

Report of Mobilisation, Advocacy and Training Modules and Pilot Study on education for Girls in the 15-18 years age group July – December 2018

1. All girls must be in a full-time school or any fulltime education stream until completion of 18 years.

i. Follow-up of all girl students in 74 high schools, 7 KGBVs¹, 3 model schools and 19 Junior colleges and work towards reduction of dropouts and their retention.

ii. Address specific complaints of abuse in family, community and in schools/colleges.

iii. Follow up of girls and boys in the age group of 11-18 years and studying in classes' 6th to 12th grade at the village level.

(Specific cases of children's follow up to schools have been covered under Annexure 1. Details of girls followed up to school and other educational institutions are provided in a later section of the document.)

The volunteers undertook random visits to schools in their respective areas once a week to track children's presence in school. They verified attendance registers and compiled lists of absentees. They gathered feedback from teachers and members of the Gender Committees and KBS on the reasons for the children's absence. They visited the children's homes along with these members, the SMC², the CRPF³, youth and women's groups and motivated their children's parents to resume their wards' schooling. Some teachers supported the agenda by paying needy children's fees and thus ensuring continuity in their education.

Volunteers from Shankarpally mandal linked 7 girls to private colleges with subsidised fees/financial support from lecturers. Education material was sponsored for nearly 25 girls in Shankarpally and Vikarabad mandals. Teachers from Atmakur gave away stationery, uniform, notebooks and shoes to 110 children through Ashaya Foundation – a philanthropic initiative by 16 teachers. The teachers had been contributing an amount of Rs. 500 to the Foundation every month.

Girls' engagement as wage labourers in cotton fields and chilli farms and other seasonal work was noted to be one of the major causes for their absence from school. In some cases, parents of older girls (aged 15-18) had withdrawn them from school/college, as they deemed the girls too old to study. There were also instances of girls being taken out of school because they had not succeeded in clearing the exams and their parents had no belief in their abilities to clear them in successive attempts. To add to this, teachers had been discouraging such girls and had been literally forcing them to quit full-time school and apply for the exams through Open stream instead.

Many girls from families in difficult circumstances – especially children of single parents, were being forced to shoulder the burden of domestic responsibilities. Parents with financial obligations or limited monetary resources had often discontinued their daughters' education so they could educate their sons. Children that had shifted from Telugu medium to English medium schools found it difficult to keep with the others and felt embarrassed when they couldn't respond to their teachers' questions in class. More often than not, they received little support from fellow students or from teachers, who resorted to favouritism.

Unavailability of public transport was a major issue in villages of Halaharivi and Holagunda mandals. Halaharivi mandal had no Junior College and children commuted 10-20 kilometres to the nearest Junior College. Children from border villages of both Halaharivi and Holagunda mandals that had

¹ Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyaya

² School Management Committee

³ Child Rights Protection Forum

studied up to Class 10 in the Kannada medium had to go to Bellary 35-40 kilometres away to pursue Intermediate level education. Parents were highly insecure about their daughters and hesitated to send them to schools outside the village alone. Girls were often forced to travel in overcrowded auto rickshaws, which embarrassed them for numerous reasons. Wherever a family had more than two girls of school-going age, their parents kept one or more of them away from school.

Children from Ingaldahal village of Holagunda mandal had been attending the school in Hebbatam because teachers in their school were not as active as teachers from the former school. Many girls from Kogilathota village of the mandal had shifted to the KGBV after Class 5 though the school had education facility up to the Class 7 level. Some cases of eve teasing had been identified in Chintakunta village of Halaharivi mandal. The Mandal Parishad President was involved in the issue and he resolved it.

No full-time teachers had been recruited in 5 schools of Halaharivi mandal and 1 school of Holagunda mandal. Older girls aged 9 and above from some villages of Holagunda mandal had been accompanying their parents whenever they migrated. When the volunteers suggested that they could stay behind with their grandparents, the latter retorted angrily, asking them if they would care for the girls. The absence of girls' hostels in both Halaharivi and Holagunda compounded this problem. The volunteers followed up 13 girls from Kogilathota, Yellarthy and Hebbatam villages of Holagunda mandal that had been withdrawn from school due to teacher shortage.

Nearly 200 Muslim girls from Holagunda had dropped out of Classes 6 and 7 to enrol in Madrasas. The volunteers mobilised 10 of them for the Class 10 exams through Open stream but they had no documentation of any sort. The Madrasas had no Registers, Transfer Certificates or Admission Registers. The volunteers pulled up the Principal and he got some Registers. The 10 children were duly linked to the Open School Society for the exams. The volunteers later spoke to the parents of the other girls that had dropped out and told them that studying in a regular school had its own benefits and that it was wrong for them to sacrifice their daughters' future.

There were also a number of institutional factors at play. Government schools had mandated the linkage of children's Aadhaar Cards to their mothers' Aadhaar Cards at the time of admission. Working mothers could not be physically present for Fingerprint and Iris scans, which led to problems in their children's admission. Many girls from Shankarpally that had applied for the Class 10 Supplementary exams had been allotted examination centres that were located up to 40-50 kilometres away, which meant they had to spend at least 4-5 hours just for their travel. Their parents were often unwilling to send them so far.

Four girls from Chandupatla village of Nutankal mandal dropped out of Class 10 because they had to walk the entire distance of 4 kilometres to attend HS⁴ Yerrapahad. Though they had no real issues, their bags were too heavy for them to carry. They took up this issue with the teachers, four of who came forward to sponsor one cycle each for the girls. The girls would use the cycles until the end of the year and hand them over to the school so that other girls could use them. Some youth from Kothapally, Maddirala mandal sponsored a cycle for one girl in Mukundapuram.

Six girls from Nitravatti in Halaharivi mandal were at risk of dropping down from Junior College, as they had been given no hostel facilities. They went to the warden of the SC⁵ hostel for 15 days but to no avail. The volunteers spoke to the warden but he informed them that he had only 3 seats. He spoke to the warden of the BC⁶ hostel, following which 2 and 3 girls were enrolled in the BC and the SC hostels respectively.

Jagruthi College in Shankarpally had no science laboratory but children from the Second Year of the Intermediate were being charged Rs 500 and those from the First Year were being charged double that. Some of the children were inspired by their friends, who were associated with the Gender Committee, to protest this and successfully demanded rollback of the First Year fee to Rs. 500. The volunteers followed up the daughter of

⁴ High School

⁵ Scheduled Caste

⁶ Backward Caste

the SMC chairman from PS⁷ Madanpally, Vikarabad mandal to KGBV, Shankarpally and four of her friends to the Model Junior College, from where they had dropped out.

More than 2000 school-going children are associated with Gender Committees formed in the project area in addition to 9000-odd children that are part of Village KBS. The details of these Committees are as under:

Mandal	Gender Committees				Village KBS ⁸			
	Schools	Boys	Girls	Total	Forums	Boys	Girls	Total
Shankarpally	12	190	200	390	76	150	1310	1460
Vikarabad	13	130	130	260	41	100	960	1060
Nutankal	21	220	220	440	63	345	1484	1829
Atmakur	21	210	210	420	57	285	1725	2010
Halaharivi	8	110	114	224	89	73	1557	1630
Holagunda	8	144	144	288	91	0	1089	1089
Total	83	1004	1018	2022	417	953	8125	9078

The formation of Gender Committees at the UPS⁹ and the HS¹⁰ levels was one of the key interventions during the reporting period. The volunteers spoke to head teachers in all schools and introduced the agenda to them, informing them that the objective of forming the Committee was to enable children to address gender issues at their level. These Committees would have equal representation by girls and boys. Brainstorming sessions were held to arrive at the composition of the Committees, at the end of which it was decided that the Committee would have two girls and boys each per class. One female and male teacher each per school would be placed in charge of the Committees. They would guide and support the Committee in its functioning. The head teacher would be the Convenor of the Committee.

