

ANNUAL REPORT 2005 - 2006

Introduction

STEPS is a society registered under Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act of 1975 and established in the year 1991. The vision of STEPS is to build up gender-just society. The main objective of STEPS is to develop women's self-confidence and help them to live with Self-respect and dignity. STEPS take up all issues related to women as individual and as social citizens. Our Slogan is 'Self Respect is the first step of Women's liberation'.

STEPS addresses petitions that are directly coming to STEPS and petitions coming to Helpline at All women police station in Pudukottai and Trichy district. The activities of STEPS had expanded to Trichy district last year and now to Theni and Dindugal all women Police stations this year. Currently STEPS is working in two districts directly and 10 districts of Tamil Nadu indirectly. STEPS also addresses petitions from victimized women from other districts of Tamil Nadu.

Apart from addressing issues of women in general, STEPS has been working for the empowerment of Muslim women in particular for the past 7 years. The intervention of STEPS for Muslim women has laid milestones in the lifeline of STEPS during the last years.

Objectives of the Organisation

- To take up issues related to violence against women such as marital dispute, desertion, dowry harassment, sexual abuse, cheating, physical and psychological torture and help the victimized women to find alternatives or solutions.**
- To provide a space for the women in need, and support them in their crisis period through the short stay home.**
- To provide free legal aid and counseling to the people in need.**

- **To conduct women's awareness programmes through campaigns, public meetings, seminars, workshops, poster exhibitions etc.**
- **To take up local issues of the people like road facilities, Balwadis, distribution of ration cards, panchayat television, land pattas, drainage, light, transport etc and make the village women organized to get such things done.**
- **To sensitize the school children and the college students on the need for gender justice.**
- **To be a part of district, state and national level networks and is a part of lobbying and advocacy for gender justice.**
- **To empowering the status of Muslim women in social and economic spheres**

Major Focus Issues of STEPS

- a. **Our special focus is on raising voice consistently against atrocities on women especially Muslim Women.**
- b. **Issues related to violence against women. (Marital, Dowry, Sexual, Harassment, Destitute women, child rape & Domestic violence).**
- c. **Free legal aid to victimized, socially neglected and economically poor women.**
- d. **Provide homage for destitute women.**
- e. **Women's awareness campaigns on women's status, women development and other women's related issues.**
- f. **Establish functional co-ordination among the NGOs who are working for Muslim women.**
- g. **Empowerment of Muslim Women for mainstreaming the Muslim women.**
- h. **Educating the Muslim girl children who lack the opportunity to continue their education.**

Addressing the issues of Women against violence

During the year April 2005 to March 2006, STEPS had taken up 151 petitions related to

women issues like violence against women, human rights violation and injustice of Jammatt. Most of the cases needed legal advice and law expertise. STPES has an advocate for legal counseling, which helps STEPS to deal with such problems at the same time a file cases in court, according to the facts of the situation.

Family counseling at the following stations was made during the reporting period

S. No.	Name of the Station	Place	District
1	All Women's Police station	Town Area	Pudukottai
2	All Women's Police station	Contonment	Trichy
3	All Women's Police station	Ponmalaipatti	Trichy
4	All Women's Police station	Town Area	Trichy
5	All Women's Police station	Town area	Theni
6	All Women's Police Station	Town area	Dindugal

Details of issues addressed by STEPS in Trichy and Pudukottai district

S.No	Name of the Branch	Through STEPS	Through Helpline	Court
1.	Pudukottai	48	35	
2.	Trichy	29	68	
Total		77	103	

Empowerment of Muslim Women

STEPS has been working for the empowerment of Muslim Women for the past 8 years. Apart from its activities at Trichy and Pudukkottai districts directly, it is working in 12 districts in Tamil nadu indirectly by organizing Muslim women and providing periodic training to them. Owing to the intervention of Steps for the empowerment of Muslim women, a State Level Muslim Women Federation has been formed and the strengthening of the federation was made during this year. The activities for the

empowerment of Muslim women are:

1. Leadership Training To Muslim Women – IV

As a process of empowering Muslim Women, STEPS has been providing Leadership training to the Muslim Women since August 2003. This is the 4th of its kind, in which different aspects of leadership qualities, specifically applicable to Muslim women are imparted to them on 12th and 13th May 2005.

