

EARTH REPORTS

First Analysis

March 31, 2016

**Centre for Environment Education
(CEE)**

in collaboration with

Earth Charter International

©CEE

No part of this report may be reproduced without prior permission of CEE

The following summary collates the key points drawn from responses to survey questions along with quotes where relevant. This is only a preliminary compilation and analysis of the initial responses from participants from 9 countries, both developed and developing.

*Dr. Prithi Nambiar
Program Director, Earth Reports
CEE*

Q1. How have your experiences within the family and/or larger community been affected by gender expectations?

Positives:

“My culture and upbringing has shaped my gender identity in no way inferior to men in the society” - Female, 50-55, India.

- Perceptions are gradually changing, and women are now being treated at par with the men. Even at the societal level, gender barriers are fading. Opportunities for women are increasing, and there is hardly a domain that is yet to be scaled by them.
- The larger community as well as the family is becoming really supportive of the overall choices.
- I have not faced any gender discrimination as such specifically, either from my family or from my office.
- Society has changed for the good over the years and so has the role of women.

Negatives:

- Community at large is gender biased and will remain, because we are passing the thoughts to the future generation by our words and deeds.

- In our society/family, there are certain tasks which have typically been assigned to women like household work and taking care of the child, laundry, housekeeping etc. Even, the outside environment is not so supportive.
- In many cases, even when the family is supportive, and gives a healthy childhood to girls with equal opportunities, women still face several exclusions from so called modern and educated society. There are set rules for women and deviation from the set norms are frowned upon.
- Even when women are brought up in conducive and healthy environments, when they grow up they are burdened with extra expectations by society, family and at the workplace, etc.

“The norm is that women have a need to deliver babies and that they have time to take on responsibilities in the house and are available for friendships most of the time. Males are expected to be busy and not have time for such things. That sometimes leads to disapproval”. **Female, 45-50, the Netherlands**

“There is a sense of exclusion from the extended family and larger community even if your own family is OK with the decisions. I will define it as lack of inclusion than exclusion as a lot of it was not targeted to me personally but what I represent and choices. The society is bound by social, economic and religious rituals where there is no defined role for a single person. This is what underlies the lack of inclusion. It’s been an interesting journey as each day I learn more about the society and their way of dealing with this new breed. The single breed has divorcees, widows and unmarried; again while these are all single the ritualistic society has different views and positions for them”. **Female, 40-45, India**

- There is a lot of social stereotype. People usually regard women as fragile, and those who need protection. Women are perceived as the vulnerable gender by the family and community as a whole and not fit for certain professions like engineering, etc., they are encouraged to take up career options like ‘teaching’. However schools nowadays are supportive of gender equality among students.
- Women are expected to be demure, not get angry or raise their voice, as strongly opinionated women are not considered ‘marriage material’. There is much more pressure on women when it comes to getting married, as compared to men. Status of women may also depend on religious beliefs.

“Even though we expect Nordic countries to be fairly equal we still have strong gender based expectations within families. As a mother I am expected to take care of all the issues concerning the child - such as making sure that the child has proper clothes for the weather (which really is a big task in Finland! I'm not only referring to daily clothes but also for purchasing them, storing / getting rid of the small ones, etc). This is just one small example but there are dozens of similar child related tasks that the mom solely is in charge of / has to manage it (tell the husband to take care of something). We call this women's 'meta work', she is micro managing the household yet at the same time working full time just as her husband” - Female, 35-40, Finland

“Emotional disorders have been affecting women the most. Women are basically controlled, dominated and undervalued by the both fraternities and especially male who are reluctant to accept and share the same position with the other gender, though exceptions are found in many incidences. I feel that I am one such exception who though has not suffered much through all these but has experienced such incidence in the society” - Female, 40-45, India

*My culture has shaped my gender identity I guess for some 99%, since I consider gender as a societal construction. I was raised in the fifties and sixties by my mother who was fired as a teacher at the moment she got married. She tried to keep on working, but the norm was that she should take care of the children and household. My father who was sick and could not work was considered to become the breadwinner. I was fortunate that my parents encouraged me to study and develop myself in a free spirit”
-Female, 55-60, the Netherlands*

