

Report - Campaign on Air Quality

By All India Women's Conference



Clean Air is a Human Right

A Campaign on Air Quality in Delhi

About the organization

All India Women's Conference (AIWC), founded in 1927 by Margret Cousins, is a 90 years old pan-India Non-Governmental Organization established with the primary focus of women's education and empowerment. AIWC has steadily grown into a pioneer women's organization working towards socio-economic empowerment of women. The organization has membership of over 100,000 dedicated women volunteers working through a network of more than 500 branches across India. At the international level, AIWC has consultative status with UN ECOSOC and observer status with the UNFCCC.

Background

Title of a 'polluted city' and Delhi seems to be synonyms for each other for past few years. The US protection agency had issued a notification in 2016¹ stating that fresh air does not exist in Delhi. Currently, Delhi is suffering from the worst air quality in years. Multiple reports suggest that it may leave larger impacts on human health. Delhi government has also issued an advisory for people not to go out during early morning and late evening in the city. The reasons for this continuous deterioration of air quality are multiple, such as crackers burning, stubble burning, large scale construction, and most importantly, vehicular emission. As per the report by Barcelona Institute of

¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/11/07/asia/india-new-delhi-smog-pollution/index.html>

Global Health (ISGlobal) – Spain in 2017², the air pollution can be more harmful than cancer. The Lancet³, a reputed medical journal, stated in 2015 that 2.51 million people die prematurely in India due to diseases linked to air, water, and other forms of pollution. In fact, most of us barely acknowledge that this issue can cause major long term harms on human health and economy. The smog situation of Delhi in 2016 was compared with the dangerous Great Smog of London (1952). However, the situation worsened in 2017 and the initiating factors continued despite legal intervention made by Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.

Objective

Clean air, safe environment, and clean water are some of the objectives of climate and development justice which AIWC advocates for. With that in view a campaign was initiated by AIWC on the issue of air pollution in the month of December 2017. The motive of this campaign was to reach out to the maximum number of Delhi's residents including children, members of civil society, youth and community members to spread the knowledge about:

- a) *The harmful impacts of air pollution*
- b) *that each one of us are responsible to mitigate the situation*
- c) *basic preventive steps to be taken to fight air pollution; and*
- d) *Inculcate the idea of behavioural change among stakeholders to combat the situation.*

The basic idea of the campaign generated from the fact that while governments' and civic authorities' intervention is essential to reduce the air pollution, each individual should also be knowledgeable about emission caused by them personally and do something about it. AIWC being an organization

with primary focus of environment protection, also intended to take up this issue on a war-footing.

Methodology

The campaign majorly focused on raising awareness about toxicity of air in the city, encouraging communities to take strict actions to mitigate the situation, and methods to be safe in such environment. The campaign was instrumental in bringing together multi-level stakeholders, provoke thoughts on adopting effective measures, and generate the feeling of individual responsibility towards this burning issue. Citizens' engagement with the government was also highlighted as an important tool for mitigation initiatives.

AIWC collaborated with Indian Medical Association (IMA) for the city wide campaign and kicked off the one day campaign on December 22nd 2017 in twelve locations of Delhi with the help of its branches. The campaign managed to reach out to more than one thousand people with-in the city. The general awareness on the effects of bad air quality and how one can ensure safety from being negatively affected was delivered among citizens. AIWC branches collaborated with multiple stakeholders and experts for the successful implementation of the campaign. The one day campaign was held at twelve locations in Delhi out of which nine were in schools and three at the community level. The campaign teams in each location consisted of one health expert, one environmentalist, one AIWC member, and other resource person/s depending on the target audience. The output methods for the campaign differed in each location – such as street plays, public rallies, workshops, discussions, Colony Meetings (Mohalla Sabha), and consultations. AIWC branches used immense level of creativity to organize the campaign in their particular locality. The campaign managed to draw stakeholders' attention towards the concerns on health as well as environmental degradation. During the campaigns AIWC also conducted greening the area activity where community people and school children planted five symbolic plants known for reducing pollution which was followed by a pledge to adopt waste management methods, eliminating open burning of waste, keeping the area green, and making people aware about the issue. AIWC also distributed

² <https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/wellness/story/air-pollution-lung-cancer-carcinogen-health-lifest-1077176-2017-11-02>

³³ <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=wm#inbox/161b2602b95fd5e5?compose=161dbdf5aaf7091c>

resource material on air pollution and a list of anti-pollution plants among all participants in English and Hindi languages.

