

*Social Mobilisation for Rights of Adolescent Girls
focusing on Gender Violence, Gender Equity and Education
- Progress Report for the period July – December 2019*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

District level orientation sessions were organised for **83 Gram Panchayat members** from across the project area on the project agenda, gender issues including discrimination and the role that they were expected to play in the campaign for gender equality. Members of **37 Panchayats** have begun to **prioritise girl child issues** and are **regularly interacting with girls** on their issues. **District level orientation sessions** were held in Vikarabad and Rangareddy districts for **125 newly elected SMC¹ members** on their roles and responsibilities in strengthening schools. **Mandal level SMC bodies** were formed in Shankarpally and Vikarabad with **11 and 10 members** respectively. A **training session on gender equality** was organised for the **project staff** in Hyderabad. **Training sessions on the structure of the KBS², leadership skills, roles and responsibilities of the members, gender equality, discrimination and children's legislations** were held for **1553 KBS members and leaders**.

Model Centres are currently operational in **16 villages (including 2 new villages)**. Girls attending these Centres have been participating in a wide range of activities, which has resulted in a sense of bonding and unity among them. **Inter-Centre exposure visits** were arranged for **88 girls from 7 Centres**.

The **organisers participated in 235 Gram Panchayat review meetings** during the reporting period and highlighted the status of the girl child and the issue of gender discrimination with the members. A number of Sarpanchs have been addressing these issues in a proactive manner and have also taken steps to improve basic infrastructure in some schools, which has positively impacted girl children's retention in some villages. A few of them have acted on complaints of abuse/missing girls. The organisers convened **336 SHG³/VO⁴ meetings** with a combined **turnout of 6083** and **14 MMS⁵ meetings with 661 participants**. Members of **47 VOs** across the project area are **discussing and addressing gender/girl child issues** and have also realised the importance of girl child education. The organisers also held **85 parents' meetings** with **1316 participants** and **12 CRPF meetings** with **247 participants** to discuss **family support to girls, discriminatory practices at home and alcohol abuse**. Parents were urged to adopt a friendly approach towards girls and treat them on par with boys.

Headcount exercises were taken up in **83 schools** of the project area at monthly frequency to keep track of children's presence in school. The organisers undertook quarterly headcount exercises to identify children that were absent for 5 days or more and **followed up 728** of them to school. A **cohort of 8111** children that had given the exams in academic

¹ School Management Committee

² Kishora Balika Sangha (Adolescent Girls' Committee)

³ (Women's) self-help groups

⁴ Village organisation (village federation of SHGs)

⁵ Mandala Mahila Samakhya (mandal level women's federation)

2018-19 was followed up and **368 missing children** were brought back to school. The organisers successfully motivated **20 older children** (aged 15-18) to register for the **Class 10 exams through Open stream**.

The organisers held **306 Gender Committee meetings** at the school level with a **turnout of 4861** to discuss gender equality and support by boys to girls. They drew the attention of school authorities to issues such as mistreatment by teachers, name shaming, abuse and harassment. The organisers also conducted **90 school level orientation sessions on gender issues with a participation of 932**. These sessions have boosted their self-confidence and they have become more expressive. The conduct of the meetings and orientation sessions has resulted in notable changes in teachers' attitudes towards children in many schools. **Teachers in 10 schools are organising meetings of the Committee on their own and children in 3 schools are being seated together**. Children in some schools of Suryapet district are involved in combined games and studies. **Essay writing, games, quiz and elocution competitions** were organised for **1042 children** from **107 schools** on the occasion of UNCRC⁶ Week.

KBS meetings were held on **630 occasions** with a **participation of 10480**. The girls have begun to identify and refer cases of abuse and harassment to the Gram Panchayat and police officials and are protesting discriminatory treatment meted out to them at home. Some of them have begun to enlighten their mothers and other women in the family in this regard. The organisers also facilitated linkages between the KBS and the Gram Panchayat, as a result of which **37 Sarpanchs** from the project area are **regularly taking part in KBS meetings**.

A review meeting of the Gender Advisory Committee formed under the project was held in November with the participation of 10 members. The members shared their individual experiences and expressed solidarity with MVF's agenda of girl child empowerment. Campaign posters denouncing the practices of child labour and child marriage were released in Suryapet district on International Day of the Girl Child – 11th October.

Children's Conventions were held at the district level in all three districts with the **participation of 395 children** in all. These events served to familiarise both girls and boys with each other's problems. Boys have pledged their support to girls and some of them have followed up on their promises by sharing the burden of domestic responsibilities with female members of their families. **More than 200 adolescents participated in the Ika Chaalu Convention** that was held in Hyderabad with the objective of bringing the issue of gender violence and abuse/harassment of girls. They had an opportunity to interact with leading gender activists, who shared their valuable experiences with them and offered to guide and help them in their journey.

⁶ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1 TRAINING

1.1 Gram Panchayat members

A district level orientation session on the role of the Gram Panchayat in addressing girl child issues was conducted on 4th November in Hotel Sai Brindavan, Suryapet with the participation of 20, 9 and 6 Sarpanchs from Atmakur, Nutankal and Maddirala respectively. Resource support was extended by MVF⁷ Chief Coordinator Y Rajendra Prasad and Coordinators Dhanunjay and J Bhaskar.

The participants were given inputs on the concept of gender, gender discrimination and its manifestations, the link between gender discrimination and girl child rights and children's legislations. The speakers also discussed the role of the Gram Panchayat in resolving issues of concern to the girl child. They were informed that children's development was crucial to national development. Children – both girls and boys, must be able to access their rights and entitlements. The participants were exhorted to visit schools and other institutions regularly and coordinate with SMCs.

The speakers made a presentation on MVF's non negotiable principles in the context of gender and went on to initiate a discussion on gender perception at the community level. Whenever a case of a missing girl or elopement was reported, it was common for the majority to blame the girl and malign her character. This kind of mindset must be done away with. It was incumbent on the participants to handle such issues sensitively and take a stand in favour of the girl child.

The members next reviewed their experiences with girl child issues. The Sarpanch of Dacharam had acted upon a complaint of alcohol abuse and had booked some people. In another incident, a Class 10 girl from the village was being harassed by a married man from the village. The Sarpanch had spoken to him but to no avail. He later filed a case against the man and he was sent to jail. Unfortunately, the man's father died of a shock after the incident. The man was permitted to return home for 10 days and was sent back to jail. Three of the Sarpanchs had been discussing gender equality and had been publicising this agenda at the village level. The Sarpanch of Nassimpeta had instructed teachers from the local school to seat children together right from the Class 1 level itself.

The Sarpanch of Nutankal Panchayat had acted on two complaints by girls of eve teasing/harassment and had resolved the issue. The Sarpanch of Somla Thanda had been regularly discussing girls' issues during Panchayat meetings and had offered financial support to girls for their studies. The Sarpanch of Thallasingaram had visited the local school in Teachers' Day upon invitation from some girls and had got the motor repaired. The Sarpanch of Yedavelli had prevented one potential case of child marriage.

⁷ Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation

Two girls from Atmakur Likhita and Lakshmi shared their experiences with the KBS. They opined that schemes like Kalyana Lakshmi were a disincentive to girl child education and that it would be better if such funds were used to support girls' education rather than their marriage. They called upon the participants to give them the support and opportunities necessary for their progress. They informed that association with the KBS had given them a platform for expression and that they had even been able to persuade some men folk to quit drinking alcohol.

The below action plan was finalised at the end of the session:

- Members of the KBS would be invited to Grama Sabhas for experience sharing
- Adolescent girls from the village would be invited once in a quarter to express issues of concern to them and seek redressal during exclusive meetings
- Girls and boys would be seated beside each other in class right from the primary level on
- Exclusive toilets would be constructed for girls with running water facility
- The Panchayat would pass a resolution to register all marriages and to prevent child marriage
- The Panchayat would take sides with girl children whenever an issue involving them came up
- Girls would be given equal access to schools, the Panchayat office, the library and other public spaces

The project team wrote letters of thanks to all the participants after the conduct of the session and reminded them of the action plan. Upon his return from the training session, the Sarpanch of Mukundapuram from Maddirala mandal passed an order shutting down all unlicensed belt shops (shops that sold toddy and local liquor). He publicised this through means of the *Dappu* and also informed the same to the SI.

District level training sessions were held in Vikarabad on 20th August and in Shankarpally on 23rd August for 30 and 18 Gram Panchayat members (Sarpanchs, Deputy Sarpanchs and ward members) respectively. The participants were oriented on the concept of gender and the role of the Gram Panchayat in upholding girl child rights. MVF Coordinator J Bhaskar and Childline Coordinator Venkatesh addressed them on gender bias and discriminatory practices in society. They highlighted areas in which the Gram Panchayat could support girls. They highlighted the need to focus on prevention of child marriage and also made a presentation on Learning Outcomes among children.

They suggested the following areas of intervention by the Gram Panchayat, at the end of the sessions:

- Maintenance of child data for children aged 0-18 years
- Streamlining implementation of the RTE⁸ Act

⁸ Right to (Free & Compulsory) Education

- Supporting the KBS and the Gender Committee
- Hold children’s assemblies to identify and resolve children’s issues

The number of Gram Panchayats that are discussing girl child and gender issues during their meetings and inviting members of Gender Committees/KBS to their meetings are as under:

<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Panchayats</i>
Atmakur	10
Nutankal	8
Maddirala	7
Shankarpally	5
Vikarabad	7
Total	37

1.2 SMC

MPDO⁹ Sattaiah, MEO Akbar Ali, MVF Chief Coordinator Y Rajendra Prasad and MVF Coordinator J Bhaskar were among those present at a district level training session held for 45 SMC members in Ambedkar Bhavan, Shankarpally on 16th December. The Chief Coordinator spoke on the manner in which government schools had lost sheen. They were at risk of closure if their standards were not improved. This was the responsibility of not just the teachers but of the SMC as well. Schools must admit children on demand. Chairpersons of High Schools must keep vigil on children’s movements. The MPDO spoke on the need for teachers to focus on quality and keep track of children’s performance. The MEO cautioned them against punishing children and asked them to be punctual to their duties. He instructed them to complete their syllabus as per schedule and asked them to give additional inputs to children with learning gaps. Discipline, tracking children’s presence in school and proper utilisation of school grants were the other issues that he touched upon. An 11-member mandal body was formed at the end of the session.

