

INTERROGATING THE NORM: INNOVATIVE INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE GENDER JUSTICE AND SAFETY IN INDIA



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**Interrogating
The Norm:
Innovative Interventions
To Promote Gender
Justice And Safety
In India**

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This publication is an outcome of a grant from the Tata Trusts to the Harvard University South Asia Institute for a project on 'Livelihood Creation in India through Social Entrepreneurship and Skill Development'. The project explores strategies for strengthening the educational, social and economic empowerment of women.

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Preface

Thanks to the generosity and support of the Tata Trusts, the Harvard South Asia Institute, in collaboration with the Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, had the opportunity of convening some of India's most impressive and creative civil society organizations working in the field of girls' education. The convening took the form of a short but intensive workshop outside Mumbai at the end of January 2016. During the course of this meeting, formal presentations on aspects of law, policy and practice concerning education in contemporary India in general and girls' education in particular combined with opportunities for group discussion, networking and case presentation. The result was a rich exchange of views, a learning opportunity for participants, and a decision to highlight for more general dissemination and benefit some of the most original and innovative gender education-related interventions. While some contributions focus on aligning intervention outcomes with development investments to advance a clearly articulated reform agenda, others probe elusive questions about the social factors that impinge on girls' educational success. This publication's modest goal, and hope is that the following pages will provide interesting and instructive reading for a range of audiences. This effort is, part of a broader set of projects distributed nationwide and across public and private sectors aimed at radically improving access to quality education at all stages of the pedagogical process for all India's children and adolescents, an aspiration still a long way in the making.

We welcome feedback from readers and hope to develop further work with our dedicated researcher and practitioner colleagues over the coming months and years.

Jacqueline Bhabha
Professor of the Practice of Human Rights
Harvard University.

Introduction

Despite a progressive constitution and proliferation of laws supporting gender equality and prohibiting customary practices that perpetuate discrimination such as dowry, child marriage, sex selection, domestic violence, etc. pervasive gender discrimination and gender based violence in India have attracted anxious scrutiny. It is in this context, over an eighteen-month period, the Harvard South Asia Institute explored issues, challenges and solutions connected with gender based violence and social empowerment of women in India. Geographic spread, diverse theories of change and working methods, working with multi-stakeholders, focusing on legal entitlements, building new gender norms through mentorship – these are examples of very creative work being undertaken in some of India's most challenging and deprived communities. Hence, this compilation has documented a rich body of work, through insightful essays and action-oriented case studies, some going back decades, that address the complex issue of the social empowerment of women in India through a range of strategies.

The reflection pieces by Suparna Gupta and Bhanumathi Kalluri explore innovative and creative strategies for enhancing respect for human rights in the context of potentially oppressive or rights-violating gender norms. They target harm prevention and a holistic set of theoretical and practical approaches. The goal is to increase the capacity of community members to collaborate, in building safe and mutually respectful societies. In one case, a key technique described involves bringing community activists into close and trusting contact with state and law enforcement agencies, with a view to building trust and ensuring cooperation. In the second case, the community organization relies on a mentorship model to build skills and change gender-related norms. Both essays set the context for the case studies that follow.

During the eighteen-month period of this project, the Harvard SAI Team undertook field research, capacity strengthening, and knowledge dissemination. Professor Jacqueline Bhabha, the Faculty Chair of this track engaged with and mentored six of the 30 organizations that were identified for a grant to document their work, projects and impact. Three of these six organizations that focus on social empowerment of women, have been included in this book as case studies. These include Dhaatri: Resource centre for women and children's rights,

Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), and Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG). Each of them describe a diverse set of contexts and activities geared, in their different ways, towards improving access to empowerment, rights and protection for several vulnerable communities.

The case on Dhaatri specifically focuses on rural populations and access to forest land ownership by women. The case on MAVA examines their initiative on sensitizing and engaging young boys and men using out-of-the-box methods to deconstruct and redefine masculinity and prevent gender-based violence. The final case on AWAG explores a range of strategies to strengthen the access to protection for marginalized women, subject to violence, exclusion and stigma. In different ways they outline the challenges that exist, despite welcome legal reform, in protecting and ensuring women's rights to land ownership.

The findings of this publication are very insightful and relevant to the contemporary efforts of the central and state government in India for women's empowerment. To have made this outcome possible, we wish to acknowledge the efforts of our team. Clare, our copy editor has done a brilliant job in spite of tight deadlines. Her eye for detail is indeed commendable. The creative team led by Usha Gawde and Aashika Cunha have spared no effort in the design, layout and in presenting the content with fine aesthetics. Nora, Meghan and Diana from the Harvard SAI Team at Cambridge helped us throughout the project. The guidance from Professor Tarun Khanna, Director, and Meena Hewett, Executive Director, Harvard SAI was most valuable. We are most grateful to Professor Jacqueline Bhabha, Faculty Chair of this project, for her continued efforts in studying and devising innovative approaches to deal with gender based violence in India. She provided very valuable inputs and insights for this publication. She was ably assisted by Anisha Gopi who coordinated the field efforts with all grantees, knowledge partners and subject experts. Her efforts and initiative in compiling this publication are noteworthy and commendable. We are also thankful to R. Venkataramanan, Executive Trustee, Tata Trusts, and his team for the grant and support.

We hope that researchers, practitioners, civil society leaders, gender activists and policy makers will draw valuable insights from this compilation.

- Dr. Shashank Shah
Project Director, *Livelihood Creation in India*
Harvard University South Asia Institute

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records in a business setting. It highlights how proper record-keeping can help in identifying trends, making informed decisions, and ensuring compliance with legal requirements. The text emphasizes that records should be organized, up-to-date, and easily accessible to all relevant personnel.

Next, the document addresses the challenges associated with data management in the digital age. With the increasing volume of data generated by various sources, businesses face significant difficulties in storing, processing, and analyzing this information. The text suggests implementing robust data management strategies, such as data backup, security measures, and regular audits, to mitigate these risks.

The third section focuses on the role of technology in enhancing business operations. It explores how automation and digital tools can streamline processes, reduce errors, and improve overall efficiency. The document encourages businesses to invest in modern technology and provide training to their employees to maximize the benefits of these tools.

Finally, the document concludes by emphasizing the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in a rapidly changing business environment. It suggests that businesses should regularly assess their performance, seek feedback, and be open to new ideas and innovations to stay competitive and successful.



Shakti girls meeting

Reflections

Bringing it Home: Building Resilience To Gender Based Violence Through Activating Community-based Protection Systems For Adolescent Girls In Most Marginalized Groups

Suparna Gupta¹



A brief background on Aangan

Established in 2002, Aangan is an independent non-profit organization that works on preventing the occurrence and recurrence of child harm through a community-based harm prevention model. The model aims to build protection systems geared towards increasing the resilience of adolescents in the most vulnerable locations or situations, reducing risks of gender-based violence including child marriage, child trafficking, hazardous work and abuse. Aangan's goal is to transform '100 hotspots'² into 'child safe zones' over a period of three years. Our work is currently being implemented in locations across the 22 most-backward districts in six states (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bengal and Odisha). Working towards joint responsibility and action by officials and community members, Aangan ensures that the most marginalized women have the tools to engage community members and persuade local officials to keep 100,000 children safe (2014-2016). In some cases, when child harm has already occurred, Aangan strengthens recovery and reintegration systems towards the prevention of recurrence of harm, emphasizing the role of state functionaries (child welfare committees) across the 100 'hotspots'.

The organization's history includes a decade of work with state authorities and government-appointed frontline workers/officials who provide the first response to victims of serious harm. In order to improve the notoriously poor care and conditions for child survivors placed in state-run rescue and shelter homes, Aangan designed and implemented India's first standard of care tool for government care homes (developed and piloted in partnership with UNICEF in 2009).

¹ Suparna Gupta is the founder of an independent Indian non-profit Aangan, which works with children in dangerous situations. She has designed programs that bring together often inert, inaccessible officials with most-marginalized children families - in order to drive joint responsibility and collaborative action to keep children safe and free from marriage, trafficking, labor and exploitation. She was awarded the Ashoka fellowship for leading social entrepreneurs 2009, The Asia Society Young Leader 2011 the Edward S. Mason Fellowship from Harvard Kennedy School of Government (2012) and in 2014 was a finalist at the Jubilant Bhartia Schwab Foundation India's Social Entrepreneur of the Year 2015.

² Hotspots are defined in Aangan's context as locations associated with high rates of child harm as per published data on child marriage, child trafficking, violence abuse, Government of India's backward district list or recommended as priority locations for government officials (departments of women and child welfare or police). Each hotspot is a village/settlement within which 300 families out of 1,000 families are impacted.

This tool was introduced in partnership with state departments of women and child welfare across 16 states, impacting 150,000 child survivors of harm in over 648 rescue homes/shelter homes. This experience with children post-harm led Aangan back to the source, in search of systems that could prevent harm through early intervention.

From Policymakers To Practitioners: Preparing Local Communities To Engage With Adolescent Girl Safety Work

The situation for adolescent girls in India is alarming. One hundred thousand children go missing every year (Ministry of Home Affairs);³ many are believed to be trafficking victims. Almost half (42%) of all child brides worldwide live in South Asia; 1 in 3 are in India. (United Nations Children's Fund, Ending Child Marriage: Progress and prospects, UNICEF, New York, 2014.)⁴ and 53% children reported to facing some form of sexual abuse in a study published by the Government of India. (Study on Child Abuse: India 2007, Ministry of Women and Child Development Government of India, 2007)⁵. This is despite robust legislation and innovative social policy including India's Child Marriage Restraint Act, the Right to Education Act, the Dowry Prevention Act, the recently amended Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act, the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) and a new anti-trafficking law (currently being drafted). There are a host of government programs or schemes also dedicated to adolescent girls' empowerment like the *Kishori SHAKTI Yojna*, the Nutrition Program for Adolescent Girls, Sabla and the Nirbhaya Fund for women's safety. And, in 2015, the prime minister launched the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* program for the health, education and protection of girls in 100 priority districts.

However, it is well-acknowledged that the actual rigor with which laws and policies for adolescent girls are implemented on the ground is a challenge (UNICEF Population Fund 2013).⁶ Aangan found that this was echoed in the opinions expressed at the grassroots level. In 2014, through a survey with 203

³ CRY Organization, "Missing or Sold? Child Trafficking in India," in Human Trafficking: The Stakeholders' Perspective ed. Veerendra Mishra, 136.

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, Ending Child Marriage: Progress and prospects, UNICEF, New York, (2014): http://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Child-Marriage-Brochure-HR_164.pdf

⁵ One lakh children go missing in India every year: Home ministry. Times of India. (August 2014).

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/One-lakh-children-go-missing-in-India-every-year-Home-ministry/articleshow/39779841.cms> based on data by Home Ministry in Parliament July 2014.

⁶ Bhabha, Jacqueline. Adolescents: Current Rights for Future Opportunities. South-South Cooperation for Child Rights Working Paper 2. UNICEF ROSA and UNICEF EAPRO, Kathmandu. (September 2013) https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Working_paper_2_-_Adolescents.pdf

women (many of them parents of adolescent girls) in severely disadvantaged locations, 66% of women believed that girls in their neighborhoods and villages were unsafe but only 24% had ever participated in action to make communities safer for girls. 82% of them knew about government services, officials, laws or policies that could be used, and 66% did not believe that government programs, laws or policies would have any impact on making girls safer. When asked about the accessibility of local officials, a high percentage named health and panchayat/ward officials, while under 15% knew of protection-related officials like child marriage, child labor and child welfare committees, education officials or school management committees.

The question then is this: What is the kind of preparation and support needed at the local level to ensure the actual delivery of laws and policies regarding adolescent girls and their families? Given the fact that local conditions interact with seemingly efficient scaled 'solutions' (laws, policy or programming) which make implementation enormously complex, how can states ensure that local programming succeeds in those locations where the situation is urgent, but systems are absent or broken?

Drawing heavily on a capability-building methodology described by Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, a good place to start is to acknowledge that the 'system' in question is in fact a human system and requires investment in building local problem-solving capabilities on complex issues.⁷ Gender violence as a theme is particularly challenging because it is highly contextualized, ruling out the success of purely technical replicable solutions. However, what can be replicated is a methodology to introduce systems that enable communities to map risks, leverage resources, engage in creative problem-solving and build coordination skills. Moving away from the overly centralized model that deploys large sets of NGO staff to push out a standardized, codified 'best practice' activity to solve problems, these recommendations examine a few pragmatic strategies designed to embed capability around gender violence permanently into communities (over a limited time period and within a viable cost) – factoring in the complexity of such work.

Using a few firsthand examples from Aangan's experience, this paper looks at three under-addressed components key to building resilience around gender violence that require state attention and investment: (a) Valuing hyper local

⁷ Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. & Woolcock, M. (2012). Escaping Capability Traps through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation, Harvard Kennedy School.

'data for action'; (b) Engaging a range of actors to be gender-informed; and (c) Acknowledging and investing in the key function of coordination between sectors and government departments in order to ensure a multidisciplinary response.

Data for Action: Harnessing the Power of Local Knowledge

The lack of reliable data on gender violence has been acknowledged across countries. A study by the American Journal of Epidemiology found that only 7% of women reported violence.⁸ A UN survey (2012) found that, while close to 70% of countries produced statistics on women/girls' health and education, less than 40% produced statistics on violence against women and girls.⁹ India is no exception to this data deficit, but there have also been examples that showcase the powerful impact of gender violence data on policymakers. NGO *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* reported that, in the case of 75,000 children who went missing (2009-2011), police reports were not filed. This shocking statistic resulted in landmark directions by the Supreme Court of India and, in 2016, the Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act was also amended making reporting of missing children mandatory, linking it to the prevention of trafficking.¹⁰

However, one might argue that the kind of data impactful in galvanizing policymakers is not as relevant to the ground-level practitioner who requires data to diagnose problems in order to come up with a customized solution for a particular context.

Aangan works with community women across villages/settlements in six states, providing the tools to lead the work of making communities safe for adolescents. They collect, reflect and report on 'data for action' using a tool called the PACT mobile app designed to catch early signs of family vulnerability that might lead to trafficking, child marriage and other kinds of serious harm. This process helps build capability of community members to spot early warning signs within seemingly disconnected issues like family debt or school attendance. The resulting PACT Community Report Cards capture granular and disaggregated data, providing community members with information that can help stakeholders jointly reflect on priority problems and plan for action.

⁸ Palermo, T. (2013). Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-based Violence in Developing Countries.

⁹ Violence against Women Prevalence Data: Surveys by Country. (compiled by UN Women, 2012 update)

¹⁰ Bachpan Bachao Andolan. (2011). Missing Children of India; A Pioneering Study by Bachpan Bachao Andolan. <http://www.bba.org.in/sites/default/files/Synopsis.pdf>

For district officials, this specific local data is of particular significance because the district is the Indian administrative unit for planning and managing government schemes/programs including those related to girl safety, child marriage/trafficking prevention or victim compensation. This is indeed powerful, but there is little to go by in order to plan action without the more granular disaggregated data required to define the problem. Which gender are these children? What age are they? What are their family circumstances? Are they in school?

An example of local data for action might look more like this:

In Community S, a semi-urban location in eastern Uttar Pradesh, PACT women found that of the 13% of families who reported their adolescent children had been missing from home for a period of time, 55% were girls. Of the 28% of children who had never attended school, most were girls – staying home to do household chores – isolated and alone. It was also interesting to note that, in the 13-17 age group, parents (both working) left children with no supervision all day. 36% of younger girls under 12 were also unsupervised. Such data point to the need to engage various stakeholders in protection work, including those who might not conventionally be considered ‘safety and protection’ resources. For instance, in this case, the group is supported to think through possible action:

- As individuals: Families might make a safety plan for/with daughters, leveraging informal relationships with neighbors and friends to help with supervision. PACT workers might also help parents consider school as a safe space for their girls to be all day.
- As a group, they could strengthen community supervision systems activating informal neighbor/family networks to rotate duties of supervision.
- An informal systemic solution could be that the community could activate local youth clubs/safe spaces which are supervised.
- Solutions in coordination with formal authorities could be: a) Planning with local anganwadi workers (government crèche workers); or b) Working with school principals or education officers to extend school-supervised time and understand the barriers to sending girls to school.

Perhaps such data appears to be ‘common knowledge’ – and thus data collection might be considered unnecessary, being a painstaking and long process. However, it is important to note that informal data, while valuable, is rarely

acknowledged nor used in a timely or proactive manner. Providing a mobile phone app – (or for that matter any methodology related to participatory data), and community report cards (or any tool that helps groups reflect and define problems specifically) are convenient ways of converting anecdotal, under-valued and under-used knowledge into actionable data.

KEY RECOMMENDATION: Increased state demand for *data for action* across specific hotspots to assess problems and track action on gender violence issues. Keeping in mind the value of such actionable data, a reduced reliance on the spirit of ‘volunteerism’ and specific investment is required to ensure local capability around such data is built⁶ over three to five years.



Pact Meeting

Safe Space for the Empowered Adolescent Girl: Building Gender Informed Communities

Gender violence is heavily based on how rigidly roles are defined within a group (Heise 1998). In order to initiate ideas that challenge traditional notions of what adolescence, girlhood, safety or protection means, one must create an environment likely to be receptive and hospitable to the idea of the empowered adolescent girl in the first place. It is important to note here that the protection and the empowerment of girls have in the past been difficult concepts for communities to grapple with. Parents in the most-marginalized communities have been known to pull girls out of school or keep them indoors, out of the gaze of men, and to prepare them for an early marriage with the idea that this is the

only known effective safety and survival strategy. Thus the notion that protection and agency could coexist or the idea that empowerment and safety are in fact linked must grow as concepts in value for community members as effective safety strategies.

One example of how this has been done in Aangan: Women trained as local child protection workers are provided with the SHAKTI tool, designed to reorient the role of adolescent girls through a multi-year strategy which increases agency and empowerment at an individual level for girls and gradually impacts the way girls are viewed at a family and community level too. While several versions of entertaining, informative curricula that engage girls in empowerment work are available across the country, the SHAKTI tool helps adolescent girls to go beyond the training sessions in closed restricted spaces discreetly hidden from public gaze, placing them in the heart of the community. This is done by offering a methodology that facilitates engagement with adults, officials and males in the community while acknowledging family and community resistance. Drawing on Moore's concept of the 'authorizing environment' (On Creating Public Value, 2004),¹¹ Aangan's PACT women are workers who are trained to build 'legitimacy and support' (Moore, 2004) in order to introduce the concept of a SHAKTI girls' safety network for adolescents in the community. For this reason, SHAKTI girls' safety networks are often 'hosted' in anganwadi centers or government schools and community halls. This communicates to the larger community the support of community influencers like the police, respected school principals or trusted health workers. SHAKTI is typically not located in an invisible spot away from the gaze of the community but makes the adolescent girl visible, and facilitates the acceptance of this.¹²

The SHAKTI tool also includes a set of community events that allow engagement with community adults, who might otherwise have been out of reach. For instance 'The SHAKTI Window Project' in Community D Mumbai, began because girls were being harassed in the public toilet by men, their privacy invaded because of a broken toilet window. Girls mobilized support from other community women (the traditional choice for girls of a supportive adult) but also reached out to male representatives from the private agency in charge of maintaining the shared toilet (a non-traditional stakeholder whom the girls

¹¹ Moore, Mark and Sanjeev Khagram. "On Creating Public Value: What Business Might Learn from Government about Strategic Management." Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative Working Paper No. 3. Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. (2004).

¹² Id

would never have dreamed of approaching previously). The success of this group extended from having a toilet window fixed to also having the area patrolled at night and impacted more than 5,000 women and girls in the settlement.



Chauraha Boys

Engaging boys and men in the community is widely acknowledged to be a crucial component for empowering adolescent girls. PACT workers have tools to engage men from the police, and fathers and school principals through parent circles, encouraging them to engage with children's issues – traditionally a woman's domain. The CHAURAHA tool engages adolescent boys in gender and safety work. This adapted version of Project H (a program first designed for Mexico and Colombia by non-profit Promundo) is designed to reorient concepts of masculinity and look at gender roles in fresh ways. After one year of work, 308 adolescent boys were surveyed and small changes were already noticed. The survey found that 69% of the boys had started out believing that physically abusing one's wife was necessary at times, but this figure decreased by 48%. Initially, 85% of the boys surveyed felt that, if a girl was sexually assaulted, she was primarily or partially to blame, a number that later reduced to 26%. There was a 74% decrease in boys who believed that that the financial responsibility should be with the man, demonstrating a gradual acceptance of women and girls working outside the home.

In the case of officials, it is essential that state authorities ensure that local officials are gender-informed. In order to have meaningful guidelines and

protocols for this kind of work, barriers for the most-marginalized groups of women and girls from caste groups, minorities or local hierarchies must be clearly acknowledged and addressed during the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines that typically accompany laws and policy. For example, if a child welfare official or a 'police didi' may be appointed across every police station to tackle gender violence issues, but is inaccessible because of the huge lack of trust between girls/women and the police (54% of women from disadvantaged communities surveyed by Aangan believed that government officials would not act in the best interest of their child), this results in a barrier to accessing justice. This barrier, unless addressed, will lead to the failure of a well-intentioned central solution. Addressing such issues as traditional hierarchies or trust deficits must be viewed more accurately as huge challenges to be tackled rather than as 'soft issues' which will sort themselves out.



Shakti girls and Chauraha Boys working together on community project

It is inadequate also to work with a small, specialized set of actors and limit gender sensitization to female officials or those officials in women and child-related departments. There is a dire need to have broad sets of officials who are gender-informed, especially because seemingly unrelated officials could play a key role in specific situations of risk or harm. Take, for example, a newspaper article (Sana Shakil, Times of India, 2014) which revealed that, two years after the Delhi Victims Compensation Scheme was put in place to provide timely financial assistance to survivors of sexual abuse and other cases of assault, the scheme had been inaccessible, with authorities taking several months, even years to deliver compensation. In this article, one impediment was attributed to the ‘files getting stuck at the divisional commissioner’s office’ and another to the ‘confusion among police’ about how the scheme works.

This highlights the need for all stakeholders to be informed about survivor experiences and needs in order to understand why timely compensation is crucial. Moreover, both police and district commission officials might need to interface with victims or their families and this needs to be done in an informed and sensitive manner. Keeping in mind that gender violence prevention often requires a multi-agency response, it becomes all the more important that administrators, the police and other related officials are gender-sensitized.

KEY RECOMMENDATION: Training and monitoring of gender and survivor sensitivity for a wide range of officials, not limited to those in women and child departments.

Working at the Intersection: Activating Formal and Informal Collaborations for Girl Safety

Whose responsibility is it to keep adolescent girls safe from harm? Much of the work related to preventing and responding to harm falls somewhere at the intersection between individual and group, civil society and government, formal and informal action. This undoubtedly requires huge amounts of coordination and convergence between functionaries, sectors and government departments/ministries. Unless deliberately and meticulously designed into a solution, which requires a multidisciplinary approach, it cannot be assumed that the technical expert will have the skills to take on this complex and challenging coordination function.