Objectives of the training programme

- To provoke the thoughts of Muslim Women about the present status of Muslim Women.**
- To emphasise the need for an intervention to Muslim Women for their empowerment and a dignified life.**
- To provoke their thoughts about the understanding and different aspects of empowerment.**
- Educate them about the real meaning of empowerment of women in different angles.**

Training process

The training programme was conducted by Ms. D. Sharifa, and her team members. The first day's session was mainly focusing on the understanding of the Muslim women about their empowerment. The views were consolidated and their misconceptions regarding empowerment was made clear to them. The second day's session was fully focusing on the true meaning of different forms of empowerment, which is very much required for the Muslim women. The need for establishment of ones identity and self image, creating space for women to express themselves, mobilisation and collective identity – in organising Muslim women into sangams and social leadership.

2. Muslim Women Survey

STEPS has conducted Survey on the Socio Economic Status of Muslim Women in Dindigul and Sivagangai district of Tamil Nadu during the second years. The consolidation of the survey was made during the reporting period. The most important facts revealed the from the survey are as follows :

A. Education

- **34% of the Muslim women have completed their high school education and only 4% of the Muslim women have obtained graduation.**
- **Regarding religious education 52% of the Muslim women have learned reading Quoran, 21% of them completed upto Alhamdu in Arabic language and 27% of the Muslim women did not know to read Quoran.**

B. Employment

- **77% of the Muslim women are living as house wife, taking care of their children, husband and in-laws family. They are engaged in domestic work only.**
- **7% of the Muslim women are doing home based income generation activities and 9% of the women are self employed in Tailoring, thatches making, etc.**
- **4% of the women are engaged in business – vending of vegetables etc and 3% of the women are employed in factories, industries etc.**

C. Marital Status

- **88% of the Muslim women are living with their husband, 3% are divorced, 5% are widow and 4% are separated by their husband.**
- **56.4% of the marriages are conducted between the age of 12 to 18 of the Muslim girls and 41% of the marriages are conducted after 18 years.**
- **Still nearly 3% of the marriages are conducted before 12 years of age.**
- **All the marriages are done in the mosque / marriage halls which is not registered in the court.**
- **75% of the women received mehar to the tune of Rs.1000 to Rs.5000/- only 8% of the women have received more than Rs.5000/-**

- All the Muslim marriages are conducted by receiving dowry.
- Only 21% of the women have received mehar during the marriage.

D. Divorce

- 95% of the Talaq / divorce occurs due to demand for more dowry.
- Only 38% of the divorced women were given mehar during divorce.

E. Health

- 66% of the women did not aware of their health condition.
- 33% of the women who know about their health status suffer from menstruation problem, 20% suffer due to ulcers, 19% suffer from heart problem, 12% suffer from blood pressure and 16% from diabetes.

3. Literacy Programme

To provide education to Muslim women and children of Muslim women STEPS is conducting literacy programme by providing evening tuition to the children's of Muslim Women. STEPS has organised 5 Evening Tuition Centers during the beginning of the reporting period for the children of Muslim Women in Pudukottai and Trichy district. Two tuition centers in Vallithirakottai and Muthupattinam, Pudukottai were providing special coaching for the Muslim girl children in their respective areas. 31 girls are studying in Vallathirakottai centre and 32 children are studying in Muthupattinam centre. This tuition centers has emphasized the need for educating the Muslim girls children in the Muslim community. The girl children who got good marks in the previous academic year have continued their education in the current academic year.

Teachers have been appointed to give evening tuition for the children of Muslim women from 1st standard to 9th standard. Teaching materials were given for each tuition centre. The evening tuition is conducted between 4.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. every day. Periodic tests have been conducted in each centre. At the end of the reporting period, only two tuition centers in Vallithirakottai and Muthupattinam, Pudukottai were

providing special coaching for the Muslim girl children in their respective areas. 31 girls are studying in Vallathirakottai centre and 32 children are studying in Muthupattinam centre. This tuition centers has emphasized the need for educating the Muslim girls children in the Muslim community. The girl children who got good marks in the previous academic year have continued their education in the current academic year.

4. Public Hearing

The second public hearing was conducted at Threshpuram of Thuthukudi district to know the status of Muslim women in that locality on 13th July 2005. About 370 community members both men and women participated in the Public hearing. Most of the people expressed their pathetic situation after the tsunami struck. Public hearing mainly focus the minority people who are living in Thuthukudi. After the meeting it was found that minority people were severely affected due to tsunami and relief materials were not distributed properly in these areas. People who are living in Thuthukudi were neglected and discriminated by way of distribution of relief materials and rehabilitation facilities. The Muslim women who have attended the public hearing urged for a protest to convey their disappointment and demands from the government and the religious institution. At the end of the public hearing a decision was taken to conduct a hunger strike at Thuthukudi. This is the outcome of the public hearing conducted in Threshpuram.