<i>School</i>	<i>Community</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Estimated participation</i>
<i>Nav Durga School</i>	-	<i>Budh Vihar Phase -2, New Delhi</i>	<i>Workshop, discussion, painting competition</i>	110
-	<i>Budh Vihar Colony Rohini Sector -24</i>	<i>Budh Vihar Phase -2, New Delhi</i>	<i>Street play, Rally, mohalla sabha (Community meeting)</i>	140
<i>Gyan Sagar Public School</i>	-	<i>Dwarka Sector 8</i>	<i>Street play, debate, group discussion</i>	90
-	<i>Community Center</i>	<i>Asiad Village</i>	<i>Consultation, community meeting, workshop</i>	75
<i>Midfield Senior Secondary School</i>	-	<i>Jaffarpur</i>	<i>Painting competition, street play, mono act</i>	95
<i>Sarvodaya Co.ed Higher Secondary School</i>	-	<i>Masjid Moth, South Ex-2</i>	<i>Workshop, painting competition</i>	70
<i>Kaushalya World Public School</i>	-	<i>Greater Noida</i>	<i>Street play, mono act, painting competition, workshop</i>	100
<i>Vidya Niketan School</i>	-	<i>Nanak Pura, Moti Bagh</i>	<i>Painting competition, workshop</i>	90
<i>Green Field Public School</i>	-	<i>Vivek Vihar</i>	<i>Discussion, painting competition, slogan writing, quiz event</i>	85
-	<i>Agarsen Bhawan</i>	<i>Vivek Vihar</i>	<i>Workshop, Mohalla Sabha, quiz event,</i>	60
<i>Informal School running by AIWC</i>	-	<i>Sitaram Bazar, Dariyaganj</i>	<i>Painting Competition, discussion, workshop</i>	65
<i>Prem Deep Shankar Singh Memorial Public School</i>	-	<i>Fatehpur Beri</i>	<i>Workshop, painting competition,</i>	80

Target Audience

Target audience for this one day campaign was 10-14 years old adolescents in schools and community members.

Locations

The campaign was organized in twelve locations, mentioned in the table no. 1. Some of these localities have recorded high level of air pollution.

Outcome

Section A - Voices from the schools

Need for wider participation in the battle against air pollution

"The air is our right, a human right, we have never realized this. It is an essential part of Article 21 (Right to Life) in the Indian constitution, it impacts us not just health wise but also economically. It reduces our opportunities to go out, weakens us physically and mentally. It also demarcates rich and poor where poor are being affected the most"

***Female, 15 years old,
Gyan Sagar School, Dwarka***

The above comment was made by a young female participant studying in Gyan Sagar Public School in Dwarka. Additionally, she performed in a street play with her fellow students and gave a passionate speech on how bad air quality has affected her and her peer group.



(Greening of school by students of Kaushalya World Public School, Greater Noida)

The air pollution has been affecting everyone but at different levels and ways. Many young participants experienced discouragement from elders for outdoor activities. They also complained about not being able to meet and play with peer groups even during holidays because of air pollution.

"If I cannot go out and play freely breath without thinking that the air can make me sick, then

what is the point of building parks or advertising that children should play outside to stay healthy?"

***Male, 14 years old
Kaushalya World Public School***

Participants from schools displayed good amount of commitment and will to curb the air pollution in the city. During the campaign at Nav Durga Public School Budh Vihar, participants spoke about the attitude of elders who continue to burn the garbage openly.



(Students performing street play in Gyan Sagar Public School, Dwarka sector -8)

Slogans such as ***"Adhikar Hamara Saaf - Hawa, Hum Kya chahe saaf Hawa"*** (Clean air is our right, we want clean air) were raised during the rally at Budh Vihar, Rohini sector 24. The rally was entirely organized by the young people from the community with some guidance from AIWC. Many of them shared that they are generally never taken seriously. Especially, if they want to share their ideas on the issue or raise concerns with their parents and elders, they often hear that they are too young to have a say. It was also realized that young people mostly are only involved in the implementation but not in the decision making process.

Many students stated that it was the first time that they were given a free space to talk and discuss about the issue which is closely linked to their future. This also highlights the need to have a wider stakeholder consultation including young adults.

"We can see many people bursting crackers freely and openly despite pollution they emit. They will also burn garbage openly because they

do not want to recycle the garbage due to the pre-conceived stigma related to touching the garbage”

***Female, 16 years old
Gyan Sagar Public
School, Dwarka***

The students were aware about the various precautions published as advisory by Delhi government but did not have access to many of such means of protections such as special masks, which were advertised and deemed to be the best option to avoid smog but they were costly. Many of them mentioned that they were using the cloth masks to avoid smog but they learnt that these were not effective. During the discussion with the experts they were informed about the benefits of some anti-pollution plants which was an eye opener for some of them. They were surprised to know that money plant, which is a very common plant in households, can reduce the huge amount of indoor pollution.