One example of this is found in the work that Aangan does with Child Welfare Committees (CWC) across 100 hotspots. In the context of girls who are survivors of harm, the CWC (government-appointed three-member bench) is the sole authority to deal with matters related to the recovery and reintegration of children rescued from trafficking, child marriage, violence and abuse. Thus, whether a child is placed back in family care or remains institutionalized is in the hands of a CWC member. In order to make such life-altering decisions in the best interests of the child, it is crucial that CWCs have adequate information, which requires a variety of stakeholders to engage with the children themselves. These include child welfare officers, police, organizations that provide home study reports, peer CWCs in the location where the child returns to, and other service providers who have worked with the child and may know of special conditions key to the child's safety or survival. Even the best-intentioned CWC members seem unable to procure and manage such large chunks of information, given the sheer numbers that they work with. As a result, decisions are often made that disregard protocol and have limited information on the child and family concerned.

Aangan's solution has been to flesh out the coordination function required in this complex task and to provide a tool for CWCs that helps with self-

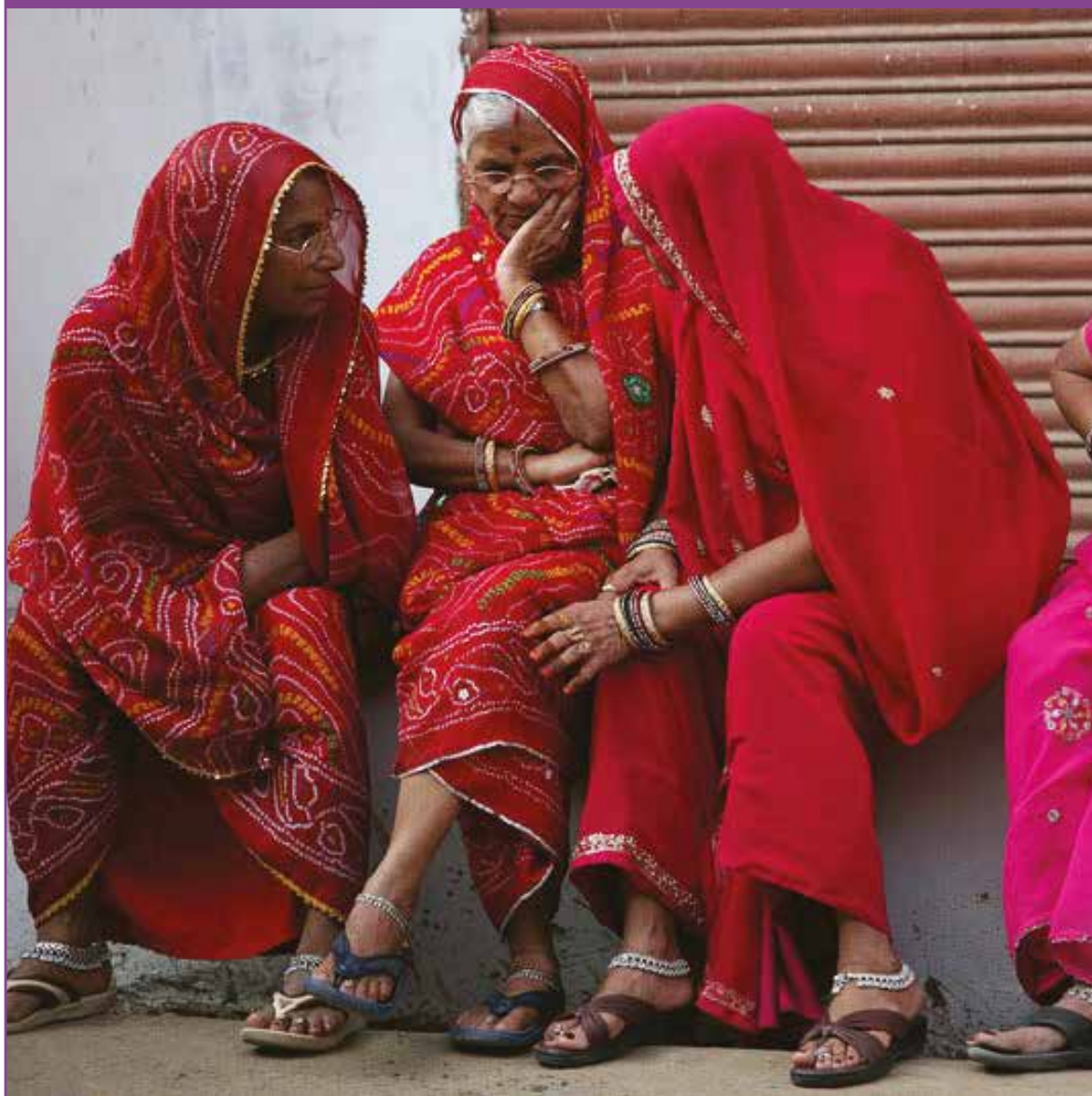


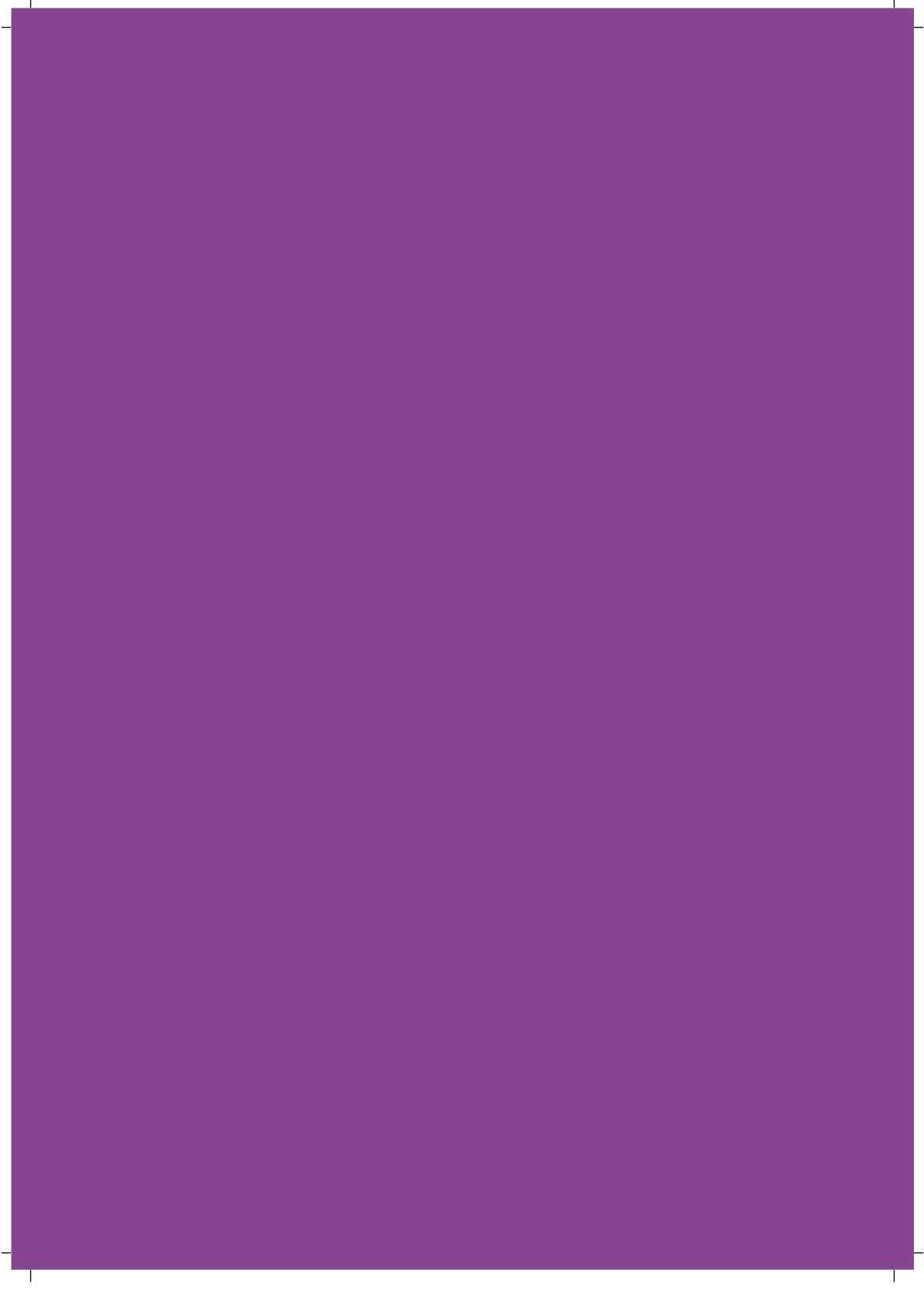
Cheeta Camp CPVs

assessment around adherence to protocol. The tool also helps them engage in the coordination function (although in the future there is a requirement for a specific coordination resource for those CWCs that have large numbers of children going through the system each day).

The question is how policymakers can factor in the role of coordination and allocate local resources and training to this very specific function. Using the analogy of the health sector, a hospital administrator requires a very different set of skills than doctors or surgeons, but is nevertheless crucial to the effective management of patients. In the case of individual scenarios of risk or harm through gender violence, it might be the role of community-based workers or child welfare officials to do this work (most have yet to be appointed and developed in many backward districts) but there is currently little investment in building capacity for such work. It is important to strike a balance between building capacity on gender/child protection (technical expertise) as a different set of skills from those required for administrative coordination work (the ability to manage operations).

KEY RECOMMENDATION: If laws and policies are designed so that protocols and guidelines require multidisciplinary responses, then states must acknowledge the need for and invest in a coordination function - including specific coordination guidelines for multi-agency use, appointing coordinators and building out this function among other possible solutions.







Public consultation by Women FRC members

The Journey Towards Equality In The Forests: Tribal Women And The Forest Rights Act

Ms. Bhanumathi Kalluri¹³

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2005, India, has to be hailed for the long overdue recognition it brings to forest dwellers' rights, especially that of Scheduled Tribes (STs), to own and access forest lands that were historically regions of community-state conflict. The Act commits to providing individual and community titles over forest lands that includes rights to live and hold forest lands, settlement of rights of forest villages, habitation and nistar rights,¹⁴ rights to conserve and access minor forest produce and biodiversity and several other enjoyment and entitlement rights. Among these, the translation of gender equality policies in the form of formal and joint titles to women forest dwellers has been attempted in Section 4 of Chapter III which states that a 'right conferred by sub section (1) shall be heritable but not alienable or transferable and shall be registered *jointly in the name of both spouses* in case of married persons and in the name of the single head in the case of a household headed by a single person and in the absence of a direct heir, the heritable right shall be passed on to the next of kin'. This brings major recognition to women as a legitimate and visible section of forest dwellers entitled to legal ownership of land. Yet, translation of legal intent into real enjoyment of rights in the daily life spaces of socio-political hierarchies of gender, calls for a conscious application

¹³ Bhanumathi Kalluri

¹⁴ Nistar rights are {}

of these rights into assertive representation and state-affirmative actions.

This landmark law opens up a range of debates that relate to tribal economies and indigenous knowledge over individual and collective forest rights, and brings contemporary arguments over the politics of the state vis-à-vis customary socio-legal cultures. It also challenges the notions of customary egalitarianism and legal pluralism especially in the context of gender relations. The transitions towards private ownership of land and the new economic aspirations of tribal communities expose the struggles of these communities to cope with external markets and development models thrust upon them, whether in their agricultural practices or their engagement with forests. This paper highlights some of these challenges that are emerging in the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh in India that need to be perceived from the dimensions of a women's rights lens so as to bring fresh insights into ecological and human sustainability and co-existence. These perspectives can lead to an understanding of opportunities that a women's rights dimension can bring to social reconstruction and ecological sustenance in the crisis over climate change phenomena globally. By questioning the gender binaries of customary legal practices and the gendered social hierarchies, it is hoped that the FRA entitlements to women will alter the subtle and underlying gender biases within the discourse of tribal rights.

The FRA And State Processes Of Implementation

The implementation and institutionalization of the FRA for bringing proactive rights to women forest dwellers is dependent on women's ability to participate in the process of claims registration, their leadership in the decision-making structures, and the futuristic nature of the Act in enjoyment of benefits legally provided under this Act to women. Although the FRA brings legal recognition to women's forest rights, the determination and perspectives required to implement the law are overshadowed by ideological and political resistance. They are also overshadowed by, perhaps, a greater focus of communities and civil society organizations around the critical demands of tribal and forest dwelling communities' settlement of rights vis-à-vis the state and, not so much on addressing this new opportunity from the dimension of women's legal rights.

While it remains a huge challenge in bringing the state machinery to act at the pace and sensitivity required to settle individual and community rights under the FRA, it is a much greater challenge to ensure women's effective participation

in the institutionalization of the FRA and women's legitimate claims to ownership of these lands. The denial of these claims are rooted both in the state's lackadaisical approach to women's empowerment as well as in the social hierarchy of customary practices over asset ownership. Even tribal societies, which may portray spaces of freedom and decision-making rights for women in many areas of their culture, are patrilineal and patriarchal where land and resource ownership are concerned. Hence, the intent to ensure that women - whether married, single or widowed - directly benefit from the FRA wavers on several fronts and herein lies the need for women's rights organizations to play an active role in steering the natural resource rights movements towards more conscious and assertive action in gaining rights for women.

This article is written from the observations drawn from fieldwork with tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh forest areas of Visakhapatnam district. A short study of the perceptions of tribal men and women on the FRA joint entitlements was conducted in 15 villages of Salugu, Vantlamamidi and Modapalli panchayats of Paderu Mandal as part of an action oriented research project supported by the Harvard University South Asia Institute. In this region, implementation of the FRA has happened in a slow and erratic manner depending on fluctuating political interests. With several obstacles from the forest department whose greater interest seems to focus on maintaining the status quo of the World Bank¹⁵ funded Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Community Forest Management (CFM)¹⁶ structures that stubbornly focus on *Vana Samrakshana Samithis* (VSS) created under this program, little effort was made to replace these committees with the constitutionally mandated structures called the Forest Rights Committees (FRCs) under the FRA.

The initial round of implementation provided titles to Vana Samrakshana Samithis where Community Forest Rights (CFR) was concerned, instead of to the Gram Sabhas without any institutionalization or verification of claims through due diligence procedures. Neither men nor women had opportunities to participate in these processes and much lesser did they have a say with respect to the extent of land they were entitled to claim. They received pattas for individual podu lands that had huge discrepancies between what was claimed and what was settled.

¹⁵ World Bank. (2004). India - Andhra Pradesh Community Forest Management Project: Resettlement Action Plan. S.I.s.n. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2004/09/5158638/india-andhra-pradesh-community-forest-management-project-resettlement-action-plan>.

¹⁶ A forestry programme of the Government of Andhra Pradesh supported by the World Bank and implemented in the field sites between 1996 and 2001 in two phases-Joint Forest Management programme and Community Forest Management programme. It was implemented through the setting up of village forest committees called the Vana Samrakshana Samithis.

Improper and inaccurate records or measurement of boundaries led to amorphous identification of lands settled. Villages where the JFM or CFM programs were implemented in the past were rejected for individual or collective rights citing reasons of ineligibility under FRA¹⁷. There was no uniformity in terms of women's names being included as patta-holders although uniformly women who were single were not included in the process of registering claims. The FRCs, if they existed, were not familiar to most people as members were hastily nominated whenever targets for settlement were given to local level authorities. In many places, where single heads of the household are concerned, it is assumed that this implies male heads and not female. This continues to be the norm in most places where there is little community awareness or where civil society presence is negligible to push for proper procedures of implementation especially with respect to women's claims.



Focus Group discussion on FRA

¹⁷ Application for registration by Modapalli village Gram Sabha, Modapalli panchayat in Paderu mandal.

Customary Laws Vis-à-vis The FRA And Women's Rights

In customary jurisprudence, women are normally not entitled to land ownership or property and their entitlement is dependent on their marital status¹⁸. Most forest lands that are occupied by tribal communities are a result of extensive manual labor of women in cutting down the forests and making the land cultivable. Women, especially from the particularly vulnerable tribal groups like the Khonds are held in awe for their stamina to work the hill-slopes and tame them for terraced farming called podu cultivation. Yet, any formal ownership of these lands is recognized even by customary law, only through the male lineage where either the sons inherit the land or in the absence of male progeny, the land is passed on to the brothers and other male members of the husband's family. The woman or her daughters remain dependents, even if they were the primary actors in cultivation and development of the land. Single unmarried women may contribute to the labor of their parental lands or may take fresh patches of forest to cultivate on their own, but they can never own these lands or apply for legal registration in their names other than in exceptional circumstances as in the case of government schemes which may make it mandatory for women to be the legal title holders. Women also do not have the resources or access to administrative procedures for purchase or registration of lands in their names. In some situations, daughters are allowed to take their parental property if there are no sons, where the son-in-law stays with the wife's family and commits to taking all responsibilities of care giving. Even in these circumstances, the land may be entitled with the son-in-law or may be given back to the male lineage of her parental family after a certain period but is rarely registered in the names of the daughters. Parental affection towards daughters is demonstrated more through gifts in cash or kind and rarely as rights over their lands and properties.

Perceptions And Reactions From Tribal Men And Women To The FRA

In the background of the above cultural practices, the FRA comes both as a fresh opportunity for women and as a point of suspicion by customary male leadership. The dominance of customary law and male dictates provides for

¹⁸ Rao, Nitya, (2005). Kinship Matters: Women's Land Claims in the Santal Parganas, Jharkhand, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Dec. 2005), Great Britain and Ireland, pp. 725-746. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3804045>

complacency among male members in the community who do not believe that the FRA entitlements to women in the form of joint pattas can lead to actual rights in practice. Perceptions about the new rights to women under the FRA vary among men and women where the former do not see it as a perceptible threat to their patriarchal control while the latter do not yet believe that it can bring any radical change in the land ownership pattern. Yet, there are elements of suspicion and elements of hope. Internal and external debates on these implications have not yet begun to be articulated in public spaces as the process of registration of claims is, at a nascent stage. Attempting a dialogue with tribal men and women on this issue raised several complex issues and responses (or silence).

A major point of hesitation for customary jurisprudence is the issue of sexuality and women's freedom of mobility in the area of sexuality. Unlike areas on the plains or external Hindu societies, tribal women are considered to enjoy several privileges in the social practices of marriage and sexuality. Changing marital or sexual partners is normally not a stigma and tribal women can remarry if they are widows or if they do not find their marriage partnership meaningful. Whereas tribal society allows for such a freedom of mobility to women, these spaces also lay down restrictions to women's rights. Sexuality is both a freedom and a restriction. Women have the freedom to select their marital partners and elopement is a popular and formally accepted form of marriage. Especially among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) like the Khonds, girls and boys interact freely and often, young men travel around villages during the marriage season seeking brides. The community provides socializing spaces of romance for youth where young girls jocularly interrogate visiting men to test their capabilities in farming and family life and only give their consent for marriage after they are satisfied. While arranged marriages are also formally accepted, tribal girls usually choose their own partners, have the freedom to accept or reject suitors selected by their parents, and are socially accepted if they have sexual relationships prior to marriage, but within certain norms and boundaries of customary laws. They can also choose to remarry or return to their marital homes if dissatisfied with their husbands. Even elderly men and women are allowed to remarry and families often facilitate elopement or marriage alliances.

This is a freedom entitled to women given their critical role in tribal economy over land and forests. No family can subsist on their traditional farming or foraging without the indispensable labor of women because of which, in



Individual discussion on FRA

Visakhapatnam district, it is believed that tribal communities pay a bride price instead of dowry and the second husband has to pay back the first husband this bride price in the event of a woman leaving her first husband for another man. It is the women's immense knowledge and management capabilities over natural resources and their primary role in the traditional economy that gives them considerable decision-making spaces, rights over cash transactions, and sexual freedom and mobility. However, the overarching patriarchy in resource ownership prevails over this freedom where customary law prohibits women from claiming property rights or ownership of land as they believe that women's mobility makes land ownership complicated and fragmented and therefore, their mobility is seen as a threat and as requiring the stability and control through patrilineality and ownership.

Any land owned by their husband through inheritance or by the hard labor of both spouses, belongs to the husband alone. The wife has to forego this land if she decides to remarry or leave her husband. Even if she had toiled hard on her land for several years and has been the principal cultivator whenever the husband is away seasonally for other sources of income or, in more recent times to pursue higher education, she has no rights to her land. The husband remains the sole owner even in the absence of any formal title deed as customary law recognizes each household's informal rights over podu lands. Hence the FRA rights given with joint titles to both husband and wife are received with a fair amount of tolerance from the men in the tribal community who do not believe

that the new law will lead to any change in the patriarchal pattern of land ownership in practice. As the main interest of land claims under the FRA is to escape the harassment of forest officials and false cases, the notional right given to women through joint titles is not considered a threat to the patriarchal system of land ownership and hence, is tolerated.

Similarly, women's excitement over legal rights under the FRA rests more on a sense of relief from the intimidating relationship with the forest guards than for any anticipated internal readjustments in asset ownership. Infact, the foremost benefit of the FRA expressed by men and women is their freedom from the clutches of the forest guards who have stopped preying on their villages for bribes in cash or petty livestock like hens and goats after the Act came into force. Besides, the women are still not aware that they are formal rights-holders along with their spouses, and do not see how it can make a difference to their separate identities as women and as legal claimants when customary law does not recognize this right. Some, however, see it as a safety net, as with the tribal custom of cash being handled by the women, given the tacit understanding that men would waste any cash they had on liquor or other frivolities. Many of the young women interviewed expressed that men may drink and sell the land and they shared their sense of greater security if their names were on the passbooks. They feel that it gives them the flexibility to exert their views and rights in the event of illogical planning or sale of the land by the husband in a state of drunkenness.

Hence, it gives a greater sense of control within their marriage where decisions related to land are concerned, although not as a security outside of their marriage in the event of a dispute. This assurance itself, however, gives women more confidence in having better negotiating spaces with their husbands. Yet, in their perspective, a situation of marital discord or dispute becomes complicated with the FRA. As is customary, most of the male leaders interviewed believe that the land should remain with the husband, in the event of a divorce or separation. Similar views are also expressed by the women because they find it difficult to envision a situation where customary leadership, which has only male members, would allow for land ownership to be a shared right even if the constitution provides such a right. As they have historically been bound by a patriarchal form of resource ownership they do not believe that any deviation would be permitted unless directed by external bodies.

A few women, did express that the land should be divided between the husband

and wife, if the latter continues living in the same village after divorce or remarriage. However, as women usually leave the village for another partner, they do not see how this right can be enjoyed in practical terms. Men do not find it acceptable for women to have property rights as many believe that women do not 'behave themselves', and hence although sexual mobility is accepted, it is viewed with suspicion and therefore, the patriarchal order protects male control through prohibiting property rights to women.

Some men went to the extent of expressing that if women do not make any mischief or cause trouble to their husbands, then they can be given a joint title. However, any such land right, they say, ought to be within the confines of the marital status of a woman and as a joint entitlement along with the husband but not separate from him as in a situation of divorce. Most participants responded with silence as they have not yet started discussing the joint titles from the angle of marital discord or disputes or have not given deeper thought beyond existing practices. However, the discussions generated in the process of the study helped in raising some issues that women were either too hesitant or inhibited to raise on their own with their customary institutions. In most group discussions, the questions were treated with humor as any notions of deviation from patrilineal practices seemed incongruous and improbable to them. The majority of the women have not yet started taking the FRA seriously as far as gender segregated rights are concerned because they do not expect that they can influence the customary male leadership to recognize these rights or dialogue with the state to ensure that the new rights are realized.