Schedules were fixed for children's meetings and children were accordingly assembled immediately after the Prayer Hour. The agenda was put forth to them and they were told that Gender Committees with two girls and boys each per class would be formed in their schools so as to enable them to discuss school- and gender- related issues. They would have 3 leaders, who would be responsible for identifying and resolving issues relating to school functioning and gender. Both boys and girls were called upon to own up the process. Children volunteered in some cases and names were proposed and seconded in others. Once the names of the Committee members were finalised, they were seated separately and asked to elect their leaders democratically. The teachers were present during the entire process. The head teacher was asked to attend all review meetings of the Committee in his role as Convenor. The members were told to record minutes of their meetings. The MVF¹¹ volunteers would play a supporting role.

Issues discussed during monthly review meetings of the Committee included abuse, dropout, child marriage, children's academic performance, supply of free textbooks, school infrastructure, gender bias and problems being faced by girls both at home and in school. Referring to cases of love/ elopement by children that had ended in suicide, the volunteers cautioned the members against being impulsive and taking immature decisions. They were the nation's future and their families were dependent on them. Women that have been married underage or had been abused in the past were invited to share their experiences with the girls and express solidarity with them.

Some teachers and parents felt that Gender Committees were not necessary, as the government had already constituted School Committees. They were told that the Gender Committee was aimed at addressing gender issues on a priority basis. Children were also hesitant to sit along with each other

⁷ Primary School

⁸ Kishora Balika Sanghas

⁹ Upper Primary School

¹⁰ High School

¹¹ Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation

initially but shed their inhibition after being told that they had to get used to sitting with each other if they believed in equality.

Members of the Gender Committee in Billehal, Halaharivi mandal participated in an exercise to list out migrant families. They identified 52 children from 57 families and shared the details with the volunteers, who physically verified the details and took up the issue with the school teachers. The teachers informed them that a local had applied to the government for a seasonal hostel in the village. The children would be linked to the hostel once it commences functioning.

Whenever a case of abuse came up, the matter was discussed with the Gender Committee or/and the KBS to ascertain the facts. Whenever the incident under mention took place in school, the volunteers spoke to the teachers and asked them what steps they had taken to resolve the issue. Girl members of the Gender Committee observed that most teachers were narrow minded and had been viewing interaction between them and boys suspiciously. Most of the children felt that teachers needed orientation on gender equality.

(Cases of abuse that were handled by the Gender Committee have been covered under Annexure 2. Annexure 3 contains stories of issues addressed by KBS/Gender Committees)

The volunteers convened school staff meetings and spoke to the head teachers in this regard, reminding them that they were expected to be more mature and sensitive towards their pupils instead of casting aspersions against them or slandering. Interaction between girls and boys was a natural part of growing and acting impulsively and punishing/castigating children was not right. The volunteers further pointed out that the school was the most secure place for a child and that it was their responsibility to repose this trust that parents and children had in them.

Association with the Committees has proven beneficial to the children in more ways than one, the most primary being that they have an identity of their own – in school, at the family level and within community. Their expression skills have improved and they are participating more actively in classroom transaction. Interestingly, girls have outshone boys in this regard. Girls and boys together have owned up the responsibility of maintaining cleanliness in the school premises and playground. Regular follow up of dropouts by the members has resulted in reduced absenteeism by children. The incidence of eve teasing has also gone down and the Committee has played a key role in preventing child marriage. More girls are taking part in sports and in combined games.

The members have demonstrated their abilities as leaders on many an occasion. Girls were earlier not involved in communicating their needs to their teachers or school authorities and boys would do so on their behalf. However, they have now started making such representations on their own. Boys would not accept girl class monitors in the past but this is not the case now. Many boys have changed their attitudes and have not only begun to assist their sisters and mothers at home but have also been announcing this with an evident sense of pride during Committee meetings.

Members of the Committee have been sharing details of the hardships that they undergo at home during the meetings and have also been updating their parents on incidents that occur in school. Parents are pleasantly surprised with the way in which their children carry themselves along and have begun to respect their individuality. The members have become more mature and have learnt where to draw the line. They have been taking abuse and other sensitive issues to the notice of their teachers unhesitatingly, which has helped mutually resolve many issues without confrontation.

Gender Committee members took part in the *Rakhi Purnima* and the Independence Day celebrations. Girls from Suryapet district have been organising cultural activities. Mock Elections were organised by the Committees in 3 and 4 schools of Atmakur and Nutankal mandals respectively. Girls have begun to vocally oppose child marriage. One Committee member from

Thummala Penpahad, Atmakur mandal went one step ahead and actually warned her parents that she would file a case against them if they persisted in their plans to get her married underage. Another girl from Atmakur got the proposed marriage of her elder sister, who was still a minor, postponed. Members of the Committee from Kogilathota in Holagunda mandal have been assembling every fortnight. They followed up 5 dropouts to school. Girls from the BC Colony in Nerniki, Holagunda mandal had been bypassing the Lingayat Colony while going to school in the past for fear of social sanction. Subsequent to the formation and orientation of the Gender Committee, they have, however, begun to pass through the Colony.

Lakshmi – a member of the Committee from Suluwayi, Holagunda mandal participated in an essay writing competition on gender equality. She remarked at the end of her essay that the head teacher of her school had been resorting to favouritism on caste grounds. When asked about this, the head teacher tried to avoid the matter but the volunteer made it clear to him that he was expected to be broadminded as the head of an institution and to set a positive example for children. He has changed his ways.

- iv. **Encourage school dropouts to continue with their education through the Open School system and subsequently mainstream them**
- v. **Encourage school dropouts to continue with their education through re-enrolment in regular schools and colleges.**
- vi. **Once the results are announced track all children who have passed the examination, counsel them and facilitate their admission into respective KGBV, model schools, and residential colleges.**
- vii. **Encourage girls to join Computer courses or link them to existing spoken English courses.**
- viii. **Withdraw children from work and work towards them utilizing all the above opportunities in the education stream.**

A comprehensive exercise had been undertaken during the month of June to follow up the cohort of children that had passed out from the previous year and track their education status. Details of the outcomes have already been shared earlier. The status of children's follow up during the current reporting period was as below:

Follow up of children	Boys	Girls	Total
Dropouts followed up	94	72	166
Hostel & KGBV	53	80	133
Shifted to other schools	249	247	496
Migration	128	80	208
Child Marriage	0	13	13
Repeaters	52	36	88
Failed Class 10	50	66	116
Total	626	594	1220

2. The discourse on gender equality must be introduced into the school curriculum from Class 1 onwards.

A State level Workshop on *Building Curriculum Framework for Gender Equity* was held in Hyderabad on 8th October with representation from the SCERT, UNICEF and the Dept. of Women Development & Child Welfare and NGOs working on education/child rights. School teachers were also present.

