’s commission. The occasion was also graced by the presence of Fr.Thathireddy Vijayabhaskar Reddy, provincial of Hyderabad Province, Ms Chaya Ratan IAS (Retd) the former Special Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh.

Human Rights Club leaders are elected to the district committees by block level functionaries of human rights clubs set up by PARA in over 587 government schools across the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. They came together to elect their leaders for the state level committees. The Andhra Pradesh and Telangana state committees were set up and from these the first ever National Committee of Human Rights Clubs Federation was formed.

Mr. S. Ambedkar, Regional Coordinator, Telangana State, HRE delivered the vote of thanks, mentioning that Human Rights as a concept has been in existence since 2000 BC, yet it has not gained prominence in the minds of citizens or leaders even to this date. He said, the phenomenal progress that the HR Clubs have made in the past four years may be attributed to the pioneering vision of Fr. Thomas Pallithanam.
BSK in collaboration with Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Govt. of India has undertaken the task of training youth belonging to marginalized groups on the issue of Gender Equity.

The trainings are aimed at sensitizing and empowering youth to be change makers, bringing about an attitudinal change in their respective communities and society at large on Gender Equity. Sessions across the five-day long residential training address the gravity of the problem India faces due to its depleting sex ratio of just 914 girls to 1000 boys (2011 census).

In the first pilot, 40 young boys and girls from across the districts of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh participated in the Training Program on Gender Equity from 09 to 13 February, 2016 at Don Bosco Provincial House.

The program started with an inaugural at 9:30 AM on 09 Feb with a welcome note to the participants followed by a prayer song. A ceremonial lamp was lit by representatives from the organization and the different groups participating as trainees. The Head of the Institution, Provincial, Fr.Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar, the Chief Guest briefed the participants on the purpose and goal of the Gender Equity Training Program, reiterating the severity of the imbalance in society due to gender disparity and emphasizing the important role every young person holds in bringing about sustainable change.

Rector of Don Bosco Ongole-Fr.Thomas Santiago, Sr.Co-ordinator BSK Ms.Pascal Flynn, Rector of Don Bosco Provincial House Hyderabad - Fr.C James were guests of honour.

The 5-day residential training program was packed with participatory sessions on various pertinent issues involving gender. Each sphere – beginning with birth, education, health, growth, employment, wages, marriage revealed disparity between a girl and boy, man and woman. The participants were living the disparities and realized that they have accepted it as a normal way of life. The sessions were eye-opening for all of them – It was the first time that young boys and girls were addressed on the issue of sex and gender - on the inclusion of transgenders, with the aim of bringing about equity in thought and action and breaking of gender stereotypes.

Experienced resource persons from fields of education, health, domestic violence, transgender rights, media, human rights and law took sessions that involved group work, role play, debate and brainstorming.

Training concluded on Saturday, 13 February, 2016 with a Valedictory ceremony. The event started with a prayer song by a small group of participants. Director BSK Fr.P Arul Das welcomed the guests - Economer, Salesian province of Hyderabad - Fr.P Sojan, Youth Director of BIRDY - Fr.K T Jose, Youth Animator - Sr.Gracie, Corporate Co-ordinator - Ms.Pascal Flynn.

Program Co-ordinator, Mr.K Satyanand gave a summary of the training program. Two of the trainees Mr.J Anil Kumar and Ms.M Bharathi then shared their opinion and experience of the program on Gender Equity. Ms. Bharathi said that “The topics discussed were very close to my heart as I experience bias and discrimination at every stage of my life. I am happy to know and understand that there is so much dialogue and intent to end this discrimination. I hope for a better society – starting with a family and a neighborhood where I am not looked down upon.” They both promised to carry the message where ever they go - at home and work.

Fr.P.Sojan commended the young trainees for their participation in the training and extolled the important role they play in society as the pall bearers. Fr.K.T.Jose expressed deep appreciation for the effort being taken to bring about an equitable society. He said that these youth now have to go and change those they come in contact with - he reiterated Gandhiji’s words - ‘Be the Change you want to see in the world’.

Certificates of Participation were distributed to all the trainees.

Ms.Deepa Xavier, co-facilitator of the training gave a vote of thanks and concluded the event with the National Anthem.
On 11 Feb, 2016, a meet was organized for parents of DB Tech trainees of Vizag City Centre. Mr. Ravi, Retail Trainer of DB Tech Vizag City facilitated the event, beginning with a warm welcome to the gathering - Asst. Director Fr. Ratna Kumar and parents of trainees. The parents of most of the students attended the meeting. They seemed pleasantly surprised to see their wards in a disciplined, professional environment, doing their best. The trainees expressed their joy by singing a prayer song then the trainers of the center introduced themselves followed by the parents.

Trainer Ravi explained the reason and the need for a parent-teacher meet. He inquired about the pre-training and post-training behavior of students at home. The parents responded well and concurred with most of his statements.

