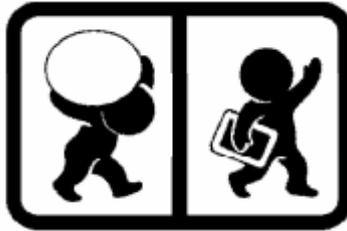


Child Rights at Shabad Mandal

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1. Introduction:

The child rights situation in Shabad Mandal is currently truly extraordinary. 99.6% of the children aged between 5 and 15 attend school regularly. This is a far cry from the situation in 1996, when MVF first started their efforts in the mandal. The mandal has seen impressive improvements with respect to child labour, quality of education, child marriages, child nutrition, child health and support for education. These improvements have been possible only due to the continued efforts of various parties involved in the performance of the society there. As part of this report, I shall look into the roles of each institution, its efforts, the results of the effort and the possible improvements to its activities with respect to the child rights situation in Shabad over the last 15 years since the involvement of MVF in the mandal.



Children at UPS Bodam Pahad

2. Shabad Mandal:

Shabad Mandal is a predominantly rural mandal. It is located in Ranga Reddy district, Andhra Pradesh. The head offices of the mandal, including the offices of the Mandal Regional Officer (MRO) and the Mandal Educational Officer (MEO) as well as the primary police station are located in Shabad town. Shabad town is approximately 70 km from Hyderabad, the capital and largest city of Andhra Pradesh. The primary languages spoken are Telugu and Urdu. Hinduism is the major religion, and Islam is a sizeable majority. The name (formerly Shahbad) hints of large Islamic influence. The main occupation in the mandal is agriculture with the predominance of the potato crop. There are also many rock crushers who provide for the cement factories in the region.

Shabad Mandal contains 66 gram panchayats. There are 66 government schools present, of which 48 are Primary Schools (PS), 10 are Upper Primary Schools (UPS) and 8 are Zilla Parishad High Schools (ZPHS). 65 of the schools are of Telugu Medium, and one (UPS Shabad) is of Urdu Medium. There are also 11 private schools. As of June 2011, 9845 of the 9885 children aged below 14 years are attending school regularly. The number of boys is substantially higher, with 5172 boys for 4713 girls in the state. Most of the children attending private schools are boys; also most of the students out of school are boys.



A boy singing at PS Machenpally

3. Changes in condition since 1996:

In the academic year of 1996-1997, when MVF first started working in Shabad Mandal, 8 villages were completely surveyed. According to the survey, 252 out of 1377 children (18.30%) in those 8 villages didn't attend school. In some cases, such as that of Kummariguda where 79 of the 275 children (28.72%) didn't attend school, more than a quarter of the children didn't attend school. And this was in villages with access to a school. By 2001-2002, in those 8 villages, 1779 of the 1846 children (96.37%) were attending school, a decrease of almost 15 percentage points in the number of child labourers. In Kummariguda, 356 of the 375 children (94.93%) of the children were attending school, a decrease of almost 24 percentage points. In fact, none of the 55 villages surveyed had more than 30 children out of school.



Children eating mid-day meals at PS Kesharam

The current situation, where there are only 40 child labourers in approximately 10,000 children (~ 0.40%), is a major improvement from the time when there were up to 80 child labourers in every village. And the change is not just statistical; there is a huge change in the attitude of society towards education. All sectors of the population have started to appreciate and understand the importance of education. An education has now become an object of pride greater than even wealth. Parents are admitting children to private schools as a status symbol despite the increasing costs, and are actively ensuring the quality of their child's education with regular visits to the school, meetings with the teachers and requests for improvement where necessary.



Children in class at Thirumallapur

The main cause for child labour in the region was the family's need or desire for another working member in the family as soon as possible. Boys would work in agricultural fields or as rock crushers. Even if enrolled in the local school, it was found that the boys hardly attended school and instead went to work. Such incidents have drastically reduced as parents understand the long term economic and social benefits of education. Another major reason was the need for a family member to take care of the younger children in the family while the parents were out of work. Such incidents have significantly reduced due to the availability of Anganwadi centres, and also because older children are bringing with them the younger children to school. This is still a major problem mainly due to the timings of the Anganwadi centre, which closes at 1:00 PM, while students leave school only at 4:00 PM. Also, distance from the school to the Anganwadi centre can also pose a problem.