Similarly, most of the men who participated in the dialogue expressed that inheritance rights should continue to remain with male progeny while women were divided on this front. Although the right given in the Act is inheritable, the coparcener rights of daughters to such land is anticipated to be prohibitive in customary practice. Some felt that sons should be handed over the land either because this would ensure being taken care of in old age or because they did not anticipate acceptance of daughters' rights by male members and feared conflict. Some of the older women who desired to share their land with their daughters felt it was unfair that custom does not allow such a practice when the new laws promote women's inheritance. Yet, between the constitution and the customary lies a long journey of dialogue and struggle for the women, vis-à-vis their own social institutions and with the external state. These are the new challenges for arguments on behalf of legal pluralism in the context of tribal women's rights and customary law.

Institutionalizing Women's Spaces For Dialogue Vis-à-vis The State

Tribal communities have limited access to information and far fewer opportunities for lobbying with governance institutions to represent their demands. Gender equality expectations in participation and enjoyment of rights within these limited spaces demonstrate the incongruence between policy visions and ground realities. Women face too many obstacles to effectively use legal safeguards that are intended to bring gender parity. Tribal women's participation in the customary public domain is either absent or their role in communal decision-making is conferred through informal spaces of influence and articulation. Most negotiations between the state and tribal communities remain within the male sphere of interaction as both internal and external social taboos restrict women's public participation. Even where attempts are made to involve women, they find it difficult to relieve themselves from the multiple tasks of household chores and livelihood demands. Especially for women from hill-top areas and particularly vulnerable tribes, the alien language of external rules, and the prospect of being ridiculed and disrespectfully treated by local authorities dissuades them from any inclination to participate in public decision-making bodies. In most villages, women do not know that they are members of the FRCs or that they have a rightful role in verification, survey and settlement of claims.

As with the institutionalization of the panchayats where women's participation is tokenistic, so are the other structural bodies created constitutionally, including the Forest Rights Committees, the School Management Committees or Mothers' Committees to give some examples. Administrative and political sensitivity or actions to move beyond tokenism will only happen with pressure and monitoring from communities and civil society groups but even here, gender equality to gain center-stage in social mobilization, is not a high priority. It is feared by many, that any attempts to bring the women's rights issues into campaign debates would lead to fragmentation and jeopardization of movement building as communities themselves are organized on patriarchal lines. Therefore, it becomes much more difficult to raise gender equality entitlements which often, to a large extent, remain restricted to the agendas of women's rights organisations. Or, even if addressed in general by political and civil society groups, the focus on women's direct demands to their rights takes a secondary significance.

It is also assumed that once a community as a whole gets rights, women would anyway benefit through these collective gains. In many ways, this may be true especially where tribal communities are concerned, as women enjoy considerable spaces of negotiation and consultation within their households and groups. However, there is no uniformity in the social organization of tribes to assume that gender equality, complementarity or neutrality is a universally practiced norm, particularly in the present dynamics of external pressures.

Further, distress in agriculture and commercialization of farming have led to out-migration where men in rural and tribal economies are constantly absent from their farmlands and forests for other sources of incomes, leaving the responsibility of farming to women. Thus, feminization of agriculture without women having any legal rights to their lands or decision-making authority is recognized as leading to gender abusive economies and this understanding has led to a push for policy reforms to recognize women as farmers and cultivators and as eligible for direct benefits and rights.

However, the signals from the state bring confusing messages of sustainability, where the more powerful industrial lobbies like the paper industry or other exotic monoculture industries have been lobbying for natural forests to be converted into plantations and pushing tribal farmers out of their podu lands. The lure of cash incomes has, in turn, brought a paradigm shift in the customary male approach to economics and relationship with natural resources. As it is the men who dialogue with the state, decision-making over land has shifted from



Public consultation by Women FRC members

internal household decisions between both spouses and the community, to a transaction between men and the state machinery under the influence of private markets. Women are slowly losing control over not only the rights to their land, but also to the decisions over cultivation.

As with feminization of agriculture, feminization of forests has led to conflicts within communities where men, especially from the younger generation whose aspirations have shifted to incomes from migration and non-land or forest based employment, are not as serious in sustaining their ecological knowledge or resource rights. Today, as they are also not the primary collectors of forest produce firewood, food or NTFP (non-timber forest produce), their alienation from forests is happening at a far greater pace than the women's. In the field sites of this study, it is also observed that where there is crisis of forest resources, men tend to reduce their foraging activities and leave these duties and the conflicts arising out of fulfilling these responsibilities to women, a striking example being that of gender differentiated roles in fuel-wood collection.

Thus, the underlying framework of customary patriarchy that denies women the right of asset ownership, transitions in customary practices due to the fluidity of current migratory contexts, and the growing influence of the state and external cultures together pose new threats to women's roles and privileges. Tribal women are rarely consulted in any state programs in forestry or agriculture, although, in order to concur with gender mainstreaming policies at ministerial levels, women's participation is encouraged. However, these occasions serve as patronizing platforms to bring 'awareness' to women rather than as consultative interactions to understand the knowledge, needs and demands of tribal women, either in the spheres of their farming or in collection of forest produce.

Tribal women as farmers do not have access to the kind of seeds, farm technology or market linkages that align with their hill-slope farming, nor do they have access or ability to influence forest species protection or regeneration that support their daily engagement with the forest for food or domestic needs. For example, the women's collectives in the field sites of the study had made representations to the agriculture department for seeds of traditional food crops that they wanted to cultivate in the lands where the FRA claims were made. However, the government was not able to provide a single variety demanded by the women nor was there any consultation with them for future planning. Even programs like the Joint Forest Management that were intended to bring partnership between communities and the state in the protection of forests that

are now claimed for CFR, have ended up either as plantations designed by forest authorities or as farmlands that have no forests as falsely claimed by these programs, in many places. Women's needs of firewood, tubers or non-timber forest produce remain a severe stress in meeting their daily requirements for the household. Hence, participation in the process of making claims as well as decision-making in the use of these forest lands can become a reality only if focus is given to strengthening women's ability to understand and dialogue with the multiple stake-holders and to break the silence of non-consent. And this calls for a strong argument in favor of tribal women having formal rights under the FRA and other revenue and common lands.

Further, the very context of asset ownership is contested by many¹⁹ as study of tribal cultures has shown that those tribes that had greater dependence on forests and common resources for foraging and hunting than on settled farming, practiced more gender egalitarian social structures²⁰. Agriculture and individual ownership of land are perceived to have shifted tribal communities towards more patriarchal and patrilineal social orders where the women's status and authority experienced a steady decline. Therefore, the opportunity provided under the FRA for individual land claims for farming as well as community forest rights for foraging and other collective rights brings a balance in concretizing women's control over their household lands and in maintaining women's higher status and authority over forests within their customary social institutions. These opportunities can become functionally effective only when political and civil society institutions believe in the foundations of gender equality and respect women's knowledge and spaces.

Realizing Rights And Authority For Women

Tribal women, given sufficient encouragement and opportunity to dialogue collectively, have responded eagerly to participating in platforms of public discussion through the FRA as was witnessed in a public interaction with government authorities and women FRC members in Paderu in June 2016. The field activists, whose persistent role in not only involving women in the formation of the FRCs, demarcation of individual and CFR boundaries, training

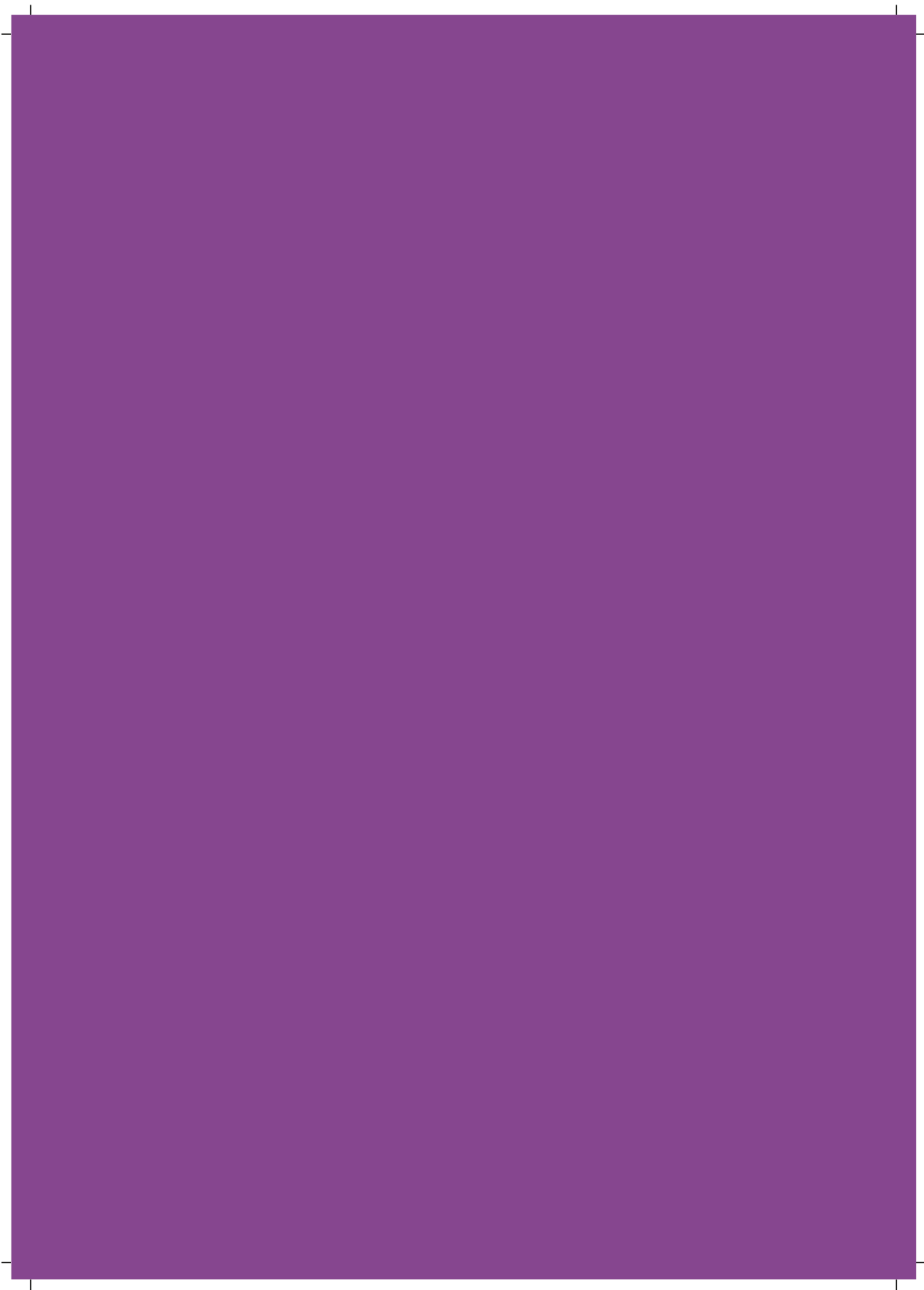
¹⁹ Haksar, Nandita. (1999). Human Rights Lawyering: A Feminist Perspective in Amita Dhanda and Archana Parasher (eds.): *Engendering Law. Essays in Honour of Latika Sarkar*. Lucknow: Eastern Book Company.

²⁰ Leacock, Eleanor, Virginia Abernethy, et. al. (1978). 'Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution,' *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Jun., 1978), The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, pp 247-275. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2741993>.

them in the process of making claims and mapping their forest resources, but also in dispute settlement and raising the questions pertinent to women's rights in these villages, helped in initiating active participation from women as well as opening up debates over women's land rights and food security.

Yet, it requires a long and sustained process of dialogue to have any long-term impact on gender sensitization or building women's confidence to assert for their rights, not only in situations of disputes but also in having negotiating power within their families on day-to-day transactions over the land and forests. It would also require new thoughts and approaches to make women's role in farming and forestry visible. From being considered laborers to becoming land/resource owners and rights holders, may not immediately ensure consultation with them. Yet it has the potential to gradually lead to a process of assertion if adequate attention is given by human rights groups for strengthening women's collective platforms and knowledge sharing so as to make the FRA an effective legal instrument for women.

The process of assertion has to follow a continuous process of not only getting the FRA lands settled but in enabling women in decentralized planning and protection of these lands and resources to meet their daily needs as women farmers and forest owners. Such intensive efforts of collective assertion need to be reconstructed for women to dialogue not only with the men in their communities but also with external societies and the state. Otherwise, the legal position of ownership gets snuffed out effortlessly by knee-jerk state policies and negative actions as in grabbing back forest lands either claimed or handed over under the FRA for various commercial, industrial or conservation projects as is witnessed in many parts of the country today. Only when women in these forest-dwelling and owning communities are able to exercise their authority for economic and ecological planning of their forest lands can any knowledgeable use of these resources happen in sustainable ways - because indigenous women's ecological knowledge is invaluable.





Individual Discussion on FRA

Dhaatri Resource Center

Study To Assess The Participation And Perceptions Of Adivasi Women In The Process Of Claims Under The Forest Rights Act



Dhaatri Resource Center for Women and Children (Dhaatri), with support from South Asia Institute, Harvard University, has undertaken a short-term study on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and women's participation and perceptions in making claims to their entitlements under the Act. Dhaatri is implementing a field project to facilitate the institutionalization of the FRA and to build the communities' capacities to benefit from the new constitutional entitlements provided under the Act. As the work of Dhaatri is to strengthen women's rights and leadership, the focus of our work on using the FRA as a tool for women's land rights gains importance from the legal provisions that the Act provides where women are equal title holders and claimants. Yet, there is limited or no knowledge of these entitlements as Adivasi²¹ women have no access to information or governance support that assists them with registering their claims. The Act not only provides for women's direct rights to individual and collective titles to forest lands, it also provides for their equal participation in the institutional mechanisms of governance and management in the implementation of this Act.

²¹Adivasi - The term is used to refer to indigenous or tribal populations of India (Sanskrit language adi=beginning; vasi=dweller). Administratively, they are called the Scheduled Tribes or STs under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution.

Dhaatri has a community program in three panchayats of Salugu, Vantlamamidi and Modapalli in Paderu mandal of Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh. This study was carried out across 30 villages/hamlets in these panchayats with the following objectives:

1. To assess the process of institutionalization of the Forest Rights Act from a gender equality perspective adopted by the field team of Dhaatri.
2. To assess the awareness of the Forest Rights Act and Adivasi women's participation in the process of making claims and institutional arrangements
3. To understand the challenges in bringing women's leadership and participation in institutionalization of the FRA.
4. To document the community perceptions (male and female) on women's land rights in view of FRA claims for enabling a process of dialogue on social transformation.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to document the awareness, participation and perspectives of women in the study sites on the FRA Act, and the progress in their awareness and participation as a result of the interventions of Dhaatri team in institutionalizing the Act. The methodology planned was to conduct individual interviews and Focus Discussion Groups (FGDs) covering 30 villages. Researchers attempted to select 30 women belonging to different tribes and social contexts as in age, marital status, land ownership and institutional responsibilities in the Forest Rights Committees. Similarly, FGDs were planned for 10 groups (five male and five female) to understand their perceptions and changes. Further, field interventions of the organization and the progress in the process of claims registration were also taken as observation and primary data to document the impact of the interventions and community mobilization actions.

In order to understand the impact of our intervention, a comparative study was taken with a sample set of 10 interviews and group discussions in an area where Dhaatri does not work. This helped in assessing the process of claims making and institutional mechanisms of the FRA, especially with respect to women's involvement and women's joint claims.

Study Process Initiated

- A preliminary meeting was conducted with Dhaatri team to plan the detailed methodology, identify the villages, prepare individual and group questionnaires, and to plan the time schedules.
- The team prepared a questionnaire and undertook a pilot study in Kapparamajji village. The questionnaires were prepared in Telugu and English.
- The team transcribed each individual and FGD questionnaire based on which gaps were identified.
- A second meeting was conducted with Dhaatri team to review the data collected and collect feedback on the gaps in the questionnaires.
- Based on this feedback a more detailed questionnaire was prepared and the team conducted the interviews with 15 women and 10 FGDs.
- Monthly staff meetings included review of field interviews and progress.
- A third meeting was conducted with the team to train them to compile the data collected. Feedback tables were prepared with the team for compilation of data from the questionnaires. These tables were prepared in Telugu first and then translated into English. The tables were prepared under three broad criteria - Awareness, Participation and Perceptions.
- Interviews and FGD discussion schedules were planned in the monthly meetings with the team.
- Individual interviews were conducted with 30 women and FGDs were conducted with men (five groups) and women (five groups).
- Community-level and cluster-level meetings were conducted with 15 villages for the process of claims verification and organizing a large public consultation with district officials. The public consultation with FRC members was conducted.
- Ten individual interviews and group discussions were conducted outside the field area of Dhaatri to assess the status of claims making under FRA and women's participation in the FRCs.
- Primary data of all 30 villages where Dhaatri has been working to support the process of claims registration, follow-up for distribution of title deeds, resurvey, and claims for re-registration and their current status were included in understanding the impact.
- Data analysis of the individual and group discussions was done through a format based on three criteria - awareness of FRA, participation in the process of making claims, and perceptions of men and women on women's entitlements. These were given scores and from this the analysis and conclusions were drawn.

Responses Received Based On The Interviews And Group Discussions

Awareness

The majority of the women participants in the research are aware of the FRA (63%) and have some understanding of how to make claims for pattas. They have some knowledge that they can claim formal rights to their podu lands as joint pattas for husband and wife. Thus 50% of them are also aware that women can get patta for their podu lands under this Act. The majority of them have received pattas for at least, part of their podu lands and have seen the passbook although they could not read the contents and whether their names are included. However, as their photographs are included in the passbooks, they say that their names have been included. Many do not know how to complain or get grievances redressed. However, the women do have a fair awareness of the members of their FRCs although they do not understand very clearly the roles of these members. Some of the women FRC members as in Modapalli, Kummarithomu and Kapparamajji have started taking an active role in the meetings and verification process after several community-level awareness meetings were conducted to give them confidence in their participation.



Focus group discussion on FRA

FGDs with men indicate that most of them have some awareness about the Act and the process of registration for claims. In all five villages where FGDs were conducted with men where there has been consistent intervention by Dhaatri team in terms of awareness meetings at the community level, formation of FRCs, land mapping and processing of documentation, most of the men are well aware of the procedures and have participated extensively in Dhaatri meetings as well as public meetings with the government. However, women's participation has been much less, especially in the beginning when Dhaatri team started working on FRA claims. But with repeated community-level meetings and training programs that focused on strengthening women's participation and awareness, there is a visible improvement in the awareness levels of women and in their participation.

Participation

With respect to participation in FRA-related meetings, 70% of the women participated in meetings organized by Dhaatri team but most never participated in any government meetings. In fact, the government hardly organized any meetings even for verification of claims except when Dhaatri initiated consultations between government officials and FRC leaders. Some of the women interviewed reported to have participated in the public consultation organized by Dhaatri in June 2016. Women have participated in Gram Sabha meetings and community meetings organized by Dhaatri whenever these were organized to prepare for documentation of claims.

Perceptions

By and large, it was seen that men are not against the concept of women receiving pattas jointly. They do not see it as a threat to their authority as they understand that the customary law and practices are active and men would anyway get the land in case of disputes. Besides, most of the men and women did not express an opinion about sharing of land rights, inheritance or dispute settlement as such issues have not yet arisen. This is only the beginning of making claims and hence discussions within the community on implications of women getting pattas have not taken place. Women (50%) informally shared that they were happy to know about pattas being given in their name because they can prevent their husband from selling it for liquor. Almost all men and women had no objection to women getting pattas (around 70%).

On the issue of women's rights in dispute situations like divorce or separation, nine members said that the husband should get the entire land; one responded



Individual discussion on FRA

that it should go to the son and others remained silent. Most of the men said that the husband should retain the land and they felt that the customary panchayat would also give the same verdict. A few men (3) said that if the wife continues to live in the same village after separation, she could be given part of the land or an equal share. At least 25% of the women said that they do not have the power to decide, so they cannot express an opinion, while another 25% responded that since only men have the right as per custom, the husband will anyway get the land irrespective of external law. Another 25% of the women said that they will demand an equal share from the customary panchayat and the other 25% either felt that they did not face such disputes so they had no opinion or that the son should get the mother's share or they were silent on this matter. On the subject of inheritance, about 30% felt that son and daughter should be given an equal share and the rest were divided in their opinions depending on their context. One person said that she did not have sons, so the land would be given to the son-in-law; some felt that it should go to the son (25%) and the other women refrained from answering as they felt that they have no decision-making choices on inheritance issues. Responses to questions regarding women's rights to the FRA lands, their individual rights in case of separation, and rights of inheritance to female children were mostly silent as such issues were not raised in the past except through Dhaatri community meetings. However, as the community's main focus has been to avoid harassment from the forest guards, the rights are seen as a safety net vis-à-vis the state machinery like the forest department, rather than as a gender equality tool for women's entitlements. The silence also revealed a lack of confidence or

inhibition as articulation of women's rights would invite the annoyance of men in the community, so the women politely refrained from commenting. Yet, collective gatherings with women bring forth bolder arguments in favor of land rights entitlements to women and rights of inheritance to daughters as women feel it is unjust when they do most of the work on the land but when men are adulterous or ill-treat them, they have to forego their lands if they decide to leave their husbands.

The following tables provide information related to the responses received from research participants of the study. Table I provides the checklist of questions and responses, Table II provides the scores under each of these three criteria, Tables III and IV provide data related to the actual claims made and received for individuals and the community. Table V indicates the focus of Dhaatri's work with respect to ensuring single women are included in the list of claimants and recognized as eligible for pattas under the FRA. Table VI gives information related to responses from research participants outside Dhaatri's area of work.