National Convenor of MVF R Venkat Reddy set the objectives for the meeting and noted that gender discrimination was an impediment to girl child education. He hoped that a concrete action plan could be chalked to make schools foster gender equality and bring an end to gender based violence – physical and mental and sexual harassment, by the end of the day. Founder Secretary of MVF Dr Shantha Sinha observed that the school was the best place to create values and norms of gender equality. Emphasising the need to introduce gender equality in school curricula right from the Class 1 level, she highlighted the need to foster equality of boys and girls by preparing them to work and

interact with each other and have mutual respect. each school should develop a code of conduct and child protection policy, she added.

Seshu Kumari of SCERT informed that the SCERT had reviewed school curriculum at the primary, upper primary and high school levels during the period 2010-14 and had trained 2000 teachers on gender related issues in curriculum. She called for the promotion of inclusive schools that facilitate education without discrimination. Sudha Murali – formerly of UNICEF, observed that cognisance of gender issues at the societal level had not translated into policy in favour of gender equality and stressed the need to revisit school curricula from a gender perspective, going beyond textbooks and mapping age- and class- specific activities to promote gender equality.

During the session on Gender, Vinayak of SCERT noted the slow and steady social transformation in favour of the girl child and added that while curriculum changes were necessary, there was the need to bring about attitudinal change in teachers and lay emphasis on gender equality while training teachers. He offered to work hand in hand with other stakeholders, on behalf of SCERT, to devise a framework on gender education. Sharing her experiences with the police department's SHE Teams in the process of addressing gender violence, Satyavathi of Bhoomika suggested including case studies in textbooks and having discussions on them during teacher training sessions.

Stating that gender bias was omnipresent in society, cutting across economic strata and educational background, Dr Mazher Hussain of COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) reiterated the need for attitudinal change towards girls. Recollecting his field experiences, Murali of Sadhana noted that parents are generally insecure about girls and it was difficult to expect them to treat them on par with boys. At the same time, there was the need to simultaneously include a component of gender in education and sensitise community to gender issues.

The next session was interactive in nature. MVF Training Coordinator Dhananjay spoke in brief on the organisation's work with girls. The organisation had been working with 15000 girls and had federated them into *Balika Sanghas* with a view to their empowerment. The organisation had also been opposing the stereotyping of gender roles in school and at the community level and had been encouraging a culture of gender-neutrality in its workplace.

Ramesh Reddy of Mahita denounced the existence of gender bias both within school and at the community level. He suggested the formation of a Committee to:

- Develop curriculum and peruse the report of the SCERT on gender review of curriculum taken up in collaboration with the police department
- Engage in advocacy with the government on classroom management regarding gender based issues
- Prioritise teachers' training

The participants came up with the following Action Plan at the end of the meeting:

- Form a Committee to take forward the agenda of introducing gender equality in the curriculum – first meeting to be held in SCERT
- Interact with teachers' unions on the issue
- Review the Report on Gender Education produced by SCERT with the police department
- Have a meeting with NGOS to collect existing material on gender programmes

Subsequent to the conduct of the Workshop, discussions were held with (head) teachers to discuss the feasibility/possibility of introducing gender in school curricula from the level of Class 1. Quite a few of them questioned the very rationale for introducing gender as a component of school curriculum while some others were vehemently against this. Many teachers from Holagunda and

Halaharivi mandals had shied away from teaching a lesson on the Reproduction System in the Class 9 Science textbook, as they had felt the content was obscene.

There were some positive responses as well. One head teacher from Atmakur mandal suggested the conduct of fortnightly input sessions at the UPS/HS levels and replicating the same in lower classes later on. Plans are in the pipeline to organise a teachers' workshop in the mandal to take the issue ahead. Some head teachers opined that a separate booklet could be printed with a view to disseminating gender related information. It was finally concluded that such a booklet could initially be brought out with inputs from teachers. Nearly 75 teachers from the project area are keen on inclusion of gender in school curriculum and some of them have already begun to plan for this.

3. No girl shall marry before attainment of 18 years of age. Child Marriage law must be amended to nullify marriage of all girls until 18 years of age.

i. Include the issue of child marriage in the ensuing Gram Panchayat elections and seek all the candidates, across political parties to pledge to work for total abolition of child marriages.

The volunteers, women's groups and the CRPF and interacted with contestants for the local body elections due to be held in January and urged them to pay special attention to the issue of child marriage, which had a direct bearing on the status of girl child education. Members of the Gender Committee also assisted them in this effort.

II. Intensive campaign at mandal level through pamphlets, posters, against child marriage.

Rallies were organised against child marriage in all mandals of the project area with the participation of Gender Committees, KBS, women, CRPF members and elected representatives, Potential child marriages were identified and petitions submitted to officials along with the details of such cases exhorting them to act. Child marriage was denounced and marriage registration publicised through the *Dappu* in Shankarpally mandal.

Two campaign posters were designed by MVF with messages against underage marriage and sexual harassment/enslavement saying *Vaddu Maaku Pelli, Badiki Potham Mem* (we don't want marriage – we shall go to school) and *Ika Chaalu maa meedha laingika, manasika, sharirika himsalu* (enough of sexual, mental and physical violence against us). The first poster also proclaimed that it was illegal to marry girls aged below 18 years and boys aged below 21 years and that either could result in 2 years of jail and Rs 1 lakh of penalty.

The posters were released at the district level by the District Collector, the District Medical & Health Officer, the Project Director – ICDS¹² and doctors of the Primary Health Centre. Tehsildars, SIs¹³ of Police, the CDPO¹⁴, Health Supervisors and leaders of the Mandala Mahila Samakhya released the posters at the mandal level. Sarpanchs and ward members were in charge of proceedings at the village level. District Collectors and Tehsildars instructed departmental officials to pay special attention to curbing child marriage.

Campaign slogans were written at 162 locations in 8 villages of Halaharivi mandal to highlight gender equality, the losses associated with child marriage, sexual violence (*Ika Chaalu*) and child marriage legislations. An equal number of posters were pasted. The volunteers pasted 200 posters in Devaragattu village of Holagunda mandal on the occasion of Dussehra. Male youth and adolescent

¹² Integrated Child Development Scheme

¹³ Sub-Inspector

¹⁴ Child Development Project Officer

girls identified central locations in 5 villages of Holagunda and pasted 60 campaign posters. The Grama Darshini was used as a platform to release the posters in both mandals.

iv. Prevent child marriages by tracking girls who are at risk of child marriages with support from community and local officials.

An ongoing campaign was taken up against child marriage with the participation of local officials, community stakeholders and the KBS. The details of potential child marriage cases identified and followed up are as under:

Mandal	Identified	Prevented
	Girls	Girls
Shankarpally	5	3
Vikarabad	8	6
Atmakur	9	9
Nutankal	6	5
Halaharivi	6	4
Holagunda	5	3
Total	39	30

4. Arguments that control girls' bodily integrity and deny them autonomy such as domestic work, distance to schools, lack of safety for girls, eve teasing, and increase in dowry, sibling care, poverty, and pressure of marriage are unacceptable.

Discussions in schools and colleges on NN (non-negotiable) points on adolescent children

- i. Conduct essay writing and elocution competitions**
- ii. Celebrate girl child day involving all stakeholders, boys and girls, men and women.**

Interactive discussions on the Non-Negotiable principles and child marriage legislation were held with KBS and male youth in schools of Halaharivi mandal. They expressed that government officials were often reluctant to take up the issue of child marriage owing to its sensitive nature. They noted that change was possible only when politicians and officials acted seriously. A brainstorming-cum-sharing session on the issue was held in the Education College with the participation of nearly 50 students.