Other major causes included bonded labour, child marriages and the lack of awareness about education. The issue of bonded labour has been completely eradicated in the mandal, with the help of the police or even the villagers who have volunteered to pay the loan in some cases. Child marriages have been a very huge problem in Shabad Mandal. Historically a lot of child marriages have occurred in Shabad, and continue to till this day. Despite various efforts to educate the public about the misgivings of such marriages and also the installation of strict regulations to combat this, a few marriages continue to happen to this day. Social boycott as well as legal action is used to combat this, and the frequency of such marriages continues to decrease. Currently, everyone is aware of education, and everybody appreciates the need for it. Thus, except in cases of dire need or where the child is stubbornly unwilling to attend school, every child is attending school regularly.



High School Children at ZPHS Thalapally

Currently, as there are very few children outside school, and as the number looks to come down with every passing year, the focus in the mandal of educational authorities, local self-governing institutions, MVF as well as other institutions is to establish a system to ensure a complete quality education for the child free of cost. This has been facilitated by the passage of the Right to Education Act of 2009, and all members of society are striving to enforce it to the greatest possible extent. There have been various problems with such an undertaking, due to the great demands of the RTE and due to inefficiency in co-ordination or operation of one or more of the following institutions.

4. Role of different parties/institutions:

a) MVF:

MVF has acted very carefully yet swiftly for over 15 years in Shabad. When MVF started working in Shabad in 1996, the MVF organizers built a good rapport for themselves in the mandal. This is very evident even today as everybody in the mandal knows about and appreciates the efforts of MVF in the mandal. The head of every institution is grateful to MVF for its continued support in the fight for Child Rights, and every villager, from the farmer to the shop-keeper, can speak only praise for the institution. Even individuals in MVF, such as Mr Mallesh who is the head of operations in Shabad, have become venerable figures in the eyes of the public.



Mr Sathyanarayana of MVF in front of the Kitchen Shed at PS Machenpally

The organizers then start conducting surveys to learn more about the extent and nature of the problem. The most basic survey involves a head count of school-going and non-school going children, while a more extensive survey may include family and personal details such as names,

date of birth, address, highest class attended, etc. These figures are then disclosed to the public. The villagers admit that they knew nothing about the importance of education and child rights and the extent of violation of child rights in their villages before MVF, and thus had no reason to act either. The survey numbers helped them gain a statistical image, as often the school-going children were highlighted and the others ignored.

Following this, the organizers started various awareness programs to get the parents to send their children to school. These included door-to-door motivation programs, street plays, night rallies, village meetings, distribution of pamphlets, writing of slogans on walls, Padyatras or marches, signing of petitions, motivation camps etc. These were the general awareness programs which targeted the entire village, and were especially used in the initial stages. In order to target stubborn parents or children, the organizers would talk to the parents directly at first, and then ask the Sarpanch to approach them as he is a much respected figure, and then ask the friends and family of the parents to motivate and pressurize them into sending their children to school. This approach has shown to have a very good success rate.



A night rally coordinated by MVF organizers in PS Machenpally

The organizers also sets up various groups such as the CRPF and the REPC with volunteer members in various villages, thus establishing a mechanism to handle the child rights situation in the village even in the absence of MVF. They also sign petitions requesting the authorities to sanction various facilities and provisions as per regulation. They also coordinate meetings at the village level (such as the AMC, SEC and general village meetings), mandal-level (such as the CRPF meetings, REPC meetings, Task Force Committee meetings, workshops) and the district-level (such as the CRPF meetings, REPC meetings) and also participate in other meetings (such as the Panchayati meeting, Government workshops, Teacher's Seminars) in order to appraise themselves of affairs and also to resolve any arguments.

The organizers also regularly go for field visits to resolve problems between various parties, seek feedback from various institutions, address the concerns of various parties, conduct surveys and to make sure that the mechanism in place functions smoothly. The organizers of the mandal regularly meet up in the office in Shabad to discuss various affairs, share experiences, compile data, decide on the future course of action, prepare documents such as petitions, pamphlets or press-notes, electronize data, and entertain guests.

