

A National Conference on

Voices of the Unheard: Putting the Last First

held at Xavier Institute of Social Service, Ranchi
8-9 November 2019

A two day National Conference on 'Voices of the Unheard: Putting the Last First' was organized by Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS) in collaboration with Plan India and Save the Children on 8-9 November 2019 at XISS, Ranchi.

Inaugural Session

The conference began with an inaugural function held on 8 November 2019. This session was coordinated by Dr. Raj Shree Verma and Mr. Anup Hore. The Guest Speaker for the session was Ms. Aruna Roy, Ramon Magsaysay Awardee & Founder, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan. Ms. Aruna Roy in her inaugural address said: "Language is the biggest barrier and also the biggest tool to understand the voices of the unheard." In her address, she talked about the lives of the unheard and marginalized in front of the audience captivating them with how a small change like ensuring work in every hand might change the lives of these marginalized. She concluded saying that the main concern of every poor is to have a job, be it a poor from anywhere in India.

The inaugural session also saw the attendance of Prof. Amar E. Tigga, Acting Director, XISS; Prof. Himadri Sinha, HoP-Rural Management, XISS; Mr. Anindit Roy Choudhary, Save the Children; Mr. Tushar Anchal, Plan India, and Dr. Anant Kumar, the Conference Convener.

In this session, Prof. Tigga highlighted the need of balance between the Voices of Heard and Unheard in attaining sustainable development and said that taking along the deprived section of the society with the development agenda is very important.

Prof. Himadri Sinha emphasized on XISS's role in the upliftment of the marginalized community through various programs and supplementing the process of development with other Government initiatives.

Dr. Anant Kumar, the convener of the conference talked about the conference theme, 'Voices of the Unheard: Putting the Last First'. He said

that the theme 'Putting the last first' is the core value of XISS with which it was established way back in 1955. He also mentioned that the voice, participation, and accountability are the major thrust areas around which development evolves, and any change cannot be felt unless and until people are able to express their voices, share their opinions, participate in their own development, and take accountability for their success and failure. He also mentioned about conference subthemes and shared that this conference is an opportunity to bring academic scholars and unheard voices on one platform to discuss, empower and echo the voices of those who are unheard and left behind.

Meanwhile, Mr. Choudhary shared that children are the future of society and we should be able to create opportunities for children to be able to help themselves. Mr. Anchal stated that the protection of our children is a challenge today as crimes against children have increased in society and that community approach in this regard is a necessary step and civil society should come forward.

On the first day, two sessions were held with Session chair and paper presenters in attendance.

Session I: Gender Equality and Inclusion Issues

The first session on Gender Equality and Inclusion Issues was chaired by Prof. Ravi Verma from the International Center for Research on Women. Prof. Verma said that one should learn to reconstruct power and deal with its negotiations and that accomplishment of one SDG leads to the attainment of another.

The papers presented in this session were 'Addressing the question of 'exclusion' of Dhuku women in OBC communities through the voices of six women in Gumla' by Ms. Aarshi Jahan; 'Beyond 377: Is Corporate India LGBT Inclusive' by Dr. Sangita Laha & 'Commercial Sex Workers and their children: A Study in Bokaro district' by Dr. Muktidani Kullu.

In this session, Voice of Unheard was Ms. Rumi Kumari (A Woman Survivor) from Save the Children who shared her experience stating: "Upon returning home after escaping as a house help, I was treated as a house help only by my relatives and neighbors; but today after all the struggle I have gone through, they see me as 'One who shows ways to other". This was followed by a poster presentation by Mr. Nishant on 'Releasing the Caged Canary: Case of Empowering the Tribal Women'.

Session II: Child Rights

The second session on Day 1 was on Child Rights and it was chaired by Prof. Shanta Sinha, M V Foundation, Padma Shri and Ramon Magsaysay Award winner and she said that rights are entitlements, to every person which they should have every day for the rest of life without discrimination.

