

CONSTITUTION OF COMMITTEE AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT (CASH) AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, KOLKATA

INTRODUCTION

On 13 August 1997, the Supreme Court of India declared that sexual harassment of women is a violation of the fundamental right of women to work in a safe environment. The Supreme Court has defined 'sexual harassment' to include:

1. Physical contact and advances
2. Demand or request for sexual favours
3. Sexually coloured remarks
4. Display of pornography
5. Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature

Often such behaviour goes unpunished because victims hesitate to report such behaviour out of shame or fear or both. It is important for women to protest against any behaviour that they feel is unwelcome and unacceptable. The Committee against Sexual Harassment at the National Library has been set up with the aim of providing women employees and readers with an appropriate complaint mechanism against unwelcome sexually determined behaviour whether directly or by implication.

OBJECTIVES OF CASH

The objectives of the Committee are to:

1. prevent discrimination and sexual harassment against women, by promoting gender amity among employees and readers;
2. make recommendations to the Director General for changes/elaborations in the Rules and Regulations, to make them gender just and to lay down procedures for the prohibition, resolution, settlement and prosecution of acts of discrimination and sexual harassment against women, by the employees and readers;
3. deal with cases of discrimination and sexual harassment against women, in a time bound manner, aiming at ensuring support services to the victimized and termination of the harassment;
4. recommend appropriate punitive action against the guilty party to the Director General.

PROCEDURE FOR APPROACHING CASH

The Committee deals with issues relating to sexual harassment at the National Library, Kolkata. Its purview includes all cases affecting all employees and readers. A complaint of discrimination or sexual harassment may be lodged by the victim or a third party. A written complaint may be addressed to the Convener of the CASH. If the complaint is made to the Director General, Principal Library Information Officer or any of the Committee members, they may forward it to the Convener of the Committee against Sexual Harassment.

STRUCTURE OF CASH

Constitution: A total of six persons representing the different levels and Departments/Divisions of the organisation would constitute the Committee. A gender balance should be ensured when constituting the Committee. The number of women should at no time be less than 50%. The Chairperson of the Committee should be a woman. While the Core group of the Committee should be small, in order to ensure better functioning and coordination, an option would be left open for the Committee to establish/ appoint/ invite other members from organisation to form Referral Groups as and when required.

Membership Criteria: Members of the Core Group should have been in the organisation for a minimum of two years. The members selected to join the Committee should have a clear understanding of gender issues, and should have preferably undergone a short training in dealing with the issues concerned.

Tenure of Committee: The Core Group of the Committee will have tenure of two years. After this two-year period a review will be undertaken to assess the work of the Committee and constitute a new Committee.

Of the six members of the Committee only one-third of them should be replaced to lend continuity to the efforts of the group. Only in exceptional circumstances should more members be replaced.

In case of a vacancy created in the Core Group of CASH, a panel of three names prepared by the Committee will be forwarded to the DG, National Library, for final selection.

FUNCTIONS OF CASH

The functions of the Committee have broadly been divided into three categories:

- 1. Institutional**
- 2. Internal**
- 3. External**

Institutional Functions

To ensure that all staff policies, service rules and regulations of the organisation are gender just and gender sensitive. Periodic reviews toward the purpose should be undertaken. The Committee would also ensure that these policies conform to government provisions, which the organisation follows.

Recruitment and Induction

The organisation would have a gender sensitive recruitment policy. All new staff members joining the organisation shall be oriented to the organisation's Gender Policy and the role and functions of the Committee.

Training and Reviews

The organisation would be committed to creating and promoting a gender sensitive work environment within the organisation. Towards achieving this goal, it would organise regular workshops / seminars and exposure to a variety of other inputs regularly.

Sexual Harassment

Through the Committee, the organisation would address complaints relating to sexual harassment made by staff members, guests, and participants to workshops etc.

Documentation of Processes and Dissemination

The organisation document all the processes related to the activities on the issues of gender within the organisation. These would be accessible to all those who wish to use to promote and strengthen gender equality.

Internal Functions

The Committee will work with the organisation staff to create a gender sensitive environment and approach towards professional life.

Workshops / Seminars / Training

The Committee will organize internal training programmes and other events for the entire staff at least once a year, with assistance from an external facilitator, if necessary. The Committee will also be responsible for setting up teams / referral groups within the organisation.

Complaints

The Committee will address complaints relating to sexual harassment made by staff members. The Committee shall be responsible to set up structures where staff members may feel free to seek redress of their grievances. Members of the staff can speak to Committee members (either individually or collectively), or write to the committee.

External Functions

The Committee would also be a key focal point for gender issues and represent the organisation at different fora to share its experience.

MECHANISM FOR CASH

The Committee will meet at least once every quarter. These meetings will be designed to discuss programmes and projects, review of progress on the plans, linkages with other organisations and other issues that may emerge.

Emergency meetings shall be called whenever necessary but a minimum of four members of the Committee should be present or a decision to be taken.