A district level orientation session was held for 80 newly elected SMC members in Boys’ HS, Vikarabad on 17th December. Points on the agenda included key provisions of the RTE Act, responsibilities and powers of the members, gender equality, the Gender Committee and the KBS. MEO¹⁰ Babu Singh, MVF Coordinator J Bhaskar and Organiser Narasimhulu handled the sessions. The MEO spoke on the role of the SMC in school development. He asked them to focus on child attendance and promised to release transport allowance to children where eligible. He denounced the prevalent conservative mindset towards girls and emphasised the need to adopt a more broadminded approach in this regard. Bhaskar spoke on the UN–CRC, corporal punishment and gender equality. Boys and girls must be treated on par with each other and must be given equal opportunities. A component of gender must be included in school curriculum. The school must take children’s feedback and their

⁹ Mandal Parishad Development Officer

¹⁰ Mandal Education Officer

expectations into consideration at all times. A mandal body was formed with 10 members at the end of the session. It was decided that they would meet once in 3 months to review their progress and plan for the ensuing quarter.

1.5 MVF Staff

A ToT (Training of Trainers) session on Gender Equity was conducted for the project staff on 11th and 12th November in Don Bosco Institute, Ramanthapur. Noted author and women's activist Kondepudi Nirmala and MVF Coordinator Dhanunjay were the resource persons.

Kondepudi Nirmala noted that different approaches must be adopted in the process of engaging with children and community on gender issues. She also informed that different sets of leadership skills are required in different forums. She made a presentation on the various forms of gender discrimination and their manifestations. Violence against women starts right from the womb and continues until the end of life. She also spoke on social restrictions on girls/ women, safe/unsafe touch and the POCSO¹¹ Act. Media must act responsibly and exercise discretion in the choice of words and use of language while reporting on their issues. Dhanunjay spoke on training methodology. He informed that training content must be customised in view of the knowledge levels and requirements of the trainees. Every training programme has four components, namely setting the objective of the training, its methodology, its execution, and finalising an action plan.

The participants took part in an exercise in which they were given two sets of statements that listed out the natural differences between males and females and societal conception of such differences. They were asked to separate them from each other. They were informed that it was not possible to do away with natural differences but it was very much possible in the case of differences governed by social/cultural norms. They were later divided into five groups and assigned role play on forms of discrimination against the girl child at different stages of life – infancy, childhood, youth, mid age and old age with emphasis on forms of violence.

1.6 KBS leaders/members

Training sessions on gender equality were organised for members of existing KBS and reconstituted KBS in all 3 districts. The details of sessions and participants are as below:

<i>District</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Mandal level</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Cluster level</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Suryapet	Atmakur	21	807		
	Nutankal	5	213	3	95
	Maddirala	14	359	2	73
Rangareddy	Shankarpally	1	60		
Vikarabad	Vikarabad	2	114		
	Total	39	1553	5	168

¹¹ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences

All participants of the sessions in Atmakur were newly inducted members. They reviewed the progress of their activity and their achievements. The organisers later introduced the project to them and made presentations on the concept of gender and gender discrimination. The difference between the concepts of sex and gender was explained to them. They were informed that discrimination is practiced in the five key institutions of society, namely issue the family, school, media, religion and government. The roots of discrimination can be traced to the patriarchal nature of our society. It may be noted that male members of the family are usually the ones that earn and this gives them an edge over female members, who generally don't participate in economically productive activities. The former exercise control over family decisions and they have a tendency to dominate as a result, which gives way to violence sooner or later. The girls took part in a game called *Power Walk* to illustrate the stereotyping of gender roles in society. The girls later took part in an exercise to list out the various forms of discrimination at home. They identified role division, clothing, access to recreation and occupation and brainstormed the steps that could be taken to do away with such discrimination. They stated that it was important to equally respect the work done by female and male members of the family. It was also necessary to change attitudes towards girls.

The sessions held in Nutankal and Maddirala mandals were held at two levels depending on the understanding levels of the girls. New members were given a basic introduction to the concept of gender through an understanding of role division at home. They were informed that gender equality was possible when both female and male members of the family owned up the responsibility for domestic chores and divided them between each other. Change at the family level led to social change. Once the members had developed clarity, they were oriented at the second level on the manifestation of discrimination in social institutions and public places. Select members were also oriented on children's rights as enshrined in the UNCRC and on children's legislations such as the CMPA¹², the POCSO Act, the Juvenile Justice Act and the RTE Act.

A district level orientation session was held for 60 leaders of the Committees in Shankarpally on 21st July. They were given inputs on the structure of the Committee, their roles and responsibilities, life skills, leadership skills, the concept of gender, gender equality and natural differences between male and female and social conceptions of the same, through interactive sessions, Speaking on gender equality, SI¹³ Sanjeev Kumar reminded the girls that they were not inferior to boys and called upon them to assert themselves. He also spoke on the steps that they could take to maintain their health. While it was completely natural to get attracted by/infatuated with boys during this age, they ought to set aside such feelings and concentrate on their education and career without diversions.

The girls were later divided into 4 groups and asked to discuss the below topics:

¹² Child Marriage (Prevention) Act

¹³ Sub Inspector of Police

- Gender discrimination in home
- Challenges to gender equality
- When did you most regret being born a female
- Role of the government in achieving gender equality

Subsequent to the conduct of the group discussions, the girls made group wise presentations. They were asked to be role models and set an example for their fellow members and other girls to emulate.

2 MODEL CENTRES IN 12 VILLAGES

Model Centres are operational in the following villages:

<i>District</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Villages</i>
Suryapet	Atmakur	Nimmikal, Gattikallu, Patharlapahad, Thummala Penpahad
	Nutankal	Thallasingaram and Pedanemila
	Maddirala	Mukundapuram, Reddigudem
Rangareddy	Shankarpally	Parveda, Proddutur, Ravulapally
Vikarabad	Vikarabad	Mylardevarampally (new), Gottimukkula (new), Madgula Chittampally, Madanpally, Siddulur

Regular activities at the Centres

Review meetings were held in all 4 Centres in Atmakur mandal. Girls from all Centres took part in games. Drawing activity was taken up in Thummala Penpahad. The mobilisers have been bringing along newspapers to some Centres so that the children can read them. Girls from two Centres of Atmakur mandal participated in a rally for universal sanitation. Girls from the Centres in Nimmikal and Gattikallu took part in Grama Sabhas and made presentations on the importance of education for girls. Girls from the Centres in Thallasingaram and Pedanemila undertook a baseline survey in the respective villages to map education of children aged 6-18 years. Girls from the Centres in Nutankal and Maddirala mandals have access to library books kept in the local ICDS Centres.

The National Flag was hoisted in all 4 Centres of Atmakur mandal on Independence Day. Participants included Sarpanchs, MPTCs¹⁴, Village Revenue Officers, head teachers and Village Organisations. The ZPTC¹⁵ addressed adolescent girls on the occasion in Mukundapuram. The SMC, women's self-help groups and boys made logistical arrangements for the events. A skit on violence against women was performed at the Centre in Thallasingaram. Response from community was good and more than 200 people turned up though it was raining. Haemoglobin tests were held for girls from all Centres in

¹⁴ Member – Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency

¹⁵ Member – Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency

Atmakur mandal and girls diagnosed as anaemic were referred to the local Primary Health Centre. A rally against sexual violence was held in Nimmikal with the participation of nearly 80 members.

Monthly review meetings were held with the girls at the Centres in Shankarpally and Vikarabad mandals. Other regular activities included games and newspaper reading. They followed up irregular girls to the Centres and also followed up some college dropouts and absentees. Girls from all Centres of Vikarabad district celebrated *Bathukamma* in traditional fashion. Girls from the Centre in Ravulapally drew a village map and surveyed the child population of the village during November. Girls from Siddalur took part in a survey of the village population and gathered information on the number of males and females and the differently abled. They participated in Grama Sabhas and came up with a demand for newspaper facilities in their Centre. Children from the Centres in Vikarabad mandal planted an average of 10-15 saplings per Centre as part of the government's Haritha Haaram initiative.

2.1 Peer group exposure visits

A group of 12 girls from Gattikallu visited the Model Centre in Nimmikal on 22nd July. Girls from both the Centres spoke on the functioning of their respective Centres and on the manner in which they had been identifying and resolving problem issues. The girls from Nimmikal highlighted the challenges that they had faced at home, in school and in community. Some of them informed that they had been competing on par with boys in all aspects. They had been following up absentees and had counseled the parents of one girl that they had been planning to get married underage. They had involved the Sarpanch and had successfully prevented them from performing the marriage. They had also contacted Childline – 1098 in the process.

A group of 15 girls from Thallasingaram visited the Centre in Nimmikal on 22nd December. The girls from Nimmikal informed that they had been assembling twice a month to discuss their problems. Combined studies were being held in the house of one of the girls. Earlier, their parents were against this but they began to accept this after the girl convinced them. One Lakshmi from Nimmikal had attained puberty two months ago and the mother of a boy to whose home she had been going for combined studies had objected to this. Lakshmi's mother spoke to the boy's mother and told her that this was a natural phenomenon for all girls and that there was no reason for her to be fussy about it. The boy's mother realised that she had been wrong and apologised.