5. Formation of Muslim Women Groups

Formation of Muslim women groups is an ongoing activity. STEPS was involved in the process of formation of groups among Muslim women in 10 districts of Tamil Nadu. Most of the groups were opened bank account in their respective bank branches and banks are onlending loans to the groups also.

S.	Name of the	Details of groups with savings and credit activities	Non savings groups
----	-------------	--	--------------------

No	District	No. of groups	No. of members	Savings	No. of groups	No. of members
1.	Tiruchirapalli	-	-	-	10	140
2.	Pudukottai	24	408	357162	0	0
3.	Thirunelveli	17	240	324750	0	0
4.	Madurai	4	238	84500	-	-
5.	Dindigul	1	17	19300	6	53
6.	Kanyakumari	2	40	100800	2	40
7.	Sivagangai	9	127	58575	-	-
8.	Theni	3	48	14175	9	117
9.	Nagapattinam	4	72	36400	-	-
10	Thuthukudi	6	104	46500	6	98
	Total	70	1294	104216 2	33	448

6. Free Legal Aid and Counseling

Muslim women at distress are approaching STEPS for redressal of their problem. The family members of the victimized women are provided counseling for finding a solution to the misunderstanding among the family members / for educating them about what are the legal protection available for women as per the Indian Constitution. During the reporting period of the 1st Phase, 16 Muslim women were given counseling on rights of women, and the protection available for women.

The details of the category of cases attended by STEPS are as follows :

S.No.	Category of cases	No. of cases
1.	Attack	4
2.	Talaq	6
3.	Family Problem	24
4.	Second Marriage	5
5.	Other supports – Pension	3
6.	Cheating	11
7.	Eve Teasing	2
8.	Family Violence	1
9.	Rape	1
10	False promise of marriage	1
11.	Threaten to death	2
12.	Compensation	1
13.	Dowry harassment	8
14.	Drunken violence	8
15.	Land problem	4
16	Illegal contact	4
	Total	=SUM(ABOVE) 85

A brief study of some of the important cases dealt by Steps.....

The sufferings of Ms.Sharmila banu

Mrs Noojehan and her husband are residents of Thiruvopppur, Pudukkottai district.

They have a daughter named Sharmila Banu. Mrs Noorjahan left her daughter Sharmila aged 19 yrs, for domestic work, at the house of Mr. Mohammed Ghani, who is an ex MLA. While leaving her daughter for domestic work, Noorjehan borrowed Rs.10,000 from Mrs & Mr. Ghani. She asked them to deduct Sharmila's salary towards

payment of the borrowed amount.

Sharmila was not paid any salary but was taxed with physical work and mental torture. Mrs Ghani credited Rs 1000 only as salary, at the end of thirteen months of hard work by Sharmila and deducted the same from the loan amount due to her by Sharmila's parents. Mrs Ghani threatened Sharmila and her parents to return the loan amount immediately, else she would complain to the police stating that Sharmila had stolen some jewellery from their house.

Sharmila's parents fearing the ex MLA and his wife, brought Sharmila to Steps asking for help. They wanted Sharmila to stay at the short stay home. Mrs & Mr.Ghani threatened Sharmila's parents many times. They also spoke to the Director of Steps and asked her not to allow Sharmila stay in the short stay home run by Steps. After the enquiry by the police and intervention of Steps the case has been amicably settled. Sharmila who was at the short stay home for over a month is back to her parents. She is now continuing her higher studies.

The case of Ms.Forshia

Forshia hails from Muncipal colony, Thanjavur district. She was married to Charles, a teacher at the government school, for two years. Both of them were staying along with Charles' brother and his wife.

Forshia complained that her husband was having illegal relationship with his brother's wife (his sister-in-law). Because of this she has been under great mental pressure. She complained that her sister in law was not allowing her and husband to live together peacefully. On some pretext or the other her co- sister would send Forshia away to her mothers house. Even after continued and repeated requests by Forsha to her husband he never heeded to her.

Then she approached Steps to find a solution to her problem. She wanted to live with her husband peacefully. Forshia's husband Charles was called and counseling was given to both of them. Steps took the initiative of setting up a new house for the couple and

made arrangements for them to live separately. Forshia's husband assured Steps that he would take care of his wife and would keep her happy. The case was thus solved amicably due to the intervention of Steps.