Table I: Responses from women and men regarding FRA awareness, participation and perceptions

| | Awareness | Responses |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | Do you know about FRA? | 63% of participants know about FRA. |
| 2 | Do you know how to claim? | 57% of the participants do not know how to claim under the FRA. |
| 3 | Do you know what kind of proof to give for registration of claim? | 53% of the participants know what kind of proof to give for registration of claim. |
| 4 | Do you know about individual claim? | 37% of the participants know about individual claims and 43% don't know about it. |
| 5 | Do you know that title deed is given jointly in the name of women/wife? | 50% of participants are aware that the title deed is given jointly. |
| 6 | If you don't get patta what will you do? | 53% do not know what to do however, 37% have some understanding of how to go about it. |
| 7 | Do you know the FRC members in your village? | 70% of participants know who the FRC members in their village are. |
| 8 | If you know you have received the patta, are you aware of the details? | 50% of the women know everything about the details however, 30% do not know the details. |

| | Participation | Responses |
|----|--|---|
| 1 | How many times did you attend Dhaatri meetings? | More than 75% have at least sometimes attended the Dhaatri meetings. |
| 2 | How many times did you attend government meetings? | None of the women participants attended any government meetings. |
| 3 | Other meetings ? | 75% have never attended and the others only attended sometimes. |
| 4 | Did you participate in FRC meetings? | More than 2/3 of the people have attended at least sometimes the FRC meetings. |
| 5 | Did you participate in GPS survey? | 90% have not participated. |
| 6 | Did you participate in submission of claims? | 90 % have not participated. |
| 7 | Did you participate in Grama Sabha meetings? | The majority participated in the meetings. |
| 8 | Did you participate in verification meetings? | A few have participated. |
| 9 | Did you participate public meetings? | 7% of women participated in public meetings with the government organized by Dhaatri. |
| 10 | Did you participate in any dispute settlement? | 70% did not participate. |

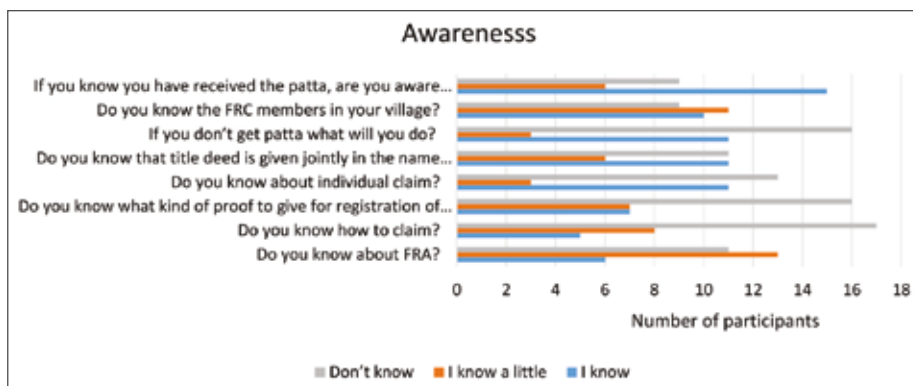


Individual discussion on FRA

| | Opinion | Responses |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | What are the benefits of the FRA? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have less problems with forest officials and more confidence in facing them (5); • Creates awareness about our rights (1); • It gives us more information (1); • We have the option of cultivating land with traditional crops (1); • If the patta is on our land nobody else can claim it is their land (1) • Don't know (1) • No response (20) |
| 2 | Is it useful to get patta for women? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes it is useful to have the patta in women's name (27); • It is good it is in women's name otherwise men will sell the land for liquor (1) • Don't know (0) • No response (2) |
| 3 | What will you do when you get the patta? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivation (11); • We can work on our own land now (1) • Don't know (4) • No response (14) |
| 4 | What are the men's opinions on women getting pattas under FRA? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's good for women – they can have security (20); • It should be on men's name (1) • Don't know (1) • No response (8) |
| 5 | In the future will you transfer the land right to your daughter also? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To both the children (2); • Yes to the daughter (5); • No, to son only (4); • No, after marriage it goes to the son-in-law (1); • Not to daughters, they get married and leave the house (1) • Don't know (7) • No response (10) |
| 6 | If there is marital discord, or if the women leave their husband's house, who will get the land? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Husband (9); • Son (1) • Don't know (9) • No response (11) |

| | | |
|-----|---|--|
| i | In the above mentioned scenario what would the decision of village panchayat elders be? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If she stays in the same house she may have equal rights (3); • The land will go to the husband (2); • The land should be given only to the son (1); |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the husband and wide should get an equal share (1); • The land should be given to whoever the children stay with (1) • Don't know (10) • No response (12) |
| ii | In the above mentioned scenario what would be the opinion/decision of women in the village? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per our custom it goes to men, so now we demand equal share to women and we demand equal rights and sometimes women do not have power to decide (5); • The land belongs to the husband as per custom, so we accept this custom, we cannot question it belongs to the husband (5) • Don't know (8) • No response (12) |
| iii | If the village council gives land only to men, what will you women do? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for equal share for survival and equal rights (5); • The land should be given to husband as wife comes from another family (1); • We have no right to demand (3) • No idea, we never faced a problem so far (1); • Don't know (8) • No response (12) |

Table II: Responses from participants



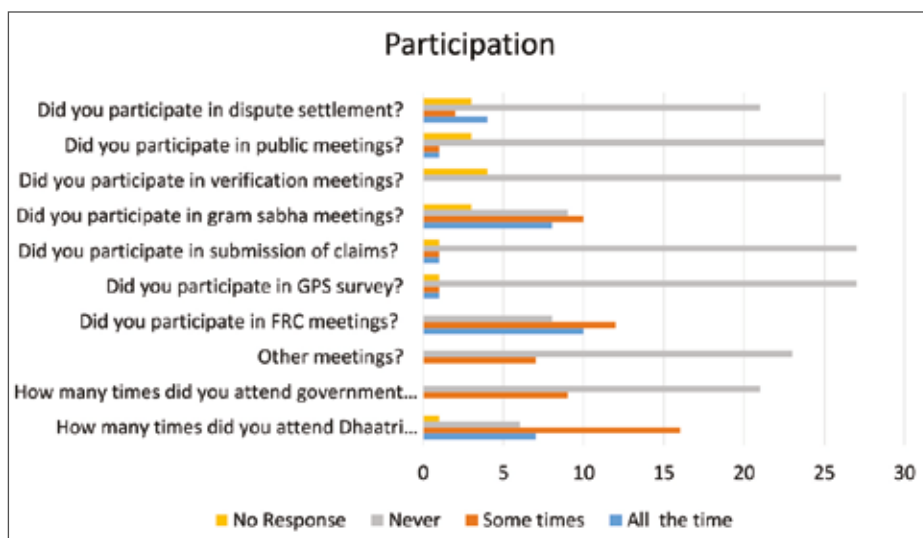


Table III: Status of FRA claims in Dhaatri's field area

| Sl. no | Panchayat | Village name | No of families in podu cultivation | Extent | No of families who submitted claims | Extent of claims submitted (Acres) | No of families given pattas | Extent of claims received (Acres) | No of families claiming for re survey | Extent | No of new claimants |
|--------|-----------|----------------|------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------|---------------------|
| 1 | Sabagu | Bodochattu | 14 | 119.72 | 7 | 62 | 7 | 17.5 | 7 | 44.5 | 7 |
| 2 | Sabagu | Bidarigaravu | 29 | 155.5 | 25 | 137.8 | 25 | 62.5 | 25 | 75.3 | 4 |
| 3 | Sabagu | Rangasingipadu | 34 | 172.81 | 12 | 66.8 | 12 | 27.58 | 12 | 39.22 | 22 |
| 4 | Sabagu | Dabbagaravu | 7 | 41.7 | 7 | 41.7 | No | No | No | No | No |
| 5 | Sabagu | Gopalapalem | 7 | 37 | 7 | 37 | No | No | No | No | No |
| 6 | Sabagu | Poolabanda | 8 | 45.7 | 8 | 45.7 | No | No | No | No | No |
| 7 | Sabagu | Relnamidi | 12 | 68.1 | 12 | 68.1 | No | No | No | No | No |
| 8 | Sabagu | Chalimeta | 26 | 157.8 | 15 | 97.5 | 15 | 37.5 | 15 | 60 | 11 |
| 9 | Sabagu | Baradapadu | 13 | 59.9 | 13 | 59.9 | No | No | No | No | No |
| 10 | Sabagu | Malapadu | 10 | 64 | 4 | 27 | 4 | 10 | 4 | 17 | 6 |
| 11 | Sabagu | Burugochettu | 35 | 271.7 | 34 | 265.7 | 34 | 154.64 | 34 | 111.06 | 1 |
| 12 | Sabagu | Thurumamidi | 9 | 75 | 6 | 52 | 6 | 20.58 | 6 | 31.42 | 3 |
| 13 | Sabagu | Baddigummi | 16 | 91.5 | 16 | 91.5 | 16 | 46.25 | 16 | 45.25 | No |
| 14 | Sabagu | Kapparamaji | 23 | 212.85 | 22 | 156.57 | 22 | 81.88 | 22 | 74.68 | 11 |

| Sl. no | Panchayat | Village name | No of families in poda cultivation | Extent | No of families who submitted claims | Extent of claims submitted (Acres) | No of families given pattas | Extent of claims received (Acres) | No of families claiming for re survey | Extent | No of new claimants | |
|--------|---------------|----------------|------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------|---------------------|-----|
| 15 | Salugu | Lolangipadu | 44 | 228.23 | 44 | 228.23 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 16 | Salugu | Eedilpalam | 22 | 115.5 | 22 | 115.5 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 17 | Salugu | Dallapalli | 54 | 434.36 | 54 | 434.36 | 54 | 144.15 | 54 | 290.21 | No | |
| 18 | Salugu | Kakki | 51 | 161.25 | 51 | 161.25 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 19 | Salugu | Chilakalagondi | 20 | 36 | 20 | 36 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 20 | Salugu | Junjarvada | 4 | 24 | 4 | 24 | 4 | 5.9 | 4 | 14.1 | No | |
| 21 | Salugu | Podagopetu | 4 | 6.5 | 4 | 6.5 | 4 | 6.5 | No | No | No | |
| 22 | Vantlanaamidi | Iskalagondi | 13 | 35.5 | 13 | 35.5 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 23 | Vantlanaamidi | Chinrada | 27 | 134 | 27 | 134 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 24 | Vantlanaamidi | Chodepalli | 34 | 193 | 34 | 193 | 34 | 154.69 | 33 | 38.31 | no | |
| 25 | Vantlanaamidi | Onuru | 50 | 286.55 | 38 | 220.55 | 38 | 40.3 | 38 | 180.25 | 12 | |
| 26 | Vantlanaamidi | Kummarithom | 44 | 104 | 44 | 104 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 27 | Vantlanaamidi | Nandigarovu | 47 | 236.75 | 32 | 166.56 | 32 | 95.2 | 32 | 56.55 | 15 | |
| 28 | Modapalli | Modapalli | 31 | 144.75 | 31 | 144.75 | No | No | No | No | No | |
| 29 | Modapalli | Vankachinta | 31 | 179.02 | 22 | 126.02 | 22 | 42.17 | 22 | 83.85 | 9 | |
| | Total | | 719 | 3892.8 | 7 | 628 | 3339.47 | 329 | 947.34 | 324 | 568.06 | 101 |



Focus group discussion on FRA

Table IV: Community forest rights claims list

| S.no | Panchayat name | Village name | Extent of CFR claimed |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Salugu | Kaparamajji | 120Ac |
| 2 | Salugu | Rangasingipaddu | 190Ac |
| 3 | Salugu | Baddigummi | 80Ac |
| 4 | Salugu | Bidarigaruvu | 130Ac |
| 5 | Salugu | Lolangipadu | 150Ac |
| 6 | Salugu | Bodichattu | 100Ac |
| 7 | Salugu | Buruguchattu | 160Ac |
| 8 | Vantlamaamidi | Chodepalli | 200Ac |
| 9 | Vantlamaamidi | Nandigaruvu | 150Ac |
| 10 | Vantlamaamidi | Polabanda | 60Ac |

The following table shows the direct impacts of Dhaatri's intervention on women's land rights where, perhaps, this is one of the few areas that single women have been included as independent claimants under FRA to lands they are cultivating.

Table V: List of single women claimants under FRA

| S.No | Village name | Single Women List | Extent(Acres) |
|------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Rangasingipadu | 14 | 58.17 Acres |
| 2 | Bidarigaruvu | 6 | 26.00 Acres |
| 3 | Chodapalli | 15 | 68.66 Acres |
| 4 | Onuru | 3 | - |
| 5 | Nandigaruvu | 2 | 3.20 Acres |
| 6 | Edulapalam | 8 | 25.5 Acres |
| 7 | Salugu | 7 | 12.30 Acres |
| 8 | Arlada | 5 | 21.3 Acres |
| 9 | Jinjurabada | 3 | 10.0 Acres |
| 10 | Malapadu | 1 | 11.88 Acres |
| 11 | Buradapadu | 2 | 03.04 Acres |
| 12 | Poduguputt | 6 | 22.39 Acres |
| 13 | Chilakalagondi | 4 | 10.8 Acres |
| 14 | Iskalagondi | 2 | 2.00 Acres |
| 15 | Chintada | 3 | 9.00 Acres |
| 16 | Poolabanda | 9 | 20.00 Acres |

| | | | |
|----|---------------|------------|---------------------|
| 17 | Rellamamidi | 3 | 5.00 Acres |
| 18 | Lolangipadu | 2 | 2.00 Acres |
| 19 | Kummarithommu | 12 | 20.00 Acres |
| 20 | Kapparamajji | 3 | 26.00 Acres |
| 21 | Baddigummi | 2 | 5.00 Acres |
| 22 | Vankachinta | 3 | 4.00 Acres |
| | Total | 115 | 366.24 Acres |

The table below shows responses from women in villages outside Dhaatri's area of work that indicates the low levels of awareness of FRA and the poor implementation of the Act where claims registration has been negligible.

Table VI: FRA awareness and participation in some villages outside Dhaatri's area of work

| Sl No | Name | Village | Awareness | | | Participation | Opinion |
|-------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-----|---------|---------------|--|
| | | | FRA claim | FRC | Process | | |
| 1 | K.Bullamma | Gunagummi | No | No | No | No | Don't know |
| 2 | V.Gunamma | Gummadigunta | Yes | No | No | No | Important for women to get patta, inheritance right only to son, decision as per panchayat |
| 3 | G.Bullamma | Gunagummi | No | No | No | No | Will ask panchayat for equal share |
| 4 | G.Chinnammi | Gunagummi | Yes | No | No | No | will ask for equal share if we live in same village |

| | | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|-------------|-----|-------------|-------------|---|--|
| 5 | J.Surya Shanthi | Gumadigunta | Yes | No | No | No | No inheritance right to daughter, will respect panchayat decision |
| 6 | J.Kondamma | Gumadigunta | No | No | No | No | In our custom only boys inherit land.so far no dispute between husband and wife |
| 7 | P.Jambo | Sappiput | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | It is good for wife to get patta, men only drink. Will give equal share to daughter and son. Men are also happy that women get patta |
| 8 | M.Balammi | Sappiput | Yes | No | Know Little | Sometimes | Men and women are happy that women get patta, inheritance is only for son. No dispute between husband and wife so far, so I don't know |
| 9 | V. Haso | Sappiput | Yes | Know Little | Know Little | Participated in survey and meetings with government | Equal right to husband and wife, but we don't have dispute |
| 10 | G.Eshwaramma | Nerellu | Yes | No | No | No | We have no dispute, both husband and wife should have patta. Will give land to daughter if she marries in same village. In case of dispute we will ask panchayat either for equal right for share in land or share in crop |

In terms of the process of making claims and success so far, Tables III and IV provide details of area and families who have registered their claims with the subdivisional office and the extent of land for which pattas were given. Although there is a major discrepancy between registration of claims and actual claims settled in terms of area of ownership, the very process that was undertaken earlier by the government, completely ignored or bypassed many claims, especially those of single women. After Dhaatri's intervention in the last two years in the process of claims registration, there were re-survey applications submitted for new families who were left out, and for lands that were either rejected due to lack of proper documentation support as people had little awareness of the registration process or due to oversight by the officials. Two categories of claims were either not entertained or not even made. The first was related to claims from villages where the World Bank-funded forestry programs were implemented in the past. After campaigning with local authorities, Dhaatri managed to get the claims from these villages (Lolangipadu, Modapalli, Rellamamidi, Nandigaruvu, Poolabanda) to be accepted and they have been promised settlement by December 2016. This is a major achievement as the forest department's aggressive tactics tried to override the constitutional rights of Adivasis whose forest rights were deliberately withheld on the pretext of earlier program contracts that were little known to the communities involved. The second was with respect to claims from single women and widows. With Dhaatri's facilitation these women got their claims registered under FRA. The third major challenge is with respect to the settlement of community/collective rights as there was not a single claim registered or settled. Due to Dhaatri's consistent advocacy and campaign efforts, the subdivisional authorities accepted the community claims for which settlement is pending but promised. This work of claims making is time-consuming both in terms of compiling the mandatory supporting documents as proof of ownership of the lands under occupation and in terms of the institutional process of forming the FRCs and verification of claims before submission. Yet, as land is the most critical resource for Adivasi families, in order to be accurate, the field team had to ensure that every family participated in the process, and therefore, the multiple visits, meetings and consultations with the communities and the gram sabhas were important in bringing community participation, particularly that of women.

Reflections And Analysis

In the villages where Dhaatri has done more extensive work and training, as in Kapparamajji, Baddigummi, Buruguchattu, Rangasingipadu, Lolangipadu, Malapadu, Rellamamidi and others, women are more aware of the Act and have actively participated in meetings and in the process of mapping and claims documentation as was seen in the group discussions and responses regarding rules and FRC procedures.

The responses indicate that the majority of the women have heard of the Act and it is colloquially referred to by the women as 'podupatta' (title for shifting cultivation land). They have responded that they know a little about the Act and have participated in some meetings, if not all, where Dhaatri conducted community meetings. However, their participation is much lower compared to men given their time constraints (which they shared informally). Some of the responses indicate that women have not yet considered the impacts of having a title deed in their names in case of disputes.

The interviews and group discussions have served as a means of awareness raising and dialogue about the Act among men and women and have raised new dimensions to the dormant issues around women's property rights.

The responses gave us feedback on the extent of participation and awareness on our own interventions among the women. We could see a comparative improvement in women's awareness and participation due to the consistent mobilization work in the last two years of engaging women's attention and confidence. Even women from PVTGs like the Khonds who do not dialogue with outsiders have started participating in FRC meetings. The large number of women present at the public consultation held in June 2016 is evidence of this impact of women's mobilization.

The study also indicates that despite continuous training and community-based work with respect to conducting repeated village-level meetings, gram sabha consultations, undertaking mapping of individual and community boundaries, collecting documents for filing claims and organizing interactions with local government staff for verification of claims, it is still a challenge to involve women. Yet, there is a marked difference in the awareness and participation between women in the field sites where Dhaatri works and in the communities where we do not work. This difference is especially stark with respect to women

making use of the FRA. As women have less time to spare than men in the public arena of participation and meetings, many are yet to have an understanding about the Act. However, if they participated in any meetings, they were mainly meetings conducted by Dhaatri field teams and not by government officials. Many of them are aware of the Act although understanding of the details is limited.

Some interviews reflect that in several cases, although women have some awareness and participation in the process, they are too modest to admit to their understanding. Hence, even active women have given responses of ignorance of the law and procedures (e.g. Vankachinta) although, it is true that both men and women have little access to information other than through the Dhaatri interactions.

Although few male participants gave a negative response regarding women getting pattas, we were surprised by how much the women valued having this new right. In private, they admitted to perceiving this new land right as a way of ensuring that men do not sell the land without their consent - the patta was a source of assurance from the responses given by the women. Yet, women were not confident that it was possible to claim this right in situations of marital discord or in decision-making about inheritance or passing it on to their daughters. Again, such discussions have not yet occurred within the communities and hence the women were unable to give any response or were confused. The interviews and group discussions initiated some positive thinking on these lines and possibilities of opening up dialogue with male leadership as 25% of the women research participants expressed that they would approach village councils for their equal share. As customary law only allows men to own and inherit land, the women are not confident that a constitutional law such as FRA can change this practice at the ground level. As far as property ownership rights are concerned, social practices and customary judicial decisions are based on this patriarchal norm and hence customary practices draw very clear lines and boundaries around what kind of constitutional mechanisms would be accepted and where they tend to tacitly reject them. Since land ownership would remain with the men in practice, the men do not feel threatened by aspects of the FRA that relate to women's equal entitlements at this stage. Given this complacency of male customary leadership, the women, by and large, do not perceive the Act as a transformative vehicle for gender equality. Yet, it provides them a glimpse of a hope of gaining some foothold in these legal claims.

The rights of inheritance to daughters were perceived with mixed feelings and perspectives among women. Most of them feared that the customary law does not allow for daughters to make claims to land and hence they did not think it was relevant to discuss this. Many felt that their old age is secure only if the land is given to sons as daughters are culturally under no obligation to take care of them and sons-in-law may prevent them from taking any responsibilities. Especially as daughters usually marry outside the village, they do not see how any enjoyment of land can be exercised by daughters and they fear that land may go fallow or a daughter's land rights may lead to land grabbing by relatives or outsiders. Some women, however, felt that if they had a lot of land, they would distribute some of it to their daughters. But informal discussions gave an impression that women did not want to antagonize the village elders with their opinions if they felt daughters had rights to inherit or if wives had rights to an equal share, especially in situations of dispute. It was interesting that some women felt that they would uphold their demand for women's equal rights with the customary elders when any future disputes arise between spouses, and the customary panchayat's verdict is in favor of the husband retaining all the land.

We need to review the methodology of the study as we have found it too ambitious to implement all the planned activities with the limited resources, time and team supported under this study. It is not possible for one person to conduct all the interviews, given the large number of villages and their geographical locations. Hence, almost the entire team was involved in the study although only one person was supported. It was difficult to complete one round of interviews as it is time-consuming; women cannot spare much time to sit through the interviews which have to be done over multiple visits. As the monsoon season begins early in the hills, it has been raining heavily in the villages since the month of May, and it was not possible for the team to walk up to the villages within the time period. This is also the season of illnesses, and most of the field staff in Dhaatri contracted malaria and dengue. Given these limitations, it is not possible to conduct two rounds of individual interviews or group discussions. To divert the time of staff working on other deadlines for the documentation of this project with the resources provided creates an imbalance to other committed work.

Yet, the process of undertaking this study has been a training in itself for the field team to understand the process of planning and conducting research, and getting inputs in research methodology, preparing questionnaires, compiling data and analyzing data. It has been useful to the women in the community

and to the field staff, leading to reflections on the implications of the entitlements provided to women. The field staff shared their interactions with the women, stating that those who have silently accepted the male dominance of land ownership have informally shared how glad they were that women have titles in their names. Due to high incidence of alcoholism among men in some of the tribes, it is a culturally accepted practice that women have rights to cash management and cash is handled entirely by the women. However, property and land are entirely under patrilineal control and only in rare circumstances are women allowed to own land. The FRA has brought a radical change in this practice although women haven't started staking claims in formal ways as the tribal villages in these hills practice a consultative process of planning their farming between both the spouses. It is mainly in times of marital discord that injustice is experienced as husbands retain land rights at the time of divorce or separation. But with the social dynamics of change, migration and urbanization, the cohesiveness of the communities' obedience to customary law is dwindling, leading to the gradual decline of traditional safety nets that protect women. Young men are shifting out of the villages for work and thus find it easy to avoid customary orders and rules. With men migrating to towns seasonally, women are left to take care of most of the land-based activities in the village. Although the decisions are fairly consultative so far, the state agriculture/land programs and influence of plains farmers to grow more cash-based crops are bringing changes to land use patterns that are mostly male-centered. Men are attracted to cash incomes from these crops as they acquire gadgets and motorbikes for their personal use, whereas women's personal expenditures are largely confined to household needs. Therefore, the younger women find these imbalances in expenditure disturbing and see their access to the land right patta as a vehicle for protecting their social and economic spaces.

