

Influencing Stakeholders: Advocacy Workshop For Interfaith Practitioners

19th & 20th June 2016
At the Umrao Hotel, New Delhi

REPORT SUMMARY

Introduction

Sarva Dharma Samvaad (SDS) is a civil society organisation which encourages inter-faith dialogue among youth inter-faith practitioner. Its objective is to promote religious tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful co-existence. Keeping in view this objective, SDS in collaboration with KAICIID (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue) organised two-days workshop on- “Influencing Stakeholder: Advocacy Workshop for Interfaith Practitioner”, which was conducted on 19th and 20th June 2016 at The Umrao Hotel, New Delhi.



Workshop Objectives:

The objectives of this workshop were:

- to equip the interfaith practitioners with an understanding of advocacy and its theoretical underpinnings
- to motivate interfaith practitioners to formulate interfaith advocacy groups to make society a more civil and just space



- to provide hands-on training to interfaith practitioners in advocacy tools and strategies

Profile of the Resource Persons:



The key resource person for the workshop was **Ms. Anshu Chaudhary**. She is an expert soft-skill trainer with over eight years of experience in consulting and teaching. Presently, she is associated with the Department of Psychology at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi in capacity of Assistant Professor. Previously she has conducted workshops on mental health advocacy and has acted as resource person for media and social

media training for inter-faith practitioners.

For the initial session of the workshop, Ms. Chaudhary was supported by **Dr. Vikas**



Baniwal who is an expert in the area of interfaith dialogue. Dr. Baniwal has completed his doctoral studies in field of education from University of Delhi and is currently pursuing his post-doctoral studies from Jawaharlal University as ICPR (Indian Council of Philosophical Research) fellow. Apart from teaching at University of Delhi, Dr. Baniwal also acted in capacity of Assistant Director of Inclusive Education at Central Board of Secondary Education (C.B.S.E.). Prof. M.M. Verma (President and Founder of Interfaith Foundation) and Dr. Archana Gaur (Representative, Directorate of

Education, Delhi) acted in capacity of the observers for the workshop.

Participant Profile:

The workshop was well-attended by 20 youth participants representing various religious organizations working on interfaith teaching at the grass-root level in different corners of India. Most of the participants were youth falling in the age range of 20 to 40 years. Most of them were very well qualified, highly experienced and had key positions like National General Secretary, All India President, Co-founder, Researcher and Trainers in their respective organizations. Few religious



priests also participated enthusiastically in the workshop. The workshop saw participation from some well-known religious and inter-faith organizations in India. Some of the key organizations who nominated their members to attend the training included United Religions Initiative, Shanti Ashram, Tahseeni Foundation, Student Islamic Organization, Remembering Allah, Global Network of Religion for Children (GNRC), Church Doctrine Father, Department of Art and Culture from Government of Goa, MASH Global Trust, Acharya Sushil Muni Ashram, Ahimsa Bhawan, Risho Kosei- Kai, Focolare Movement, Islamic Relief Fund, Quill Foundation, and Art of Living. Though the workshop was organized in Delhi, the participants hailed from different parts of the country. Apart from Delhi, some of the regions represented were: Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Delhi.

Overview of the Workshop:

Day 1 of the training program started with welcome from the Chairperson of SDS, Mr. Manu Singh. Mr. Singh also introduced the resource person-Ms. Anshu Chaudhary-and handed over the stage to her. The first session was introduction where both participants and the resource persons got to know each other better. The next session on day one was theoretical introduction to the idea of ‘advocacy’ which was followed by a session on exploring the linkages between advocacy and inter-faith. Post lunch session on day 1 was dedicated to exploration of nuances of forming an inter-faith advocacy groups and dealing with the challenges in developing inter-faith collations. After this session, the participants formed their own interfaith advocacy groups and selected a topic for advocacy. The rest of the day involved undertaking hands-on activities as group on developing the ‘inter-faith advocacy strategy’.



Day 2 started with a recapitulation of key learnings on day 1. Since formulating the ‘inter-faith advocacy strategy’ is a vast area involving multiple steps, the exercise



continued till post lunch session on day 2. The participants engaged in variety of group activities and exercises to formulate the advocacy strategy as a group, which they presented in the post-lunch session. The trainer continuously engaged with the participants giving them continuous feedback and suggestions. In the session that followed the group presentations, i.e. 'Diary from the field', Chairperson of SDS-Mr. Manu Singh, was invited by the resource person to share his experience of advocating in inter-faith group for animal rights in case of banning the Gadhimai animal slaughter festival in Nepal. After this very interesting and moving session, the closing remarks were made by the resource person-Ms. Chaudhary. This was followed by the valedictory session and distribution of the certificates. The workshop closed with a vote of thanks from the organizers.