“I really do not understand why women should get half of inheritance. Islamic scholars say it's because men are the spenders. Why do we have to treat women as burden every time; someone who needs to be taken care of, as if she's very old or sick”? -Female, 20-25, Bangladesh

“I belong to the Babaji community of Junagadh, Gujarat. The Babaji community’s occupation is to conduct religious rituals for a living. The community has strong patriarchal influence, as a result the girl child education is not much encouraged. The common belief of the community is that if a girl gets educated and empowered then it would be difficult to find the right groom for her from within the community. Such regressive and backward thinking leads to young girls getting married off at a tender age, even before they attain puberty. So we see the prevalence of child marriage in the community, a practice which is legally not permitted.

Thus, when my father decided to educate me and two other sisters, he had to face a lot of opposition from his immediate family and relatives, who were of the opinion that the girls need not study and rather learn household chores, which will be useful after marriage. My parents did not toe their line and chose to educate us. The stand taken by them at that time, has enabled three of the sisters to get educated and get empowered for leading a dignified life. I have even enjoyed economic freedom at my parental home. I have taken all the financial decisions on my own. Even in the matter of choosing life mate, my family has been very liberal towards me, so we see that the community practices did not influence us much. Mittal said, “There is no alternative to hard work. Success comes only to those who work hard for it. Only having lofty dreams and aspirations cannot help you achieve the cherished goals. Success comes to those who relentlessly move on irrespective of challenging circumstances. And to achieve the cherished dreams, the human being keeps on striving hard and if any of the goals are not achieved then they accept defeat. Without the support of my parents, and the exposure at Saath, it would not have been possible.” -Female, 25-30, India

MIXED:

- Family expectations from male children are different even in liberal and supportive families. Men are not often judged on the basis of their personal choices and have more freedom than women when it comes to choosing the course of their life, while women are judged more even in the comparatively more liberal societies of the west.
- The women are also so used to the norms that they do not question it and think that is the right way, hence accepting and themselves giving this invisible consent. Not being rebellious and aware, women indirectly promote the same system
- Even in developed and comparatively 'free' countries like Netherlands, etc. where women don't feel the need to behave in any particular way because of their gender, it is still incredibly difficult to change a whole culture's view on something as complicated as gender. Still many people believe that men are worth more than a woman and even though it is not openly talked about still there are issues like women are not paid equally for the same work as men.
- The role of media: Media representations of women can also often affect our beliefs and attitude towards them.
- Gender inequality still prevails in communities in Nepal. Generally people prefer sons over daughters. However, perspectives are changing slowly.

“From my observations of my female cousins in South India what education led to was different for men and women, education apparently did matter only till they got married and only a few took up a career. I also think that my mother being a career woman played an important role in shaping our thoughts that having a job and family was doable. The family was supportive about our education but certainly didn't expect us to rebel about everything - education, career, and marriage.” -Female, 30-35, India

- Male opinions are given importance in family decisions. It is the man who takes decisions related to important matters, even decisions related to the women of the house.
- Role of media is important. Many a times, media in the form of films and dramas represents women in a certain set of roles and with some characteristics like women being “needily naggy” etc. which influences the generic view about women. Also the prejudices society holds towards women are quite restrictive.

Q2. How can we as a society change values, attitudes and beliefs to achieve gender equality and empowerment?

- Education has a prominent role to play in impacting the mindsets of the masses and bringing about a change in the societal perspective.
- Apart from formal education it should also be awareness at a personal level. Sensitization towards gender issues is very important.
- Initiating discussions and providing people with a platform to talk about these issues.

“I am horrified that I already have been thinking about how to combine a job and family life since I was very young. I know that it will be very hard for me to work as much as I want and be a mother – a care my boyfriend has never experienced. I hate it that he will not get pregnancy leave and that I will be judged as a bad mother by some when I want to keep on working fulltime (and as an unemancipated wife if I don't). Every bad thing I do reflects on my character, while the mistakes men make are often seen as 'boys will be boys'-behavior”. - Female, 25-30, the Netherlands

- At the policy level, it is the availability of opportunities that would lead to empowerment. Decision makers must focus on creating and sustaining opportunities for women, be it in the domains of education, employment or equality. A three-pronged approach of educating, equalizing and empowering should certainly go a long way in achieving gender parity.