A short comparative survey was conducted in a few villages where there is no interaction by Dhaatri field activities to assess the status and awareness among women regarding FRA process. Only in one village (Sappiput) women have some awareness about the Act, have filed for claims and have some idea about the process of claims. This is due to the active efforts of the sarpanch (village council elder) who tried to get pattas for this village. Some families have received pattas, although not for the entire land in their occupation. However, the women do not know that they are formally eligible for pattas and only some women participated in the survey to measure their podu lands. The claims were made by the male members of the village, so there is not much clarity on the documents to be submitted for proof and verification. However, as Sappiput

village has a fairly active interaction with outsiders, and most of the women in this village are known to brew rice beer for their income, they have experience of dealing with police cases and officials, and hence there is some awareness and participation in interactions with officials who visit the village. In the other three villages, no process of making claims has taken place so far, and women and men do not have much understanding of the Act or that women are joint claimants to their podu lands. With regard to opinions and perspectives, this is the first time that the women were being interviewed on their land rights issues. The majority of the women responded that they will give land only to sons, the assumption being that the cultural/customary law does not allow any other inheritance rights. The women also feel that daughters do not live in the village and hence the land would go to waste or be poorly managed in their absence. They therefore feel that if daughters marry within the village, they can exercise their rights to inheritance. They also feel insecure about being taken care of in old age as they feel that sons have responsibilities, whereas sons-in-law do it only out of generosity and not out of compulsion.

These responses also indicate that there is a long journey of struggle for the women to come out of their cultural norms of patrilineal control to even think of alternative forms of resource sharing or ownership.

Annexes:

Visakhapatnam District Location Map



Paderu Mandal Location Map



Map showing Visakhapatnam district, Andhra Pradesh India with field sites of the study in three panchayats-Modapalli, Salugu and Vantlamamidi



Training to Youth on GPS usage to measure their forest land

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial data. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses, income, and any other financial activities.

The second part of the document provides a detailed breakdown of the accounting process. It starts with the identification of the accounting cycle, which consists of several steps: identifying the accounting cycle, identifying the accounting cycle, identifying the accounting cycle, and so on. Each step is explained in detail, with examples and practical applications.

The third part of the document focuses on the classification of accounts. It explains how to identify and classify different types of accounts, such as assets, liabilities, and equity. It also discusses the importance of using the correct accounting language and terminology to avoid confusion and ensure clarity.

The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial data. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses, income, and any other financial activities.

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Youth Mentors discussing in their group during a Body-Mapping Exercise.
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Men Against Violence And Abuse

**Documenting Impact of MAVA's Innovative Work
among Young Men on Gender**

**Research conducted and compiled
by Ms. Roopashri Sinha**

The Challenge of Exposing Men to a Gender Lens



The Backdrop

Changing attitudes is easier said than done as it involves changing beliefs and behaviors that are formed, nurtured and perpetuated by society. In the case of gender inequality, changing attitudes means changing the way men and women relate to each other within the home and in society. It also means changing attitudes towards what is right or wrong about beliefs and behaviors they have been taught as children.

Attitudes towards women in a society are reflected in what the society has attained in terms of development indicators like education, health, nutrition, economics, decision-making at home, right to public life and human settlements of women. In India, these indicators highlight the fact that men and women function in different worlds.

India's Constitution, progressive legislation, affirmative action by the government and ongoing efforts made by the Indian women's movement have

contributed to some perceptible changes in the socioeconomic and political conditions of women. However, equality for women in India is still a far-fetched dream. Most of the energies of agencies, NGOs and activists have been concentrated on providing counseling, caring and legal aid to victims of discrimination and abuse, and empowering women to assert themselves. Activists and citizens concerned with the unrelenting issue of violence against women realized that the fight for women's rights had to go beyond women's campaigns and get support from the masses.

The group of 205 men who responded to a creative appeal in September 1991 in a daily newspaper, 'Wanted men who believe wives are not for beating...'²², was one such group. They expressed their wish to change the social environment so that men could be 'part of the solution' in addressing gender violence. The group's formation of a non-profit organization, Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), put forth for the first time in India the need to look at 'gender issues' as 'also men's issues' and engage them through a gradual process of humanization and cultural transformation.

MAVA has been working in a resolute manner with men in changing their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in support of gender equality by engaging youth in group meetings and training sessions through varied media forms and campaigning strategies.

Keeping the vision of a gender-just society, the MAVA team (generally a 3-4-member working team), tried out different activities in its formative years. It provided counseling services and utilized cultural events, community groups and media to conduct mass awareness programs. It also networked and garnered support from women's organizations and citizens as it raised issues with men on brutal, horrifying gendered violence situations all across India, and upheld the rights of the distressed women to live with dignity and in safety. MAVA also continues to bring out an annual Marathi publication (*Purush Spandan*)²³ that has given a voice to the men who are and want to be different. It has given visibility to the oppressive nature of patriarchy from men's point of view. The MAVA Helpline provided an anonymous space for distressed young men and women to communicate their problems, thoughts and insecurities related to gender.

One of the important activities undertaken in the pre-2006 phase that laid the

²² Men Against Violence and Abuse. (2016). <http://www.mavaindia.org/Genesis.html>

²³ Purush Spandan (Marathi, which means male vibrations).

foundation of the MAVA model of mentoring was the guidance and counseling program for youth. Pre-marital guidance workshops for young boys and girls, who were desirous of marriage and needed basic inputs on various aspects of marriage and sexuality, were organized regularly for five years.

Moreover, MAVA's experiments with different forums, especially youth-friendly events also indicated that there was a section of the youth that needed a platform to express its questions and views and who did not wish to be perpetrators of violence, abuse and discrimination against women.

MAVA's pioneering initiative with men in the early '90s has motivated and given impetus to many new initiatives in India that are now moving towards developing a gendered lens among men in India.

MAVA has thus far worked with young men in nine districts of Maharashtra State: Pune, Kolhapur, Satara, Mumbai, Nagpur, Bhandara, Buldhana, Dhule and Jalgaon.

Documenting MAVA

Throughout MAVA's programs, 'mentoring' seems to be a key concept. MAVA has shaped mentors in the first four districts mentioned above. In three districts, Nagpur, Bhandara and Buldhana, the mentoring program was cut short, and in the last two districts the mentoring program was newly initiated in 2015.

Much of MAVA's work is qualitative rather than quantitative. Although a significant number of people are reached during mass awareness campaigns and events, the deeper and sustainable impact lies mainly with the male youth who associate with MAVA, namely the peer communicators/ mentees, who gradually become mentors.

The working definitions of the terms used in this document are:

1. Mentor: A male youth or peer communicator who has had the opportunity to be trained on gender perspective at MAVA (through training camps, workshops, internships, volunteering or field placements) for a substantial period of time, has evolved as a gender-sensitive person, and has the capacity to engage and communicate with youth peers/other young men and women on gender issues, to influence their thought-processes and to facilitate changes in their behavior.



Mentees discussing their thoughts after viewing a picture during a workshop exercise. © Leading Lines

2. Mentee: A male youth peer communicator who is undergoing training on gender perspective and is in the process of being influenced primarily by a MAVA mentor. Through self-reflection, there is a change in his perspective, attitudes and behaviors towards women.

3. Girl Mentee: Young women are involved during orientation programs, street plays and cultural events held for youth, encouraging peer communicators to share and discuss with them as equals. Women get the opportunity to meet and communicate with young men who are learning the importance of gender-sensitive language, attitudes and behaviors.

This document has captured the process of transforming the male youth in the 16-21-year-age group into peer communicators/mentees and later as mentors. We have conducted qualitative data collection, including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with mentors from three districts, Pune, Satara and Mumbai, and undertaken in-depth interviews of 10 youth mentors. We have also interviewed 10 mentees from Pune, Mumbai, Dhule and Jalgaon as it is important to see the movement from a mentee to a mentor as an ongoing process. Among the mentees interviewed, there are a few girl mentees.

Building Seminal Work With Youth (2006-2016)

In 2006, MAVA's chief functionary, Harish Sadani, received the Population Council's 'Health and Population Innovation Fellowship' for working with rural youth in Pune on gender issues. The two-year pilot project called *Yuva Maitri* (Friendship among youth) provided a road map for keeping the youth closely and consistently linked to gender issues over a period of one to two years.

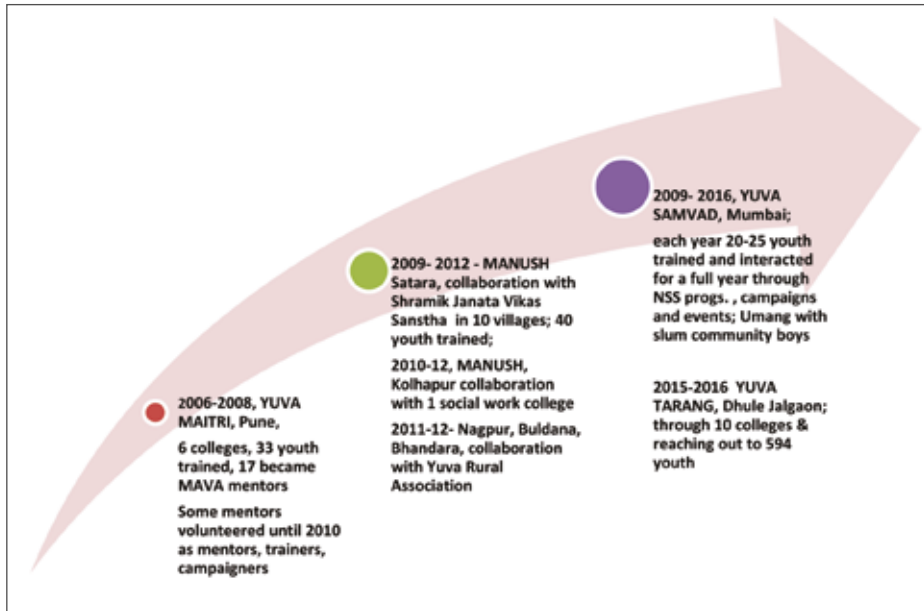
Strategic aspects of the pilot model were:

- To orient college youth (men and women) about MAVA's vision.
- Engage selected young men from participating colleges (short-duration residential training camps) and develop their gender perspective. They become MAVA's peer communicators/mentees.
- Use innovative and appropriate media to reach out to a wider section of youth; for example, workshops, group discussions, debates, reading materials (Purush Spandan, Frequently Asked Questions²⁴, (FAQ) booklet), films, games, songs, street- theatre, posters, flipcharts and competitions. Many initiatives and strategies are evolved and developed by the youth mentees for reaching out to other young men and women.
- Provide exposure visits, weekly sessions, refresher workshops as facilitators and street-play activism to selected youth who have undergone the residential gender training.
- Encourage the peer communicators/mentees to reflect on 'personal change plans' in order to transform their own behaviors and attitudes.
- Persuade and support the peer communicators/mentees to reach out to other youth (men and women) and share what they have learnt from MAVA trainings.
- Take collective action on contemporary gender events and involve more youth (men and women) in those programs.

The pilot program encouraged MAVA to expand to other districts: Mumbai, Satara, Kolhapur, Nagpur, Bhandara, Buldhana, Dhule and Jalgaon. While the main features from the pilot program were continued, each district evolved its own action plan to get in touch with youth in the region. It is therefore important to note the key features of each district project undertaken by MAVA from 2006-2016.

²⁴ The MAVA FAQs were first compiled by the peer communicators from Pune and were later edited and published by MAVA.

Diagram 1: MAVA growth



Peer Communicators / Mentees

The approach to contacting youth is generally based on the need and the environment. So far, four routes have proved their utility: (1) The National Service Scheme (NSS)²⁵ units in colleges, institutions of higher education; (2) NGOs who were working or aiming to work with youth; (3) Contacting community youth directly; (4) Reaching out to trainee social workers.

Some college youth were selected by their teachers, some were selected by MAVA after a brief orientation session and some joined on their own. Some were initially reluctant and skeptical about participating in a residential camp.

²⁵ National Service Scheme is aimed at involving college students pursuing university degrees across India. The focus is on the development of the personality of youth through community service.

Key Features Of Districts: Mentees And Processes

(i) Pune district, *Yuva Maitri* (2006-08)

Profile of Mentees

The majority of the peer communicators/mentees were NSS volunteers who were studying in colleges located in hinterlands like Jejuri, Saswad, Hadapsar, Narayangaon and Manchar. Except for one college, Hari Desai College in Pune city, the rest were all located in towns close to villages. Most students came from farming communities, and worked either in agriculture or some caste/family trade, while studying.

Key Processes

- NSS students were given an orientation session on gender issues.
- 33 youth were selected for an eight-day residential camp on gender sensitization.
- The residential camp training was followed by periodic weekly interactive sessions.
- Peer communicators were expected to share information with friends in the college and in their neighborhood.
- The group compiled a set of 100 questions that were generally asked by youth.
- The students prepared posters; this was a novel way of reaching the youth who were outside their own circle or college.
- They prepared and performed street-plays on topical issues.
- Though the project formally ended in 2008, the mentors were encouraged to continue their association with MAVA by conducting and participating in workshops, sessions and campaigns.
- In 2009 and 2010, the mentors and some female mentees conducted two awareness-generation camps for girls and women in two villages.
- The mentees conducted training workshops for the youth groups in Satara district, thus becoming the first group of 'MAVA mentors'.

Pune mentor, Sunil Chachar, associated with MAVA since 2006

As a college youth, Sunil had not decided what to do. His goal was to complete his graduation. Belonging to a single-parent family that had four acres of agricultural land in drought-prone Purandar taluka, Sunil was used to hard work. His mother was the sole family member as his father had passed away when he was in 4th standard.

While studying in college, Sunil was an active NSS volunteer. He was asked by his teacher to give a brief speech on a social problem. Out of the 50 students called to speak, six were selected and Sunil was one of them. Feeling proud of this achievement, Sunil went readily for the *Yuva Maitri* residential camp in Pune. He was one of the 17 peer communicators who worked quite actively with MAVA until 2010. He believes that MAVA gave him his passion for training.

Sunil fondly recalls some memories from college. One of them is when a group of boys from his college were to be rusticated for teasing girls. He, along with other MAVA peer communicators, requested the principal to allow them to work with the eve teasers. Sunil was actively involved in this behavior change experiment which he felt was also a 'big test' for them. Within two months, the team had succeeded in convincing all the defaulting youth that they had made a mistake. The success of these efforts was seen when the boys did not misbehave again and one of them became the top NSS cadet for the year.

Pune girl mentee, Prajakta, started her association with MAVA in 2007

In her second year of college, Prajakta saw some of her seniors, who were peer communicators from her college, talking about gender issues with other boys and giving brief talks in the classrooms. Their ideas matched what Prajakta had learnt from her parents.

This was the beginning of her 'good friendship' with Yuva Maitri mentors. For the first time, she realized that she could have close friends who are male. In the second year, she participated in a poetry-writing workshop organized through MAVA and got to meet renowned poets and learn from them. Prajakta was encouraged by the MAVA mentors to conduct a training program for adolescent girls and women in her village in Pune. 'The MAVA mentors helped me but I was asked to take all the decisions. For the first time, I realized that I had the capacity to conduct sessions on gender issues and could also do all the organizing,' she said.

Later on, when asked if she would join the street plays, she agreed. It was then that she realized she had so many skills which she had never explored. Those skills got exposure during a street play entitled *Dhokyachi Ghantaa* (Wake-up Call). Another campaign, The Bell Bajao Campaign on Stopping Domestic Violence, was a great experience for her as she was the only female to join, and she got to learn about varied communities in Aurangabad and Nashik.

(ii) Satara district, *Manush* project (2009-10 and 2010-11)

Profile of Mentees

They hailed from 10 villages of Javli taluka, Satara. Most of them worked on farms while studying in college and were also the first generation of students aiming to become graduates. The boys were associated as youth members with the local organization Shramik Janata Vikas Sanstha. Two staff members appointed on the project who had completed their MSW (Masters in Social Work) were trained by MAVA to become mentors.

Key Processes

MAVA and Shramik Janata Vikas Sanstha decided to create a pool of male youth communicators. The initiative was called Manush (Humane).

- A seven-day training program was conducted for 25 youths. In the second year, another batch of 25 youth was trained.
- The project added a new focus in the second and third year, namely HIV/AIDS.
- The residential gender training linked discussions of HIV with sexuality, reproductive and sexual health, ignorance, stigma, discrimination and violence against women.
- The group was also trained in communication skills and the storytelling method.
- A street-play addressing violence against women was performed by the youth on the first day of the seminar.
- Even after the project ended, the mentees stayed in touch with MAVA and continued the peer-to-peer communication on gender issues.



Youth Mentors have fun while sharing their experiences at a get-together. © Leading Lines.

Dhananjay Sanas, staff mentor, *Manush*, Satara, 2009

With a Masters degree in social work, and a few years of work experience to his credit, Dhananjay was selected as the coordinator for the *Manush* project in 2009.

He received many training sessions on gender through MAVA that had built strong networks with women's organizations like *Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal* (MASUM), Stree Mukti Sanghatna and Tathapi Trust. He was guided by senior MAVA mentors who had been part of the Pune project. MAVA also had a good collection of reading materials on gender, which added to Dhananjay's perspective-building. The intense training sessions on developing communication skills and street plays were huge additions to his learning and growth as a mentor.

Dhananjay facilitated the close bonding between 32-35 youths during the project. He recalls how the village youth were brought together to discuss the high rate of deaths due to alcoholism in the village. The discussions that followed led to the group members taking an oath that they would shun alcohol, not use bad language, and utilize their well-earned money for good causes rather than on religious festivals and rituals. He further recalls how the group had coordinated a question-and-answer session with the local police, organized a candlelight protest march, and put up posters in colleges, shops and police stations regarding violence against women as and when an issue cropped up.

(iii) Kolhapur district, *Manush* project (2010-12)

Profile of Mentees

The peer communicators were studying for a Masters in social work from D.K. Shinde College of Social Work run by Chhatrapati Shahu Institute of Business Education and Research (CSIBER), Kolhapur.

Key Processes

- In February 2010, the ex-collector of Kolhapur organized a special meeting of principals from leading colleges in Kolhapur to garner support for MAVA's *Manush* Project in Kolhapur.
- In the academic year 2010-2011, students were provided one-day gender-sensitization training and reading materials to add to their training.
- Six students of the M.A. in social work from the two colleges were placed for fieldwork at MAVA's *Manush* Project. Skills training to communicate

effectively with youth was provided.

- The six trained peer communicators conducted sessions in colleges, awareness-generation camps for girls and women in some villages, distributed the FAQ booklets and put up posters in their own and neighboring colleges. They also visited villages to study the situation of a skewed sex ratio in some talukas.
- Some students started a forum called the Youth Dialogue Center in the college, where needy students were given psychosocial counseling and guidance on gender, relationship and sexuality issues.

(iv) Nagpur, Bhandara & Buldhana (2011-12)

Profile of Mentees

No peer communicator could be trained as a mentor as the collaboration between the two organizations was stopped midway. We have therefore interviewed one mentee from Bhandara district who had undergone MAVA training and was deeply influenced on several gender issues.

Key Processes

- MAVA decided to network with Yuva Rural Association (YRA). The two organizations decided to work in Buldhana, Bhandara and Nagpur for two years.
- It was planned that MAVA youth mentors would be invited to facilitate trainings and capacity-building workshops so that the young men in the YRA network could undertake a healthy dialogue on gender matters and prevent violence against women and girls.
- Unfortunately, MAVA's team was invited to conduct only 40% of the planned sessions as the YRA team decided to discontinue its association.

(v) Mumbai, *Yuva Samwad*, (from 2009 to date)

Profile of Mentees

The peer communicators from Mumbai are selected from 8-10 colleges that undertake MAVA activities for their NSS program. The colleges are situated in varied geographical locations in Mumbai. One of them is a night college which has students who are working and studying. Most students are from the arts, commerce and mass media field, and belong to different religions, castes and class groups.

Key Processes

- MAVA's work with college youth in Mumbai started in 2009, and has gained momentum in the last four years. The initiative is called *Yuva Samvad* (Dialogue with Youth).
- Each year, 20-25 NSS college volunteers are trained and encouraged to interact with MAVA for a full year through training programs, campaigns and events on gender issues.
- *Yuva Abhivryakti* (Youth Expressions) is a cultural forum which has intercollegiate competitions in different fields like debates, elocution, poster-making, slogan-writing, street-plays, and short film-making.
- A four-day intensive street-theatre workshop facilitates the writing and organizing of street-plays on contemporary gender themes.
- The peer communicators participate in the '16 Days of Activism', which is observed internationally as Violence against Women Global Awareness Fort-night.
- MAVA started a pilot project called *Umang* (Aspiration) in July 2014 to work with adolescent boys of 13-17 years of age from two disadvantaged communities of Mumbai in collaboration with two NGOs. The community groups came together with the help of football and cultural activities initiated by MAVA mentors. For the past three years, a two-day film festival *Samabhav* (Equanimity) is being organized.

Mumbai mentor, Ganesh Jadhav, associated with MAVA in 2011

During the camp and various other interactive sessions with MAVA, Ganesh found answers to several questions that had rumbled silently in his mind for some years. Questions like how class, caste and religious systems have promoted discrimination and divisions in society, why physical attraction towards girls becomes so overwhelming for teenagers, why sexual issues are not discussed in families and why no one opposes the gender inequality practiced in everyday life were being answered by MAVA mentors and trainers in a free and casual environment.

For some time, Ganesh was employed as a part-time staff member of MAVA and conducted sessions in coordination with NGOs working with slum and street children and children of commercial sex workers. The young boys are brought together to play football and sometimes 'just chat' under a tree. He has managed to guide quite a few young boys who look up to him today and can now aspire to come out of the shackles of family deprivation like him.



Group Discussion among mentors on planning a youth event. © Leading Lines

Mumbai mentee, Vedprakash Jaiswal, associated with MAVA since 2014

17-year-old Ved had started interacting with two to three mentors from MAVA two years back. The group of about 10-12 boys from his slum and Ganesh and Aspar (staff from MAVA) would play football on the playground closeby and sit under the trees discussing gender violence, gender inequality and men's behaviors and attitudes. After a few months, they were taken to Lonavla for a three-day residential workshop. Here, Ved, along with his community friends, learnt many new things which made him stand out in his community. Later on, Ved was given training in communication and street plays. He recalls how he performed in many street plays. He says, 'I am more confident, I think properly, I advise some of my friends, I don't shout at my mother and sister.' He helps them and his neighbors with filling water and carrying heavy loads. He does not want to go the same way as the other boys in his area. They are all either gambling, loitering or passing comments on girls. 'I don't want to be like them...'

Mumbai mentee, Bhavin, associated with MAVA since 2015

Bhavin, who is studying in a college in a distant western suburb. said, 'I belong to a "not-so-well-to-do" family. My dream as a child was to earn a lot of money and live a happy life. I thought of getting into software engineering as that would give me a good job and good income.' In college during NSS, they were

given an orientation on gender by Ravi Jaiswal, from MAVA. Bhavin recalls, 'I was so impressed with that one lecture, that I started rethinking about my childhood goal. Later, when I attended the residential camp and the street-play training sessions, I learnt a lot.' The main message that he took home was, 'We are unaware of so many facts about our own bodies and unconscious about our behavior.'

