

WOMEN'S DAY CAMPAIGNS - 2007

1. INTRODUCTION:

AF has facilitated the celebration of women's Day involving the women and men of its project villages. AF together with the women leaders played active part in organizing the campaigns. The women leaders included the active members of the women groups, SHG leaders, Sasya Mithra Group (SMG) members, NPM village activists, V.O. leaders and PRIs in the planning. Some interested women groups from the villages took initiative in cooking and serving lunch to the participants at the campaign. The AF staff campaigned and mobilized the women and gave them the awareness on the Women's Day and helped them to participate in the campaigns at the mandal head quarters. Thus 8 campaigns were organized at 8 mandal head quarters, viz Kalyanadurg, Be3luguppa, Settur, Kundurpi, Kudair, Atmakur, Rappthadu and Dharmavaram. It is interesting to note that 20% of the total participants have been men, who participated voluntarily and expressed their solidarity with women.

2. Objectives OF Women's Day campaigns:

The rural women are still facing gender discrimination in many aspects. They are not getting equal respect on par with men. Their status in the family, work place, and in the society at large is lower. Generally they are denied equal opportunities in making important decisions such as family finances, marriage, property, child birth etc. The girl children are being discriminated in the aspects of property, education, nutrition etc. More over social evils like child marriages, dowry, domestic violence and alcoholism still exist to some extent, which have a profound impact on the lives of rural women.

The main objective of Accion Fraterna in conducting women's days is to bring awareness and empower women by bringing out their inner abilities and tapping out their inner strengths by bringing them out on a common plat form. This platform is utilized to give self strengthening positive messages and awareness through people particularly eminent women from different fields to thousands of rural women.

The working objectives:

1. To remind the women about their rights and entitlements and the processes to acquire them.
2. To give awareness on the new laws passed by the Government in the favor of women like anti domestic violence, scholarships for girls education and reservation facilities in different Government programmes and their effective utilization.
3. To provide knowledge of employment opportunities that are available within and outside their villages.
4. To give awareness on the importance of the education of the girl child.
5. To give awareness on the health problems of the women and methods to prevent and overcome them.

6. To facilitate them to think independently and enhance their self confidence.
7. To provide an opportunity to have knowledge exchange, awareness and solidarity on different kinds of women problems and their solutions.
8. To encourage them to take part in the decision making related to their family and village.
9. To motivate them to fight against social evils and atrocities against women.
10. To encourage and demonstrate the existing women leadership from among the project villages.

3. Participation and events:

During this year, women's day celebrations were conducted in all the 8 mandals of AF's project area. In each campaign about 1000 to 1200 women and men from about 30 villages of that particular mandal participated enthusiastically. From each village about 30 women and 5 men participated in the campaigns. Many women participated for the first time from BCs and others.

In the 8 campaigns conducted in the project area totally 7650 women and 1400 men attended enthusiastically and made the celebrations a great success.

3.1 Women Rallies:

Each campaign began by an impressive women's rally through the main roads of mandal head quarters. The objective of the rally was to create awareness on Women's Day to people at large. About 800 women participated in each rally. They took out a procession through the main roads of the towns holding banners, placards, singing songs and raising slogans against discrimination and owing to fight for equal status of women in the society. Their problems of discrimination, social evils affecting them were highlighted during the procession. Some women drove bullock carts in the rally to show symbolically that they can also perform the (so called superior) roles that are culturally assigned exclusively for men.

3.2 Public Meeting:

Eminent personalities particularly women from different fields like, Doctors, Lawyers, Police, Women and Child welfare association members, officials from panchyath raj, Zilla Parishad, IKP, DRDA, teachers political leaders, MMS leaders, women group leaders and some journalists were invited as guest speakers in these campaigns.

Following are the important messages given by the speakers from various sections of the society:

1. Parents should treat both girls and boys alike and provide equal educational opportunities to them. Girls should be provided either higher education or skills training to make them self-reliant. Boys should be grown in such a way that they should help their mother and sisters in the household work. All the women present took oath to get their girl children educated at least up to 10th class.

2. Child marriages should be completely stopped. The boys & girls should be married only after they cross 20 years of age when they are in a position to earn and are mature enough to manage the family.
3. Women should collectively exercise their rights to avail the Government schemes like Arogyasri, NREGP, PDS and other social welfare schemes.
4. Pregnant women were advised to take nutritional food and access AN & PN care facilities by the Govt. without fail.
5. Women should develop alternate livelihoods by taking help from Government and non-government organizations. They should also save some amount in order to have some economic freedom and respect in the family.
6. Women should not hesitate to approach judicial remedies in their fight against the atrocities done to them.
7. Women should unite and collectively fight against social evils like alcoholism, child marriages, dowry, domestic violence etc. Many examples were quoted from the villages on how unity and co-operation among women brought significant changes in the society.

3.3 Women group leaders conducted the public meetings:

SHG leaders in 6 mandals took initiative to organize and conduct the entire public meeting. Some women from the villages came forward and shared their observation on the changing mindset of the rural women, for better.

The women participating in the campaigns took the following resolutions unanimously, that:

- 1) They will encourage their daughters to get higher education.
- 2) They will try to stop Child marriages and Alcoholism in their families and villages completely.
- 3) They will make sure that, their daughters have equal share in healthy food along with their sons.
- 4) They will get united and make efforts to solve the problems in their families and villages.

4. Role plays & fun games :

Songs and role-plays on issues of women and their development were performed by RDT cultural team. Through a role play called "GOAL" it was shown, how the life of a girl was made miserable right from the beginning to the end of her life and how she overcame all those hurdles and proved herself as a successful women. Both the roles of men and women were played by the women. It attracted the participants very much and it was observed that the women watching the play were immersed in it. And responded well with positive answers to the questions asked by the girl character, at the end of the play. Some funny games were also organized during these campaigns, which provide some entertainment and comic relief to the participants. The participants responded positively and felt very happy that it was as if, they re-lived their

childhood again. Mementos were presented to the winners of the fun games and a small memento has thrilled the winners as it was first time ever they were rewarded and honored in that manner.

5. Exhibitions:

An exhibition was arranged at the venue with the (a) photographs of successful women in different fields. (b) Income generation activities and the products like silk saris, work saris, bangles, petty coats etc, (c) NPM methods and products etc. The idea was to create interest and enthusiasm among women and to motivate them to strengthen agriculture and develop alternate livelihoods.

6. Arrangement of a festive – meal :

Meeting came to a close by serving good festive meal to all participants. Meal with vegetable fried rice, lemon rice, curd rice, snacks, sweet and fruits was arranged at the meeting place to all the people who attended the meeting.

7. Conclusion:

The general response for Women's Day Campaigns was overwhelming. The enthusiasm, excitement and happiness were budding on the faces of women. Following are some of the feedback comments made by participants:

Participants' response:

1. "Some women have achieved the impossible through unity. We can take them as role models and fight for our rights."
2. "We will fight against the discrimination & harassments we are facing."
3. "I understood the importance of education for girls. I will try to make my two daughters settle in life first, and then only I will think about their marriages."
4. "We understood the problems of child marriages."
5. "We learnt about the laws that are helpful to women."
6. "Interacting and celebrating with many other women gave us happiness and a feeling of strength, solidarity and security."
7. "We were reminded of our childhood by playing games."
8. "Participating in the rally was a great experience to us."