There are currently 5 organizers (Mr Malleesh, Mr Sathyanarayana, Mr Ramulu, Mr Sathayya and Mr Narsimhulu) in the mandal, who work every day of the week and operate throughout the mandal jurisdiction. The mandal has been distributed into 5 clusters (Thallapally, Shabad, Bodam Pahad, Hythabad and Chandampally), each assigned to one organizer. They function from a small office in Shabad equipped with a basic computer and other essential facilities necessary for documentation.

b) Policy:

Since 1996, there has been a great development in policy. With the introduction of the RTE Act of 2009, the provision of education has become much easier at the village level. But the amount of resources sanctioned is not sufficient. Sufficient teachers are not available, Vidya volunteers are not working effectively, proper infrastructure facilities are not provided and learning materials are inadequate and insufficient. Sufficient resources should be sanctioned after a comprehensive evaluation of the needs. This should be done as soon as possible due to the nature of the academic calendar - resources are most needed at the beginning of the year. Also, an effective system should be in place to ensure that all the sanctioned resources are effectively utilized. Further, certain items such as school-bags that are necessary but are not provided by the government should be provided.

The RTE handles almost all matters of importance with regard to quality education; however a few essential details are not visible. The Act makes provisions based on number of students enrolled, however it was found in many places that due to low number of students one teacher had to teach all classes. This leads to negligent or insufficient education. A floor amount of resources necessary should be determined irrespective of student numbers. Also, the law makes no provision as to when this number should be checked. In some cases, such as in Machenpally, where due to a large inflow in the last year the number of students jumped from 20 to 51, teachers have not been sanctioned as numbers were low on the last inspected date. Also, the Act does not prioritise between the requirements. A careful prioritisation is essential for the optimum use of resources.

Also, the Act asks for promotion to the next grade without any attendance or performance criteria, and this leads to children continuing to higher grades without having absorbed the material. An effective system should be in place to ensure the understanding of the material. This is especially essential for private schools and schools that lack facilities. Further, the Act serves for only children up to the 8th class. A similar act for higher classes needs to be in place. The Act requires all teachers and volunteers to be trained; however due to shortage of such teachers, a contingency plan is needed to ensure the operation of the school.

c) District level officers:

The district level officers command great authority in the villages. The arrival of any district-level officer's car is met with great fan-fare as well as fear among local authorities. They are also widely respected, and they ardently listen to their words and speeches. The district authorities also have a lot of power with respect to the sanctioning of resources.

These authorities have contributed a lot to the situation here, even with only a signature or even a half-hour visit. They have sanctioned various infrastructure projects for several schools, mostly involving the construction of part of or complete structure. Though these issues may also be addressed by the mandal-level officer, there is quicker response in case of action by the District Collector, District Educational Officer (DEO) or the Deputy-DEO. There have been numerous instances such as in Thallapally and Kesharam where many child marriages were stopped due to the insistence of the DEO or other district-level authorities.

Though quick action has been seen in response to a few petitions, many petitions are ignored by these authorities such as petitions for infrastructure by the headmaster of CPS Arjanwadi, or for another teacher to aid the single teacher in PS Machenpally, possibly due to the scale of issues they deal with. However, a quick response would ensure work happens and also speed things up drastically. Also, more field visits from these authorities would ensure that the lower-level officers are more vigilant.



Children at PS Kesharam

d) Mandal-level officers:

The role of the mandal-level officers is similar to the district-level officers; though they command less respect and have less power, they have greater access to the people and are able to pay greater attention to the mandal. They have the power to sanction minor resources such as funds for clothing, maintenance etc. The Mandal Education Office manages provision of text books and other learning materials.

Mandal-level officers such as the Mandal Regional Officer (MRO) and the Mandal Educational Officer (MEO) have contributed sufficiently to the improvement of child rights in Shabad Mandal. They have sanctioned resources for mid-day meals, uniforms, books and other learning materials, and taken up greater issues with higher authorities. They have also conducted several regular workshops for teachers, Saakshar Bhaarat coordinators, and other members regarding various issues such as The RTE Act of 2009, Child Rights etc. They have also distributed a lot of literature in the form of pamphlets, books, booklets and posters about child rights.