7. Second State Level Workshop On Empowerment Of Muslim Women

The second state level workshop was conducted on 4th April 2005 at ICOSA center, Chennai. During the first state level workshop, the Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat was originated. Hence the second state level workshop was conducted as a First Anniversary Meeting of the Tamil Nadu Muslim women Jamaat. 360 Muslim women from 10 districts of Tamil Nadu participated in the workshop. Jamaat members shared their experience over the past one year in addressing the issues of Muslim women, experience with the respective Jamaat members while addressing their issues. Some of the petitioners who approached Women Jamaat for their problem shared their issues with the gathering. This sharing has disclosed the attitude of the men Jamaat in different parts of Tamil Nadu and the different ways in which Muslim women are harassed by the men in the community. Mrs. Vasanthidevi, the Chairperson of State Women commission , Mr. Inqalab, Lawyer Ms. Geetha from Chennai have shared their valuable ideas over legal protection available to women in general as per Indian constitution, which is applicable to Muslim women too. The lawyers have personally discussed with the women petitioners for taking necessary action through court.

A Press meeting was also conducted during evening at the Chennai Press club. 35 reporters from different print and visual media participated in the press meeting and interacted with the Jamaat members and the Director of the organization.

8. Third State Level Muslim Women's Conference

The third State Level Muslim Women's Conference was conducted at Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. Two Muslim women were killed by the in-laws family and they were hanged as if the women have committed suicide in Dindigul district alone. Hence the Tamil Nadu Muslim women Jamaat and STEPS has decided to conduct the Muslim

women conference in Dindigul to bring awareness among the Muslim women about the existence of a forum to hear the voices of Muslims Women. It was also a warning for the Muslim men, who indulge in offensive activities towards Muslim women. During the conference Ms. Ruth Manorama, the Director of National Alliance of Women (NAWO) and Ms. Teesta, the editor of Combat Communalism Magazine, and NGOs friends participated and delivered their valuable thoughts among the Muslim women gathering. 400 Muslim women from Tamil Nadu participated in the conference. Recommendations / Demands of the Muslim Women from the state and religious authority were also presented by the Women Jamaat members. A press meet was also organized at the end of the conference.

9. Advocacy and Lobbying

The status of Muslim women, the need for change in the current structure in the religious institutional set up and changes at the policy level are drafted as demands of Muslim women and it is being forwarded to the state and central government, and religious institutions. Eventhough same set of demands along with few more additions were sent, this will hold good till the demands are materialized.

During the first week of April 2005, the team members of STEPS went to Dindigul and distributed a notice for raising our voice against the murder of a Muslim girl. The staff members conducted a press meet in Dindigul to convey their distress over the violence on Muslim women. It is another type of campaign, advocacy and lobby with the community and also to bring awareness among the community over real status of Muslim women. The team members faced life threatening too while they were involved in the notice distribution.

10. Communal Harmony

As a mark of bringing harmony among the Muslim community, STEPS has conducted four meetings with the Muslim women in Kanyakumari, Thuthukudi and Nagapattinam.

02.05.05 - Muslim women Meeting at Kanyakumari

22.05.05 - Muslim women Meeting at Thuthukudi

- Muslim women Meeting at Nagapattinam

- Muslim women Meeting at Dindigul

Volunteers in the above districts mobilised the Muslim women in the area and the meeting was conducted by the STEPS team members. The meeting highlighted the need for Muslim women to come together and organise themselves into group for collective bargaining and fight for their rights. The Muslim women find it more powerful to gather in a meeting and expressed their involvement in the programmes implemented by STEPS for the empowerment of Muslim women.

11. Staff Capacity Building Training

STEPS has conducted a staff capacity building training on 27.06.05 at Hotel Satham, Pudukottai. 10 staff members, 15 volunteers and 10 Jamaat leaders participated in the training programme. The training was conducted by Ms. Beulah, IWID, Chennai. The training programme mainly concentrated on personality development and self analysis of the staff members. Different attitudes and circumstance were given to the participants and temperament test was also done among the participants. This was very useful for the staff members to judge themselves, their weakness and need for improvement in their attitude and behaviour while they are working with the community.

12. Federation Leaders Meeting

The members of Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat met on 27th August 2005 at Pudukottai to discuss about the issues in their respective areas. 20 Jamaat members from 10 districts of Tamil Nadu along with 10 staff members and 2 reporters from Denmark participated in the meeting as observers. The members shared the issues of

Muslim women in the respective areas and the reflections of the Muslim community over the efforts of STEPS.