Essay writing competitions on the pros and cons of introducing gender equality in schools featured in HS, UPS and KGBVs in Halaharivi and Holagunda mandals on 15th August in addition to the Junior College in Holagunda. A mandal level rally that was held on 11th October in Halaharivi was followed by a meeting. CDPO Maddamma addressed the participants on the importance of the occasion, Reproductive & Child Health, girl child education and life skills. She called upon them to assert themselves in all walks of life. Four Anganwadi Workers also shared their experiences with the girls. A mandal level rally held in Holagunda on 11th October was attended by ICDS Supervisor Padmavati. She spoke on girl child emancipation and highlighted the role of education in empowering girls. Police personnel and Anganwadi Workers were also present.

Mandal level rallies were held in Atmakur, Nutankal and Maddirala on 11th October to observe International Day of the Girl Child. Officials of the Health Department and the ICDS were also present in addition to women's groups. Cultural performances (Bathukamma) featured on the occasion. The speakers highlighted the importance of the occasion and called upon the girls to share their experiences on issues relating to gender and girl child freedom. A rally was also held in Proddutur, Shankarpally mandal on the occasion.

Essay writing competitions on the below topics were conducted in Atmakur mandal on 14th November to mark Children's Day:

- Gender bias against girls
- Social factors/customs that inhibit freedom of the girl child
- Social impediments to girl children's development
- Measures to do away with restrictions on children's movement
- Arguments that control girls' bodily integrity and deny them autonomy

While the event itself was organised by the school authorities, the volunteers were given the choice of topic. Both girls and boys took active part in the competitions.

A mandal level youth meeting was held in Holagunda on 14th November in Holagunda with the participation of the MPDO¹⁵. He addressed the youth on child rights and gender equality. The team in Vikarabad organised games competitions in 6 villages with 546 participants.

Essay writing competitions on Child Marriage and Child Trafficking were organised in Shankarpally mandal and on Gender Equality in Vikarabad mandal. Prizes were awarded for the two best essays in Shankarpally. Elocution competitions on Gender Equality were held in Vikarabad mandal. Elocution competitions on Human Rights and Child Rights were conducted in Zilla Parishad HS Lingampally on 10th December to mark Human Rights Day.

Volunteers from Atmakur mandal maintained regular contacts with the Police Department's SHE Team and arranged school level meetings with their participation to educate teachers and children on issues such as eve teasing, gender equity, the Nirbhaya Act and interventions of the SHE Team. They were also addressed on girl child empowerment. A group of 56 children from HS Atmakur were also taken on a visit to the local police station, where the officials made a presentation on the functioning of their department and on the processes involved in lodging complaints. Interaction between children from 5 HS and the SHE Team was facilitated in Vikarabad mandal.

A skit on girl child issues was performed in 7 villages of Vikarabad mandal. The topics included child marriage, gender equality, dowry, girl child education, abuse, child marriage legislation and the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act. Community groups and children responded in a positive manner. Girls used the stage for well over an hour and sent across the message that both girls and boys were equals. The villagers were full of praise for them and opined that they had never witnessed such courage among girls – this was a welcome development.

The Non-Negotiable principles on gender equality were discussed with members of the Gender Committee during their review meetings and in the Model Centres whenever they gathered there on weekends. They were encouraged to discuss ways and means by which they could ensure implementation of these principles at the household, community and institutional levels. Rallies were organised in Shankarpally and Vikarabad mandals, during which the children held placards to highlight the principles through slogans.

The details of campaign activities taken up in the project area are as follows:

Mandal	Rallies		Essay writing competitions		Elocution competitions	
	Rallies	Participants	Schools	Participants	Schools	Participants
Nutankal	6	1232	6	131	8	172
Atmakur	32	4656	14	226		
Shankarpally	1	152	5	242	3	256
Vikarabad	2	267	2	40	4	30
Holagunda	4	1055	9	405		
Halaharivi	7	960	9	180		
Total	52	8322	45	1224	15	458

¹⁵ Mandal Parishad Development Officer

iii. MVF to participate in the training programs conducted for the functionaries of ASHAs and ICDS staff including Anganwadi Workers

The Non-Negotiable principles were discussed with ANMs¹⁶, Anganwadi Teachers, ASHAs¹⁷ and women's groups on an ongoing basis during their periodical meetings. A cluster level ASHAs' meeting was organised in Shankarpally on 25th September with the participation of 32 ASHAs. The organisation's perspective on gender equality was discussed with them and they shared their personal experiences. They were requested to support the initiative in their respective areas by reaching girls aged 6-18 years, as they were best in a position to influence the girls and bring about attitudinal change in them. Similar messages were also sent across to ANMs.

5. Build an atmosphere in support of rights of adolescent children especially girls and their education.

Volunteers and community groups from Halaharivi submitted 14 petitions to the District Collector, the Dy DEO¹⁸, the MPDO and the MEO for a Junior College, transport facilities and compound walls for schools. A petition was also submitted to the CDPO seeking steps to curb child marriage. Volunteers from Holagunda submitted 10 petitions to the District Collector, the Revenue Division Officer, the DEO, the Project Director of the ICDS, the Tehsildar and the MPDO on transport allowance, bus facilities, drinking water, streetlights, compound walls, seasonal hostel, midday meals in the Junior College and upgrading the KGBV to include the Intermediate section. Water facility was provided in the school in Mudathamagi at a cost of Rs 30000 in response to a petition.

As many as 30 children from Gajjehalli, Holagunda mandal were forced to go to a different school because there were insufficient teachers in Class 10. The issue was discussed with the children's parents and they offered to sponsor a volunteer if necessary. A petition was also made to the MEO¹⁹, who deputed a Hindi teacher from the neighbouring PS.

Conduct a campaign on the Child and Adolescent Labour Amendment Act 2016

A district level petition was submitted to the District Collector of Suryapet, asking him to ensure that children aged below 18 not to be involved in election campaigns, as this was in contravention of the Child and Adolescent Labour Amendment Act. Wide newspaper coverage was also given to the issue. He responded positively by issuing instructions to election officials. Another petition was given to him demanding justice for a girl that had been raped in Huzurnagar. A case was filed against the guilty youth under the Nirbhaya Act. Petitions on learning outcomes in schools and girl child education were given to contestants of the Assembly elections and they were asked to act on these issues if they were successfully elected.

A signature campaign was taken up in Holagunda to extend the scope of the RTE²⁰ Act to cover children aged 15-18 years. As many as 555 people from Holagunda supported the cause. A document signed by them was submitted to the High Court of Andhra Pradesh. The volunteers also put up stalls at central locations in the mandal headquarters. Response to the effort was highly encouraging with active support from student unions. The SI was the first to sign the petition. The volunteers also undertook a postcard campaign to endorse this demand. College students wrote 116 postcards addressed to the High Court as part of the campaign.

¹⁶ Auxiliary Nurse Midwife

¹⁷ Accredited Social Health Activist

¹⁸ District Education Officer

¹⁹ Mandal Education Officer

²⁰ Right to (Free & Compulsory) Education

6. Model Centers

Activities taken up in the Model Centres during the reporting period included meetings with girls, newspaper reading and discussion sessions, quiz competitions and life skill education for girls. The discussions focused on child marriage, abuse and incidents of love/elopement by girls. ANMs, Anganwadi Teachers/Workers and ASHAs were invited to address the girls on these issues. The Model Centres were also showcased as a resource centre and community groups were urged to visit them whenever they could. Telugu versions of two books by Kamla Bhasin as part of a series entitled *Conversations with Adolescents*, namely *Understanding Adolescence & Sexuality* and *Life Skills* were procured and made available in the Centers for the benefit of the girls.