A group of 11 girls from Pedanemila visited the Centre in Mukundapuram on 22nd December. The girls from Mukundapuram informed that they had been conducting review meetings on a regular basis and had been following up dropouts. They had been participating in a wide range of games and had been reading the newspaper every day. They had referred some cases of potential child marriage to the local Anganwadi Teacher. In one instance, a Class 10 student had made a Test Call to toll free No. 100. The SI had come there within 10

minutes and had expressed anger at the prank. However, they had apologised, after which he had made a detailed presentation on the services that they could avail themselves of by contacting 100. Upon their return home, the girls from Pedanemila promised to hold review meetings of their own regularly.

A visit was arranged for 18 girls from Reddigudem to Mukundapuram on 7th July. One girl each from Mukundapuram made a presentation on their activities, the challenges they had faced and their achievements. They had also prevented one case of child marriage. The gap between girls and boys had narrowed. Domestic chores were being performed by both girls and boys in a number of families. Parents of girls were no longer apprehensive about permitting them to go long distances to attend meetings or Workshops. The visitors appreciated the presentation skills of the local girls.

A visit was arranged for 12 girls from Proddutur to Maharajpet on 18th August. Girls from the Centre in Maharajpet had generated a village map and had mapped the employment profile and child population of the village. The Sarpanch, the Deputy Sarpanch, ward members, the SMC chairperson and the Anganwadi Teachers, who were present during the visit, spoke on the support that they had extended to the girls. The Sarpanch of Maharajpet offered to sponsor games material for the girls.

A group of 10 girls from Sankepally visited the Centre in Parveda on 22nd December. The girls from Parveda introduced the concept of Model Centre to them and reviewed their activities. They also displayed the Village Profile and Village Maps that they had prepared and explained the process to them. They also showed the visitors some drawings of theirs. The visitors also reviewed their processes in the presence of a VO leader and members of the CRPF and the Mothers' Committee for Quality Education.

The MPTC, the ANM and the ASHA were among those present at the Centre in Madgula Chittampally during a visit by 10 girls from Gottimukkula on 12th August. Girls from the Centre in Madgula Chittampally reviewed their activities and spoke on the changes brought about among them as a result of their association with the Centre and the employment profile of the village. They also proudly displayed some of their drawings. Both the visitors and the local girls also spoke on the challenges and problems that they had encountered. The ANM made a presentation on personal hygiene. The MPTC encouraged the girls to study well and to focus on their future without any diversions.

2.2 Organise reading sessions periodically

Girls from all Centres in Suryapet district took part in reading sessions once or twice a month. The girls read books on gender issues and books authored by Kamla Bhasin. They held discussions on the Nirbhaya case and the Priyanka Reddy incident and the action/precautions that they could take in such situations.

2.3 Organise lectures by experts at village level

The ICDS¹⁶ Supervisor visited the Centre in Thalasingaram and addressed girls on the provisions of the CMPA. She also spoke on the adverse impact of early marriage and motherhood on their health and wellbeing. She also made a presentation on the structure of the Child Marriage Prevention Committee and redressal mechanisms available to them in the context of child marriage. They could approach the nearest Anganwadi Centre or contact the SHE team of the police department. The Anganwadi Teacher and the ANM¹⁷/ASHA¹⁸ respectively counseled them on the importance of nutrition and on different aspects of personal health.

A local lawyer visited the Nimmikal Centre and spoke on the legal provisions relating to sexual abuse/violence. He also familiarised the girls with salient features of the POCSO Act and the CMPA and sections of the Criminal Procedure Code that could be invoked in cases of abuse and violence. The ICDS Supervisor spoke to girls at the Centre in Mukundapuram on the principles of Menstrual Hygiene Management, personal healthcare and anaemia. She advised them to use the facilities being offered by the government through various institutions and to get their heights and weights measured regularly. The ICDS Supervisor addressed girls at the Centre in Pedanemila on the ill effects of child marriage. ANMs and ASHAs from Madgula Chittampally and Ravulapally oriented the girls on personal hygiene. The Anganwadi Teacher visited the Centre in Ravulapally and addressed the girls on the importance of nutrition.

Impact of the Model Centre intervention

The concept of the Model Centre has begun to attract the attention of community groups, which has translated into an increase in the numbers of visitors to the Centres. These visitors include Gram Panchayat members, the SMC, youth groups and parents. Most of the girls now enjoy the support of their male family members. Parents and brothers were earlier reluctant to send the girls outside the village but the situation has changed now and members of the KBS do not hesitate to even go as far as the district headquarters or Hyderabad to attend important meetings. They have also begun to communicate their learnings to their parents. Male youth extended logistical support for the conduct of the *Bathukamma* in Vikarabad district. More parents and girls' brothers are discussing gender issues in their homes now. There are a number of instances of male youth accompanying their sisters to and fro the Centres – something that was unheard of in the past.

Challenges

Despite the general success of the Model Centre intervention, there are some issues that remain to be addressed. One of the key issues is that most of the Centres do not have any

¹⁶ Integrated Child Development Scheme

¹⁷ Auxiliary Nurse Midwife

¹⁸ Accredited Social Health Activist

dedicated buildings and operate mainly from community halls or other public buildings. They are not spacious, which makes it difficult to display the girls' drawings and other creations and to implement all the proposed activities. Access is a problem in the case of 3 Centres in Suryapet district. The Centre in Reddigudem operates from the Anganwadi Centre. The Teacher in charge is unwilling to hand over the keys to the organisers, as she stocks her food and other rations in the Centre and is worried about their safety.

Turnout of girls is not very high, as the Centres run only on Sundays, which is the only free day that they have in the entire week. Quite a few girls – especially those from high school classes, are busy with their weekend school assignments. Girls from Class 10 are being encouraged to bring along their books to the Centres in Nutankal mandal so that they do not lose valuable time. Children's seasonal employment in cottonseed farms continues to remain one of the major impediments to girls' turnout in the Centres. It has also been difficult to reach girls that are studying in hostels at distant locations.

Conclusion

It has been noted that the Model Centre intervention has proven to be very useful to adolescent girls from the respective villages. They have been actively participating in a wide range of activities, which has helped educate them on various issues. They feel empowered and their mobility has also gone up. Most important of all, they have been sharing the knowledge that they have gained through these activities with their parents, who have begun to acknowledge the usefulness of these activities and have been supporting them. At the same time, MVF believes that restricting these activities to just a few Centres would limit the impact of the intervention. We, therefore, propose to extend these activities to all villages under the project in a phased manner.

3 SOCIAL MOBILISATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

3.1 *Conducting meetings with Gram Panchayat members at Panchayat level*

No meetings were held exclusively with the Gram Panchayat, as it is an apex body that controls all public institutions in the village. The organisers, however, participated in periodical review meetings of the Gram Panchayat across the project area and shared the progress of the project with the members. They spoke on the status of the girl child in the village and brought issues of discrimination, abuse/harassment and girls' seasonal employment in cottonseed farms to their notice. They also spoke on the initiatives of the KBS and invited them to visit Model Centres whenever possible and to encourage the girls by supporting them in all possible ways.

The Sarpanchs responded positively and many of them have been undertaking regular monitoring visits to schools. They have been addressing school infrastructure issues and have been following up absentees to school. They have also taken cognisance of girl child issues including their employment in cottonseed farms and have been facilitating

community level discussions on gender issues, especially abuse and harassment. The details of Gram Panchayat review meetings in which the organisers took part are as under:

<i>District</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Meetings</i>
Suryapet	Atmakur	84
	Nutankal	52
	Maddirala	58
Rangareddy	Shankarpally	16
Vikarabad	Vikarabad	25
Total		235

The broad outcomes of the meetings are as below:

- Enrolment in PS¹⁹ Gummadavalli went up from 60-70 to more than 150 due to the efforts of the Sarpanch.
- The Sarpanch of Maharajpet reported a case of harassment of an adolescent girl by a local youth to the police station
- The Sarpanch of Atmakur got a scavenger posted in the Model School after being informed by the girls there that there was no provision to dispose of their used sanitary pads due to poor maintenance of the 30 toilets in the School
- The newly elected Sarpanchs in Mahalingapuram, Gottimukkula, Maharajpet, Gopularam and Dontanpally villages of Shankarpally mandal permitted the organisers to use rooms in the Gram Panchayat for the conduct of review meetings
- The Sarpanch of Settigudem got 150 tractor loads of earth dumped to control the seepage of sewer water into the school premises.
- The Sarpanch of Asla Thanda in Atmakur mandal held a counseling session for youth from 3 Thandas after an incident of eve teasing had caused a girl to drop out of hostel
- The Sarpanch of Isthapuram, Atmakur mandal got the school drain cleaned after he received a complaint that it was overflowing. He also prevented a potential case of child marriage.
- The Sarpanch of Mukundapuram got the defunct electric motor in the school repaired. He also got water taps fitted and installed a Reverse Osmosis Plant in the school.
- The Sarpanch approved the sanction of transport allowance to 7 children from Mamillamada – a remote village, to Maddirala.
- Upon being informed of monkey menace in the school, the Sarpanch of Kuntapally – a remote village, got a compound wall constructed in just 15 days.
- A residential school sanctioned by the government in Kuntapally, Maddirala had been shifted to Penpahad mandal for want of accommodation. The newly elected Sarpanch, who also happens to be the President of the Sarpanchs' Forum, spoke to

¹⁹ Primary School

the MLA²⁰ and got the School relocated in Kuntapally. The School will begin functioning in the next academic year.