Another Federation Leaders meeting was conducted in Trichy during the month of September 2005. 30 Muslim women participated in the federation meeting. 6 cases of Muslim women were discussed during the meeting. These meetings build strength to the Muslim women when they are all together and discuss about themselves for their own empowerment and also for finding a solution to their problems.

13. Short Stay Home

The deprived women who are at distress find STEPS as a place where they can relax themselves and think over the solution for their problem. Women generally stay at STEPS for one day or a week, which depends upon the nature of problem of the women. During the reporting period 37 Muslim women stayed in the home. During their stay at STEPS they were provided moral support, counseling and conducive atmosphere to think of themselves in a relaxed manner over their future.

14. Children's Home

STEPS has evolved a children's home for the Muslim girl children who are denied education or who lack opportunities to continue education because of the socio-economic situation of their family. STEPS has accommodated 14 Muslim girl children in the children's home, provided educational materials, food, place for their study and stay during the reporting period. The children were also given religious education and academic education. The children continue their education in the Government girls high school in stay in the children home. Evening tuition for all the children for special coaching were also provided to the children.

15. District level Orientation Meetings

Two district level meetings were conducted in Thuthukudi and Thirunelveli on 10.8.05 and 23.08.05 respectively.

At Thuthukudi

Ms. D. Sharifa met the community members from Madhavanayar Colony and Mettupatti Pallivasal Street. She discussed with the community about their socio-economic status, impact of Tsunami and the level of support and solidarity provided to the community. The Muslim women expressed the negligence of the government, NGOs in providing relief and rehabilitation for the Muslim community. Identification of dalit community, Christian minority by the religious people were not given to the Muslim community. The Muslim community is totally neglected by the relief and rehabilitation mechanism. The Muslim women are in a very pathetic situation that they do not have a space for defecation. They were using open places covered by pushes and thorns. After Tsunami, the area used was totally washed away by the waves and now Muslim women in Threshpuram do not have any closed enclave for at least to defecate. Hence the women defecate at home and take throw the stools in the sea. It is a very worst state of living of the Muslim women in Threshpuram. This basic need of the Muslim women was not understood and recognized by the male members and religious clerics. The community pleaded with the STEPS team to do some thing for the Muslim women. The Muslim women expressed their grievance over the response of the Muslim religious leaders, politicians, government officials towards Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation at Threshpuram.

As an outcome of the meeting, STEPS taken a decision to construct community toilet for the Muslim women and mobilized fund from friends of STEPS and fulfilled their requirement in constructing the toilet in Kayalpattinam and Threshpuram.

At Thirunelveli

Another district level meeting was conducted in Thirunelveli which is also affected by Tsunami. The Muslim women at Thirunelveli also expressed their needs and response of the relief and rehabilitation mechanisms of the government, religious institutions, NGOs in the locality. As there is no life loss in Thirunelveli, the Muslim community was totally neglected by them. Hence it was decided to conduct a hunger strike to express

the needs of Muslim women affected by Tsunami by Tsunami.

The outcome of the two district level meetings is the emergence of the need for conducting a hunger strike at Thuthukudi.

16. Hunger Strike – One day fasting of Muslim women - Campaign on Rights of Women

As per the budget submitted for the interim period – August 2005 and September 2005, STEPS has planned to conduct the following programmes

Federation leaders training

Volunteers capacity building training

Training on health and hygiene

The above three programmes were not conducted by STEPS as the immediate need of the Muslim women to express their grievance to the government and religious institution for livelihood support. Hence the fund allocated for the above programmes were utilized for conducting one day fasting – hunger strike at Thuthukudi on 28.09.2005.

There emerged lot of threat for the STEPS team and co-ordinator of Thuthukudi area from the religious leaders not to conduct any programme in Thuthukudi. It was a open fight between the Muslim women Jamaat members and the men Jamaat at Thuthukudi. They have circulated notice against the women Jamaat and tried their level best to stop the muslim women from sitting at the road side to express their grievance. But with lot of difficulty, the STEPS team and Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat members successfully conducted the hunger strike. 500 Muslim women from entire Tamil Nadu participated in the hunger strike. The support from the police department is enormous. They provided a battalion of women police for protection to STEPS team and the Muslim women. As a result of the one day fasting of Muslim women, 50 Muslim women

families were removed from the enrolment of the men Jamaat and the associated mosque. All the 50 Muslim women went to police station and made the explained the purpose of the fasting of Muslim women and their demands from the government and the religious authorities. There is no harm / damage made against religion and religious people. Hence the police came forward to solve the problem by controlling the activities of the men Jamaat members in the locality.