Volunteers from Thummala Penpahad, Atmakur mandal invited 3 caste elders to the Centre in the village and informed him that this primary objective of the Centre was to uphold girl children's rights, prevent child marriage and promote girl child education. Reminiscing his childhood days, one of them observed that girls of the present generation were quite fortunate to be able to enjoy their right to education. He recollected the hardships that his generation had to undergo. He was appreciative of the role that MVF had played in bringing education to the doorstep of the girls. He called upon them to make the best of this opportunity.

Children at the Model Centre in Madanpally, Vikarabad mandal debated the issue of women's entry in Sabari Malai temple and noted that women are revered as goddesses just as a formality and women didn't have the right to exercise their freedom. They also discussed a newspaper article on girl child empowerment that they had read in a local newspaper. Turnout at the Centre has been adversely affected due to paucity of space. It not only operates from the congested premises of an Anganwadi Centre but is also, inaccessible to girls from the far end of the village. Some of the girls attending the Centre felt that it ought to be shifted.

Efforts were made to enhance turnout of girls at the Centres in Shankarpally and the volunteers joined hands with members of the KBS to publicise the activities at/facilities available in the Centres. The girls were advised to watch the News regularly. A group of 34 girls cut a cake in the Proddutur Model Centre on 31st December night and went to their homes, which were located at a fair distance, without for any escort. Interestingly, 6 of them belonged to the SC Colony and had been out so late for the first time in their lives. A cake was also cut in Atmakur on the occasion.

Girls at the Centre in Parveda village discussed the status of child marriage and also undertook a comprehensive Village Mapping exercise. The girls divided themselves into four groups and promised to follow up dropouts/absentees in their areas. Girls from the Ravulapally Centre in Shankarpally mandal also prepared a Village Map. They cut a cake on 1st January and also prepared charts on child marriage and wrote essays on environmental issues.

The volunteers took 12 girls from the Centre in Angadi Chittampally, Vikarabad mandal on a visit to two locally popular temples in response to demand from them. Girls from the Centres in Shankarpally mandal visited a temple in Chandippa village. Cluster level meetings were held with 60 and 65 girls from Centres in Vikarabad and Shankarpally mandals respectively.

There has been one unexpected development in the Model Centres. There has been ever growing demand for inclusion of boys in review meetings being held in the Centres. It is felt that this would help them appreciate concerns of the girl child.

7. Trainings and Advocacy

Training programmes were organised for different stakeholder groups during the reporting period on various issues as under:

Mandal	Gender Committees			
	Sessions	Boys	Girls	Total
Shankarpally	16	174	452	626
Vikarabad	4	195	192	387
Nutankal	11	110	110	220
Atmakur	33	619	798	1417
Halaharivi	8	110	114	224
Holagunda	7	221	240	461
Total	79	1429	1906	3335

Training Sessions								
Group	Village level	Participants			Mandal level	Participants		
		Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
Adolescents	455	1035	6339	7364	21	486	705	1191
SMC	27	276	204	480	3	56	54	110
CRPF	25	341	37	378	8	146	11	157
VOs/Self-help groups	65	0	1778	1778	5	0	278	278
School Committee	11	190	190	380				
Youth	50	1148	0	1001	1	45	0	2245
ASHAs	4	0	176	176				
Anganwadi staff	10	0	195	195	3		216	216
Total	647	2990	8919	11752	41	733	1264	4197

A 3-day workshop on gender equality was held for all staff members of MVF from 1st – 3rd November in St. Ann's Generalate. Noted women's activist Kamla Bhasin was the resource person. She spoke on the definition and concept of gender. She stated that the nature of the modern family is based in the concept of ownership. She linked ownership of private property to patriarchy. Modern neoliberal capitalism had reduced women to their bodies via the billion-dollar cosmetics and pornography industries. This had resulted in the dehumanization of women and a culture of violence and abuse. Capitalism, she said, was as a system in which everything was saleable and profits mattered more than people.

Women in India were being exploited in the name of culture and religion – both of which were used as a shield to justify patriarchy. Social customs and beliefs perpetuated patriarchy. A cultural revolution was the need of the hour. Patriarchal ideas have even encroached upon our language, the speaker observed. The word *Swami*, for example, refers to both lord/owner and husband. Such words are in contravention of the woman's right to equality and a dignified life. Men are always opposed to gender equality because it implies freedom and equality for women, which wrests power from them. Gender equality does not imply a war between men and women – it is a rather between an ideology that elevates men and gives them power and one that advocates for equality. Gender inequality is often a factor of caste and class – upper class/caste women are more equal or less unequal than women from the lower class/caste.

The speaker made a detailed presentation on the *One Billion Rising* movement – a global campaign to end rape and sexual violence against women. Women, she said, must be brought to the forefront in all walks of life. Adding that change begins at home, she called upon the members present to take a stand. She divided the participants into groups and engaged them in a discussion on gender based discrimination in the contexts of the family, society and the workplace. She also asked them how much work men shared with women at home. The participants' response brought out that men did roughly 20% of work on an average, implying that women bore the brunt. Kamla Bhasin went on to state that equality came at a cost. She opined that women claiming equality also ought to be ready to own up responsibility.

MVF has agreed, in principle, to be part of the *One Billion Rising* campaign.

The Workshop on Gender was followed by a meeting of all women volunteers from the organisation to discuss and frame a policy on Sexual Harassment in (the) Workplace. The 40 members that were

present reviewed the problems that they had been facing. An Internal Complaints Committee was formed under the leadership of Administrative Officer Usha Sriram at the end of the meeting.

A midday meal cook from Mandal Parishad UPS Chinnaheta of Holagunda mandal and her daughter, who had been passing by during the conduct of a gender training session in the school, found the content to be very interesting and spent nearly half an hour there. At the end of the session, the mother told the head teacher that she had withdrawn her daughter from school and wanted to know if she had any opportunity of pursuing her education. The head teacher suggested that she could give the Class 10 exams through Open stream. The girl duly registered for the exams.

The newly appointed head teacher of HS Halaharivi had a limited idea of the conception of gender earlier though she was an amicable person. She realised after her participation in a gender training session that there were many dimensions to gender. She appreciated the efforts of the volunteers and permitted 22 children from the school to attend the Convention in Holagunda. The SMC chairperson husband was against this but the head teacher convinced her.

Training sessions apart, community meetings were also employed as a means to involve community stakeholders in the campaign. The details of community meetings convened are as below:

Group	Village level	Male	Female	Total	Mandal level	Male	Female	Total
Adolescents	455	1035	6339	7374	21	486	705	1191
SMC	100	900	737	1637	3	56	54	110
CRPF	75	743	317	1060	8	146	11	157
VOs/SHGs	134	0	4046	4046	5	0	346	346
Parents	36	271	302	573				
Grama Sabha	5	280	75	350				
Youth	53	1228	0	1228	2	63	0	63
CPC ²¹ /CMPC	8	52	73	125				
Anganwadi staff/ ANMs/ASHAs					7	0	392	392
Total	866	4509	11889	16393	46	751	1508	2259

8. District level conventions of Adolescent Girls

A Girls' Convention was held on 17th December in Veerabhadreswara Kalyana Mandapam, Holagunda with 198 adolescent girls. The invitees included ZPTC²² Ayyalappa, MPDO Mary, Medical Officer Dr Krishna Reddy, KGBV Special Officer Renuka and Coordinator of Reliance Foundation Nagaraju. The ZPTC emphasised the need for the girls to assert themselves and demand their rights. The MPDO spoke on the deleterious effects of child marriage and promised to solve any problems being encountered by them. The head teacher of the local HS urged the girls to pursue education uninterrupted no reason whatsoever. The Medical Officer gave the girls tips on menstrual health. MVF Coordinator Bhaskar made a presentation on the non-negotiable principles. The children earlier shared their experiences.