Workshop Proceedings: Discussions and Key Learnings

To set the interactive tone for the coming two days, the workshop opened with an ice-breaker activity, which aimed at making participants better acquainted with each other's work and inter-faith initiatives. The **'role-reversal' activity** got participants interacting with each other as pairs for 10 minutes after which the roles were reversed, i.e., they assumed their partner's identity and introduced them as if they are introducing themselves. Assuming the identity was not so easy, yet the participants enjoyed this fun way of getting to know each other better. The essence of the activity, however, was to give participants a taste of advocacy, i.e. understanding the needs, beliefs and expectations of the 'other' and accurately representing them.

Session 1 of the workshop was aimed at acquainting participants with **theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of 'advocacy'**. Ms. Chaudhary introduced the concept of advocacy through a brief reflective exercise where participants were asked to go down the memory lane and think of a situation where they were not able to voice their opinion or assert themselves in the matter of importance. Through the discussion on reflections of the participants, it was established that no matter how well connected or influential one is, everyone needs advocacy and everyone can be an advocate for others. The discussion was extended to the definition of advocacy, its differentiation from related terms, its sub-types and characteristics. The significance of advocacy in promoting a society rooted in ethics of care was also discussed in this session. During the discussion, it was highlighted that the advocacy initiatives play a crucial role in putting policy makers in touch with the ground reality of the marginalized section of the society, thereby democratizing the way policies are made. It was also discussed that the advocacy initiatives make any government or institutions more accountable and strengthen the civil society. At the end of the first session, few real life case studies of advocacy initiatives were shared with the participants.



Session 2 aimed at highlighting the **interface between advocacy and interfaith practice**. The session was jointly rolled out by Ms. Chaudhary and Dr. Baniwal. Dr, Baniwal, through his lecture and discussion emphasized on the idea of interfaith dialogue and the ways in which advocacy initiatives take form of action oriented inter-faith dialogue. He also reiterated the significance of acknowledging and respecting the otherness of the other as an ethical basis for meaningful dialogue and effective advocacy.

Dr. Baniwal's training session elaboration focused on the ways in which, dialogue can be used both as a medium and a tool for the advocacy by interfaith practitioners. Towards the end of the discussion, Ms. Chaudhary highlighted the ways in which inter-faith organizations, leaders and practitioners are in a unique and privileged position to take advocacy forward. She also emphasized that the youth practitioners should integrate socially ameliorative actions in their interfaith practice and advocacy offers that unique opportunity. She highlighted that the appeal and following of interfaith leaders and the massive resources of interfaith organizations could be used to give much needed impetus to advocacy activities.



Before commencing with the workshop post lunch, in order to promote collaboration and synergy, a group activity called '**shrinking island**' was carried out. The purpose of the activity was to let participants acknowledge the importance



of sharing and sustainability, especially where there are limited resources. The participants not only enjoyed this fun-filled activity, but also appreciated the idea behind the activity. The activity was followed by session 3 which was aimed at acquainting participants with the dynamics of forming the inter-faith collations. This was achieved through another hands-on activity where participants were required to form an interfaith advocacy group on the cause they believed in. This activity involved participants persuading each other on the advocacy issue and coming together as a group. The permitted group size was 4 members. As a result of this exercise 5 groups were formed and each group identified an advocacy issue to work on. Post activity reflection involved thinking about the challenges one faces while coming together as an inter-faith group despite differences. The typical steps in formation of inter-faith group collations were also discussed.

In **Session 3**, the participants embarked on an extensive module of **'developing advocacy strategy'**. The aim of this module was to equip participants with necessary tools and techniques to develop an advocacy action plan that could be used within their organization context. This module has **six subsections** which were carried out by the participants with help of the resource person for six sessions. Three of these sessions were completed in post-lunch session on day 1 and the rest were carried forward to day 2. The first sub-section was about **identifying an advocacy issue** which involved understanding the issue at hand and developing a compelling advocacy case for the cause. The participants carried out in-depth research for the cause and collected relevant data to narrow down their intervention areas with respect to the issue at hand. In the second sub-session, the participants worked together as a group to **develop aim, objectives and interim activities** to roll-out their advocacy initiative. They worked on the basis of guidelines shared by the resource persons where it was highlighted that goals and interim activities should be SMART, i.e. they should be- specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. The participants also worked towards identifying the funding opportunities for their advocacy initiatives in this sub-session.