17. District Level Federation Meetings

STEPS team with Ms. D. Sharifa has conducted district level meetings in 9 districts of Tamil Nadu. The meetings were conducted during the month of October 2005. The Muslim women were organized for meeting and explained about the objectives of the project, the scope of the project and limitations of the project. The Muslim women from different parts of Tamil Nadu expressed their socio – economic status, need for livelihood opportunities, backwardness of Muslim women in education, employment opportunities and means of survivals. The women in remote corner of the districts are living in utter poverty. They require opportunities for employment which is suitable for them. They could not take up any job according to the availability of employment. They need to fulfill their religious identities and then only go for employment. The district level meeting highlighted the status of Muslim women and the need for intervention in these areas.

The details of meetings conducted by STEPS team are as follows

S.No.	Date	Name of the Place	Name of the district	No. of participants
1.	15.10.05	Vallathirakottai	Pudukottai	47
2.	16.10.05	Konguvarpatti	Theni	55

3.	17.10.05	Sithaiyankottai	Dindigul	58
4.	18.10.06	Anthur	Nagapattinam	40
5.	19.10.06	Threshpuram	Thuthukudi	65
6.	22.10.05	Devar Hall	Trichy	62
7.	23.10.05	Thenkasi	Thirunelveli	80
8.	16.03.06	Melmidalam	Kanyakumari	52
9.	18.03.06	Thittuvilai	Kanyakumari	37
	Total			=SUM(ABOVE) 496

18. State Level Muslim Women Jamaat Meetings

The Tamil Nadu Muslim women Jamaat is meetings once in a month at STEPS office and discuss the activities of the organisation and issues of Muslim women in their respective areas. The cases of Muslim women who are victimized by the men Jamaat, the women's grievances are expressed in the Jamaat meeting. The Jamaat members from 10 districts of Tamil Nadu take the decision over addressing the issue. The follow-up of cases during the previous meetings were also discussed during the Jamaat meeting. Six Jamaat meetings were conducted during the reporting period. This monthly meeting of the Jamaat members strengthen the activities of the organisation, the vision of the Muslim women keep the Muslim women Jamaat more vibrantly.

The Jamaat meeting was conducted on the following dates :

S.No.	Date	Place
1.	08.10.05	STEPS office, Pudukotati
2.	22.11.05	STEPS office, Pudukotati
3.	29.12.05	STEPS office, Pudukotati

4.	30.01.06	STEPS Pudukotati	office,
5.	27.02.06	STEPS Pudukotati	office,
6.	29.03.06	STEPS Pudukotati	office,

19. Publication

The activities, outcome and experience of the project was converted into print media through publication of a quarterly magazine in the name of “Pengal Jamaat” – Women’s Jamaat. The articles and reports to be published in the magazine was decided and the magazine was under preparation during the reporting period.

Our New initiatives: Dialogue with Muslim men

The two years of process of Empowering Muslim women has necessitated the emergence of Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat to enforce the rights of Muslim women within religion. The existence of Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat raised lot of controversial debates among the Muslim religious institutions as if STEPS and Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat are going against Islam religion. Hence there is a need for conducting positive discussions with the Muslim men over the objectives of the Women Jamaat, issues of Muslim women and to analyse the different ways in which Muslim women and men joint together in addressing the issues of Muslim women.

Objectives of the discussion

- To express the vulnerable status of Muslim women.
- To discuss over the evil practices such as dowry and improper ways of Talaq as against the true inert of Shariat and Quoran.
- To express the objectives of STEPS and Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat towards addressing the issues of Muslim women.
- To discuss the ways in which joint efforts could be made work together.

Strategy

- **Panel discussion**
- **Group discussion**
- **Group presentation**
- **Question & Answer session**

Outcome of the Meeting :

The men who have participated in the workshop expressed their support for the efforts of STEPS in empowering Muslim women. The workshop has created a space for the men to get to understand the activities of STEPS and Tamil Nadu Muslim women Jamaat, the poor status of Muslim women, and the impact of the intervention for the past two years in the lives of victimized Muslim women. The misconception of the Muslim men over the women Jamaat and STEPS was cleared.