- The Sarpanch of Madanpally got the timings of the public bus service rescheduled so that children were not late to school.
- The Sarpanch of Mylardevarampally declared prizes for school toppers and also solved the problem of water shortage in the local school.
- The Sarpanch of Siddalur followed up two dropouts to school
- The Sarpanch of Proddutur declared cash prizes for children with 100% attendance and the first two rankers from Class 10. He further paid the fees of 8 children studying in Intermediate First Year and is supporting the salary of one volunteer in the local HS²¹. The MPTC is paying the honoraria of two more volunteers.
- The son of a widowed woman from Mamillamada dropped out of school and refused to rejoin unless he had a bicycle of his own. His mother, on the other hand, couldn't afford it. The head teacher informed this to a former Sarpanch. The two of them jointly bought him a bicycle, after which he resumed his studies.
- The Sarpanch of Maharajpet provided a room to accommodate the Model Centre and also arranged transport facility for 16 children to the school at an expense of Rs 8000 p.m. One of the ward members sponsors 8 cans of water for the school every day.
- The Sarpanch of Dontanpally has allotted a room in the Gram Panchayat building for use by the KBS and also recruited 2 volunteers to offer tuitions for children with learning gaps.
- The Sarpanch of Gopularam personally followed up 3 girl dropouts to school and allotted a room for the conduct of MVF review meetings in the village
- The Sarpanch of Ravulapally – has been supplying 10 water cans each to the PS and the HS every day.
- The Sarpanch of Mokila sponsored an English volunteer at a monthly honorarium of Rs 5000
- The Sarpanch of Parveda declared prizes for three Class 10 toppers. She also arranged makeshift roofs for the school toilets.
- The Sarpanch and the MPTC of Mahalingapuram have been jointly supporting the honorarium of a school volunteer. The Sarpanch also arranged 20 benches for the school and supplied water through a tanker.
- Community members from Pulmaddi had been drinking liquor in the school premises after dark. The Gender Committee passed on this information to the Sarpanch, who contacted the SHE team and got the problem resolved.
- The Sarpanch and the Deputy Sarpanch withdrew 20 children from private schools based in Vikarabad and got the PS in Pendlimadugu, which had been closed down for want of strength, reopened. They also petitioned to the MLA for an additional teacher in the school.

²⁰ Member of Legislative Assembly

²¹ High School

- The issue of liquor drinking within the school premises was resolved through the Sarpanch's involvement in Pulsumamidi. He also sponsored bags and books for 15 girls.

Some youth had been hanging around HS Yepuru every evening, passing comments at the girls as they were on their way out. A few of them, who owned auto rickshaws, used to park their vehicles outside the gate. On one such occasion, Madhavi – a girl from Class 10 gave them a piece of her mind. One of her classmates misinterpreted the situation and began passing remarks at her, linking her to one of the youth. Madhavi took it to heart and shared this with a couple of her friends that were enrolled in Intermediate First Year. One of them, who had secretly been eyeing the girl for long, asked the boy how he had dared to poke fun at the girl that he loved. In the meantime, Madhavi told her parents about the incident. They consulted the Sarpanch and she suggested to them that they ought to file a case with the police against the older boy. The two boys were taken to the police station and handed a thrashing. The Sarpanch, in the meantime, came to know the facts of the case. She intervened and counseled both the boys. She also ensured that no one caused any trouble. CCTV Cameras have also been installed in the school premises. The auto rickshaw drivers have also topped parking their vehicles near the school.

*

An auto rickshaw driver from Nutankal had lured a 13-year old student from Chilpakuntla and she fell for him. He would frequently come to the school after school hours. She went missing one day and her parents approached the head teacher, who brought up the issue for discussion during a Panchayat review meeting. The Sarpanch spoke to the parents of both the girl and the youth. An inquiry revealed three days later that they had been staying in the house of one of the youth's relatives. Some of the villagers demanded legal action but the Sarpanch decided against this because the girl was a minor and it would only tarnish her image. He accordingly asked the both of them to his office and counseled them. The girl returned to school and maintained a distance from the youth. A case was put up against the youth and he was handed over to the police. He was let off with a warning.

*

The Sarpanch of Nutankal convened a school staff review meeting after she had undertaken a visit to the local HS along with the MPTC and the ward members. The teachers informed that they had not been facing any issues. The Gender Committee was active and both boys and girls were being seated together in class and that they were participating in sports jointly. The Sarpanch suggested the conduct of meetings with the parents of children from Class 10 to inform them of their children's academic progress and their weak areas. She held a huge meeting in coordination with the head teacher. Nearly 150 parents turned up on the occasion – some of them from as far as Hyderabad. The reasons for children's absence were established on the basis of feedback from their parents. The Sarpanch addressed them in the

importance of education for girls and asked them to educate their daughters at least up to the undergraduate level.

*

Ramzan – a Class 10 student from Juvvichettu Thanda, Atmakur mandal was absent for a fortnight in September due to dengue. She could not give her Summative Assessment exams and her name was struck off the registers. She informed the organiser about it and he suggested talking to the Sarpanch. The organiser and the Sarpanch went to the school and spoke to the head teacher, who came up with lame excuses. The teachers supported him and one of them went to the extent of speaking ill of her character. The head teacher claimed that he girl had not told him anything about her health condition. The Sarpanch told the head teacher that whatever had happened was past and asked him to readmit the girl but the latter was adamant and stated that she was not a good student. The Sarpanch rang up the DEO²² and asked her to speak to him. The head teacher begrudgingly took her in after being instructed by the DEO.

*

Fehmina – a resident of Madanpally from Vikarabad mandal and a student of Intermediate Second Year in Gautam College, Vikarabad was being harassed by a local youth, who had also written her some letters. She handed over the letters to the organiser during a meeting of the KBS. She asked him to maintain confidentiality, as she had not told even her parents. The organiser met the Sarpanch and informed him that a girl from the village was being harassed. He did not tell the Sarpanch her name initially. He later disclosed the girl's name after consulting her. The Sarpanch spoke to her and asked her not to worry. The organiser went to the college 3-4 times over the course of the next week and the boy stopped coming. Fehmina, who had never attended even a single meeting of the KBS before joining college, is regular to the meetings.

*

The incidence of child labour among the Waddera community in Nimmikal was quite high with 18 girls employed in cottonseed farms. The organisers submitted a list of the girls to the Sarpanch. He launched a special drive with the participation of the ward members and the organiser. They went to the farms in Gattikallu, where the girls worked, as early as 7 a.m. Some of the children fled but the team caught up with the others. They spoke to the farmer but he was indifferent. The team paid a second visit to the farm along with the MEO a few days later and followed up all 18 children to school. The Sarpanch coordinated with the Childline team to withdraw 9 more children from work over the next fortnight.

*

²² District Education Officer

Gitanjali – a Class 10 student of Ramoji Thanda, Atmakur mandal was taken out of school after her mother passed away. Her maternal grandmother took her home along with her. Her maternal uncle, who was married and had no children of his own, wanted to marry her and he told his mother about it. His wife was also in favour of this. The old woman spoke to Gitanjali, who was shocked at the proposal. She informed this to the Sarpanch, who had attended a KBS meeting. The Sarpanch summoned the girl's uncle to a meeting and told him that it was unethical for him to think of marrying a girl that was like his own daughter. He would be setting a bad example by doing so. The man dropped his plans of marrying Gitanjali and she returned to school.

*

A student of Intermediate Second Year from Mukkudidevulapally in Nutankal mandal had an affair with a Class 8 student of Vijaya Mary School. They met nearly every day and their closeness eventually translated into a physical relationship. Fearing a backlash, they went missing for two days. The girl's friends passed on this information to the Principal, who contacted the Sarpanch. She took prompt steps to locate the couple and counseled the two of them and their parents personally. The Sarpanch also punished the boy and cautioned him that he would be sent behind bars if he repeated this act. She later convinced the Principal to let the girl continue her schooling, assuring her that this kind of incident wouldn't recur.

*

A Class 8 boy from Thallasingaram in Nutankal mandal had been stalking one of his classmates Madhavi. He followed her wherever she went and told her a couple of times that he liked her. She told her parents, who spoke to the head teacher. The head teacher summoned the boy to his room. The boy broke down and denied any wrongdoing. The head teacher referred the matter to the Sarpanch during a review meeting. The Sarpanch spoke to both the children's parents and told them that this was a sensitive issue that had to be handled properly. He later spoke to the boy separately and counseled him.

*

Uppalaiah – a 12-year old boy from Alaganur in Nutankal mandal had been withdrawn from school by his alcoholic father and had been forced to beg for alms. One day, he suffered severe injuries to his hand and was advised to rest fully for 4 months. His father refused to send him back to school after he recovered. Upon being informed of this by a local youth, the organiser visited Uppalaiah's house and spoke to his father, who was in no mood to oblige the organiser and spoke rudely to him. The organiser involved the Sarpanch in the matter and took him along with the ward members and the head teacher of the local school to the boy's home. His father finally agreed to send him back to school.

*

The Sarpanch of Gottimukkula visited the local school and took the children's feedback on their problems. They listed out water, sanitation and public transport. He solved all the issues as part of the government's 30-day action plan for model villages. Some of the children complained to him that one of the teachers had established physical contact with girls indiscriminately. He warned the teacher against such behaviour and warned him that he would be suspended if any further complaints were received against him. He has mended his ways.

*

The school in Reddigudem village of Maddirala mandal had a huge playground of nearly 5 acres and was full of teak trees but had no compound wall. Some locals had taken advantage of this to consume liquor in the school premises after school hours. They had been strewing the empty bottles around. The Sarpanch warned them and got a fence put up around the school. He also prevented a case of potential child marriage and followed up the girl to school.

*

Ch Priyanka from Gattikallu in Atmakur mandal was withdrawn from school so she could look after her pregnant sister's daughter. The Sarpanch received this information from the head teacher of the school during a Gram Panchayat review meeting. He summoned the girl's father to a Grama Sabha and asked him to send her to school, failing which he would be deprived of all benefits under the government's welfare schemes. Priyanka duly returned to school.

3.2 Meetings with village federation of SHGs

Regular meetings were held at the village and the mandal levels with SHG and VO members and the MMS respectively to discuss gender violence, sexual abuse and gender discrimination. Interactive discussions were held with them on the need to prioritise gender equality. They were informed that change began from home and that they ought to treat their daughters on par with their sons if this goal were to be achieved. Stereotyping of gender roles needed to be done away with. Maintaining friendly relations with their daughters and cooperating with them would earn them their trust and they would openly share their problems. This would lead to harmonious relations between them. Identifying the girls' needs and supporting them in all possible ways was important. The project team in Shankarpally and Vikarabad mandals emphasised the importance of networking with the Mothers' Association for Quality Education and the Gender Committee.