(vi) Dhule & Jalgaon Districts, Yuva Tarang (2015-17)

Profile of Mentees

These two districts have started functioning from January 2015 and there are only peer communicators, i.e. mentees. Out of the 21 students selected, 13 are studying social work (seven at postgraduate level), while the rest are arts and commerce students. Most come from farming communities and a few are from tribal communities.

Key Processes

- Since January 2015, MAVA started a long-term project with college-age men in two districts, Dhule and Jalgaon, called *Yuva Tarang* (Ripples by Youths).
- Amol Kale, a mentor from *Yuva Maitri*, Pune, who had volunteered with MAVA since 2009, is working as a full-time coordinator of the project.
- So far *Yuva Tarang* has reached out to students from 10 colleges (some are social work colleges). They have received two days of orientation, four days of residential training on gender perspectives, four days of communication skills training, and four days of training on street theatre.

Jalgaon mentee, Umesh Jamuna Kaniram Rathod, associated with MAVA since 2016

When responding to the questionnaire about training, Umesh had written, 'I had never received information on gender equality in such an interesting manner, through games and entertaining activities... I also got to know about health issues that can prove to be very useful. I learnt about male-female equality, to treat women with respect and as equal.' They also received a booklet '*Hey sare mala maahit have*' (All that I should know) which provides information and can be used for revising.

Umesh, who is staying in a hostel for his studies, says, 'I am now able to communicate with some close friends at the hostel about what I learnt at MAVA. I shared whatever I had learnt. I am sure I will be able to do more later on. Since

our teachers are also involved in the MAVA program, it is easy to take this ahead in our college now.'

Difference Between Mentees In Different Districts

The mentees from rural areas are more exposed to gender violence as it is more rampant in these areas.²⁶

Observing the first day at a residential camp in August 2016 for newly selected Mumbai youth, the researcher found that while most agreed with the mentor who was discussing gender discrimination, there were one or two youth who said that noticeable gender inequality existed only in the villages.

The coordinator of the Dhule-Jalgaon process also commented that he finds a difference between urban and rural youth as the former get information through the Internet and school sex education programs. According to him, 'In this area, there is no major difference between youth who studied social work and those who did not. The level of information on gender and sexuality is almost the same.'

The Mava Journey For Mentors And Mentees

Are the Youth Peer Communicators Different from Other Youth?

During the two FGDs, quite a few of the mentors from Mumbai, Pune and Satara said that they had participated in the residential training camp out of curiosity, 'to get an exposure to a new places, new friends and experiences'. Some had joined thinking they would get some field exposure while some had come hoping to get academic training. This is not unlike the thinking of a youth in the 18-21-years age group. However, each one had something that was kindled during the initial residential training.

For Yogesh, MAVA training hit a chord...He had seen his mother slog as a door-to-door sales woman for eight hours every day, returning home and continuing to do household chores. His mother was forced to take up this job

²⁶ National Family Health Survey 3 - Domestic Violence. (2006).[http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-3%20Data/VOL-1/Chapter%2015%20-%20Domestic%20Violence%20\(468K\).pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-3%20Data/VOL-1/Chapter%2015%20-%20Domestic%20Violence%20(468K).pdf)

due to their 'not so good' family condition. His father owned a small *Kirana* (multi-item) shop and income from that was insufficient for a family with three growing boys. He had seen how his mother had to face the taunts of people and deal with harassment by customers due to the pressure of earning an additional income to supplement her husband's income.

Dhananjay said he has always had questions about traditional norms.

Sarath, from Mumbai said that although he was called different names by classmates, he did not care as he performed well at school and he was brought up in a family where everyone did housework.

Sunil had seen his mother struggling to manage her land and the family income in an unsupportive village environment. He was keen to understand gender issues and what could be done to change the situation.

VV from Pune said that MAVA training had shown him a way out of his family trade.



Group Discussion among new mentees at a workshop © Leading Lines

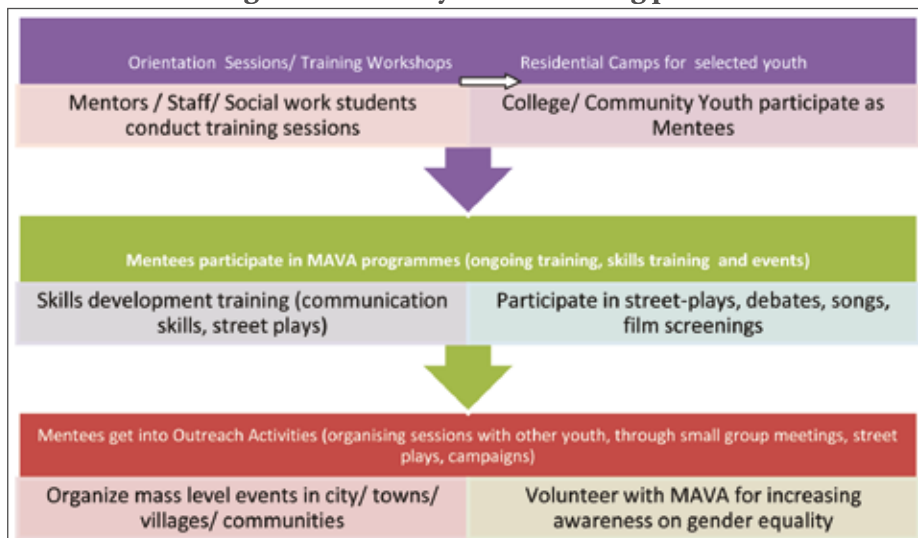
The Youth Mentoring Process

Broadly speaking, the MAVA youth mentoring process is as follows:

1. Youth (preferably who are studying in the first/second year in a degree course and are NSS volunteers) are introduced to MAVA.
2. Some of them are then invited to participate in a residential camp where the complete training module is imparted.
3. After the camp, the youth continue to receive a number of interactive sessions on gender, either by MAVA or other organizations.
4. Mentees also receive training in communication, facilitation skills and street-theatre.
5. This package of mentoring enables a mentee to start organizing sessions for other youth, conduct small group meetings and street plays, and participate in mass awareness events and campaigns.
6. In the last phase, the mentee youth are given exposure to campaigns, events and protest marches against gender discrimination.

Opportunities for displaying and trying out skills were abundant for mentees; some with the MAVA initiative, some with the support of women's groups and some with their own initiative. This intense interface with friends, peers and citizens increased their confidence. They are also encouraged to conduct formal outreach programs for students (including girl students) in their own way.

Diagram 2: MAVA youth mentoring process



Appointment of Mentors and Their Learning Process

Apart from the mentee to mentor pathway, MAVA has employed two other processes for shaping mentors.

(1) College students studying social work come to MAVA for a one-year field placement.

Suraj Ashokrao Savitabai Pawar, student social worker (2012-13)

Suraj, hailing from a small town in Washim district, had joined Tata Institute of Social Sciences and was placed at MAVA as a student social worker for his fieldwork. He recalls his first impression, 'It was an orientation program for us. Detailed information about MAVA's work at different levels was given by Harish Sir... The message which I took after the orientation was that I need to be a part of this social movement which takes men to fight against gender discrimination and inequality... What I liked the most was the way MAVA works with college youths, mostly men, on the issue of gender, masculinity, sexuality, violence against women and relationships.'

After the brief orientation, Suraj had the opportunity to attend the residential training program and got a feel of the entire scope of training for newly associated youths and the training process. After a few more sessions of learning from observation and reading materials from MAVA, he was made a co-trainer working with the MAVA trainers. He could learn different methods and strategies to communicate ideas on gender issues with youths.

(2) Trained social workers are appointed to projects.

Mayur Lad, staff mentor Manush, Satara (2010)

Mayur was 25, had completed his M.A. in social work and was looking for a job. Coming from a family of agriculturists, there was an unstated pressure on Mayur to find a job as soon as possible. In 2010, Shramik Janata Vikas Sanstha offered him the post of project coordinator. As a student social worker, Mayur had not given much thought and importance to gender issues. Moreover, he felt that he was not a person who could talk about sensitive issues like sexuality. He took up the job with a feeling that if he could not handle it, he would quit and look for another job.

Soon his views changed. He participated in the orientations, training sessions

with college youth and a residential camp, where the self-reflective and discursive training process helped him understand the key issues in gender equality. He realized that the project name, Manush, symbolized the primary goal of shifting the focus from being a 'male' to being a 'human'. 'When we treat everyone, male, female and transgender on an equal footing, we evolve as better human beings.' He started discussing with MAVA team members to understand the multiple nuances of being a gender-sensitive person. He could see his growth in his first job and was enjoying it.

Gender Training of Peer Communicators

Content

The gender-sensitization training offered by MAVA has content that is based on modules developed by MASUM and Tathapi Trust and further evolved by the MAVA team. MAVA uses five main modules:

1. Sex and Gender
2. Sexuality – Reproduction, Healthy Sexual Relationships, Consent
3. Equality and Equity
4. Health, Violence and Rights
5. Media

In Satara district, the module had an additional component of HIV/AIDS.

Given these broad headings, the trainings generally dealt with issues like the difference between sex and gender, masturbation, menstruation, masculinity, women's lower status, discrimination, patriarchy, socialization of boys, anger, stress, loneliness, tobacco and alcohol use among men, sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS. What has changed in the MAVA training program since the Pune residential camp in 2006? It was earlier held for seven days while the recent ones are held for four days. Two trainers interviewed said they have added their own style, their own stories and a few new activities. They adapt the content and methodology to suit the participants. However, the focus on core concepts has remained unchanged.

When mentors were asked what was easiest and most difficult for them to understand during their training, most of the mentors said it was easy for them to comprehend the difference between sex (natural/biological characteristics) and gender (referring to the social characteristics like norms, ideas and images)

about being a man or a woman). Most attendees found the nexus between patriarchy, religion and caste very complex to understand. Amol Kale, a youth mentor, said, 'I am still unraveling the many layers and depths of their linkages.'

SPK and TP, who were working and studying in a night college in Mumbai, acknowledged that they had heard the words, *laingik samabhav* (gender equality) for the first time.

Rathod, a young mentee who is studying for a Masters in social work in Jalgaon said, 'I learnt about the physical changes occurring in boys and girls as we grow up and the way in which the male body functions. I also learnt about health issues that can prove to be very useful to me later on.'

The topic of sexuality was found interesting for most youths.

D- a senior Mumbai mentor who attended a training in 2013 said, 'In sexuality workshop, I have learnt the body map, where and how each organ has an assigned job as per nature...'

Sunil's strongest memories are those of the trainers at the residential camp. He says, 'I can still recall Dr. Mohan Deshpande explaining *swapna awastha* (nightfall) in simple words, Milind Chavan did a magical facilitation of the "power-walk game" to explain the concept of gender inequality, Dr. Anant Sathe and Mrs. Sathe explained sexuality issues with so much patience.' Sunil, along with 32 other participants from Pune, was also trained in writing simple songs. They learnt to sing many motivational songs developed by activists. He also recalled the 'Tree of Patriarchy'. This was one of the most important lessons he had learnt and 'it is successful even today, because not much has changed in the villages'.

Ved recalled what he had learnt at Lonavla during a three-day residential workshop. '...how the girls' and boys' body is, how we feel attracted to girls, how we can be abused if we are unaware about laws that protect children.' They asked us to think about many things, like why there are so many bad words for women, why girls cannot be equal to boys in playing cricket, in studying, working in big companies, how would it feel to be teased like boys tease girls, why boys cannot grow their hair like girls or wear earrings or necklaces, why we tease people for

doing what they like doing, why films show only some body parts.' They learnt about *mardangi* (masculinity) and how 'this makes boys behave badly'.

The residential camp training generally surprised even the reluctant participants like Yogesh from the Pune batch. He agreed during the interview that he was awed by the resource persons, their new ideas and viewpoints on gender equality, legal aspects of violence and abuse of women, and the need for social change. He was excited by the ease with which the speakers and resource persons spoke and the language and style they used for presentation at the MAVA sessions. Over the two years, he found himself learning new skills of communication, debating, writing street-play scripts and singing radical songs taught by cultural activist Sambhaji Bhagat; all building his confidence in presenting sessions for college students and reaching out to new people.



Raju Inamdar, MAVA trainer explaining Sexual and Reproductive Health through simple charts at a residential Camp for youth leaders © Leading Lines

Other mentors who were associated with MAVA in 2011 and 2015 had similar things to say:

Ganesh (2011) found that everyone was treated equally, irrespective of the college they belonged to or the background you came from. The trainers were young people like him and they talked just like him. The difference was that they had so much to share about the human body (male and female) and sexuality and gendered inequality in society. They chatted and discussed freely on so many sensitive topics.

Sarath from the 2014 batch, said, 'The training was in Hindi and Marathi, but I and my friends asked lot of questions.' Everyone shared and discussed so easily and freely that 'we did not realize when our opinions started having new depths. We learnt that gender-based discrimination is not just limited to big issues like rapes and acid attacks but it is also ingrained far more into our system of living.'

SJ (Mumbai) was introduced to MAVA when he was placed for field-work while doing his training in social work. As a volunteer, he got an opportunity to attend some of the training programs for college youths. He said his takeaway was 'a better understanding of self, on what it means to be a male in our society, the privileges he enjoys and to be rational enough to say "no" to them.'

RJ, one of the mentors training to be a social worker in Mumbai, said that his association with MAVA has 'helped me to locate myself in society and understand my thinking towards the other genders.'

Methodology

The boys, when given a free and safe peer forum, are ready to air their innermost thoughts. They can talk freely about their experiences of growing up as a boy, and share their dilemmas and inner turmoil without any hesitation or inhibitions. The interactive sessions and participatory exercises with the youths not only help create awareness on existing gender inequality but also to think about deeper and more complex issues like masculinity and patriarchy, consider

gender roles and break away from stereotyping and discrimination.

The trainers use youth-friendly language and tone and interesting exercises like body-mapping exercises, power-walks, and 'agree /disagree' statements. Story-telling, awareness songs and films are also used to send out gender messages in different formats. The screening of gender-sensitive films and those questioning masculinity and patriarchy were followed by group discussions, which added to knowledge and perspective-building.

Amit said, 'What I cherished most was the close bond I had formed with all the other boys at the training camps and events and there were so many new thoughts churning in my head.'

Suraj, now a volunteer trainer for MAVA, said, 'I also learnt the way in which a trainer should take the sessions with participants. I learnt about different strategies for interacting with youth on gender and masculinity issues. The gender training module was quite unique... simple and easy to understand.'

Participants' Response

Sarath said, 'The MAVA trainings did not preach, they gave facts and a fresh perspective.' He was aware of some of those facts but after MAVA training 'the dots and blanks got connected and I can now see the bigger picture... I was enlightened on how society works.'

The 'power-walk' game was mentioned by two of the mentors in their questionnaire responses. 'Through the power-walk game I have learnt that the dominance of one gender is different in different settings and it depends on culture, education and how that keeps control on the means of production or controls the production,' D- mentor, Mumbai.

'...After playing this game, I understood how economic, political and cultural power function in society and how a few people get privileges based on gender and caste,' said NZ.

In a role-play exercise to make youth sensitive to women's (especially mother's) household work, the trainer keeps adding one bag at a time representing a task, to the participant's hand, shoulder, head and back, based on participants' responses. This addition of 'bags' is theatrical and impactful as it catches the

trainees' attention and motivates them to start thinking about how to reduce the burden by taking away one 'bag of responsibility' at a time. At the end, it proves that if all family members decide to share the work, it can be distributed evenly. This provokes the youth to think about what household chores he can do to share his mother's or his sister's burden of work and take a positive step towards gender equality.

During gender training, a common question raised to prod youth to think differently is, 'Why do we include only father's name and not mother's name while introducing ourselves?' This urges many youth to think and some change their names and write their first name, followed by their mother's name and then their father's name. It is important to note that in the new group of 21 mentees from Dhule-Jalgaon, there were six mentees who had added their mother's name on the questionnaires given to them.

Suraj, a mentor trainer, identifies himself as 'Suraj Ashokrao Savitabai Pawar', during the training program as a preamble to the subject.

Yogesh Kanthale said, 'I think it will make a lot of difference in our children's life by including mother's and father's names. I feel proud that I am the son of my mother Sunanda Kanthale and my father Sadashiv Kanthale.'

After his MAVA training, Dhananjay had changed his name to include his mother's name, but he realized that everywhere he was facing problems. For example, when he wanted to make changes in his ration card, 'the village government functionaries created lot of hassles'. Even when he wanted to get a passport, old rules and loads of paperwork stopped him and his wife from making this change.

A girl mentee from Pune, Prajakta said during her interview that she had heard of senior mentors adding their mother's name instead of a surname, which impressed her a lot. 'The traditional way of using surname only makes us feel unnecessary pride in one's family of birth,' she said. Further, she said, 'I have not changed my name officially as Prajakta Vanita Dhananjay because I don't have the mental stamina to start this long government process.'

In one of the group exercises, entitled 'Acceptable and Non-Acceptable in Sexuality', the participants form small groups and discuss five statements. They are asked whether they agree or disagree and why.

The statements are:

1. Masturbation leads to weakness.
2. A girl should not have sex before marriage.
3. When a girl says 'no', she actually means 'yes'.
4. Women who wear revealing/short dresses invite violence/rape.
5. The behavior of men having sex with men/women having sex with women is unnatural and abnormal.

The participants are asked to talk freely without being judgmental. After jotting down summarized responses and viewpoints on a chart, they present their points to the larger group. The myths and misconceptions about male and female sexuality are thus discussed through this exercise. Participants are encouraged to reflect and express their thoughts on a healthy sexual relationship. At the end, the facilitator sums up key messages on healthy sexuality, stereotyping, discrimination and gender justice.

Another activity, a 'Personal Change Plan', is conducted as it helps the youth to self-reflect, change their perceptions and notions of masculinity, and change their attitudes and behaviors towards women. The mentees are encouraged to think of their specific action-plans to examine their gender biases and how they are or will be working to empower women in their personal lives by questioning male stereotypes and restrictions on women.

A quick analysis of personal change plans of a group of 21 mentees shows: Out of the 21 mentees, 12 wrote about sharing the household chores, cleaning utensils after food and washing their own clothes. For two of them, it was their sister, and in one case it was the grandmother who was managing these chores. Three mentees had said that they would provide support to their mothers in major decisions that are taken in the family. One response was, 'I will provide my mother and sisters opportunities for recreation.' Four others wrote about their sisters who faced restrictions about staying out for long, and promised to ensure that there would be no restrictions on their mobility and decision-making. They promised they would help them take their own decisions like choosing marriage partner. Two mentees said that they would intervene strongly in case someone took away the rights of women in their lives. One of them hoped to change the traditional outlook of parents of his female friends.

'I will share my innermost feelings and emotions with my close friend,' was one of the most common statements in the personal change plans. Some said that they would stop the use of swear words, and a few others said that they would challenge the pressures to perform as a 'man' to always be an achiever, a winner and succeed at all costs.

The personal change plans indicate that most mentees from 2006 to 2016 are more or less similar in their socialization as boys. Some new forms of discrimination were challenged through personal change goals as one of the new mentees wrote, 'I will not mistreat /disrespect transgender persons when I meet them.'

SPK, a Mumbai mentor said, 'After that MAVA camp, I started washing my own food plate and inner clothes and I continue doing it even today.'

SG, like many other mentors, practiced what he had promised in his personal change plans. He encouraged his cousin sister to marry the boy of her choice. Vijay, a mentee from Jalgaon, had opposed the early marriage of his sister, but could only delay it for a year. 'My aunt, to whose son my sister was to be married to, insisted for an early marriage. She convinced my parents that my sister will not be able to pursue college education as she would have to travel to town. So it is better that she gets married and settles down and lessens the burden of her parents.'

Skills Development for Peer Communicators

Since mere knowledge about gender issues is not sufficient for young people to undertake outreach activities, they are given skills training so that they can communicate easily with others on sensitive topics. Thus trainings are conducted for communication and facilitation of group discussions.

The youth are also given four-day street-play training that encourages the participants to write scripts collectively based on their knowledge and perspective. The basics of sending out the message clearly and performing are taught to the youth. One of MAVA's favorite trainers is Raju Inamdar, who uses street plays, folk songs and puppets to communicate with the masses.

In the skills development and community outreach programs, quite a few girls from the same participating colleges are also involved.



Talking about Rape Culture at the Roots of Gender-Based Violence, youth mentor Tanaji Patil appeals through street-play by MAVA © Leading Lines

Sarath, a mass media student, said that he learnt the method of writing a street play. He recalled how the presence of girls during the street-play training made the actors feel awkward in the beginning. Gradually, they realized that it broadened their perspective on gender issues. They could understand how the girls view boys' behavior. They realized that the girls' feelings and responses had to be incorporated in the script. He learnt the skill of dialoguing and understanding an issue from different angles.

Prashik, who could only attend the street-play training camp, said he got the opportunity to have general discussions and chats with the MAVA group in college which helped him to understand one aspect more clearly. 'The LGBTQs and our misconceptions about them were again a revelation to me and my other friends. I am now more informed and I can communicate with girls more sensitively and sensibly. I also accept transgender people without any bias now.'

He also found the girls who were attending the street-play workshop to be quite vocal about how they felt when they were teased, followed and taken for

granted. This was an eye-opener for Prashik. 'My thinking about girls changed during this short program. My attitude towards girlfriends and women also changed as I actually saw how girls view boys. The street plays on the streets of Mumbai were great as I saw how people were responding to our ideas.'

Amit, from the Satara project, realized the power of media to question traditional norms and present new thoughts. His attraction to street plays was shared by a group of 15-16 youth from the neighboring villages who continued to organize street plays during Ganpati and Durga puja festivals. Amit also realized that there are many youth groups who want to do something in their neighborhoods. He started helping these youth groups to organize street plays on gender issues by sharing the MAVA perspective with them.

Sarath recalls, 'It was the greatest experience I ever had and it was a new media for me to explore.' The play kept evolving as they moved from place to place and received people's feedback. On one occasion, when they were performing at SNDT Women's University, a student from Rajasthan shared how one rickshaw driver had abused her in her home town and, when she asked the police to help, they refused. She wanted to know what could have been done. The street-play group directed her to an NGO where she could file a complaint against the rickshaw driver and the police.

One of the Mumbai female mentees said, 'The street-play event with MAVA made me imbibe independent views about gender equality. Street-play performances in almost 50 venues helped me interact with different groups of people,' something she had never done before.

Mentors from Mumbai shared the most common responses during mass events:

'When we perform street plays, some people ask, "Why are you doing this? Are you going to change the world?" And some say, "Good work, continue."'

'Some friends and classmates laugh at us in the beginning, but gradually they accept what we are doing. The girls in college are more open to what we are doing. The teachers and NSS coordinators are encouraging us all the time.'

Mentors and mentees found that the women and college girls respond more

positively to the street plays and campaigns on gender equality than male audiences. For example, in one of the Ganesha festival pandals, where a street play on domestic violence was being conducted, one of the men started objecting saying, 'Why should this be shown at a religious festival?' However, his wife stopped him from creating a ruckus and asked the mentees to continue.

What Changed for the Youth?