A broken slide at UPS Machenpally

e) Local self-government:

The local self-governing organizations such as the Gram Panchayat have been instrumental in the improvement of child rights in this Mandal. Ever since the involvement of MVF in their villages, the Sarpanch and other ward members have contributed often beyond what might be expected for the village. For example, the village of Kesharam saw much progress regarding child rights in their village due to the involvement of the Panchayat. The villagers claim that there has been no effect of The RTE Act, as almost all of the facilities were provided with the help of the Panchayat before the RTE came into effect. The villagers contributed from their own pockets to build up the structure and provide learning materials for the children. The Panchayat has also been influential in motivating children to attend school and parents to send their children to school. The members of the Panchayat have often advocated child rights at all Gram Sabha meetings. They attend regular AMC or SEC meetings with the head-master of the local government school and other authorities to discuss various matters and what they might do regarding it. They have listened to the concerns of teachers, parents or youth and addressed them. They also inspect the local government school to ensure smooth operation. They also sign petitions for higher authorities for teachers or infrastructural improvements. Even Gram Panchayat candidates, such as in Kesharam, have donated large amounts of money and resources for the children as part of their candidature.

However, in many Panchayats, the members have proven to be very corrupt such as in Shabad, which is the largest village. Many projects have halted in Shabad, and one of the schools CPS Arjanwadi lies in utter shambles as most of the sanctioned resources fail to reach the school. There is no drinking water, toilets, kitchen shed or compound wall. Money was sanctioned for drinking water, toilets and kitchen shed, but the drinking water tank is incomplete and open, the toilets were constructed but since the Panchayat refused to pay the money to the contractors, the contractors demolished it, and the kitchen shed is dilapidated and hardly usable. The RTI needs to be enforced to ensure all the funds are delivered. This is also suspected to be the case in Thirumalapur, where the uniforms provided were of inferior quality and easily damaged.



The Sarpanch of Bodam Pahad along with youth at UPS Bodam Pahad

Thus, a very sincere Panchayat can be very helpful and has proved to be in several villages, but an ignorant or greedy Panchayat can make the school almost non-functional. Since the members are elected by the villagers, the villagers must ensure that sincere and enthusiastic members of the community become members of the Panchayat, since it is one of the most important parties in the development of the local government school and improvement of child rights in the village.

f) Parents:

The parents or the local guardians of the children are the most important party with regard to Child Rights, as they have almost complete authority over their ward. In Shabad, the parents have shown great enthusiasm for their children. They were educated about the importance of education and child rights and have since taken great interest in the education of their ward as well of the wards of other villagers. So much so that good performance of their children in school and the attendance of their children in a private school has become a status symbol, for which they are ready to spend a large fraction of their income.

But they have also started taking a genuine interest in their children's well-being and education, as they realize that the future of their children is very important and is decided in these years. Thus, many have shifted their children from private to government schools as private school teachers have often resorted to capital punishment when failing to teach the lesson. The parents are ready to provide supplementary materials as necessary, and even to provide their time to help with their education. They have actively pursued problems with the schools so that their wards get a proper education, such as in CPS Arjanwadi and PS Machenpally, where parents have been struggling for long to obtain the necessary facilities for the school. They have also brought it up with other parents and discuss them in committees such as the School Education Committee (SEC) and the Academic Monitory Committee (AMC).

Although parents who have taken up such significant interest in their ward's education have been very active, most parents have taken no interest. Also, as they are often uneducated or uninformed, they don't consider their child's education but opt for the simplest and socially-accepted standard, following the crowd. In villages where such parents form the majority, the local government school falls victim to negligence. Since they are also responsible for the election of the Panchayat members, their child's education needs to be of great priority in their minds for significant improvement, and also the development of an education-conducive environment.