Discussions were also held on the high incidence of dropout among girls during the cottonseed season. Many of the members were of the opinion that the girls had to eventually be married and that there was no use educating them. They were asked to change this attitude and to place no restrictions on the girls' movements with specific

reference to the girls' participation in Committee meetings. The role that education plays in the development of a girl' life was also illustrated with examples and the women were asked to educate their daughters at any cost.

The government has mandated the formation of Gender Committees under the MMS. The formation of these Committees has been taken up across the State but they are not very active. Discussions held with the MMS focused on the need to revive the Committees and streamline their functioning on a priority basis. MMS Presidents of all 5 mandals have invited the organisers to participate in their quarterly meetings and are reviewing the status of gender issues in their respective mandals. The details of meetings held and participants are as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>SHG/VO meetings</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>MMS meetings</i>	<i>Members</i>
Suryapet	Atmakur	147	2183	4	280
	Nutankal	73	1009	4	179
	Maddirala	38	583	3	76
Rangareddy	Shankarpally	35	1146	1	50
Vikarabad	Vikarabad	43	1162	2	76
Total		336	6083	14	661

There have been some positive changes as a result of these meetings. Absenteeism in school has gone down among girls. More girls are pursuing education after the Intermediate level and mothers are no longer objecting to their participation in meetings way from home. Some of the members shared their experiences with the girls during KBS meetings and counseled them. Members of 11 VOs each in Atmakur and Nutankal, 9 each in Shankarpally and Vikarabad mandals, and 7 in Maddirala have prioritised gender and girl child issues such as girl child education, child marriage and girls' employment in seasonal work. They are visiting school regularly and are standing by girls in times of need. They have been playing a key role as a support group in the campaign for empowerment of the girl child.

Ailamma – an SHG member from Chilpakuntla in Nutankal mandal had been planning to get the elder of her two daughters married off, as the girl had failed to clear her Intermediate First Year exams and Ailamma was not sure if she would clear her exams. She changed her decision after she attended a meeting held by the MVF team and decided in favour of sending the girl to college, Turnout of SHG members at the flag hoisting event on Independence Day in the Thallasingaram Model Centre doubled to 10 from 5 last year.

The husband of MPTC Renuka from Thallasingaram was highly conservative and never let their daughter move around freely. He would even send one of his men to accompany her to school when she gave her exams. Subsequent to her participation in the meetings held by MVF, she began to motivate him and convinced him to change his attitude towards the girl. VO members from Narayanpur in Vikarabad counseled the parents of a Class 10 girl

from the local KGBV against marrying her off. She had failed to clear her exams earlier during the year. The women asked them not to risk her future by getting her married and further convinced them that she would pass her exams in her second attempt.

Venkatamma – a single woman from Mukundapuram in Maddirala mandal had not taken any decision about her daughter’s future after the girl had passed her Class 10 exams, as she had no clue about the available options. She consulted the organisers during an SHG meeting and sought their advice, after which she enrolled the girl in Intermediate First Year. This was the first instance of the girl having ever stepped out of her village.

The organisers came across 5 cases of missing girls in Bopparam village of Atmakur mandal. One of them had been away from home for 5 days. They filed a case in Atmakur Police Station along with the MMS and VOs but there was no response. They then petitioned to the Deputy Superintendent of Police and the SI but they did not act as well. The team finally went to the house of the Superintendent and shared the details of the case with him. He instructed his subordinate officials to track down all 5 girls and also asked the SHE team to counsel the youth and children involved. The team held counseling sessions in 14 HS of the mandal. As many as 20 active VO members from the mandal contributed to this effort.

3.3/3.4 Conducting SMC meetings at school level on girls’ issues, gender perspective

Elections to the SMC were held across schools of the State in 30th November after a long gap of three years. Exercising the right choice of chairperson one of the primary points on the agenda of SMC meetings held during the reporting period. The participants were asked to choose to elect chairpersons based purely on their merit and their dedication to school development and child right protection. Other issues discussed included the status of children’s education, the members’ roles, responsibilities and powers, implementation of the midday meal scheme, absenteeism and availability of basic infrastructure in school – especially separate washrooms for girls and boys. The details of meetings held are as under:

<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Meetings</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Atmakur	69	741
Nutankal	25	322
Maddirala	18	216
Shankarpally	2	60
Vikarabad	2	45
<i>Total</i>	116	1384

The newly elected chairpersons from two schools of Maddirala and one school each of Kotapally and Mukundapuram noted during visits to their respective schools in end December that the quality of the midday meal had suffered due to lack of coordination between the agencies and the teachers. This had led to the absence of some children in the post lunch session. They brought both the groups on to a common platform and counseled

them, after which the issue was sorted out. The chairperson of the school in Mukundapuram submitted proof of the poor quality of food to the MEO in the form of a video. The MEO promised to get the agency replaced. The SMC chairperson also mobilised sports material for the children from some local youth.

A Class 10 girl student from ZPHS²³ Kotapahad was found to be going outside the school premises during the short break without informing either of her teachers. One of the teachers subsequently spread a rumour that she had a relation with some youth. Upon receiving this information, the SMC chairperson met the teacher personally and asked her if she was sure about this. The teacher was unable to confirm it. The chairperson followed up the issue and discovered that the girl had gone home to change her sanitary pads during the period of her absence. The chairperson shared this with the teacher, who apologised for the misunderstanding.

3.5 Conducting parents' meetings

Retention of girls in higher classes, especially Class 10, was one of the major issues taken up for discussion during parents' meetings. The organisers had noted that these girls were being burdened with household responsibilities even during the exam season. Many girls were also engaged in seasonal work. The participants were asked to prioritise the girls' education and to educate them at least until the Intermediate level so that they could stand on their own. Teachers were also invited to attend the meetings in some villages. They shared the details of absentees with the parents and asked them the reasons for their children's absence. Meetings were also convened with the CRPF to involve them in addressing gender issues and promoting the concept of gender equality.

The details of parents' meetings and CRPF meetings held are as below:

<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Parents' meetings</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>CRPF meetings</i>	<i>Members</i>
Atmakur	32	566	2	55
Nutankal	32	456	4	85
Maddirala	18	240	3	62
Shankarpally	2	29	2	25
Vikarabad	1	25	1	20
Total	85	1316	12	247

The issue of alcohol abuse by fathers was discussed during CRPF meetings held in Atmakur. The organiser, the teacher, the CRPF members and some proactive parents persuaded the fathers of 3 girls from the mandal headquarters to quit alcohol consumption. In an incident from Isthalapuram, one woman consumed sleeping pills because her husband had been harassing her. She left home accompanied by her daughter, who she had withdrawn from

²³ Zilla Parishad High School

school. The woman was summoned to a meeting and asked to send the girl back to school. The organiser from Peepya Naik Thanda on Atmakur mandal identified 4 girls that were irregular to school, as they had been working as seasonal wage labourers. They motivated the girls' parents and brought the girls back to school.

One Manik Reddy from Parveda had been stalking Akhila – an Intermediate Second Year student of Chaitanya Junior College, and had been following her wherever she went. Three of her classmates made fun of her and went to the extent of even linking her name to his and scribbling their names at public places in the college. This disturbed Akhila and she dropped out for 45 days. Manik Reddy took her number from her friends and called her up. She was bit at home and her mother picked up the phone. He spoke rudely to her and she informed this to her husband. He went to the college and spoke rudely to the Principal, questioning him what morals he had been inculcating in his students. The Principal feigned innocence and asked him to bring the girl along with him. He asked Akhila why she had not informed her parents beforehand, to which she replied that she didn't trust them. A couple of days later, Akhila's paternal grandmother took her to her own village a few kilometres away without informing anyone and the girl missed college. The Principal rang up her father, who began to doubt her further. Some of her friends spoke negatively of her, adding fuel to the fire. The girl's younger sister Keerthana, who studies in Class 9, informed this to the organiser during a Gender Committee meeting. The organiser spoke to the girls' father and explained the entire issue to him. He finally acknowledged that he had been wrong about his daughter. The parents of Manik Reddy and another friend of his signed declarations to the effect that they would be responsible for any untoward incidents involving Akhila.

*

Sneha – a Class 9 student of HS Pulsumamidi and a boy enrolled in Intermediate First Year from her village Dannaram commuted together every day. One of Sneha's classmates – a boy, spread rumours linking the both of them. One afternoon, she left school for home. The organiser took note of this and approached her. She took the girl to the office room, from where the both of them went to the Anganwadi Centre. The Anganwadi Teacher and the organiser counseled her, hinting that her behaviour was not appropriate. She broke down and told them that nothing wrong had happened and that she had not informed her parents because they would use this as an opportunity to discontinue her studies. The organiser spoke to the youth later and he too denied any link with her. They had just spoken casually to each other. The organiser took her to school and explained the situation to the teachers. They reprimanded the boy and asked him to apologise to Sneha for having caused the misunderstanding. The issue was thus resolved without involving the girl's parents.

*

Ch Sirisha from Gottimukkula, Vikarabad mandal was dark in complexion and slightly overweight. This gave her a feel of inferiority and she began to walk 4-5 kilometres every day to reduce her weight. One day, she came across a group of 3 boys when she was walking.

She started to run away from them when they approached her. She eventually fell down. As ill luck would have it, a local gossipmonger saw her and took her home by auto rickshaw. The woman began telling one and all that the youth had molested the girl. She attributed this to the Girl Youth Committee intervention. Upon coming to know of this, the organiser convened a meeting and discussed the issue with the girl's parents and the woman. Sirisha's parents had decided to discontinue her education but she was keen on pursuing her undergraduate level education. The organiser told them that it was not right for them to mistrust their daughter and that it was best for them to send her to college. Sirisha has enrolled in college.