Fr. Ratna Kumar addressed the parents and passed a beautiful message. He initiated the speech by enlightening the gathering about the origin and existence of Don Bosco in Andhra Pradesh and other places. He introduced Don Bosco as a great personality who once lived in Italy and always dreamt for the betterment of youth. He emphasized that Don Bosco is for the youth in need of employment and for the children at risk, in not mere sentences rather with live examples of “a girl who stepped into school at the age of 10 for the first time and her illiterate parents were responsible for impairing her childhood.” He suggested the parents not to include themselves in the list of such parents. He shared the results achieved by DB Tech since its existence in Visakhapatnam.

Parents of DB Tech Trainees Meet in Vizag

Young Ministers rally against Alcohol and Smoking

Alcoholism affects not just the person but his family and an entire community. Members of Children's Parliament in NTR Nagar decided on organizing a rally in their locality with the support and guidance from their teachers and Program Coordinators.

They took the request to the teachers asking for the involvement of the local corporator Ms. Radha Dheeraj Reddy. This was taken up seriously and was materialized into a rally with powerful slogans and messages on 01 March, 2016. Local field partner, LIGHT – an organization working with children with special needs was actively involved in the event.

The messages they carried was ‘Alcohol takes you away from family and society’, ‘Smoking harms not only you but others around you’.

At the beginning of the program, CWC Chairperson, Ms. P Syamala briefed the participants on these two evils and commended the children for taking the initiative. She advised them on the best way to carry their messages effectively to the elders.

Mr. S Ambedkar, Program Coordinator oriented the children on the rules to be followed in order to fulfill the objectives set by the rally.

The rally went through the two colonies where the menace of alcoholism was highest. Many women joined the rally as they were directly affected by the problem. An elderly lady said, “I am so happy to see children carrying such an important message. I am sure the men will feel ashamed and work towards ridding themselves of this habit.”

The corporator Ms. Reddy was also highly encouraging of the children and assured her total support to develop the initiative of Tuition Centres. She said, “I am extremely happy to see the outcome of the initiative of organizations like BSK on our children. I promise to extend my total support in ensuring a safe and stable environment for them to conduct these evening tuitions and Children's Parliament. Also, if a space is identified, I will help to provide sports and games material. My best wishes to the children and the organizers.”
M Parvati lives with her husband Suryanarayana and two sons in Gollapalli village, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. Suryanarayana works at a welding shop and their two sons do ‘Centering’ work at construction sites. She joined Bosco Swashakti MACS in 2012 and started making small savings regularly.

Parvati is good at crocheting laces. With the first loan she procured raw material to improve her skill, trying out new designs and patterns. This has increased the demand for her products.

She is getting better returns and is happy that the family income has improved. “Our standard of living has improved since I became a member of Bosco Swashakti MACS. I thank the staff for their support and guidance.”

B.Manikyam lives in Navabharat Nagar in Guntur Urban with her husband B Sudhakar, son and daughter. She is a member of Kranthi MACS in Guntur. Sudhakar worked at a printing press.

Manikyam joined the society in 2008. The first time she got a loan, she invested in setting up a ‘Screen Printing Centre’ along with her husband. She soon learned the work. They got good response and successfully carried out several orders for wedding invitations and other printing works. They invested a further loan of Rs.10,000/- also in procuring material for the business.

In December, 2015 with a loan of Rs. 25,000/- and some amount of savings they had, the couple bought a small binding machine. So they now take up book binding work orders too. “MACS is a mighty help for small enterprises like ours. Our standard of living has greatly improved.”

Nallabotula Pullamma is a widow, living with her son's family of four, in Kurlavalli village of Tallada Mandal, Khammam district, Telangana. She has worked hard as a daily wage labourer. She got all three of her children married facing great difficulties.

In 2014, Pullamma joined a thrift and credit group called Pujitha—part of SADA MACS. Since then her life has taken a positive turn. With the first loan she bought a ‘Soda Vending Cart’. She would procure soda bottles and sell them on the cart in the market place.

With a second loan of Rs.10,000/- she has bought a Soda Bottling Unit. Her son has also got involved in this business. While Pullamma works at the unit, filling the bottles, her son goes out to sell them. Business reaches its peak during summer season.

“I have always wanted to be independent and if possible leave behind a legacy of self-sustenance. Thank you Sada MACS for making this possible for me.”

Sheik Mohidinabi lives in Swarnabharati Nagar, Guntur district with her two sons. She was widowed early on. She worked as field labour to manage the household. One day she heard a board member of Nirmal MACS speaking to a group of women and joined.

Madina took a loan of Rs.5,000/- and started a business of selling Fancy items door-to-door. The business took time to pick up. She could not afford education of both the children so her son dropped out of school and started to work.

The business gradually picked up and she repaid the instalments. With another loan Madina started a second business of giving water drums on hire to construction sites. Madina has a fixed deposit of Rs.1,000/- and her monthly saving has increased to Rs.200/-. “I am very grateful to Nirmal MACS for supporting me with financial help at a time when I needed it the most. My family lives happily now.”

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