Parents attending the AMC at PS Machenpally

It was also noticed that the parents asked their children to not attend school on certain days to work or for household duties. Though this is OK in small amounts, often this exceeds the acceptable amount. For example, in PS Bodam Pahad, many students are regularly absent during the sowing and harvesting seasons. As this coincides with the working days, they attend very few days of school. Efforts should be made to restructure the academic calendar so that the sowing and harvesting seasons coincide with the holidays. Also, parents need to support their children in their education and not require such laborious tasks on a regular basis.

Also, though the boys are often encouraged for education, the girls are not encouraged and are either never sent to school, pulled out of school early, or forced into marriage, making their attendance very difficult. The parents need to realize the need for education of the girl child as the girl child grows to be the mother who can teach the children at home. Currently there is very little support from parents regarding school-work due to high adult illiteracy, and this may continue unless the girl-child is educated.

g) Headmasters:

As heads and representatives of the schools, the headmasters of schools, where present, are very important figures. They have been responsible for improvement of the schools, advocacy of education among the villagers, complete administration of the school as well as reporting the status of the school to the Panchayat and the MEO. The headmasters have often transformed schools into highly successful institutions. In CPS Arjanwadi, the headmaster took it upon himself to protect the credibility of the school that was criticized in favour of the very expensive Dhyanaitha private school right next door. Though he was largely responsible for making the area completely free of child labour, especially with girls, he was also criticized for the functioning of the school. To demonstrate that his school was more successful than the expensive private school, he called children of the same class from both schools and tested them publicly. The results clearly showed that the government school children were better versed in the common curriculum. Many parents shifted their children from the private school to CPS Arjanwadi this academic year following this. In some schools, such as in PS Bodam Pahad where the entire necessary infrastructure is available, the headmaster is demonstrating improving quality of education through a grading system. His motive is to improve the average grade of the school so that the school produces the best students in the mandal, and teachers of the high school agree that the level of students from there is definitely higher.



Mid-day meals being cooked under a tree at Thalappaly

The headmasters also co-ordinate between the teachers and promote other programs such as games, lunch etc. Also, the headmaster is in charge of admissions, a very important aspect in government schools and in the RTE Act. Due to efforts of headmasters to eliminate requirements for admission, the admission in government schools has drastically increased. Headmasters need to continue and facilitate this form of admission. The headmaster also oversees the AMC and SEC meetings, and is hence a very important figure in communicating school matters to others. It is essential that the headmaster actively involve himself with every aspect of the school.

h) Teachers:

The local government teachers have come under much flak from all the villagers and institutions. They have been described as irregular, undedicated and even lazy. Though this is not always the case, it is often true, though the teachers do not admit it. Parents can ask the mandal-level authorities to inspect this, but this is only carried out in areas close to the Shabad office, otherwise hardly done and when done the teachers are only given a warning. Also, only the regularity can be checked while the dedication towards teaching cannot be evaluated.

But it must be considered that the teachers often have to travel as much as 100 km every morning, and the availability of transport can influence their ability to report on time. Also, due to the remote locations of the schools, the villages are almost inaccessible during bad weather seasons. But it has been found that the teachers do indeed have a very casual attitude towards their profession. They consider it allowed to report late and leave early as needed, and want to report only for their wages. This is accepted among the teachers who consider the most important part of their job the signature in the registrar. As overheard in a conversation between two teachers, “What's the big deal? We just have to sign, eat the mid-day meal and leave”.



The headmaster and only teacher of PS Machenpally (in the right in light blue shirt) with parents and MVF Organizers in an AMC meeting

Despite the general attitude of the teachers, a few teachers are noteworthy for their sheer dedication. In PS Thirumallapur, the single teacher arranged for accommodation for himself in a nearby village, though his home is in another district. As the only teacher, he gets no leave, and yet works overtime every day to teach children who are lagging. He even goes to the child's house if he reports absent. The villagers are very impressed with his dedication, and many have shifted their wards from private schools to this school only because of his dedication. But he suffers silently as the school lacks several facilities, such as a playground, drinking water and toilets, and as a single teacher for all 5 grades. A similar case is present in PS Machenpally, where the single teacher has been struggling for the last year. In PS Machenpally the strength has increased from 20 to 51 due to the visible dedication of the teacher and the efforts of MVF.