*

Three children belonging to a migrant family from Isthapuram that had settled in Nimmikal became highly irregular to school, as their alcoholic father would often beat up his wife. She had left the village for 2-3 months along with her children and their names had been struck off the school rolls. She shared this during a parents' meeting. The organiser arranged the children's readmission but they again became irregular. Their mother was, however, indifferent. The organiser made her vice-chairperson of the SMC, after which she took their education seriously and sent them to school regularly.

*

The organiser from Yenkepally in Nutankal mandal identified 8 cases of abortion in just one month. The issue of a missing infant from Somla Thanda was discussed during a meeting in the village. The child's mother came up with all kinds of excuses, saying her husband had taken it to a hospital. Her answers were not convincing. The organiser contacted the mandal officials, who instructed the ANM and the ASHA to look into the issue. They launched an in-depth inquiry into the incident and retrieved the child.

*

Deepika – a native of Koti Naik Thanda and a student of Class 6 in Kudakuda, dropped out in August after her father abandoned the family. When asked the reason for this, she stated that she had no friends there. She was later sent to the school in Nimmikal, from where she dropped out yet again because she didn't have a Transfer Certificate. The Village Bookkeeper, who happened to be an aunt of hers, motivated her to return to the school in Kudakuda.

4 ACCESS TO EDUCATION

4.1 Track Adolescent Children's Education at Village Level (Micro Level Planning with Support from Local Institutions)

The organisers took up headcount exercises on an ongoing basis to track children's presence in school. They visited schools and verified their physical presence in class against

entries in the school registers. They shared their findings with the teachers and undertook visits to the children's homes in order to follow them up. They spoke to the children's parents and motivated them to send their children back to school. More than 4 in 5 cases of absenteeism in Shankarpally and Vikarabad were accounted for by health reasons – especially fevers. The number of such girls was higher than that of boys. In some cases, girls had stayed away from school for a fortnight or so, as they had attained puberty.

One day, a youth from Thummala Penpahad approached P. Mounika – a 15-year old girl from the village and asked her if he could borrow some games material that had been provided to her and her friends at the Model Centre. The Physical Education Teacher of the local school, who saw them speaking, misunderstood the situation and spread rumours linking the both of them. The girl eventually stopped coming to school and most of her friends also quit visiting the Centre. The organiser came to know of this and spoke to Mounika, who came out with the facts. She informed them that she had done nothing wrong. The mobilisers tried to contact her father twice or thrice but he was never at home. They finally caught up with him and spoke to him about the incident. He felt strongly that she was guilty and did not agree to send her back to school. The organiser involved the Sarpanch in matter. He counseled Mounika's father and told him that he had to trust his daughter and that sending her to school would benefit her in the long run and that the quality of her life would improve if she studied. He finally consented to send her back to school.

*

Vamsi – a Class 10 boy from ZPHS Yerrapahad was regularly absent from school for 3-4 days a month. His father – an auto rickshaw driver, and his mother, who left home for work early in the morning, had no inkling of this. Even his two sisters did not inform their parents of this. The organisers met the boy during the follow up exercise and spoke to him. He told them that he was disinterested in studies. His father beat him and he left home in a fit of anger. He spent the night in the open fields. The organiser made some inquiries and discovered that he had been socialising with older boys that were studying at the Intermediate/undergraduate level. They counseled him that he still had a lot to see in life and that he could not achieve anything significant if he neglected his studies. He agreed after the organiser spoke to him thrice and also convinced the teachers to pay extra attention to him.

*

Students of the Girls' HS in Shankarpally informed the organisers during a follow up exercise that one Christian teacher from their school had been spreading a rumour that ghosts had been hanging around the school. When a fellow teacher objected to this, she used foul language against her. She also used vulgar language with the children, who reported this to the organiser and asked her to get the teacher replaced. One of the girls informed that the teacher had literally grasped her by the throat once. The organiser convened a parents'

meeting and invited the MEO to attend it. The parents informed that 40-50 children were absent every day on an average due to the teacher's false propaganda. The official got her transferred promptly.

*

Kongala Teja – a Class 7 student from Patharlapahad in Atmakur mandal was absent for two months due to health issues. Her parents, who were very superstitious, believed that going to school was what had caused her problems. She walked daily from the hostel in which she had been staying to the school. Her grandmother was against this. There was thus all round opposition to Teja's education. The organisers invited her to attend a KBS meeting. Her fellow members sought her parents' permission and convinced her to attend a training session. At the end of the meeting, she agreed to resume her education. However, the head teacher was not in favour of this. The organiser spoke to him and got Teja admitted in Class 8.

*

The mother of Gaddi Ramya – a Class 9 girl from Nutankal developed a cancerous tumour that badly affected her health. She took the girl out of school so she could look after her and help her at home. Her husband began harassing her, after which she came to her mother's place. He also harassed Ramya – the youngest of his 3 daughters. She left him and went to her mother, who put her to work as a wage worker. Her neighbours informed this to the organiser during a follow up exercise. The organisers spoke to the girl's parents and followed her up to HS Pedanemila.

The details of children that registered and paid the fees for the lass 10 exams through Open stream are as follows:

Mandal	Boys	Girls	Total
Atmakur	6	2	8
Nutankal	1	5	6
Maddirala	1	2	3
Shankarpally	1	1	2
Vikarabad	0	1	1
Total	9	11	20

The organisers gathered school wise information on children that had appeared for the annual exams at the end of academic 2018-19 and tracked their school-going status at the commencement of the new academic year, subsequent to the school enrolment drive in June/July.

The details of children tracked and followed up are as under:

<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Children Tracked</i>			<i>Missing Children followed up (from cohort)</i>		
		<i>B</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>T</i>
Atmakur (S)	14	975	996	1971	56	44	100
Maddirala	9	409	479	888	17	25	42
Nutankal	12	488	648	1136	38	36	74
Shankarpally	16	460	792	1252	18	23	41
Vikarabad	21	1477	1387	2864	44	67	111
Total	72	3809	4302	8111	173	195	368

5 EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND BOYS IN SCHOOLS

5.1 Conducting meetings with gender committees in schools/colleges

The organisers reorganised Gender Committees in 14 ZPHS, 6 UPS and 3 colleges of Suryapet district. They also convened meetings with these Committees to discuss gender equality, discrimination, sharing of responsibilities, harassment/violence/abuse, absenteeism, child marriage, classroom activities, quality of education, corporal punishment, joint participation in games, combined studies and sharing of study material. The details of Gender Committee meetings held are as under:

<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Meetings</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Atmakur	105	1808
Nutankal	59	970
Maddirala	52	838
Shankarpally	44	505
Vikarabad	46	740
Total	306	4861

There have been notable changes in awareness levels among not just teachers but parents as well on gender issues and in their attitudes towards girls due to the Gender Committee intervention. This is reflected in ownership of this agenda within the school and division of household responsibilities between girls and boys. The practice of name shaming girls by writing their names along with those of boys has gone down and fewer cases of eve teasing and violence have been reported. Teachers have also begun to take cognisance of such issues and are addressing them without any delay.

Teachers in charge of the Gender Committees in Ravulapally, Proddutur, Maharajpet, Parveda and Mahalingapuram villages of Shankarpally mandal and Pulumaddi, Pulsumamidi, Mylardevarampally, Siddulur and Madanpally villages of Vikarabad mandal convene meetings of the Committee on their own. Teachers from the school in Madgula Chittampally seat boys and girls beside each other in school. Children from UPS

Chandupatla, HS Thallasingaram, UPS Yedavelli, UPS Soma Thanda and UPS Chilpakuntla in Nutankal mandal sit together and participate in combined studies and joint games.

The Class 10 Mathematics teacher of HS Patha Suryapet never adhered to the timetable and had been lagging behind, as a result of which a considerable portion of the syllabus was pending. He was a dominating personality and even the head teacher feared to question him. The Committee members took the matter to the notice of the organiser, who spoke to the teacher and resolved the issue. The head teacher of HS Isthapuram arranged supplemental coaching classes in Physics after some Gender Committee members informed him that children from Class 10 were not able to understand what was being taught to them.

Prior to the formation of the Gender Committee, children were tolerant of abusive teachers but the formation of the Committee has emboldened them and they are openly reporting such cases to their head teachers/the MVF organisers. Members of the Committee from HS Nimmikal complained to the head teacher that the English teacher spoke to them in derogatory fashion and that the PET touched girls indiscriminately. The head teacher convened a staff meeting and warned the teachers against such behaviour. Venkanna – a teacher from the school in Gattikallu was known to touch girl students on some pretext or the other. When they objected, he asked them not to take serious note of it. The Committee members shared this with the volunteer, who suggested that they spoke to their head teacher. The teacher came to know of this and apologised to them.

5.2 Conducting training for the Gender Committees

Training sessions on gender issues and children’s legislations were organised for members of the Committee at the school level in Suryapet district and at the cluster level in Vikarabad and Rangareddy districts. The participants were given inputs on the concept of the Committee, its structure, gender issues, gender equality, violence, discrimination and social and natural dimensions of gender. They took part in group activity to highlight instances of discrimination in the family and in school and suggested measures to overcome them. They also discussed the status of the girl child in their respective schools.

The details of sessions are as below:

<i>District</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Agenda</i>
Suryapet	Atmakur	15	220	POCSO Act, concept of gender
	Nutankal	36	208	POCSO Act, concept of gender, RTE Act, Child Marriage Prevention Act, child rights
	Maddirala	13	234	Gender equality, Child Marriage Prevention Act, POCSO Act, role of the Committee
	Total	64	662	

One session each was devoted for each of the Acts in schools of Nutankal mandal and 4 sessions held exclusively on gender issues.

<i>District</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Members</i>
Vikarabad	26 th Nov.	Vikarabad	6	78
	4 th Dec.		6	82
	6 th Nov.	Shankarpally	7	36
	8 th Nov.		7	74
Total			26	270

Participation in the training sessions has helped rid the children of stage fear. Boys were reluctant to appear on the dais and hardly attended meetings of the Committee earlier. The situation has changed now and many of them not only turn up at the meetings without fail but also eagerly seek information on the meeting schedule. More children have begun to share information on their classmates' absenteeism. They further have no inhibitions in sitting beside each other in Committee meetings.