Post-campaign, many students reached out to AIWC through various means with an intent to further involve in the fight against pollution.

Section B- Community Engagement

Need for Sustained Efforts and Affordable Mechanisms to Fight Air Pollution

“We understand that keeping our air clean is not just a duty of the government but it is also a responsibility of us, we need to step up and take action. But most of the time we are not aware that what we can do, we are just mere citizens after all.”

***Female, 36 years old
Rohini***

AIWC with the help of its branches organized campaign at the community level. The rally in Budh Vihar colony, Rohini Sector 24, was flagged off by their local councilor Mr. Ajit Kumar Jha, Councilor

North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) Rithala Ward 28n. The rally received positive support from the community members.



(Mr. Ajit K. Jha Flagging off the Rally in Budh Vihar)

Garbage management and disposal was the biggest challenge in Budh Vihar colony, Rithala. There was no MCD truck coming in to collect the garbage as a result the open burning of the garbage was very common. Upon learning the problem Mr. Ajit Kumar Jha has promised to assign a garbage picking truck to collect the garbage from the area regularly.



(Rally in Budh Vihar by community members)

The community people were also enthusiastic about managing the garbage with the help of three R formula, Reduction, Reuse and Recycling. They informed AIWC that they will try to use the formula as much as they can.

“The bad air quality has affected my life a lot, I am suffering from asthma and due to smog I could not even roam around my own colony. There are many people like me who were bound to their houses because of such problems. It is a really good initiative that finally someone like

AIWC is reaching out to people and encouraging to be the change maker to tackle the pollution in Delhi"

***Male, 59 years old
Vivek Vihar***



(Community workshop in Vivek Vihar)

During the workshop in Asiad Village it was realized by the participants that they have been using fuel based vehicles even for small distances such as getting milk or vegetables from a nearby market. Upon realizing how much carbon they have been emitting, some of the members from Residential Welfare Association (R.W.A.) of Asiad Village decided that they will try to walk or cycle for distance within the campus.



(Mohalla Sabha (Community Meeting) in Asiad Village)

There was also a mass scale consensus that an immediate ban on crackers throughout the year is an urgent requirement.

During the discussion in Vivek Vihar, many women participants agreed that their role in this entire issue is quite crucial. They said that they will be taking initiatives to prevent open burning of waste in their

own locality and will make other people aware about the importance of waste management.

"Health is everything, we need to be healthy and to do so we need a healthier and clean environment. This is a crucial time and we need to take the position of change maker instead of damsel in distress"

***Female, 28 years old
Budh Vihar***

During the campaign suggestions for follow up workshops on the subject to keep up the momentum were also made.

Recommendations

The leading questions during the campaign were:-

- What can government do to find a solution for bad air quality in Delhi?*
- How do you see your role in this entire Movement against the air pollution?*
- How can government involve various stakeholders in this process?*

Based on the above questions, following are the complied responses and recommendations-

- *Involving youth in strategy making for combating air pollution is a must rather than involving them only in implementation process.*
- *Women can play a crucial role in this movement. Their indigenous knowledge about natural resources and environment are great strengths to be tapped.*
- *A complete ban on crackers is a must and needed to tackle the air pollution in the city.*
- *The 3R (Reuse-Reduce-Recycle) theory needs to be promoted among all stakeholders to reduce open burning of waste.*
- *Despite ban on open burning of waste it still continues in many areas of Delhi. A heavy fine needs to be imposed and strict adherence thereof needs to be ensured.*
- *Involving community based NGOs can provide a positive contribution in the fight against air pollution.*

- *Air is not an entity or object which can be contained or captured in one particular location. The air flows freely so does the pollution. Even if Delhi becomes the ideal city; there are chances that the city will again face air pollution coming from neighbouring states. Hence, a regular inter-state dialogue and co-ordination is absolutely essential to combat this evil.*
- *There needs to be a mechanism in place to curb the vehicular pollution and government needs to ensure stricter implementation.*

Conclusion

*The one day campaign on air quality issue in Delhi, officially named '**Clean Air is a Human Right**',*

witnessed huge support and participation. The general feedback from the stakeholder was very positive. It was agreed that the issue of air quality can never be solved with just few initiatives. It requires a long term process where government and stakeholders need to work together because it affects one and all not only physically but mentally and economically too. There is certainly an increase in the awareness generation due to media and advertisements; however, a consistent and continues dialogue is a must to take this initiative further. There is also a need to bring behavioral change among citizens and a political will to address the challenges which will certainly make a difference and bring about change.

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