“I have been lucky enough to be born in a well educated liberal household. So in most cases my family has not restricted my growth or ideas just because I am a girl. Though in some areas such as travelling my gender does restrict some freedom due to issues of safety and security. And though my family is well understanding the same cannot be said about the community/society. I have had experiences where I was looked down upon just because I had a different dressing style or different values and thoughts from members of my gender as well as the opposite gender”. -Female, 25-30, India

- Developing skills in women, whether entrepreneurial or service based can help them achieve financial security. Women should be encouraged to take up careers in fields which are often not deemed suitable for them. There should be a focus to target issues at grass root level.
- Policies should be made at work places to compensate men and women equally for the same work they do. Also the policies should be such that they allow men and women equal opportunities to balance out professional and personal lives. Eg: paternity leaves, etc. for men.
- Lead by example: case studies of successful women. Role models in TV-series, at schools, at universities and at work
- Gender equality and empowerment can only be possible through proper awareness, counseling, setting new and strict laws, being an exemplary and above all the major factor being acceptance of changes in the society.
- More women in top positions, board representation as a requirement for governmental support, tenders, etc.
- Flexible arrangements in the work context to allow women to step out of their homes and step up.
- Use platforms with wide outreach like social media, TV, Radio, Newsletters, etc.
- Educate your kids (both male and female) about the concept of gender equality from a very young age and find as many examples/stories as possible to let them understand the global issue. Also, encourage girls to express their views and opinions firmly.
- Access to & control over incomes, resources & assets. Through quality of Women in property, assets and also her duties to take care of her parents even after marriage. A holistic change of the society.
- We should focus on celebrating the differences between a man and a woman rather than discriminating on the basis of those differences.
- We can bring about the desired change by including all the stakeholders like the children, community, family members, school, NGOs and Government in the change process. Change cannot be brought about by a single person's efforts; it has to be a collaborated effort. Gender sensitization should be imparted from the very beginning, so that the future generations of men and women are able to live a life based on justice, equality and peace in a gender sensitive society. Gender sensitization should be imparted from the schools itself, since what we imbibe during childhood is what remains for a lifetime. The onus of creating a gender sensitive society depends on males and females equally. We need to create

positive outlook among the females about themselves, which will help them stand up for their rights and develop a forward looking approach towards themselves and society. Moreover, develop sensitivity among the males from very beginning towards females, so that they grow up with positive frame of mind towards the other sex as adults and treat them equally and sensitively.

- We should keep aside the stereotypes of "should/shouldn't" and give individuals the liberty to choose what they want.
- Being raised by a financially independent or working mother as compared to a mother who stays at home, can also have influences on a child where they see women's role in the society and the way see "yourself". Thus affirmative policies for empowering women to work/ have their own business can make a difference in the long term.
- We can change by talking. We should use our social media like facebook, twitter, etc. more responsibly to work towards the betterment of the society by empowering women through starting discussions on forums, other online platforms, etc. and involving men in those discussions.
- Many a times, constructions of race, sexuality and gender meet in the songs that our radio stations play over and over again. Its important to be more critical and diverse in our media output. Aside from this, we really need pregnancy leave for new fathers.
- Fathers need to be taken more seriously if we want our mothers to keep working. This would also make it less interesting to fire a pregnant woman (which illegally happens all the time through legal loopholes) and easier for both parents to discuss the distribution between work and care in equal ways.
- As a society we should accept the changes occurring in own society and country due to globalization and wide spread education. We should know that as the male gender will change with time, so will the female gender. Communicating via dialogue and practicing of the said beliefs with families and individuals regarding equality, respect and empowerment of women will go a long way in changing the outlook of society.
- Self defense courses should be provided to the girls in schools as part of curriculum itself. Awareness about the rights they are legally entitled to according to a nation's law and constitution.
- Advocating. We also have to raise our children equally - not to raise them as a boy or as a girl with different responsibilities. We have to follow up with gender equality in work places / institutions / higher positions. Are we having the other gender overly represented in certain positions / under represented? If so, why? Do

we need reserved seats for the underrepresented gender? That usually helps to change the practice and later the gender quotas become less necessary.