A district level convention of adolescent girls was held in DIET (District Institute of Education & Training), Vikarabad on 12th October with the participation of 180 girls. National Convenor of MVF R. Venkat Reddy facilitated proceedings. MPDO Sathaiah and officials of the Police and Labour Departments were also present. Members of the KBS reviewed activities taken up at each of the Model Centres. They were divided into four groups and asked to make presentations on problems that they had been facing at home, in school and at the community level. Each of the groups included two girls from one Model School cluster. They opined that they had to contend with opposition at all levels, especially in terms of child marriage, education, dowry demands, burden of domestic work and restricted mobility. One girl got emotional and nearly broke down stating that girls are always blamed regardless of their complicity or otherwise whenever an incident of

²¹ Child Protection Committee

²² Member – Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency

interaction/relations between girl and boy comes into the open. They also detailed areas in which they needed support from the government, prioritising follow up of dropouts at the Intermediate level and free education up to the Intermediate level. At the end of the session, the girls informed that this was the first time they had been given an opportunity of airing their views and being heard at the district level.

Feedback from volunteers

We were initially skeptical about the success of the project, given the social situation but community response has been good. Relations between us and community groups have been further strengthened. Parents are now willing to send their children even outside the mandal because they believe the children would benefit from the inputs that we give them. This is because we never approach them in an individual capacity – we always go in as a team. We are happy to state that mothers and adolescent girls have begun to confide in each other thanks to the intervention. We had been pessimistic about the success of the project at its commencement but we are now more assertive. This is a kind of lab for us. We have been able to communicate to our stakeholders that the concept of gender is not limited to children alone but extends to the entire family as well.

Our abilities to handle girls have improved due to the training programmes. We are also confident of being able to train community. We have earned the acceptance of teachers. We were initially reluctant to share the contents of the books titled *Menstrupedia* and *Mounanni Evaraina Chhedinchi Unte* but are more confident now. We are proud that we have been instrumental in changing the lives of so many children and preparing them for the future. The road ahead is long.

Despite our successes, there are some areas that we have not been able to address. Support is generally lacking from boys at the Intermediate level. Their participation in meetings is not up to the mark and their retention in school/college is also cause for concern. Boys from private schools/colleges account for a high proportion of incidents involving eve teasing and stalking. There is the need to place greater focus on private educational institutions under the project.

We strongly believe that we have to lead by example. This means we have to begin with home. We discuss this within ourselves and try to change ourselves before we expect others to change. Prior to the commencement of the project, some of his neighbours would poke fun at me because I would assist his wife in her domestic work. They have now changed their opinion of me and acknowledge my contributions to my family openly.

Venkataiah – volunteer from Vikarabad

Suggestions from teachers, Holagunda mandal

- Intake in KGBVs must be increased
- Separate hostels must be opened for girls
- KGBVs must admit even girls from regular schools
- KGBVs must have Intermediate sections
- There must be greater access to schools, especially at the HS level
- The RTE Act must be extended to cover children aged up to 18 years
- Junior Colleges must also have midday meal facility
- Free textbooks must be issued to children even at the Intermediate level
- The process of monitoring children's educational progress must continue up to the Intermediate level
- The government must use Social Media to publicise norms relating to age of marriage
- Marriages must be linked to Aadhaar Cards so that manipulation of age is not possible
- Play material must be made available to girl children in all schools so that they are encouraged to attend school

- Bicycles must be given to all girls that travel to other villages for education but have no access to public transport
- Effective coordination between functionaries at all levels of the Education Department can help promote the cause of girl child education
- Penalties must be levied wherever age is manipulated to facilitate underage marriage

Annexure 1 Follow up of dropouts

1. Morapaka Aishwarya – the daughter of Morapaka Paramatma, a CRPF member from Gattikallu in Atmakur mandal had been engaged as a daily wage worker for 6 months after she had cleared the Class 10 Supplementary exams in 2017. She joined the Govt Junior College in academic 2018-19 but dropped out for a month because she was embarrassed to sit with children that were younger to her while her classmates were in the next higher class. Some of her friends had ridiculed her, which had prompted her to take this decision. Her father informed this to the volunteers, who met her along with some members of the CRPF and the KBS. They counseled the girl and also spoke to her classmates. She eventually returned to college and regularly attended her classes.
2. Maheshwari – a Class 10 girl from Settigudem, Atmakur mandal was being stalked by an auto rickshaw driver for long. She, however, showed no interest in her. One of her classmates, who took to this seriously, had a tiff with him and the issue went to the notice of the head teacher. He called the girl to his office and spoke to her sternly. Maheshwari informed her parents of this and they decided that enough was enough. She stopped coming to school. The volunteers counseled her mother and she consented to send her back. However, she sent her son – a Class 4 student, to track his sister's movements. She quit school again after coming to know of this. The volunteers spoke to her mother and told her that it was not right for her to lack confidence in her daughter. She acknowledged her mistake and told Maheshwari that she would not mistrust her. The girl has resumed her schooling.
3. Gundlapally Bhargavi and Tejaswini from Yepuru, Atmakur mandal had stopped their studies after Class 10 on account of their mother Subhadra's ill-health. There was none to care for the woman. She could afford to send one of them to school but withdrew the both of them from school because they did not want to do injustice to either of them. The head teacher, teachers, the SMC and the CRPF spoke to Subhadra and suggested that her parents could take care of her. Her mother was unsupportive and so were some of Subhadra's neighbours, who accused the volunteers of being heartless. The head teacher told Subhadra's parents that education was the pathway to the children's future and that there could be no compromise. They were initially reluctant but saw the wisdom of this. The girls were admitted in the BC Girls' Hostel in Suryapet. The CRPF sponsored textbooks and notebooks for them.
4. The volunteers had been following up the education of Jakkula Malleshwari – a native of Kotapahad from Atmakur mandal right since her school days. She dropped out of Junior College for health reasons and was treated but did not return to College because her alcoholic mother was against educating her. The KBS members informed the volunteers that the girl had been attending a course in Tailoring. She kept trying to avoid them but they finally caught up with her. She finally revealed to them that she had taken this decision because she was unable to afford her fees. The volunteers mobilised a group of 10-15 women and went to the girl's house. Her mother was in a drunken stupor and spoke roughly to them. The volunteer persuaded her with help from locals and Malleshwari agreed to resume her education. The college lecturers doubted if she would clear her exams and tried to dissuade her but she was resolute. She dropped out after a few days owing to her health condition but took her education seriously and performed well in her exams, impressing her lecturers and gaining their acceptance.
5. Kesaboina Sravani – a Class 10 student from Yepuru, Atmakur mandal contracted Tuberculosis and her parents consulted a private hospital rather than approach the local government hospital for fear of disclosure. Her situation got critical, following which she was taken to doctors in Suryapet, Hyderabad and Khammam. She lost her hair and her parents stopped sending her to school. The volunteers took note of the girl's three-month absence and went to

her home along with some teachers. They arranged IV fluids for the girl and gave Rs 3000 to the family. A health camp was held in the school shortly after and she was taken there. She was asked to give a sputum test but her parents refused. They were told that she would be given Rs. 500 if she got treated at the government hospital. They were unwilling to get treated at the hospital but asked the doctor if they could receive the amount from the government. The doctor was not ready but agreed after the volunteers convinced him. Sravani's health improved and she is due to return to school in January.