Generally, the teachers are following good practices to teach the children, as prescribed by the government, by substituting text-book education with learning through games and songs. Where provided, they have used the play cards and other learning materials. They have readily accepted the introduction of English as a subject in many schools, but they are not adequately trained and fail to teach the children a language they hardly encounter. Further, English medium instruction is proving to be impossible for the same reason.



High School Teachers of ZPHS Sardarnagar

The government needs to provide for the teachers, with proper learning materials to aid them. More importantly, the government needs to provide sufficient teachers as it is one of the biggest problems in many schools. Almost all schools have a requirement, with up to 5 teachers needed for some private schools, such as in Thallapally and Regada Dosvada. The teachers should be employed keeping in mind travel requirements, and locals should be employed as far as possible. Transport facilities should be provided where necessary. There must also be regular and surprise inspections to ensure the regularity of the teachers. Also, teacher training for instruction in English should be given to these teachers.

i) Children:

The subject of the entire situation, children have benefited the most through the improvement in the situation of child rights in the last 15 years. Apart from being assured a good education, it has also been attempted to ensure that a proper holistic education is given through games and music. All other aspects of the child's life, such as food and clothing are also attempted to be taken care of at school. In many schools, there are letter-boxes outside the headmaster's office, where the children can post their concerns. This is regularly read and the issues addressed. The future and well-being of all the children is a very high priority of all the parties and institutions named in this report as they believe that they are the future of the family, the village, the mandal, the state and the nation.



Students having mid-day meals at PS Machenpally

Students have also actively involved themselves in school. The number of drop-outs and regular absentees has drastically come down. Weak students are working hard to catch up. Generally the students realize the sacrifice their parents have taken to send them to school, and they are working to live up to expectations. They also report all their concerns to the parents, thus establishing a proper feedback mechanism. They are also participating in various awareness programs such as rallies and promoting education through conversation and questions addressed to their parents.

j) Bridge Camps:

Bridge camps are essential to overall education. Children are brought for education, but if they lack the necessary previous knowledge, they will fall behind in classes appropriate to their age. At the same time, it is essential that they enrol in appropriate classes for the social development of the child.

There are several residential bridge course camps across the district operated by MVF, and several short term bridge course camps are also conducted over the summers in the villages. Both residential and short term bridge camps have been incredibly successful. The short term bridge camps usually attract girls; 594 girls were trained in such short term camps in just 4 camps from 1998 to 2001. Several more have been attending residential camps for the last 10 years as parents have slowly started to allow their wards to attend 3 to 6 month long residential camps, such as in Chandrayangutta. Boys usually attend the residential camps; the camp in Dharoor is very popular with boys from all over the district. Such camps are essential, and very effective. It is necessary that proper facilities be provided to them and that they are encouraged.

k) CRPF:

The Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) was started in Shabad mandal in 2004, and as of 2011 there were 555 members from 60 villages out of 66 total villages. It was initially established in 2004 with a focus on child labour, and in 2005 they organized a Padyatra, a 150 km long walk, which was attended by almost 500 people for advocacy against child labour, who walked for 4 days and 3 nights. They have continued to organize smaller marches regularly in the villages in coordination with MVF and the REPC.

They have also taken up many important issues such as the provision of a girl's hostel in 2004-2005. After promoting the issue and signing a petition, a girl's hostel was constructed. Individual village units have worked for smaller projects such as school infrastructure. They have also resolved several arguments on their own. They continue to visit the schools to ensure that the children are receiving all needs and are being properly taught.



A district-level CRPF Meeting at ZPHS Vikarabad

The CRPF regularly meets at the mandal-level and district-level to discuss the various issues and share stories of progress. In the recent district-level meeting held in ZPHS Vikarabad on 11th July 2011, the conveners from all over the district provided stories of development (such as the revival of schools in Navapet, and the increase in accommodation capacity of hostels in Pulkacharla) and concerns such as the lack of government response across the district.

By the establishment of the CRPF, MVF has ensured that an effective independent system is in place to tackle the situation of child rights without involvement of MVF and in an unbiased manner.