- Have to start from the root, sensitize at an impressionable age. Educating children about the importance of gender equality and giving them a chance to interact with the society to learn the values.

Q3. With respect to your values and beliefs, are there certain things that you feel you should and should not do or say because of your gender?

- There is the risk of being judged depending on the audience of course. Women do face isolation at times on account not meeting societal expectations. Collectively the society including women most of the times see empowerment as a threat and would subconsciously reject or not accept the silent nuances of empowerment and equality. Equality and empowerment are largely misunderstood. Characteristics that reflect equality / empowerment are often considered as a masculine feature. The sense of equality is developed or learnt through experience and interactions / reactions / responses. An equal enabling environment is not there as the society is not aligned to the equality. One learns to say or not say basis degree / extent of one needs or acceptance to be part of a society.

“How many government institutions are there where they have a day care facility to support woman. Such interventions have been largely limited.

We talk about maternal and child health. But, when it comes to policy planning, how much days of leave is actually assigned to women. Do we have any guidelines where they mention about working woman with child up to three years to be supported with child care travel also while on duty? Not as such.

The mindset change is not possible in few years, it might take decades. But, policies and guidelines can be framed keeping in mind the needs of women at all levels in the societal structure be it young, married, pregnant & lactating mother, mother or henceforth”. –Female, 30-35, India

“At its core, I see this as an ethical question. How does one change someone's ethical position? This is a huge question”. - **Male, 30-35, Taiwan**

- Certain things which are frowned upon when women do it don't catch society's attention when a man is doing that. Women are answerable to all and any such question which the other gender enjoys as nobody thinks it important to question the male fraternity.
- Women, especially in countries like India are expected to come home at time, expected to make comfortable professional choices as it is believed their primary focus should be taking care of their home and family, men however do not have to juggle so much between personal life and professional.
- Women are not encouraged to work in remote areas or at odd hours because their safety is a concern, while men do not have such curfews generally.
- Should do: good cooking, dealing with household stuffs, staying at home instead of working. Shouldn't do: Still various social stigmas are there like don't enter temples during menstruation, etc. as women are considered impure when menstruating.
- Even the women who belong to comparatively forward societies like in the west, feel that somewhere they do have to keep in mind things like “The way they shouldn't dance/dress/look at people” in order to not suffer with unwanted consequences like harassment, eve teasing, etc.
- Most of the TV dramas, sometimes produced by women themselves, eg: Ekta Kapoor, perpetuate patriarchal mindsets by depicting women decked up in gold and squabbling with her in-laws over inheritance issues. Why can we not show an assertive, educated woman challenging corruption, or excelling in her professional/academic life?
- Many women still consider feminism as a political movement, rather than a social justice movement. The term “feminism” is highly misunderstood by both genders.
- There are things others believe women should not do or say as a woman. For example, women should not curse too much while it's ok for men. You shouldn't be too rebellious and too vocal about not wanting to marry, have kids, or cook. Women should not speak about their sexual and reproductive health. Women should not challenge older men or correct men of any age.
- People are often annoyed when women speak up or are opinionated, while they are not annoyed with men who speak the same amount. A woman's opinions are often valued lower than those of her male counterparts

“We lived with my grandma who was pretty conventional always telling us what not to wear, how to behave in public, not to interact with boys, etc. My dad and brother would also behave flaunt their male privilege once in a while. I think that those things stay in one's consciousness, today I know that all they said was utter nonsense but it does come to the surface sometimes, and one imposes it on oneself. For eg. I've lived alone in many places but still afraid of going out after dark, I sometimes dress keeping in mind what other people might perceive of me, am I being able to balance my work life and take care of the house like my dear mum or my female cousins. Assuming that taking care of the house is what the female does and not asserting that it is equally the man's responsibility” – Female, 30-35, India

“Even though my family does not mind me being my own person with my own personality, thought process and coping mechanism, I have often felt the need to do things according to the norm set by the society due to my gender.”- Female, 20-25, India:

“I may want to have kids after 35 or later. but if I say that to my family they will rebuke me as according to them, career should not be a priority for me. In fact my mother stopped practicing for 10 years to raise me and my 2 siblings”. - Female, 25-30, India