6. Sridevi from Man Singh Thanda in Nutankal mandal had failed to clear the Class 10 exams on three occasions but had appeared for them in determined fashion since March 2017 upon the volunteers' insistence. She ultimately succeeded in July 2018. She was interested in studying further but her parents were not keen on this. They had been sending her to work against her will. Her relatives and neighbours had also been discouraging her. Some of them were in support of her marriage. The volunteers involved some women's group members, the Anganwadi Teacher, the Village Bookkeeper and a medical practitioner in efforts to convince her parents. They finally agreed to let Sridevi continue her education but she was unwilling to go to the Government College and wanted to study in Srinidhi (a private) College, where her friends had enrolled. The family lacked the financial resources needed to pay her fees. The team spoke to the management along with some of the locals and arranged her admission there at a subsidised fee of Rs 5800. She is studying there along with 17 children that the MVF volunteers have followed up in the last two years.
7. Vankudoth Kalyani from Asla Thanda of Atmakur mandal had dropped out of Junior College for a fortnight and was also missing from the village. The volunteers tried to trace her with no luck. They came to know a few days later that a pastor from the village had sent her to Vijayawada for some Bible training. When spoken to, her mother replied that religious education was more important for them than education. No amount of motivation worked. One of the volunteers approached another pastor that he knew and got him to speak to the pastor. Kalyani and her mother were counseled that the girl could always get a Bible education but not school education. The girl was convinced and finally returned to college.
8. The parents of Sunita – a Class 8 girl from Kogilathota in Holagunda mandal took her out of school in early June as soon as she attained puberty. Any amount of counseling and argument failed to convince her parents to send her back to school. The girl's elder brother and her teachers spoke to her parents but to no avail. The volunteers identified her as a dropout during the follow-up exercise and spoke to her parents but they were adamant. Coincidentally, a friend of hers that lived in the vicinity had also discontinued her education for similar reasons but her father was willing to send her to school if she had company. The volunteers spoke to both the girls' parents and followed up both the girls to school.
9. Suddala Ganitha – a Class 7 student from Maddirala dropped out of school after she sustained a fracture to her hand in an accident. Her name was struck off the school registers, as she accompanied her widowed mother to Hyderabad and was absent for three months. She was later admitted in the English medium KGBV in Maddirala. She couldn't cope with the classroom sessions owing to her lack of command over the language and ran away twice or thrice, finally quitting. She came up with a number of excuses. The Special Officer of the KGBV and the volunteers spoke to her and she came out with the truth. She was shifted to the Telugu medium KGBV in Thungathurthy, where she is at home.
10. Md. Samreen Begum of Class 8 from HS Parveda, Shankarpally did not to school for 11 days after she attained puberty. Upon her return to school, she seated herself in a corner and failed to respond when her name was called out at the time of marking attendance. One of the boys,

who did not notice this, remarked that she was absent. Another boy told the teacher the reason for her absence. This embarrassed her and she decided after coming home that she would not attend school further. Her parents also took the episode to heart and did not send her. The volunteer spoke to the community elders and also told the girl's classmates that it was not right for them to pass such comments, as this was quite normal for girls. They promised to be more sensitive towards Samreen Begum. She returned to school two days later.

Annexure 2 Cases of Love/Elopement

1. Shailaja²³ – a Class 10 girl from Yepuru, Atmakur mandal had an affair with a classmate. One of the teachers informed her cousin brother but to no avail. The teacher then went to the boy's house in nearby Bopparam and warned him but the boy showed him a letter written to him by the girl. He, however, concealed the fact that he had also written to her. The teacher formed a negative opinion of the girl and told her parents, who were then in Khammam, not to send her to school thereafter. Shailaja's father was heartbroken and went as far as trying to poison the girl because he had lost face. His mother-in-law took her along after the Dussehra festival and put her to work in a cotton field. The volunteer identified the girl's case during a follow up exercise and spoke to the old woman, who told them that she had no say in the matter. She asked them to contact Shailaja's parents. They were highly disturbed and broke into tears, telling the volunteers there was no way she would get a good match in future. One of the teachers from the village promised to them that he would personally escort their daughter to school and back, after which Shailaja resumed her education. The volunteers and the teachers also counseled the boy and his parents. He has been maintaining a distance from the girl.
2. Musham Navya – a student of the Intermediate section from Nimmikal, Atmakur mandal was lured by a youth from Koti Naik Thanda and they eloped. This episode was captured by a CC Camera. She was reported missing from school on that day. The duo returned after 4 days but none of her friends spoke to her. Her parents resigned themselves to the situation and sent her to school subject to the condition that she would maintain a distance from the boy. Her teachers did not accept her. The volunteer came to know of the episode through the Girl Children's Committee of which Navya was a leader. The volunteer convened a meeting in the school and told her fellow students and her teacher that such episodes occurred once in a while and that it was time to move ahead. Navya was given key responsibilities of the Committee and she gradually came over the situation. The teachers, who were initially unsupportive, have shed their indifference.
3. Pittala Uma – the daughter of Venkanna from Thummala Penpahad in Atmakur mandal had an affair with a boy from the same school while she was in Class 10. She resisted him for over a year but got drawn towards him later. The both of them were regularly absent from class. The teachers informed this to the volunteer, who spoke to the girl. The boy had been insisting that she did not speak to any boy other than him. The teachers and the volunteer went to the girl's house one day and did not let anyone know that they were familiar with the situation in hand. The girl's absence was discussed and her parents agreed to send her to school. The boy also turned up at school as soon as he knew that Uma had come back. Her father beat him up badly in the school premises. The head teacher took the boy and the girl's father to his room and counseled the both of them but the boy, who happened to be Uma's cousin, stated brazenly that he liked her. The girl, who was seated along with them, got emotional and asked him who he was to control her. The boy spoke with bravado and asked the head teacher what right he had to go send him out of school. The volunteer took a written undertaking from the boy that he would not trouble her in future and he did accordingly. The issue was resolved peacefully.

²³ The girl's true identity has been concealed for reasons of confidentiality

4. The auto rickshaw stand adjacent to HS Yepuru in Atmakur mandal had more than 30 vehicles parked there at any point in time. The drivers, most of who were hardly 20-21 years old, regularly stalked the girls. One of them had been harassing Vankudoth Navya – a Class 10 student from Boda Thanda that used to commute by cycle daily. He threatened her of committing suicide if she didn't yield to him and actually took along a bottle of poison with him on one occasion. She was a member of the Gender Committee. She thought of informing her parents at the onset but was sure that they would take her out of school without a second thought. She informed the volunteers and her fellow members of the Committee. The matter was referred to the Sarpanch, the MPTC and VO²⁴ leaders. They convened a staff meeting in the school to discuss the matter. The head teacher promised to get the stand removed from there and got it relocated. The Sarpanch also warned the erring youth's parents and he stopped pestering Navya.
5. Akhila from Class 10 in HS (English Medium) Nutankal had an affair with one Mahesh from Maddirala. They used to write to each other regularly. They belonged to different social backgrounds and she was engaged to be married to a cousin of hers. Upon coming to know of the relation between them, Akhila's brothers waylaid him on the way back to the hostel in which he had been staying and beat him up badly. The team came to know of this and spoke to the warden. They asked him if he wished to file a case against the girl's brothers because he was responsible for the boy. At the other end, Akhila was unapologetic and told the volunteers that she liked the boy a lot. The volunteers and the head teacher advised her to desist from harbouring such thoughts until had crossed 18 years of age and then marry him if she still wished to. It was not right to disturb her education for now. Her parents, in the meantime, withdrew her from school. The volunteers and some VO leaders spoke to the girl's mother and told her that merely speaking to the boy wouldn't malign their daughter's character and that depriving her of an education would only worsen the situation. Akhila's mother and brothers were convinced to resume her education. Efforts are on to get the boy shifted to another school so that neither of the children's education is disrupted.