Advocacy and Lobbying With Government Department

Steps is having a good rapport with the State and Central government departments to draw their attention towards issues and problems that women face in the society.

- **During this reporting period, the director was happy to be a part of the delegation of the minorities committee. This meeting was held as a perview of the topics that had to be discussed by the members as apart of the delegation, meeting Shri.A.R.Antulay, Hon.Cabinet Minister for Minorities, Govt. of India to discuss widely on the subject of minorities on February 13th 2006 at 4pm. The suggestions and recommendations made by the director were greatly appreciated by the members of the delegation. The delegation promised to forward the same to the Central Minorities commission.**
- **The director was invited to an important round table consultation on Muslims: a gender perspective. The prime minister had constituted a high level committee to prepare a report on the social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India. The member secretary Shri Abusalah Shariff had convened**

the meeting. The director presented an eight-minute speech on the work and issues taken up by steps for the past 15 years. At this consultation the survey that Steps' had taken on the Muslim women and its role on the community was emphasized. The consultation committee has promised to consider the recommendations that Steps had put forward.

With Academic Institutions

The Chief Functionary of STEPS has been elected as one of the members of Vigilance Committee to take up the cases of Sexual harassment at work place in Wakf Board College, Madurai. STEPS has a good relationship with student community in Pudukkottai right from the beginning. Student volunteers also support STEPS in its campaign work. As a result of such rapport, STEPS has guided students to take up research with gender perspective.

A permanent cell to contest against violence of sexual harassment against women was made in Government B.Ed. College of Pudukkottai. Ms. D. Sharifa has been nominated as one of the member of this cell.

The Director of STEPS Ms. D. Sharifa, has been invited as a resource person for the following colleges / educational institutions to provide guest lecture about empowerment of women.

- Ms. D. Sharifa provided guest lecture on Gender in Asian College of Journalism at Chennai.**
- Ms. D. Sharifa was requested to present an essay on 'Islam and status of Muslim women at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli.**
- Apart from her regular interaction with the academic institutions, during this reporting period, on March 8th, Womens day, she received an honour for her commitment towards the empowerment of muslim women. The Bharathidasan University based at Trichy gave this honour.**

•

With Media

Media – both press and satellite channels cover the activities of STEPS. STEPS is maintaining a very good rapport with reporters at the state level and national level. The issues of Muslim Women, construction of Mosque for Jamaat were highlighted in leading Tamil Magazines in a most positive way, which has paved way for international coverage of the issues. Activities of STEPS were highlighted in the following magazines and Newspaper;

- **News Internationalist Magazine**
- **Outlook**
- **The Week**
- **Savvy**
- **Communalism Combat**
- **The Telegraph**
- **The Hindu**
- **Dhina malar – Varamalar**

Around 20,000 Websites around the world were found to be describing the activities and initiatives of STEPS.

- **During the reporting period, India Today, a leading fortnightly magazine conducted a survey on women, sex and premarital sex. Statistics showed that 60% of women were indulging in pre marital sex. Ms.Khusboo, an artist from Tamil nadu was asked by the magazine to comment on this. She commented that the issue depended wholly on the woman but asked women to practice safe sex. This comment of hers, brought criticisms from the politicians and media saying that it hurt the sentiments of Tamil nadu women. The issue had been badly politicized. The director was one of the first few, to support Ms.Khusboo stating that it was her right of speech while members from her own fraternity kept silent. STEPS took initiative to conduct a campaign in support of her. A**

campaign was conducted on 28th November at Chennai in support of Khusboo to condemn the political parties who were trying to gain by politicizing the whole issue

- Sania Mirza, The sporting icon has been making India proud by establishing a significant place in the world Tennis ranking. The Muslim clergy from India are making a hue and cry about the attire she wears during the matches. Being a Muslim girl, they said that she was going against the dress code for Muslim women. Steps spoke to a Tamil magazine "Dina Malar" on this issue. Steps felt that Indian Muslim heads, should be more concerned about the game and encourage Sania to bring more laurels to the country rather than blame her for her skirts.

With Other Non-Government Organisations

While organizing Muslim women, STEPS associates itself with other NGOs who are interested in working with Muslim women. Meetings conducted by such organizations are regularly attended which provides solidarity to the efforts of other organization.

Attended and organized programmes

Steps is attending and participating in programmes as an organizing person, resource person and participant. Some of the programmes highlights are listed below for the period April 2005 to March 2006.