Almost all of the mentors and mentees believe that they are different from other youth as they had received some more information about their physiology and understood some things more clearly about gender inequality in Indian society. They also said that they now wished to contribute to changing the society.

During FGDs, responses were:

- We are open to different opinions and discussions on sensitive issues.
- We understand different types of sexuality.
- We give equal respect to all the three genders.
- We see every person as an individual with equal rights.

Expectations as Mentors

When questioned about what is expected from them as a MAVA mentor, during FGDs the responses were:

- Better one-to-one communication with friends, family members, peers.
- Facilitating participatory sessions for youth on gender issues.
- Organize events (films, campaigns).
- Communicate and network with women's groups.
- Use our own and other youth talents for events (music, drama, posters, films).
- Make personal changes.
- Apply gender perspective in family, change own attitude and behavior.
- Keep raising sensitive questions for self-reflection.
- Keep evolving as a gender-sensitive person.
- Take action and find a solution when gender issues are seen.

Community Outreach

The most common first responses of elders and parents to community outreach programs were, 'Why are you wasting time? Think about yourself and your future, waste of time, useless, all this will not change anything.'

The peer communicators/mentees in the FGDs mentioned a few strategies used for reaching out to other youth:

- We use local words that youth generally use while speaking with each other.
- Use of *katta*²⁷ to meet people we want to share with.
- Use humor to get them to understand a point.
- Start by questioning small regular actions, ask them to change them and give them reasons to do so.
- We take a cue from the topics that they are discussing and they become our starting point for further discussion.

Sunil shared one of the significant outcomes of MAVA's outreach program. He shared how, after the change seen in misbehaving youth due to MAVA peer communicators' interventions, the college principal also made a path-breaking change in the college system. 'She gave permission for boys and girls to mingle during lunchtime (most of the co-ed colleges in India still have girls and boys sitting separately). After that we, all friends, boys and girls, could sit together to eat our dabba (lunch box) and chat on various topics freely.'

Yogesh Kamble, who was known to be a quiet person to his teachers, said, 'We were expected to organize sessions in our own and different colleges. In the beginning, I felt shy and unsure whether we were doing well in the tasks assigned. Then the girls and other boys came up to us and told us that they liked what we were doing.'

VV from Pune, who had to continue running his father's barber shop during his free time, said he started by keeping books and other materials given by MAVA at his shop. He found a lot of people, some older than his father's age, had questions on sexual and reproductive health. The salon had become a place for information sharing.

SG from Pune had seen a negative turn to his outreach work. His uncle and aunt do not speak with him as he helped their daughter to marry a man of her choice. He is not invited to make family decisions because he always speaks on behalf of his cousin sisters and nieces. He is now an aspiring politician who is advocating girls' continued education in his village. He has built toilets for girls in schools. He has also established a library in his village.

²⁷ A common meeting place in the community, generally used by young boys.

Prajakta recalled how she was encouraged by the MAVA mentors to conduct a training program for girls and women in her village. 'The MAVA mentors helped me but I was asked to take all the decisions. For the first time, I realized that I had the capacity to conduct sessions on gender issues and could also do all the organizing.'

AL, a lawyer from Satara said, 'I conducted a session on gender issues at a reformatory home for boys, with juveniles and under-trials (all under 18 years of age) as well as counseling them on sexuality.' He also recalled how, when a sex worker wanted to fight a case, no lawyer was ready to take it up. He helped her to fight that case.

ML from Satara said that when he was working with 27 women with HIV and their families, he went beyond the defined role, 'I took on dealing with their issues from a gender perspective... I understood their fears and tensions and helped their families to understand as well and create a positive, enabling environment.'

Amit, who is studying gender at M.A. level, said, 'I have been conducting street



Amol Kale, youth mentor sensitizing on issue of Domestic Violence to lay public as part of an community outreach event © Leading Lines

plays, writing songs and helping other youth groups to write street-play scripts on gender issues.’ He has organized 25 shows of his street play on gender.

Yogesh, a teacher in a village school, says that he never misses an opportunity to discuss gender equality in his regular classes. He conducts a friendly debate on gender equality, and discusses popular advertisements exploiting women’s bodies, using film stories (like *Sairat*)²⁸ to question gender stereotypes and advocate women’s right to decision-making. Most of his colleagues and the principal appreciate his background with MAVA and send rebellious and dissenting children to him for counseling and guidance.

Impact of Youth Mentoring Program

An impact analysis conducted by MASUM, a women’s organization in Pune, in 2008 on the peer communicators showed a good amount of transformation. It said, ‘They now display favorable attitudes towards gender issues and matters of sexuality. The outlook of trainees towards girls has changed; they have stopped teasing and harassing girls in college campuses. They have started participating in household chores and now advocate greater freedom and mobility for the women of their households. The young men and women that Yuva Maitri has reached out to are more open about discussing matters that they would have been shy about earlier.’

Most mentors and mentees in their response sheets have mentioned how most mothers, sisters and friends have appreciated the changes in them; the way they behave (more sensitively), are more attentive, communicate more freely and speak and argue in a more knowledgeable and mature way. Their attitudinal and behavior changes are noticeable.

SJ (Mumbai) said his takeaway from the MAVA training programs was ‘a better understanding of self, on what it means to be a male in our society.’ He recalled how, earlier, he was like other boys who would look at a girl and pass comments, focus only on some body parts and call them ‘Item’ or Cheez (thing)... Now he tells them, in ‘a cool tone’, that he would prefer to understand the real person rather than just look at her body.

TP, from Mumbai said, ‘What I learnt is that I need not get into fights and do

²⁸ Marathi film, *Sairat*, in which issues of caste and gender discrimination are raised by the young protagonists in the film.

gyms to be a “male”. I can help people and contribute to social change and that also shows one’s mental strength.’ He had learnt from MAVA that girls have the same rights as boys and can say ‘No’. ‘So when my friend rejected my proposal for marriage, I accepted it. I was sad, but I accepted. Later on, when I met her again, I asked if we could continue to be friends and she accepted it.’ NZ, a mentor from Mumbai shared, ‘My wife says I have become a little bit more aware and understanding towards her feelings.’

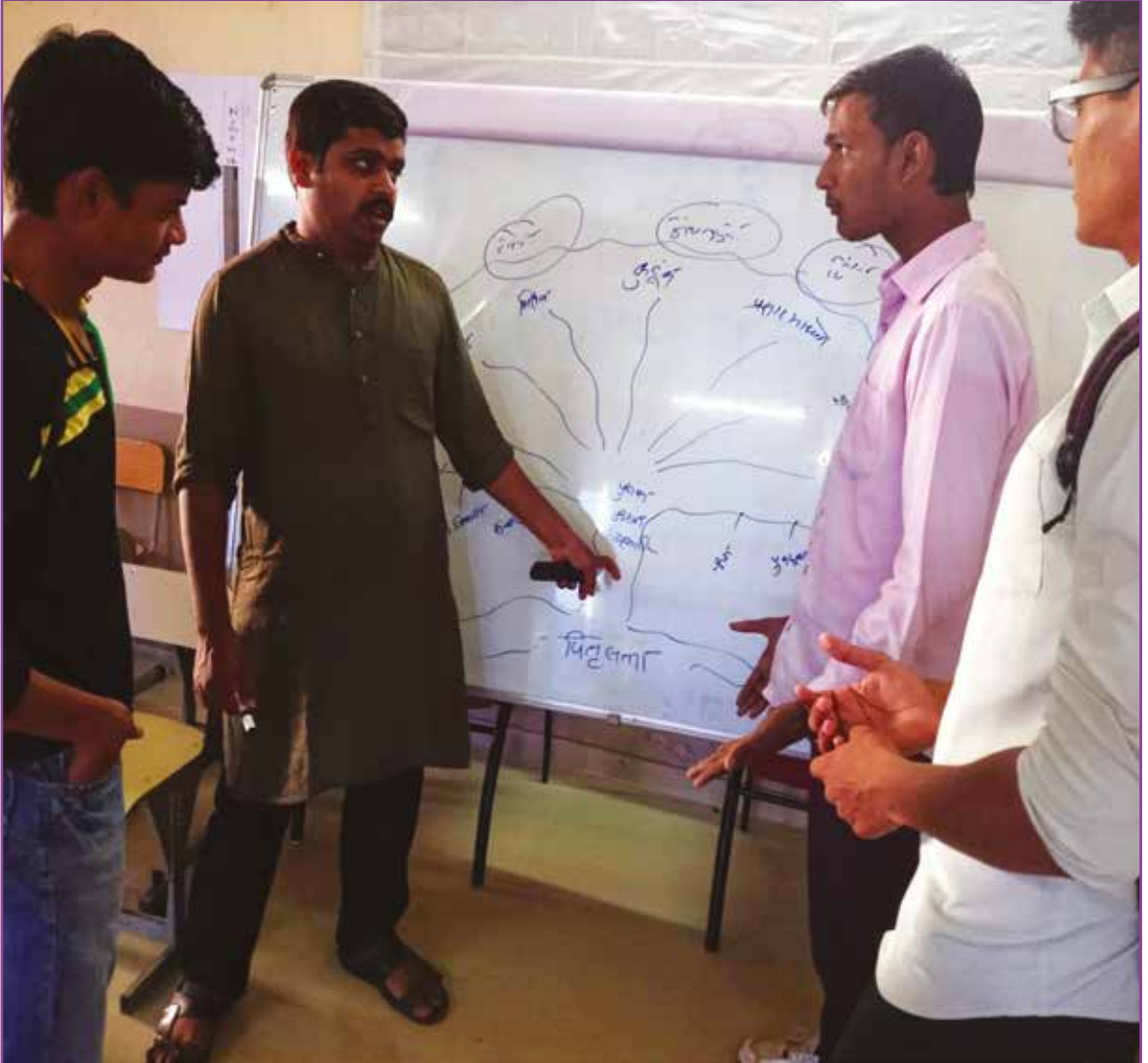
20-year-old Sarath said, ‘All my writings reflect what I have learnt from MAVA. Even when I am reviewing films or scripts, I look at how women are portrayed. There are hundreds of small and big prejudices which we hold and perpetuate. It needs rigorous attention and conscious effort to keep them at bay.’

VV and Sunil, who belong to the same village and were part of Pune’s Yuva Maitri in 2006, recounted their work post- MAVA. They have set up an NGO in their own village. ‘We conduct gender training sessions for adolescents every year. We have formed SHGs for men and women in the communities from 2011-2016 and conducted several training sessions on health and gender equality with women’s groups since then.’

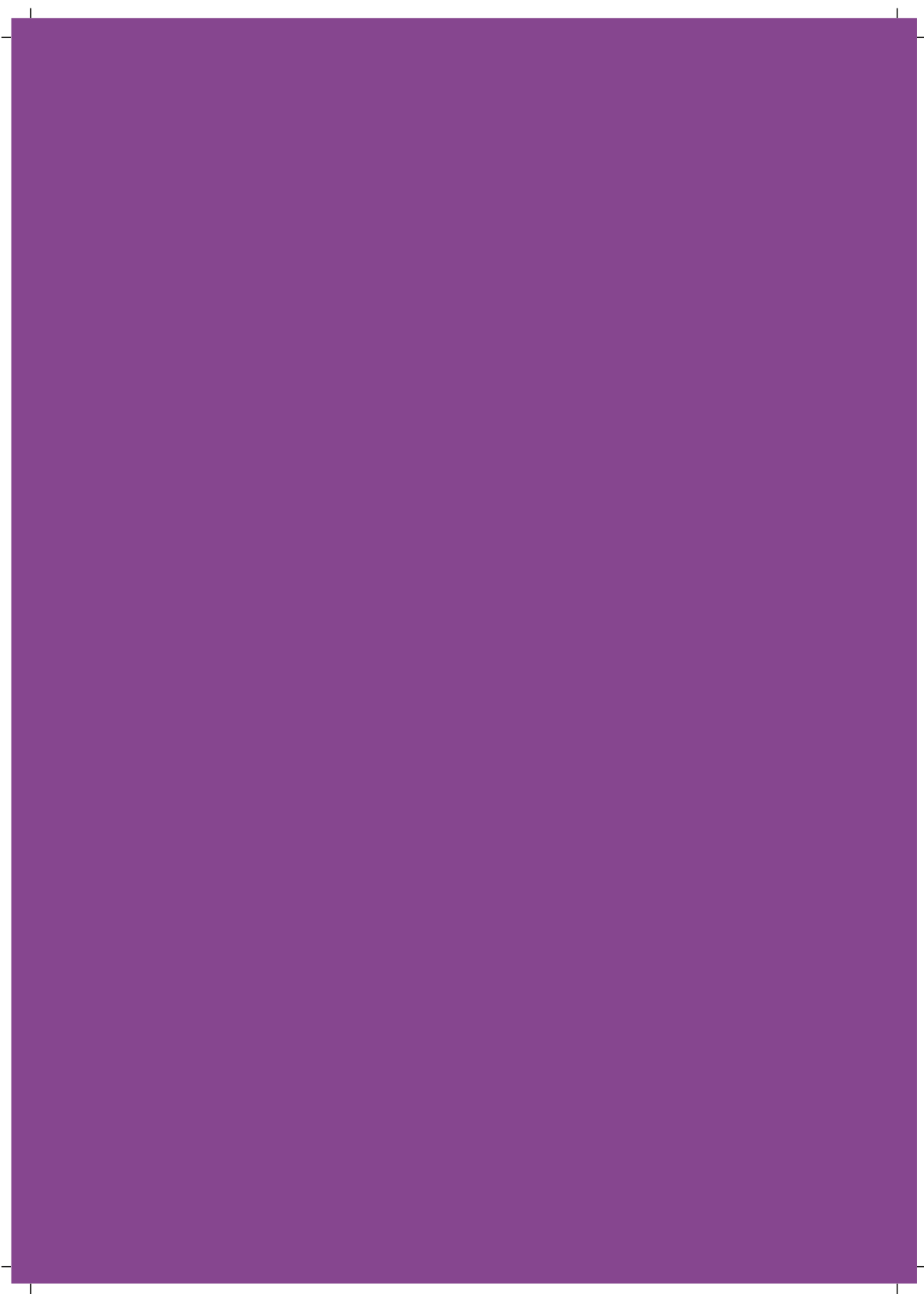
Dhananjay, looking after the corporate social responsibility function of a company, said, ‘I have been conducting gender sessions for staff, gender sensitization and domestic violence sessions for adolescents, youth and men at community level, in schools in the neighborhood.’ He said that he tries to circumvent any divide between his personal and professional perspective. He has a joint bank account with his wife, his property is equally divided and decisions are taken jointly.

During the documentation process, the researcher realized that most mentees and mentors had in their own unique ways said they had found ‘a friend, a mentor’ in MAVA.

Relevant portions from the interviews are added here while the complete case studies are available on the MAVA website. A full video presentation on the same is also available here: <http://www.mavaindia.org/videos.html>



Amol Kale, youth mentor explaining to the student mentees on how Gender and Patriarchy operates as a System in Society © Leading Lines





Community Leaders' Workshop in Progress

Ahmedabad Women's Action Group

Impact Assessment Of Awag's Interventions In Strategizing Community Leaders For Social Empowerment



Context Of The Study

This study is an effort to objectively assess the impact made in the field by a voluntary organization, AWAG (Ahmedabad Women's Action Group), that strives for the emancipation and empowerment of deprived women in the given areas of Gujarat, namely Ahmedabad, Rapar (Kutch) and Radhanpur (Patan). The study was undertaken following a workshop of the Women's Empowerment Track of the Harvard University South Asia Institute and Tata Trust's Project on Social Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Creation in India, held in Mumbai in January 2016.

In addition to serving as a learning tool for all those directly involved in the process, we envisage that the document will also serve as a source of vicarious learning to like-minded organizations in relation to the innovative idea of organizing community leaders for social action and the empowerment of women.

Research Objectives And Methodology

The purpose of the study was to document the impact of interventions undertaken by community leaders so far. More specifically, the objectives covered are:

- Examining the effectiveness of interventions related to building community leaders;
- Examining the roles of community leaders and their impact on women subjected to domestic violence;
- Understanding the effectiveness of community leaders in bringing about community governance and sustaining the same across various groups;
- Examining the comprehensiveness of the project intervention and the extent of its outreach;
- Understanding and analyzing the extent to which AWAG has contributed to empowering women subjected to deprivation and violence.

Data was collected using questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). FGDs were carried out with community leaders and personal interviews were undertaken with victims as well as allied service providers such as police, lawyers and health personnel involved in the process through community leaders. **From a total of 258 community leaders that fall under the framework of the given study, FGDs were conducted with 105 of them; equivalent to 40% of all leaders.**

The methodology also included perusal and analysis of project-level data and internal reports.



A painting depicting women's empowerment adorns the inner wall of AWAG's head office

AWAG As An Innovative Organization



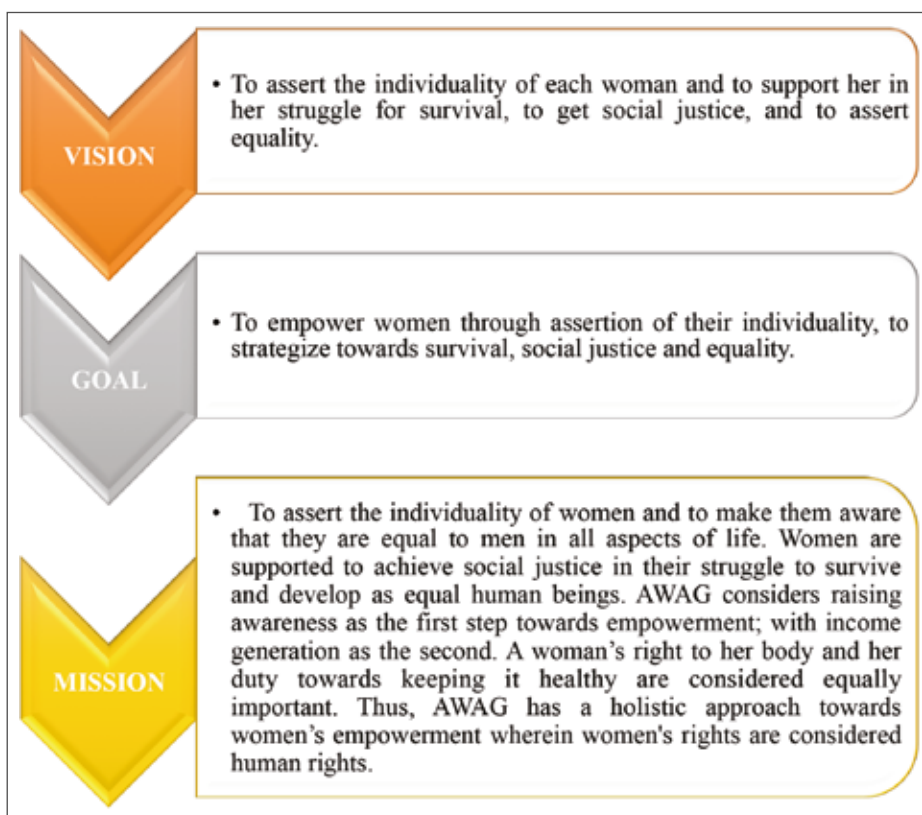
AWAG's headoffice

AWAG (Ahmedabad Women's Action Group) has been actively involved with the issue of domestic violence inflicted on women in Gujarat for over two decades. AWAG developed its own ideology that advocates – **'A family does not make a woman; it is a woman who makes a family.'** As a result, with the mission of preserving the individuality of women, AWAG initiated its struggle against domestic violence inflicted on women with a women-centric approach through direct interventions such as awareness-raising and community organization, as well as through collaborative interventions such as advocacy and networking.

AWAG has chosen to work with women victims belonging to deprived communities, which include Dalits – a scheduled caste – and Muslims – a minority community. These communities are spread over the rural and slum areas of Gujarat. The rural spread includes 36 villages in the Radhanpur block of the Patan district, wherein work was initiated in 1992; and 60 villages in Rapar block in Kutch district wherein work was initiated in 2004. Since 1985, AWAG also works in 36 areas of the industrial belt of Ahmedabad city.

The selection of these work areas is relevant. Ahmedabad is a communally sensitive city, and AWAG launched a project on 'communal harmony' in 1986 focusing on women who faced a strong setback as a result of the riots that

occurred. Similarly, interventions in the Rapar block commenced at the invitation of Oxfam following the earthquake in 2001. Owing to the subordinate status of women, AWAG intervened in this area on the fundamental issue of violence against women. Likewise, work in rural areas was commenced in the Radhanpur block of Patan district. The region is backward and drought-prone, leading to extreme poverty.



Key Activities And Outcome

The Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Mortality Rate²⁹ are high in Patan district. AWAG felt a need to expose the rural women to information related to various health schemes available to them.

²⁹ Patan District Panchayat. (2016). <https://patandp.gujarat.gov.in/patan/english/shakhao/health-branch/introduction.htm>

The table below outlines the nature of activities undertaken by the community leaders in the timeframe of the study, i.e. 1985-2010.

Table 1: Details of work areas and activities undertaken through community leaders

(NB: Some leaders are active in more than one activity)

| Area Covered | Year of Commencement of Work | No. of Community Leaders | Nature & Spread of Activities through Community Leaders | | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| | | | Violence against Women | Health | Communal Harmony | Habitat Development | Kitchen Gardens |
| Ahmedabad slums - 36 areas | 1985 | 84 | 36 | 16 | 25 | 8 | - |
| Radhanpur - 36 villages | 1992 | 68 | 9 | 17 | - | - | - |
| Rapar - 60 villages | 2004 | 106 | 23 | 9 | - | - | 50 |

AWAG is involved in numerous activities, yet the issue of violence against women is a common thread through all of its interventions. The main thrust lies in devising and strengthening systems that empower women. Activities that have been determinedly undertaken by community leaders under study can be broadly categorized as falling under the following categories:

- Violence against Women
- Health
- Habitat Development

Awareness-Raising: A Strategic Gateway

Awareness-raising is the cornerstone of all activities undertaken wherein a woman is looked upon as an independent individual. For this, emphasis is laid on workshops, which span over two to five days and stress the key issue of women's independence, individuality and need for social justice. Following this, a dialogue and discussion on the concerns of each particular group takes place locally. The idea is to raise awareness of women about their human rights and

individuality. As a group passes through these workshops, some women emerge as leaders and a committee is organized. Gradually, they become active on issues like supporting a woman who is victimized, either at home or in society, or helping a woman reach out to get medical help, or lead a demand for removing dung heaps from their villages as well as urging parents to send their daughters to school. The interventions undertaken by community leaders, rest on the fundamental premises of women's rights and autonomy.