Annexure 3 KBS/Gender Committees

1. The volunteers noted during their visit to HS Atmakur that head teacher Shankar Naik had sent more than 20 children out of class for frivolous reasons. In fact, they had been standing near the school compound when the volunteers arrived there. The volunteers took a photo of the children. When they questioned the children, the children replied that this was nothing new to them. The volunteers spoke to the head teacher, who told them that the children came up with some excuse or the other. They tried to convince him that he had to be considerate to them but he reacted indifferently. The volunteers let the matter rest. It so happened that they had scheduled an orientation session for 30 children that afternoon. They took along the children that had been sent out of class and hardly 30 out of the 110 children on rolls remained in their classrooms. Most of the teachers were left with nothing to do.

Shankar Naik brought along the other teachers to the room in which the session was being held and commented on the proceedings in a sarcastic tone. The volunteers castigated him for his attitude and warned him that they would share the children's picture with the Press. One of the Gender Committee members questioned the head teacher what action he had taken against some teachers that had been absent for 2-3 days in the previous week. One of the teachers tried to justify her absence but another member of the Committee pointed out bluntly in her

²⁴ Village Organisation

face that teachers maintained double standards. The teachers were dumbstruck and kept mum. The head teacher has now turned over a new leaf.

2. Marikanti Nandini from Thallasingaram village, Nutankal mandal was a bright student but was forced to quit her schooling after she fell victim to the pranks of a youngster. A junior of hers named Pavan walked straight into her house unannounced and proclaimed right in the midst of the hall that he loved her and that he wanted her. Incidentally, both her parents were busy with their work inside. The shocked girl broke into tears and ran towards them but he made good his escape before they could catch him. Her father went to his house with 10 others and beat him up. The girl was withdrawn from school the next day because her parents suspected that she had an affair with him. They also locked her up indoors.

Nandini was a member of the KBS. Some of her fellow members noticed her absence and informed the volunteers about it during a Committee meeting held one week later. The local volunteer and 2-3 members of the Committee went to the girl's home and spoke to her mother, who alleged the volunteer's complicity in the matter. The volunteer replied that she would not have come there if this were the case and added that ought to have full faith in her daughter. In the meanwhile, the girl told the volunteer that she had been ill treated by her parents for a week. Nandini's mother had a change of heart and sent her to school the next day. Some VO leaders spoke to the boy but he showed no remorse. A further investigation into the matter revealed that he had been involved in many such incidents in the past. He was issued a Transfer Certificate and sent out of school for good.

3. Sujatha from Yellarthy in Holagunda mandal was a bright student and an active member of the Gender Committee meeting but was untidy most of the time. Her teachers questioned her on a number of occasions but she always kept mum. She gradually opened up during a meeting of the Committee and informed her fellow members that she had one brother and two sisters. Her father bought clothes for her and sisters only once a year though their brother got new clothes for every festival. One of the Committee leaders met her father that evening and invited him to attend their next meeting. He came to the meeting and was amazed at the range and the kind of issues that they discussed. He decided that he would treat all his children equally and assured the members then and there that he would buy clothes for all four of them during the next festival.
4. Sujatha from Virupapuram village of Halaharivi mandal came from a very conservative family. She elder brother was highly restrictive and wouldn't even let her lift her head on her way to school. The volunteer invited her to the Gender Committee meetings regularly. She mustered courage during one such meeting and spoke in detail on her ill treatment by her brother, informing that he had also beaten her on occasion. The head teacher and the volunteer invited her brother to a gender training session and asked him to participate in the feedback session. They asked him if his sister had ever committed a mistake, to which he replied that she spoke to boys. The volunteer asked him if she had ever crossed the line, to which he replied in the negative. He was told that he was as responsible for his sister as his father was and that her wellbeing was his responsibility. It was not right for him to be so censorious. The girl has breathed an air of freedom since and also attended the Convention in Holagunda.
5. KBS members from Gulyam, Halaharivi mandal disclosed during a discussion on child marriage that one of their fellow members Kuruva Glemma from Class 9 was due to be married against her wishes. The volunteers spoke to her father, who promised verbally to postpone plans for the marriage but did not take any steps in that direction. One of their neighbours – a well wisher of the family, asked the volunteer to do something about it. The volunteer had recorded his discussion with Glemma. When the girl's father came to know of this, he kept ringing the

volunteer regularly and began haranguing him. The volunteer referred the issue to the SI of Police, who summoned the girl's father and warned him sternly of legal action. He also ensured that the proposal was laid off. The volunteer visited the girl's home when he was around and deleted his number from Glemma's father's phone. The issue has been put to rest and Glemma resumed her education.

6. Ch Balamani from Parveda village of Shankarpally mandal had cleared the Intermediate exams and wanted to study further but her recently widowed mother decided against this after she lost her son to snakebite. As ill luck would have it, Balamani's elder sister was also widowed around the same time and she returned home with her young daughter. Balamani's mother took her out of school and forced her to work, as the family lacked the finances necessary to educate the young child. She subsequently decided to get the girl married. The volunteer came to know of this and spoke to her along with some CRPF members. She asked them if they would pay the girl's dowry. They told her that would pay the girl's fees but the woman did not agree. They took along some members of the Gender Committee to her home along with some of the girl's lecturers. They made it clear to her that underage marriage was a crime under the law. She reluctantly agreed to drop plans of her daughter's marriage. One of the lecturers offered to pay Balamani's fees and got her admitted in Jagruthi College.
7. Vasundhara from Maharajpet, Shankarpally mandal was the only daughter of her widowed mother. She was being harangued by an auto rickshaw driver, who used to comment on her physique in public and knock at her door at nights. Vasundhara shared this with her mother, who informed this to the Anganwadi Teacher and the volunteer. They raised the issue during a Panchayat meeting but there was no response. A police complaint was lodged but there was not much of a result, as some of the villagers took sides with the youth. Vasundhara and her mother shifted to Shankarpally for 2-3 weeks in order to avoid social stigma. However, they fell short of finances and consulted the volunteer. The volunteer spoke to the College Principal and got the youth sent to jail for three months.

Soon after he came out of jail, the youth went back to his old ways. He got drunk and began shouting in the girl's face outside her home nearly nude. The entire village castigated him and the girl was perturbed but the members of the Gender Committee motivated her to continue her studies until the yearend. Her mother fixed her marriage without informing anyone. Vasundhara was irked and told her mother that she would not marry him. The groom-to-be had claimed that he had studied up to the Intermediate level. However, a brief discussion with him revealed that he had studied only up to Class 4. The girl communicated this to her mother, who repented her haste and called off the marriage. Vasundhara returned to school.