I) REPC:

The Right to Education Protection Committee (REPC) was started in June 2010 following the passage of the RTE Act, and recruitment started in August 2010. Less than a year later, REPC is already present in 23 villages as of July 2011, and is being initiated in several more villages every month. Its main objective is to ensure the implementation of the RTE throughout the mandal.

The REPC acts through village level action, where there are 10 to 15 members per village. They check for the provisions of the RTE such as infrastructure, adequate teaching staff, absence of corporal punishment etc. They then review these problems to the Sarpanch. Thus, the REPC serves as an independent vigilance body which ensures that the law is observed.

By the establishment of the REPC, MVF has ensured that effective vigilance of all government activities and institutions takes place. Armed with the Right to Information Act (RTI), the REPC even initiates action against suspected wrong-doers. As the REPC has just started, the members need to be adequately trained towards the RTE and the RTI and its role in the long term needs to be assessed.

m) Youth:

The youth serve as role models for the next generation and set a standard for them. In Shabad mandal, the youth has enthusiastically taken up that role to lead the children. They have taken an active interest, with membership in committees such as CRPF and REPC. Even outside these committees they talk to the children, as well as senior village members and discuss these matters. As they have undergone higher education in better equipped institutions, they are also able to present their experiences to them. The youth also teach the students through formal and informal free tuitions at individual homes or collectively. This support is very important as the parents are often unable to provide the same due to work and lack of education, and the teacher may not always be able to.

Villages with successful youth, especially educationally have proven to be very successful in eliminating child labour. In the village of Kakuloor, every family has at least 1 graduate. Automatically, the children of the new generation are expected to also complete graduation, and there is competition within them for good performance. This is very conducive to learning. In other villages where there is no history of education, the growth is slow. Visibly, there is a domino effect with the education of every student.



The youth at Bodam Pahad

n) Anganwadi Centre:

The Anganwadi centre is very essential to the initial upbringing of the child. The centre provides prenatal and postnatal care to all the villagers, through distribution of nutritious food, medical care, education of the child up to 5 years and general care-taking. The activities of the Anganwadi centre have helped decrease infant mortality, malnutrition and other issues, while also taking care of the children while their parents are at work. It also keeps a record of the child's birth and progress, which is later used for other records such as school admission.



Children at the Anganwadi centre of Bodam Pahad

The centres also identify the pregnant women for care, promote hospital deliveries, regularize mid-wives and provide immunization for children up to 5 years. The Anganwadi centres are regularly providing the food (including upma, eggs, multi-grain malt) which has been supplied by the government, and also educating the children as to letters and numbers through games, songs and interactive charts. It is also a common meeting place for the mothers who are given tips on how to take care of the child; they also discuss amongst themselves postnatal and domestic issue during the monthly Mother's Meeting organised by the centres.

A lot of children have started attending school because the Anganwadi centre takes care of the infants as otherwise there would be no one to take care of their infant siblings. However, since the Anganwadi centre closes at 1:00 PM, it poses a severe problem for the infant as the school only gets over at 4:00 PM, and there is nobody to take care of the child until then. Necessary steps must be taken to ensure that the infants have some place to be between 1:00 PM and 4:00 PM.

o) Health Centre:

The health workers of each village are responsible for the overall health of the village, but special focus is paid to children for regular immunization up to 5 years and health check-ups. Such health check-ups and immunization is essential as the child may not be able to attend school or develop a proper social understanding if very ill. Also it is important to diagnose the child with early diseases to prevent further damage. The health centres will also be able to provide assistance to handicapped children. There is now a ramp for handicapped children in UPS Bodam Pahad, one of few in the village.

The health workers also need to check on the hygiene situation of the children, the school and the homes. Many schools such as PS Thalapally and ZPHS Thalapally have no kitchen shed. In many other schools such as CPS Arjanwadi, the kitchen shed is very unhygienic. They also need to train the children on how to keep healthy and hygienic. There should also be more regular check-ups in schools.

p) Transport:

The main road in Shabad serves as a major trade route as the road between Chevella and Shadnagar passes through the mandal. The mandal is properly networked, with paths connected to every village, although not many are pucca and most in non-motorable condition. These roads are still used by auto-rickshaws and other cars, including some buses for transport. However, the main road which connects Shadnagar to Chevella is a pucca metalled 2-lane road which is used by trucks, regular buses and most other forms of auto-mobiles. Due to this poor network of roads, transport for teachers and students has become very cumbersome.