5.3 Conducting elocution, essay writing, sports and games in public functions jointly by both boys and girls

Mandal level meetings were organised on 22nd November in Atmakur with 140 participants and on 23rd November in Nutankal with 60 participants to mark Child Rights Day. Mandal officials gave away prizes to the winners of the competitions. Teachers were felicitated in 14 schools of Atmakur mandal on Teachers' Day. The members also participated in different competitions as during the UN-CRC Week. The details of different competitions organised and participation are as follows:

<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Atmakur	Essay writing	17	366
	Quiz	14	
	Games	16	
Nutankal	Essay writing	12	213
	Games	12	
Maddirala	Elocution	10	234
	Games	11	
Shankarpally	Essay writing	3	120
	Elocution	4	
Vikarabad	Essay writing	3	109
	Elocution	5	
Total		107	1042

Eluka Lakshmi – a student of Class 9 from Madgula Chittampally had been going home on the afternoon of 14th August along with a classmate after they had cleaned the classrooms in preparation for the Independence Day celebrations. One Naresh, who was a student of Class 9 from the Boys' School, played a prank and pulled her by the hand as she was walking. One of her uncles, who was passing by, suspected the both of them and beat them. He later went to the school and launched a verbal assault on the teachers, alleged that they didn't care for their students and did nothing to build their character. He did not send Lakshmi to school for 2-3 days and got her to lodge a complaint in the police station but there was no response from them. He also spoke negatively of the MVF organisers and said that they did nothing to safeguard girls in such cases. The organiser pacified him and seated both the girl and boy together. Lakshmi's uncle withdrew the case after he came to know of the truth. The in-charge teacher discussed the case during a Gender Committee meeting, after which the school authorities cautioned children against wandering outside school premises during working hours. The girls noted that toilets lacked running water supply and that they also had no access to drinking water in the school. They also suggested to the teachers that the school gate had to be kept locked during school hours. The teachers promised to cooperate and provided water facilities.

*

One of the lady teachers from Model School in Atmakur had a habit of speaking sarcastically whenever a girl student groomed or dressed herself neatly. She did not spare any of them and this irked Pavitra – a student from Intermediate First Year. She discussed the issue within the Committee and shared it with her brother as well. The Committee member approached the Principal and spoke to him. Pavitra's mother also spoke to the organiser. Both the Principal and the organiser spoke to the teacher, who couldn't justify her act. She was reprimanded by the Principal and has changed her ways. An orientation session on the POCSO Act was held in the School after a girl from Class 9 sustained injuries to her arm. She had earlier gone to the local temple with a boy from her class and she had slashed her arm with a blade after an altercation with him on a sensitive issue.

*

A male teacher from AVK Thanda often spoke in lewd fashion with his girl students and took selfies with some of them after school hours. He took a particular fancy for a girl from Class 8 and set some of the girls about the task of making inquiries about her. He beat them when they refused to oblige him and went to the extent of blackmailing some of them that he would share their pictures with his parents. The members discussed the issue amongst themselves during a Committee meeting and informed the Sarpanch about this. He held a school meeting and warned the teacher of dire consequences if he persisted in such behaviour. He was asked to delete the girls' photos from his phone.

*

The Telugu teacher from Patharlapahad had a tendency to physically touch girl children from Classes 6 and 7. The Gender Committee discussed the issue internally during a meeting. The head teacher, who was supportive of the Telugu teacher, called one of the Committee members and asked for the details of their discussions. The other teachers were divided in their opinions on the issue. The Committee members passed on the information to the organiser, who involved the CRPF in the issue and conducted a staff meeting. The head teacher acknowledged his mistake and deputed a teacher to participate in the Committee meetings.

*

Children from HS Atmakur were being overburdened due to extended study hours. Members of the Gender Committee informed this to their parents and they rang up the organiser, who got the duration of the study hour reduced. In a freak incident, two children from the school, who had the same first name, had a minor altercation and one of them was beaten by the Physics teacher. He complained to his father, who had a bad reputation, and bragged to his fellow members of the Gender Committee that his father would come to the school and make short work of the teacher. The members communicated this to the head teacher, who counseled the boy against taking the matter ahead and avoided a fight.

*

Anusha from Midthanpally was irregular to school for a whole week in November. Both her parents were working and she left home every morning but did not go to school. she spent the entire day with one of her friends, whose parents were not home, instead. Her name as eventually struck off the school records. Upon knowing this, the Committee members told the head teacher that she was a good student and that there must have been a reason for her absence. The members, together with a teacher and the organiser went to the girl's house. Her parents were surprised to know that she had not been to school for a week. When they asked her the reason, she told them that her friend had been ill. The organiser and the teacher told her that she should not have been so irresponsible towards her studies and counseled her to return to school.

6 EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN COMMUNITY

6.1 Conducting KBS meetings at village level

Meetings were regularly held with the KBS to discuss various aspects of gender discrimination both at home and in school and obstacles to their education.

The details of meetings held are as under:

<i>District</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Meetings</i>	<i>Members</i>
Suryapet	Atmakur	204	3559
	Nutankal	156	1790
	Maddirala	103	1547
Rangareddy	Shankarpally	78	1921
Vikarabad	Vikarabad	89	1663
Total		630	10480

Members of the Committee have begun to view gender issues from a broader perspective now and are reacting to happenings around them. They are more expressive and are articulating their needs. Mutual interaction between members of these Committees has not only enabled them to understand each others' problems and express solidarity with their peers on issues of concern but has also given them the confidence to draw the attention of the Gram Panchayat and police officials to issues of abuse and harassment. They are also questioning discriminatory practices at home and demanding equal treatment as their brothers and other male members of the family.

6.2 Facilitating interaction with village elected representatives and officials

The Sarpanchs of Nassimpeta in Atmakur mandal, Yenkepally in Nutankal mandal and Chandupatla in Maddirala mandal formally invited members of the KBS to attend Panchayat review meetings. As many as 45 Sarpanchs including 16 from Atmakur, 10 from Shankarpally, 7 each from Nutankal and Vikarabad, and 5 from Maddirala have been regular participants in KBS meetings.

Latha – a KBS member from Mukundapuram questioned her mother why she never sat on a chair when her father was around. The woman replied that she had never sat in a chair in her entire lifetime. Latha brought her a chair one day when her father had gone out and asked her mother to sit on it. Her father was surprised upon his return home but he did not comment. Latha then asked her mother how she felt about it. Her mother told her that it was a novel experience and that the idea had never crossed her mind.

*

Swapna – a native of Proddutur and a student of Intermediate First Year from Chaitanya College – Shankarpally had an affair with a youth from Shankarpally. They both belonged to different social backgrounds. The Principal came to know of the affair and he spoke to her parents but she was adamant. She bunked college every now and then off and went with him to Vikarabad 33 kilometres away to watch films or while away her time. Her father came to know of this and beat her. She retaliated by consuming phenyl and was hospitalised. As luck would have it, she had no danger to her life and recovered. The organiser, who came to know of the incident through the KBS, went and met him. He was preparing to send her to her uncle's place. The organiser told him that they ought to be brave and face the situation rather than run away from it. She also counseled the girl and

asked her to set aside all such thoughts for the moment and concentrate on her studies so that she could be employed well. She stopped speak to the youth and resumed her education. The organiser asked the Principal to put her under observation for 2 months. He was satisfied with her progress. In the meantime, the organiser involved the Sarpanch in the matter. The Sarpanch summoned the youth and warned him that a case would be booked against him if he received any complaint from anyone.

*

Prabhas – an Intermediate Second Year student from Shankarpally, had been stalking and harassing A Mounika – a Class 8 student of HS Parveda from Thangadpally village. He would send her mother messages saying that he wanted to marry her. He would also go to her home once in a while. The girl and her mother were perturbed and actually contemplated suicide on one occasion. She belonged to the BC²⁴ community and he belonged to the SC²⁵ community. He warned them of a case under the SC/ST²⁶ Atrocities Act if they rejected him. Mounika informed this to the Sarpanch during a KBS meeting. The Sarpanch rebuked him but there was no change in his attitude. She changed her number but he got hold of the new number also and continued to harass her. Mounika informed this to the organiser during the next meeting. She was asked to ring up the SHE team. Her mother, who was also the SMC chairperson, called them up and they put the boy behind bars for 2 days. His parents came to the police station and fell on the chairperson's mother's feet, asking for forgiveness. They were told that bowing to anyone was not necessary and that it was enough of their son didn't trouble the girl. He has stopped following her now.

*

Sowjanya – a native of Nassimpeta had failed to clear the Class 10 exams and had been married off. The organiser invited her to attend a meeting of the Committee and persuaded her to reappear for the exams. She was hesitant but they offered to pay her exam fees. She eventually passed the exams, after which she told her parents and the organiser that she didn't want to go to her husband's place because her husband had been troubling her. Her parents-in-law took the issue to the notice of the Panchayat. The Sarpanch summoned her mother from Hyderabad, where she had been working. He convened a meeting in which the organiser was also present. The girl stated that she wanted a divorce and a date was duly fixed. The organiser linked her to KGBV²⁷ and got her enrolled there in Intermediate First Year. She initially doubted if her husband would come looking for her but the Principal assured her that she wouldn't have to worry about that. She is currently pursuing a vocational Multipurpose Health Worker course.

*

²⁴ Backward Caste

²⁵ Scheduled Caste

²⁶ Scheduled Tribe

²⁷ Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya

Kavya – a Class 10 student from Atmakur went missing for one week. Her fellow KBS members informed the organiser that she had been moving around closely with a youth. The organiser advised her mother, who was in Hyderabad when the girl left home, to lodge a complaint with the police. The SI promised to locate the boy within a week but hastened the process after the organiser and the girl’s father met him and tracked down the girl and the youth – a 28-year old, the very next day. He was let go with a warning because he had one bad leg but he continued to follow the girl. The police again warned him and he quit his attempts to contact Kavya. The head teacher was not interested in taking her back but got her readmitted after she undertook in writing not to repeat such an act.