The next sub-session was focused on doing **stakeholder analysis** where each of the advocacy groups worked towards identifying the relevant stakeholders and prioritized them depending on their power and influence. These stakeholders included NGO/CSO/CBOs, government departments and others such as community members or traditional healers or media houses. The outcome of this session was that each group identified key stakeholders that they would like to target for their advocacy initiative. At the closing of this sub-session, the resource person concluded the day 1 of the workshop.

Day 2 started with an interactive exercise where participants shared what they discovered new about each other. The exercise was enjoyed by all the participants



as they felt appreciated by their team-members and it strengthened their bonds as a group. This session was followed by the sub-session 4 of the activity 3 where participants learned about different **tactics or techniques of advocacy**. These included lobbying, negotiation, working with media, developing partnerships, collaborations and alliances, campaigning, research & publications, conferences, seminars and workshops. Based on the input on each of these tactics, the participants designed the advocacy tactics for each stakeholder for their advocacy initiative. The next sub-section aimed at **imparting advocacy communication skills** to the participants. This involved developing the content of the advocacy message, choosing the messenger and developing skills for media advocacy. The participants engaged in activities which involved analyzing the advocacy messages from websites and developing the messages for their own advocacy issue. The last sub-section of session 3 was aimed at acquainting participants with the importance of **monitoring and evaluating their advocacy initiatives** to assess if they are going in the right direction. Based on the inputs shared, the groups worked together to develop measurable effectiveness indicators for their advocacy action plan.



Session 4 was dedicated to **group presentations**. Each of the group came forward and presented the advocacy strategy they developed over the course of session 3. Each group was given about 15 minutes for presentation and was evaluated by the rest of the members as feedback. The following presentations were made in this session:

- Group 1- Developing legislation to prevent Islamophobia in India
- Group 2- Promoting education and skill development among transgender
- Group 3- Introducing value education in schools to reduce violence towards self and others
- Group 4- Introducing ethics education in school to promote interfaith understanding and peace
- Group 5- De-radicalization of youth against extremism



After the session, the resource person shared her feedback with the group members and highlighted the areas of improvement in the advocacy strategy of each group. Based on the evaluation of the participants, Group 2 who worked at developing advocacy strategy for the issue of 'promoting education and skill development among transgender' emerged as the group with most robust strategy. The group was appreciated by all present for their efforts.

For **session 5 'Diary from the field'**, Ms. Chaudhary invited the Chairperson of SDS- Mr. Manu Singh-to share his field experience of working in an inter-faith advocacy group to advocate for **banning of the Gadhimai festival in Nepal** which led to slaughter of lacs of animals every five years. The session unfolded as a compelling story-telling session where all the participants heard the moving narrative of the struggle that Mr. Singh had to go through to advocate for animal rights. The participants were both moved and motivated as Mr. Singh narrated the ways in which advocacy initiative, despite so many political and ideological roadblocks, turned out to be a success. The narration was followed with questions, answers, comments and discussions with the participants and it ended with appreciation and applause. After this session, Ms. Chaudhary thanked Mr. Singh for sharing his experience. She further summarized the learnings from the workshop and wrapped up the sessions by thanking the participants and appreciating the efforts of the organizers.





The workshop was concluded with a **valedictory session** where Mr. Aditya Ghidiyal was the chief guest. Mr. Ghidiyal is the President of Association of Greater Noida Industries and is well known for his social service initiatives. He congratulated SDS for their appreciable efforts of promoting inter-faith dialogue and advocacy and shared his experiences of growing up in an inter-faith culture in the city of Lucknow. He also emphasized on the need for promoting inter-faith practices. Prof. MM Verma and Dr. Archana Gaur, who acted as observers for the workshop were also invited to share their comments. At the end of the session, certificates were awarded to all the participants. The two day program ended successfully with a warm note of thanks by the Chairperson of SDS, Mr. Manu Singh.

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