LIST OF EVENTS CONDUCTED AND ATTENDED BY STEPS

APRIL 2005-MARCH 2006

DATE	PROGRAM/EVENT	PARTICIPANT	PLACE
04.04.05	State level workshop for Muslim women & press meet	STEPS team & Muslim Women	ICSA, Chennai

23.04.05	State level staff meeting	Steps team	Annavasal
24.04.05 – 01.05.05	Workshop on the atrocities on women & female infanticide	Sartaj	Bihar
27.04.05	Interview with the reporter of Times of India	Director, Swathi	Pudukkottai
04.06.05	State level Muslim women conference	Steps team, Muslim women	Begumpur, Dindugal
22.06.05 23.06.05	Leadership training to Muslim women	Steps team, Muslim women	Annavasal
03.07.05	Interview with federation members by NDTV	Director, staff, Jamaat members & NDTV crew	Pudukkottai
01.08.05	South Asian Seminar	Director	Bangalore
13.08.05	Public hearing	Steps team& Jamaat members	Thuthukudi
18.08.05	Indian express interview	Director & Steps team	Pudukkottai
28.08.05	Danish TV reporters interview	Director	Pudukkottai
23.09.05	Hunger strike	Steps team, Jamaat members and public	Thuthukudi
27.09.05	Kaalaikathir-interview on Khushboo issue	Director	Pudukkottai
28.09.05	Nawo/Iwid Seminar	Director as resource person	Chennai
09.10.05	General body meeting	Board members and the director	Pudukkottai

13.10.05	Mobile counseling	Steps team, police personnel and public	Thiruvoppor Pudukkottai
06.12.05	Interview by a Swedish reporter	Steps team	Pudukkottai
12.12.05	State Level Men workshop	Steps team, Federation members and men from different districts.	Pudukkottai
11.01.06	Poster Exhibition	Steps team, students	Vathalgundu Dindugal
13.02.06	Tamil nadu womens Forum	Director	Chennai
13.02.06	Asian college of journalism	Director	Chennai
15.02.06	Meeting with minorities minister Shri.A.R.Antulay	Director	Delhi
24.02.06	Nawo meeting	Director & Ms. Roja	Chennai
06.03.06	CWS meeting	Aslam	Hyderabad
08.03.06	Teacher training institute	Director and staff	Lalgudi
10.03.06	CWS-Regional Annual Consultative meeting	Steps staff	Auroville Podicherry

PROGRAMMES ATTENDED BY THE DIRECTOR

Date	Programme	Venue
28.08.05	Programmme on Minority rights	Hyderabad
01.08.05	South Asian seminar on dialogue of	Bangalore

	civilizations and peoples movement	
28.11.05	Protest to protect the right to womens freedom of expression	Chennai
13.09.05	Campaign for Imraana issue	Chennai
17.11.05	Meeting with Actress Khusboo	Chennai
12.02.06	Resource person at the South Asian College of journalism	Chennai
13.02.06	Meeting with central minister on minorities issue	New Delhi
05.03.06	Meeting	Thirukovilur
08.03.06	Women's day celebration at the Bharathidasan University and received an honour	Trichy
08.03.06	Special invitee at Teacher training Institute	Lalgudi
09.03.06	Chief guest at women's day meet at Little Flower School	Manapparai
10.03.06	Dalit cultural meeting along with students from Visthar	Madurai
25.03.06	Special guest at St.Joseph Social Service Convent	

Important visitors to Steps

Besides empowerment activities, Steps also entertains and encourages students and other visitors from other countries as well as our own to pursue their research on women studies, especially Muslim women studies. Given bellow is the list of visitors who visited Steps during the reporting period.

Date	Name of the person	Country	Purpose
09.08.2005	Ms.Lusley	USA	Research on rights of

			minority women
18.08.2005	Ms. Jaya Menon	India	Reporter
05.10.2005	Ms Nagma Iman	Delhi, India	To study the activities of Steps
05.10.2005	Mr.Neelamber and Mr.Neelkant from CWS	Hyderabad, India	To study the activities of Steps
17.02.2005	Ms.Matilda Tomgren, Ms Nadia and Ms.Livalhgren	Sweden	Research strudents
15.03.2005 to 23.03.2005	Ait Limbu Mr.Bibek kumar Ms Sayeeda Akhtar Ms Halima Abdullah Ms.Henny Ulva	Nepal Nepal Kashmir Philippines Indonesia	To study about identities, especially on Muslim women (from Visthar)