*

P Himabindu from Maddirala had a major health issue that cost her father Rs 6000 a month. He always taunted her stating that she was a burden on her. Her teachers were, however, supportive of her and permitted her to go home during school hours whenever she felt uncomfortable. Her father, who took advantage of this, withdrew her from school so she could work. She, however, refused. Her younger sister shared this information during a KBS. The organiser spoke to Himabindu, who came out with the facts, Both the SMC chairperson and the organiser spoke to her parents and asked them to care for her. She was their daughter and it was their responsibility to invest in her health. The issue was finally put to rest and Himabindu returned to school.

*

The Principal of a school run by a Christian missionary group in Nimmikal had passed strictures prohibiting the wearing of bangles and flowers by Hindu girls. He had been seating girls and boys separately and had been monitoring their movements through CC TV cameras. He used foul language with the girls whenever he saw them speaking to the boys. He had collected small amounts towards games but had not been involving the children in any games whatsoever. The members of the KBS informed the Sarpanch about this during a meeting. He spoke to the Principal and the warden, who have turned over a new leaf.

7 CAMPAIGN AND ADVOCACY

7.1 District level meeting with network groups on amendment in RTE and Child labour and Child marriage acts

Organisers from Vikarabad and Shankarpally mandals participated in a district level meeting of the Girls’ Advocacy Alliance network on legislation against child labour and child marriage and amendments in the RTE Act.

Campaign Posters

Organisers from Maddirala released a campaign poster on World Literacy Day, highlighting the need to uphold girl child rights and demanding that the scope of the RTE Act be

extended to cover all children until the age of 18 years. Similar posters were released in Atmakur and Nutankal mandals on 11th October – International Day of the Girl Child. A mandal level meeting and a rally with 39 girls featured in Nutankal mandal with the representation of the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) and Childline. The ICDS Supervisor, self-help group members and representatives of local institutions were also present. A mandal level meeting in Atmakur witnessed the participation of 65 members including the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), the ICDS Supervisor and a functionary from the *Sakhi* Centre came. A campaign pamphlet was released on the occasion.

Gender Advisory Committee Meeting

A review-cum-planning meeting of the Gender Advisory Committee was held on 8th November in Hyderabad with the participation of 10 members, namely MR Vikram, Dr. Rekha Pappu, Kondaveeti Satyavathi, Asiya Sherwani, Savitri Sravanthi, R Venkat Reddy, Y Rajendra Prasad, J Bhaskar, Dhanamma and MVR Mohan. MR Vikram chaired the session and MVR Mohan was a special invitee.

The chairperson welcomed the participants and introduced the MVF team to the others. R Venkat Reddy next made a presentation on the organisation's initiatives to promote gender equality and adolescent girls' education. He highlighted MVF's operational framework, the organisation's basic principles and its strategies to combat gender violence and enable every girl to access and complete secondary school education in the project area. Bhaskar and Dhanamma shared the details of challenges being faced at the field level in taking the programme forward.

Asiya Sherwani shared her experiences in engaging with children and emphasised the need to give visibility to women leaders at all levels from the local to the state, national and international levels so that others were inspired to emulate them, their achievements and the principles that they stood for. She cited the examples of Savitri Bai Phule and Mexican painter Frieda Kahlo. She suggested joint participation by girls and boys in such activities as cleaning garbage, painting in public places, etc.

Asiya Sherwani also suggested identifying active adolescents – both female and male, and grooming them into resource persons. This would add strength to the programme. She highlighted the need to promote legal education and awareness on laws such as the POCSO Act. Girls must be counseled as part of the programme and they must be capacitated to assert themselves and challenge established gender norms.

Kondaveeti Satyavathi suggested that MVF could bring out an internal newsletter that adolescents could author and contribute to. Establishing children's linkages to public institutions such as the police station, Mandal offices and District offices would build their confidence. Girls' Committees could be introduced to the SHE teams that are now present in every district. She shared her personal experiences with 'She for Her' – a girl-to-girl

network that she had promoted with great success. MVF, she noted, needed to work more closely with the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) on the inclusion of gender perspective in school curriculum. MVF could also involve social activist Devi in training its volunteers in the performance of street play *Malle Mogga*, which was a very powerful tool of social change. In her concluding remarks, she asked the MVF team to share the details of *Bhoomika* Helpline No. 1800 425 29 with adolescent girls in its project area.

Dr Rekha Pappu offered to train MVF staff on documentation to capture the challenges faced. She also suggested involving internees from TISS in documenting MVF's work. Savitri Sravanthi opined that it would be good if the project team implemented all the suggestions that had been made by the participants during the course of the day's session.

All the participants offered to visit the MVF implementation site. In his ending remarks, R. Venkat Reddy invited all of them to participate in the *Ika Chaalu* Convention that was scheduled to be held on 1st December in Hyderabad.

8 BOYS' AND GIRLS' CONVENTION AT DISTRICT LEVEL

8.1 Organise Girls' and Boys' Convention at district level

District Conventions were held in 3 districts as against the proposed 2 conventions in response to demand from children. The objectives of the Conventions were to:

- Provide children with an opportunity to express themselves and mutually interact with each other on issues of common concern
- Give visibility to the issue of gender equality
- Communicate the organisational efforts to government departments
- Enable children to understand governmental initiatives for them
- Facilitate children's exposure to public spaces

A District Convention of adolescents was organised in Nimmikal on 3rd October with more than 200 KBS and Gender Committee members. Key officials that were invited included the Project Director of the ICDS, the Dy District Medical & Health Officer (Dy DM&HO), the CDPO, the Medical Officer of the local Primary Health Centre and the local Asst SI. MVF was represented by Chief Coordinator Y Rajendra Prasad and Project Coordinator J Bhaskar.

The breakup of participants is as below:

<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Atmakur	5	115	120
Nutankal	4	39	43
Maddirala	4	39	43
<i>Total</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>206</i>

The children made presentations on their activities and achievements and the challenges they had faced. They narrated personal stories of abuse, violence and emancipation. In all, 20 children – including 12 from Atmakur and 4 each from Nutankal and Maddirala, spoke on the dais. A team of girls from Atmakur mandal performed a skit on violence against the girl child.

Introducing the agenda, Y Rajendra Prasad stated that every child – girl or boy, was equal and that equality was a right. The PD – ICDS spoke on facilities in Anganwadi Centres and promised to instruct Anganwadi Teachers to cooperate with the organisers. The Dy DM&HO addressed the gathering on health problems of girls and the ill effects of child marriage. He also informed that health check up facility was available for girls every Thursday. He offered to act on any complaints in the context of the PNDT Act. He further expressed his interest in attending meetings of the Adolescent Girls’ Committee. The other officials also appreciated the work being done by MVF and promised to support the organisation.

SI Sanjeev Kumar participated in the event in Shankarpally. MLA Methuku Anand and Mandal Parishad President Chandrakala turned up in Vikarabad. The details of child participants in the events are as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Mandal</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Vikarabad	Vikarabad	1 Oct.	12	78	90
Rangareddy	Shankarpally	4 Oct.	3	96	99
	Total		15	174	189

The participants reviewed their activities village wise with focus on the changes that had come about in gender equations in school, within the family and at the community level. The girls informed that there were notable changes in their social status and that their male siblings had begun to share their work with them. They added that association with the KBS had boosted their self-confidence. They also brainstormed MVF’s non negotiable points on gender issues in groups. One boy from Proddutur created a WhatsApp group after his return from the Consultation and began to mobilise his friends for participation in Gender Committee meetings.

Boys that attended the event made presentations on the support that they had extended to female members of the household in their day-to-day activities. They had also been sharing these experiences with their friends and relatives and asking them to follow this practice. Their sisters and mothers were appreciative of their support. They further expressed that sharing of responsibilities within the domestic sphere was the first step to gender equality and that it would be possible to achieve this goal of this concept were extended to the level

of the entire community. They further pledged to raise their voices against girl child abuse and to lead by example.

9 STATE LEVEL CONVENTION WITH ADOLESCENT BOYS AND GIRLS

9.1 State level Convention with boys and girls

A State level Convention was held on 1st December under the banner of *Ika Chaalu* in Sundarayya Vignana Kendram – Hyderabad. More than 200 adolescents from across the project area participated in the event. The aim of the Convention was to facilitate mutual learning and experience sharing by the girls. Noted women’s activists Devi, Sumitra, Sajaya and Rani Rudrama Reddy were present. MR Vikram and R Venkat Reddy were also present from MVF. Rekha Wazir and Linda represented SCFR.

One session was devoted exclusively to presentations by the children on their personal experiences. Some of them spoke on the background of the recent incident involving the brutal molestation and killing of veterinarian Dr Priyanka Reddy. They opined that such violence must not be condoned and that it was necessary to take a stand against such issues. The State was not capable of monitoring such incidents. Prevention is better than cure – precautionary measures must be taken to avoid the recurrence of such happenings. Alcohol usage must be prevented. Underage people must not be given driving licences. These steps can help minimise the incidence of such cases. The children and the delegates present jointly released an *Ika Chaalu* campaign poster.

Addressing the gathering, Devi cautioned the girls against falling prey to opportunistic males and called upon them to not get attracted by outward appearances. They ought to maintain composure and not be swayed by emotions, eventually harming themselves. In addition, it was important for them to be not just mentally aware but also capable of retaliation in the event of physical assault. Linda spoke in brief on the difference between the responses of males and female in different scenarios and informed that this must change. She urged the girls to assert themselves, change boys’ attitudes and involve them in the agenda of upholding girl child rights and working towards gender equality. Sumitra emphasised the need to do away with the traditional, conservative mindset that looks down upon the girl child/women. Gender equality can be achieved only when girls/ women assert themselves and question such inequality.