The papers presented in this session were by Tanvi Jha and Nalini Khurana on 'Prevention of Child Marriage in Santhal Paragana region of Jharkhand: Opportunities and challenges to address inequitable social norms'; Sushanta Kumar Panda on 'Community participation for overcoming cultural barrier to promote sexuality education for vulnerable children in tribal residential schools in the state of Odisha, India' & Swati Sarbani on 'Equity impact of a multilayered community based intervention to reduce undernutrition in Jharkhand and Odisha'.

This was followed by two Unheard voices namely; Ms. Sarthi Tudu, a girl child survivor who said: "Some girls want to fly high in the sky but their families create hurdles in their way to achieve their dreams." She is a survivor and after completion of intermediate, she started imparting tuitions to the girls of her village free of cost. She was also awarded in the youth championship for being a catalyst for change through spreading awareness related to girl education.

Another speaker was Master Ajay Gope, who is a member of a committee which stands for underprivileged children. He has rescued a girl from child marriage and has been continuing his efforts to date. He was awarded "Child Champion Award" in Delhi. He said: "Girls and Boys both should have equal rights". This was followed by a poster presentation by Geetha Kumari on 'Dark streets: Case of children under duress'.

Session III: Vulnerable Population Groups

On the Second Day of the Conference, the day began with the third Session named Vulnerable Population Groups and was chaired by Dr. Alka Nizamie who talked on the vulnerable population groups especially those with disabilities. She said that disability in humans should not be seen as a deficiency since disabled people can equally perform if given proper training and opportunity.

The paper presented in this session were 'Use of telemedicine to reduce the disease burden on the aging population- An intervention in Rajasthan' by Abhishek Kumar; 'Living with waste injury: Voices from Ranchi's sacrificial zone' by Dr. Radhika Borde and 'Internal migration, disparities and the post-2015 development agenda: unheard voices from the slums of Mumbai' by Noli Nivedita Tirkey.

The Voices of Unheard in this session were Ajit Kumar, Convener, Disability Rights Forum who said that there are specific rights and policies of the state

for disabled people and government officials should be sensitized on those so that they can implement it with empathy and sensibility.

He was followed by Sitaram Mandal, Convener, Akshyvat Bujurg Mahasangh who narrated his experience on how a group of old people founded the organization with the help of Help Age India for the support of old age people with regard to health and other social assistance.

And then Mukesh Kanchan, Head, Disabled Sports, and Jan Utthan Samiti shared his experiences about providing training to the differently-abled sports persons on different sports and how trainees from his organization have represented at national and international levels. The poster presented for this session was by Kalyani Biswal and Dipti Paridhi Kindo on 'Emotional maturity vs. resilience in migrated rural female students'.

Workshops on Community-led approach to Child Protection

The conference also had two workshops on Day I and II on Community-led approach to Child Protection Coordinated by Mr. Rajeev Sinha, Plan India.

The conference gave an opportunity to learn to engage with communities to change local beliefs and practices that harm children. The approach of the workshop was to get results that are far more effective and sustainable than expert- driven, top to bottom approaches thus reaching & changing the lives of the most marginalized last family & children.

Valedictory Session

The conference was concluded with the Valedictory Session in which the Rapporteurs report was presented by Dr. Pramila Panda, HoD, Department of Research & Publication. Dr. Panda summed up all the discussions of the entire national conference focusing on the subaltern perspective of history i.e history from below. This was followed by the introduction of Chief guest by Fr. Pradeep Kerketta S.J., Assistant Director, XISS. The valedictory speech was given by Prof. Ramesh Sharan, Vice-Chancellor, Vinoba Bhave University, Hazaribagh, Jharkhand who focused on the importance of hearing voices of unheard especially of women. Further, he focused on the development & empowerment of women, SDG goals and is literacy making development in our society.

Lastly, the vote of thanks was given by Prof. K. K. Bhagat, RM, XISS thanking each individual involved in making the national conference a success.