All students up to 7th grade and girl students up to 12th grade are provided with free bus passes. This has been very helpful in getting children to go to High Schools and Junior Colleges. However, often the bus facility is not available, thus making it very difficult to travel. Students walk as much as 10 km to school. In ZPHS Regada Dosvada, located in a remote village, students come from as far as 6 km away, and most of them do not have any footwear, making it a painful journey to and from school.

Also, the parents have concerns regarding the journey, especially for girl children. They fear for their children's safety, and are unwilling to send children over long distances to school. Especially for girl children, this has meant discontinuation of schooling after primary school, like in Thirummallapur where the children must walk 4 km to ZPHS Regada Dosvada.

q) Press:

The press can play a very important role in exposing the schools which have inadequate facilities. Such a campaign has been started on the national level by NDTV, and has received a great response, though lacking at the local level. The local press is very involved and is informed of affairs of the schools. The reporter from Saakshi often attends AMC and SEC meetings, and tries to get the concerns published, though it is very difficult to do so. It is essential that they get published as the authorities fear the press and such reports will provoke a healthy response.



Two girls reciting a poem at PS Machenpally

r) Private schools and institutions:

Recently, the villagers have started to prefer private schools over local government schools, despite the high costs of tuition (up to Rs. 16,000 per annum only for tuition), miscellaneous costs (books, uniforms, admission fees and other hidden costs which can be up to Rs. 10,000) and large amount of travel (up to 15 km, costing around Rs. 500 per month in private transport provided by school). This preference is because of English being taught as a subject or being the medium of instruction, greater regularity of teachers, belief that private schools give better quality of education, better facilities and as a statement of social status.

However, it was found that the private schools are often not recognized, and in most cases do not adhere to RTE requirements. Teachers do not have basic training in education, and often resort to capital punishment. It was also shown that the students of the local government school seemed to comprehend the curriculum better than the private schools by the headmaster of CPS Arjanwadi. Students are also more absent in private institutions than in local government schools.

It must also be noted that the local government schools are inadequately equipped to handle all the students that enrol there. Therefore efforts must be made to properly equip both the government and private schools. All private schools must have the requirements of the RTE by 2012, and efforts must be made to ensure it. Private schools that do not provide the facilities or follow admission norms (such as 25% seats free of cost) should not be recognized, but those that do should be welcome and encouraged.

7. Abbreviations and Acronyms

- CRPF - Child Rights Protection Forum
- REPC - Right to Education Protection Committee
- RTE - The Right of Children to Free And Compulsory Education Act, 2009.
- PS - Primary School
- CPS - Central Primary School
- UPS - Upper Primary School
- ZPHS - Zilla Parishad High School
- GP - Gram Panchayat
- DEO - District Educational Officer
- DRO - District Regional Officer
- MEO - Mandal Educational Officer
- MRO - Mandal Regional Officer
- AMC - Academic Monitory Committee
- SEC - School Education Committee
- NDTV - New Delhi TeleVision
- MVF - Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation
- RTI - Right to Information Act

6. Acknowledgements:

All the data, facts and accounts that are mentioned above was collected through first-hand visits to Shabad mandal by the author. It involved a lot of interviews, meetings, discussions and casual conversations with many members of the mentioned parties. This was all possible due to support of MVF staff in Shabad mandal, namely Mr Mallesh, Mr Sathyanarayana, Mr Ramulu, Mr Sathayya and Mr Narsimhulu. Historical data was also collected from the record kept by the MVF office in Shabad.

There was also immense support from Mr Aravind from the head office of MVF in Secunderabad in organizing and facilitating visits and data collection, providing valuable feed-back and insights and encouragement on the entire project.

The RTE data was collected along with David Remington from Help International and other volunteers, who supplied the data after heavy processing. As I was accompanied on all trips by David Remington and other volunteers, they also provided me with technical and knowledge support and consistent encouragement. All pictures in this report were also taken by David Remington.