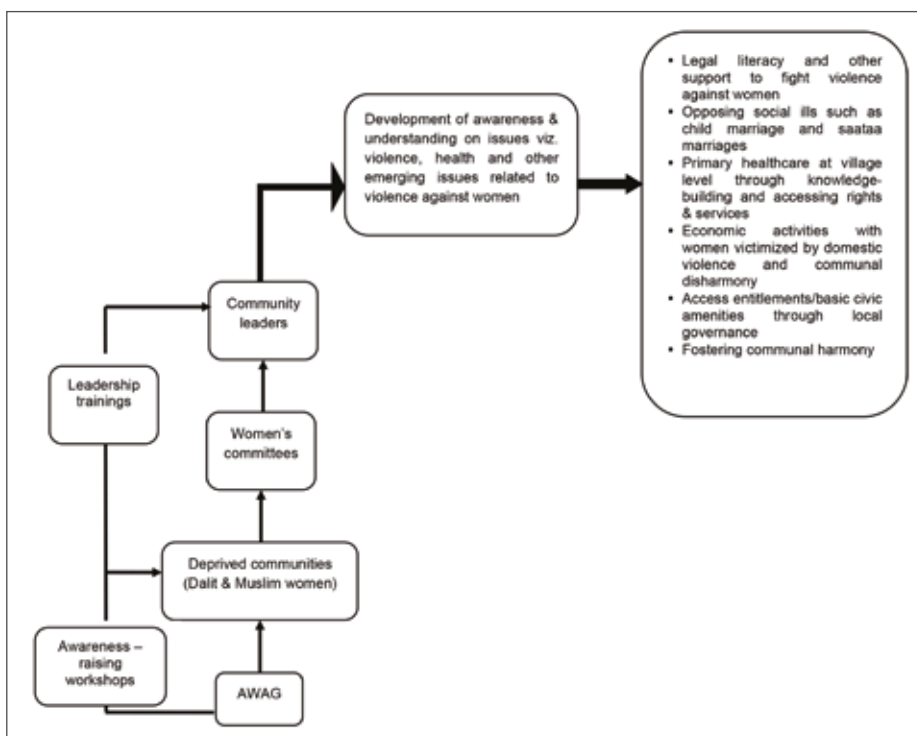
It would not be out of place to mention that a book named *Astitva thi Vyaktitva Vikas*, authored by the late Dr. Ila Pathak and published by AWAG in June 2014, includes a detailed module of Awareness-Raising Workshops as one of the core activities of the organization.

Profile and Functions of Community Leaders

As stated above, the leaders belong to the local participating communities from Scheduled Castes, Muslims and other deprived communities, with a few from the upper caste. Despite this diversity, caste differences do not come in the way of their functioning as a group. The average age of these leaders is 48 years. The majority of them have attained primary education, with a few exceptional cases of attaining education up to the 8th/10th standard. The rest are illiterate.

In addition to common local tasks, these community leaders also undertake women-centered work such as:

- Protesting against domestic violence
- Supporting women's issues
- Mobilizing women to partake in AWAG's ongoing projects
- Preventing women from unnatural deaths through primary counseling
- Bringing distressed women to the supporting organization - AWAG
- Supporting women victims faced with domestic violence, rape and atrocities
- Supporting women in accessing government services related to health or even municipal services like water supply, hygienic surroundings, etc.
- Procuring primary services such as pensions for widows, health schemes, etc.



A brief description of the activities undertaken by community leaders is essential so as to comprehend the related impact.

A major turning point was after an event that was held on 25 October 2004 at the cluster level to show solidarity and support to 'GANGA' who had dared to break the age-old saataa custom. Around 1,500 women and 450 men attended a large meeting that discussed the untoward impact of the saataa custom on women. The long-standing tradition of saataa was broken by an enterprising brother-sister duo. Heads of caste councils that had attended the gathering, publicly acknowledged that saataa was a heinous custom and had to be discontinued. At the day's end, a number of youth resolved to share their learning with their parents. The enthusiasm and confidence of the community leaders to pursue their work also increased.

Violence against Women

AWAG's key mission is to combat violence against women in a broad manner. Accordingly, various forms of violence, direct or indirect, physical as well as mental, that are inflicted on women have been taken up as the organization's activities through community leaders. Those affected by child and saataa marriages and victims of communal riots who are faced with deprivation come under the purview of the organization's endeavors aimed at fighting violence against women.

- **Primary Counseling:** Women in distress are often engulfed with thoughts of death. To address this, community leaders are trained in primary counseling wherein victims are provided with much-needed support and counseled within their homes by leaders. If the counselee/victim then chooses, she is accompanied by the leader to the organization's counseling center for specialized counseling depending upon the case.

- **Protest against the Practice of Child and Saataa Marriages:** Rapar is a socially and economically backward area. A low gender ratio, low education among girls, rigid traditions and social practices, and the subordinate status of women were some of the salient features initially observed in the area. On delving into issues related to women, AWAG learnt about the practice of child and saataa marriages, wherein marriages are based on the saataa practice. Saataa involves the marriage between a brother-sister pair of one family with that of another. If there is no exchange of boys and girls, the offending party has to pay a hefty fine and is also faced with pressure from the community. The choice of the prospective bride and groom is limited. Since such marriages are arranged at a young age, education is often hindered. More often than not, a woman faced with violence is neither able to end her marriage nor go to her parents' home, because by doing so, her brother's marriage gets adversely affected.

Hence, in real terms, she has little or no choice. The issue was addressed by the community leaders through several meetings/gatherings with the local communities, thus bringing about a realization among them to oppose the practice.

- **Communal Harmony:** Gujarat, especially Ahmedabad has been the victim of communal riots, the brunt of which has largely been borne by poor women.

AWAG's main work area is in the Bapunagar region of Ahmedabad that is home to poor laborers belonging to Muslim and Dalit communities. AWAG has been involved in organizing Muslim women from the slums in these areas since 1986. The endeavor was initiated with the formation of community leaders and women's committees. The work gradually spilled over to the surrounding areas.

After the customary awareness-raising meetings were conducted, 60 women (40 Muslim, 20 Hindu) emerged as leaders and took up the role of change agents for their communities. The main objective was to create a strong group of community leaders so as to guide friends and neighbors towards harmony. The leaders were also responsible for organizing and conducting ventilation meetings, discussion clubs, pluralism workshops and life-skill workshops so as to promote tolerance and harmony between communities.

TABLE 2: Activities undertaken by community leaders towards communal harmony by community leaders towards communal harmony

| Nature and Spread of Activities | No. of Women Participants Covered | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------|
| | Hindu | Muslim |
| Life-skill workshops – 9 | 158 | 185 |
| Workshops on pluralism – 20 | 388 | 435 |
| Ventilation meetings – 120 | 1,035 | 1,627 |
| Discussion clubs – 8 | Average: 50 women per meeting | |
| Exposure visit undertaken by 56 leaders to gain learning from like-minded organizations at Khedbrahma, Sabarkantha in Gujarat | | |

Source: AWAG's Annual Reports 2004-07



A discussion meeting with community women

Health

The issue of women's health is linked to the issue of women's rights. This is so because in Indian society, there is utter disregard towards women's health and well-being. Furthermore, women have internalized their subordinate status as a result of which they are known to ignore their own health. Malnutrition, frequent childbirth and high morbidity depict the poor health status of women. In addition to lack of proper medical care due to poor financial conditions and the apathetic attitude of the family, women have to rely on home cures. **All these are forms of indirect violence inflicted on women.** The organization's health activities are linked to the advancement of the rights of women, wherein all necessary components are woven in, including physical and mental health.

- **Kitchen Gardens:** Women in Rapar, like those in many areas, faced poverty and deprivation. Owing to their subordinate status, their health was evidently weak. Low hemoglobin levels and diseases related to reproductive health were prevalent. With the mandate of making healthcare available as a human right, AWAG initiated work in the area by undertaking the intervention of setting up kitchen gardens so as to supplement their required nutrition as well as income. With a general versatility in farming, the women kitchen gardeners were given training with kits based on the technique of drip irrigation. The community leaders led the entire activity with inputs from AWAG's fieldworkers. The hemoglobin level was recorded before and after the intervention to get a

concrete picture of the impact created. It was learnt that the produce was consumed at home with the surplus being sold in the market to generate income.

Table 3: Data of the first 10 planters who reported a rise in their hemoglobin levels

| Village | Women Planters | Percentage Increase in Hemoglobin Levels after 6 Months of the Intervention |
|-----------|----------------|---|
| Salari | Jivatiben | 3.8 |
| | Shugraben | 1.0 |
| Trambo | Nanuben | 3.5 |
| | Daliben | 0.8 |
| Lakhagadh | Kuvarben | 2.5 |
| | Raniben | 2.2 |
| | Jamnaiben | 1.8 |
| | Radhaben | 0.8 |
| Taga | Jamaniben | 1.6 |
| Ramvav | Gangaba | 0.5 |

Source: AWAG's Annual Reports 2008 - 09

- **Eye Examination and Vitamin A Supplementation:** Women, especially expectant mothers, often complained about night blindness and linked it to local beliefs and blind faith. AWAG addressed the matter through the community leaders, whereby around 420 women were administered vitamin A. Furthermore, eye examination camps were conducted in seven villages of Rapar, covering 1,066 children and 280 women. Suitable treatment was advised as per requirements.

- **Mental Health:** This intervention was initiated in February 2004 with women from low-income groups from the industrial areas of Ahmedabad's slums.

While the project covered counseling and psychiatric support to people suffering from mental illness, it also included strengthening of women who suffered domestic violence to live a better-quality of life. Gradually, a large number of women from neighboring areas took advantage of the services and treatment provided.

Table 4: Mental healthcare activities undertaken by community leaders

| Particulars | Mental Health of Women | Mental Health of Adolescents |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Total meetings held / number of participants | 411 meetings, 8,720 participants | 270 meetings, 4,665 participants |
| Total cases treated | 790 | 611 |
| Group therapy workshops / number of participants | 7 covering 185 participants | - |
| School meetings / number of participants | - | 25 covering 626 participants |

Source: AWAG's Annual Reports 2004 - 10

• **Deliverance of Public Healthcare Services:** The Radhanpur block of Patan district was highly neglected and was hence selected for this purpose. A survey that was conducted revealed that health services offered by the state were not utilized as the service providers largely remained absent. The organization was conscious that raising these demands on behalf of rural women would not be difficult, but sustaining these services would not be possible if the rural people themselves did not take charge of ensuring that the services continued. Thus, women community leaders were empowered to address women's rights, especially those related to health. Members of village councils and rural women united to obtain the health services offered by the state.

The positive outcomes observed were:

- 80% of the female health workers started residing in the villages.
- The sub-centers became completely functional and so did the three primary health facilities (PHCs).
- A gynecologist was appointed, whereby pregnant women and young children started receiving timely medical help.



Installing the kit for the kitchen garden



Toilets constructed by the municipal corporation through leaders' initiatives

Habitat Development

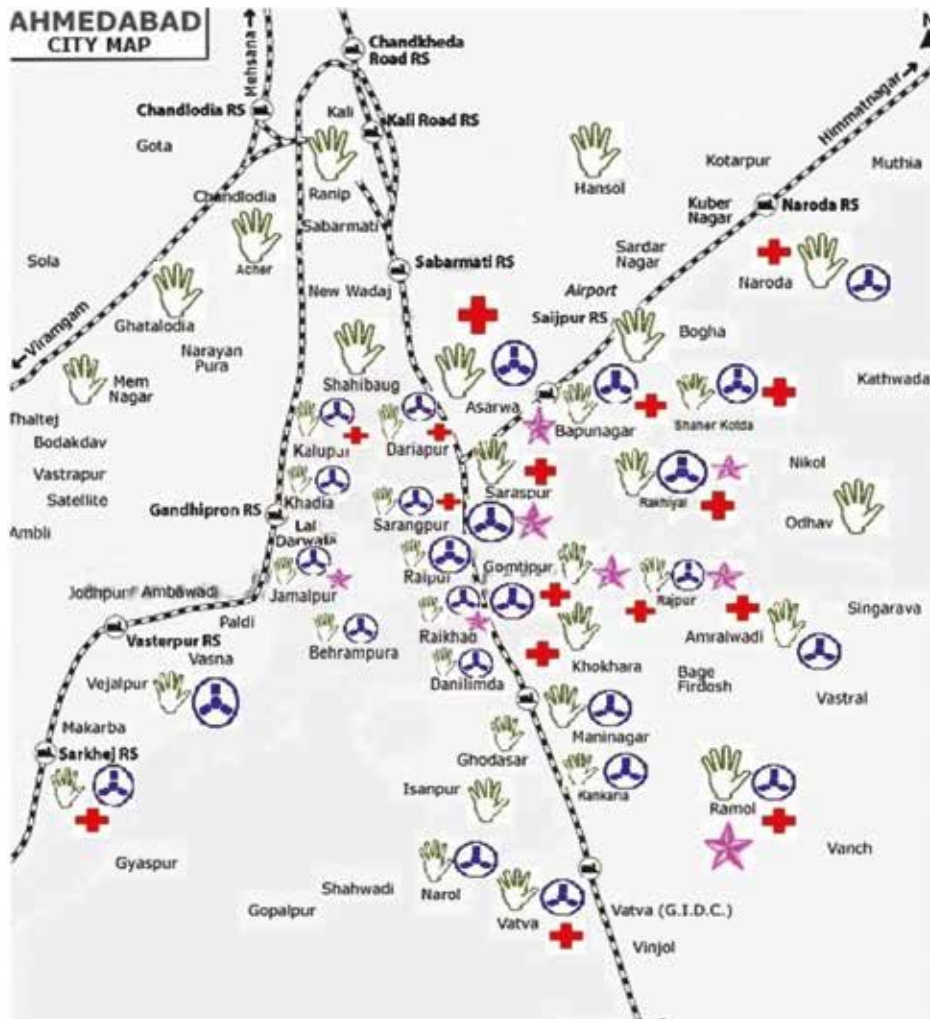
Through support from CARE India, AWAG's efforts were directed towards making a significant impact on the development of vulnerable, poor communities in selected pockets that were located in six areas of Bapunagar and Rakhial wards of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). The communities faced problems related to drinking water, drainage and roads.

This project had two specific agendas – capacity-building of the community and sensitization of service providers. The central process involved community participation, whereby slum dwellers participated in contributing towards operational and maintenance expenses incurred in the setting up of basic amenities provided by the local body.

The community leaders' interventions led AMC to pass a budget for activities such as construction of public toilets/drainage chambers, laying water pipelines and paving roads.


Constant coordination and collaboration with AMC solved a number of sanitation and cleanliness issues of the target communities in the areas.

MAP: Work area and activities through community leaders (Ahmedabad city)



Key and Spread of Activities

 Violence - 36 areas

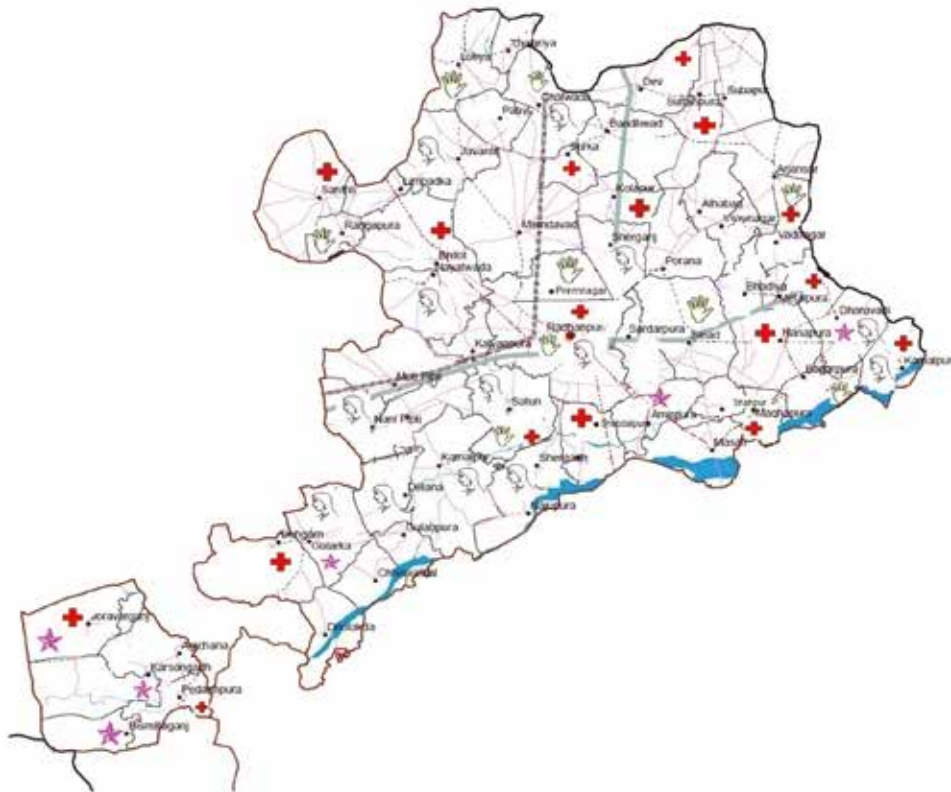
 Health - 16 areas

 Communal Harmony - 25 areas

 Habitat Development - 8 areas

TOTAL AREAS - 36; TOTAL LEADERS - 84

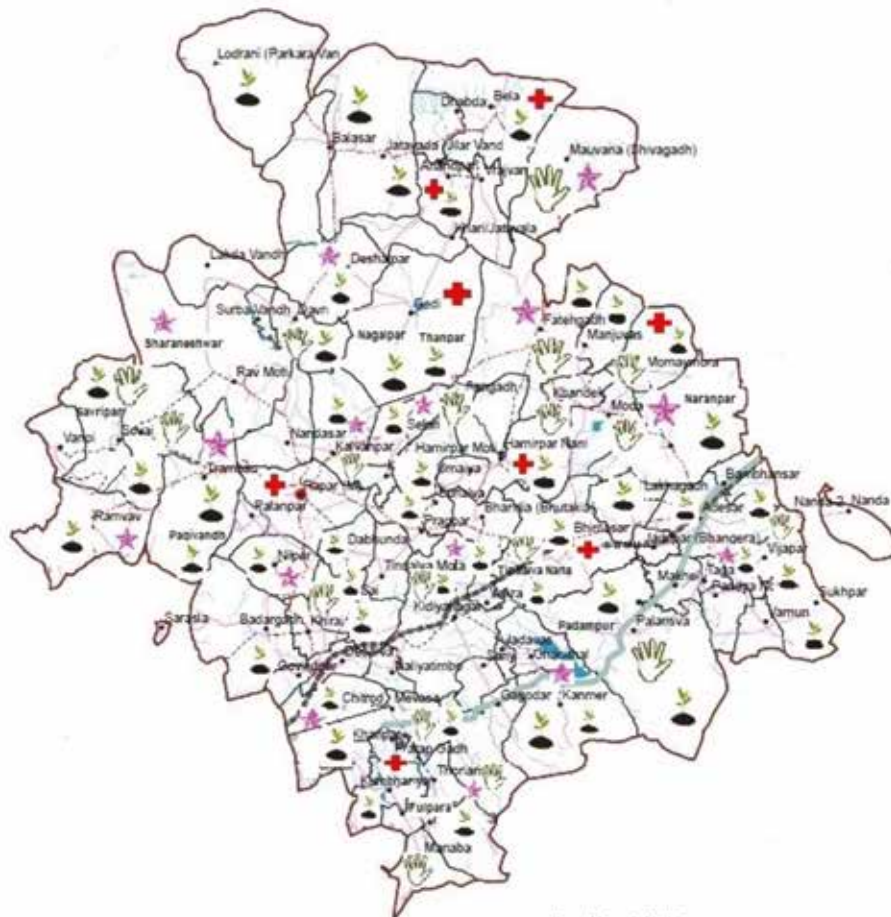
MAP: Work area and activities through community leaders (Radhanpur block)



Key and spread of activities

- + Health – 17 villages
 -  Active Women Committees – 12 villages
 -  Violence – 9 villages
 - ★ Govt. Services/Civic Amenities – 6 villages
- TOTAL VILLAGES – 36 TOTAL LEADERS - 68

**MAP: Work area and activities through community leaders
(Rapar block of Kutch district)**



LEADERS (RAPAR B)

Key and Spread of Activities

-  Kitchen Garden - 50 Villages
-  Violence - 23 Villages
-  Govt Services/Civic Amenities - 18 Villages
-  Health - 9 Villages

Assessment Of Impacts

The various activities undertaken by AWAG that fall under the broad sectors of violence, health and habitat development have created impacts that have occurred at different points in time. Hence, some activities such as primary counseling, kitchen gardening, habitat development, eye examination and vitamin A supplementation have led to immediate impacts, while others like fostering communal harmony, assertion of rights, abolishing social evils such as saataa marriages, making women aware of their individuality and raising a voice against violence, have longer gestation periods and have had impacts only in the medium and long run.

Educational inputs through awareness-raising camps tend to have long-term impacts. In this case, action taken by the community leaders to assert their rights and take proactive action along with the respective communities, collectively as well as at the individual level, could be seen as indicators of impact. Likewise, registering cases of domestic violence and even accessing basic civic amenities for habitat development from local governing bodies can be seen as indicators of impact.

Many of the activities under health have shown impacts in the short run, i.e. within a year or two. Reduced mortality during pregnancy, due to better health services created through improvements in government health centers, is also one of the key indicators of impacts.

Assessment of impacts of interventions through community leaders has been undertaken on the basis of the outcomes achieved.

Impacts/changes that have been influenced by community leaders have been articulated by respondents such as the participating community, allied service providers and survivors of violence through cases cited.

Violence Against Women

By virtue of the intense awareness-raising workshops conducted, women have become conscious about themselves. They have acquired information about the importance of their existence, their rights and gender equality. Their determination to not succumb to abuse has been strengthened. In short, with the



Community Leaders' Workshop in Progress

acquired awareness and growing confidence, women are raising a voice against various forms of violence.

Through **Primary Counseling** offered by the leaders, the community women, during the FGDs, conveyed that they were initially very reluctant to talk about their family matters in public. With the growing awareness and confidence, they started overcoming the beliefs and stereotyped thoughts that prevail in the existing system. It was heartening to learn that women soon started registering cases of domestic violence with the police and even contacting local voluntary organizations.

With regard to interventions related to fostering **Communal Harmony**, a total of 3,827 women (1,581 Hindu, 2,246 Muslim) have taken advantage of the activities undertaken by the community leaders. Through these workshops and meetings, many women have become conscious that they share hardships, regardless of their varying backgrounds (religious or otherwise). They have thus learnt to leave previous prejudices behind and unite simply as women who seek common goals such as social justice, equality and liberation. The women involved have gained a sense of self-awareness and individuality, helping them to see their need for basic human rights and equality. Many women now feel confident in seeking help from their community leaders.

Community women at the focus group discussion expressed that initially they were engulfed by feelings of animosity towards women from the other communities. But after interactions through workshops, a realization gradually dawned and women from both Hindu and Muslim communities .

Oppressive customs and cultural taboos such as saataa are being questioned and opposed. During recent discussions with the target communities, the path-breaking incident of a brother-sister duo - Gangaben and Hirjibhai - has served as an inspirational paradigm for people to gain courage and follow.

At present too, the tradition of saataa has significantly decreased. While there are no breakups of the saataas that have already been committed to, the number of cases of new saataas materializing is relatively low.

In view of this positive move, children are now permitted to complete their education rather than getting tied down to saataa.



Leaders' Meeting opposing Saataa

Health

The community leaders were instrumental in mobilizing women. In the course of **Kitchen Gardening**, the outcomes observed have had a direct impact on the hemoglobin levels of the participating women.

While it was of importance that grassroots women started growing vegetables at their household level, the more vital aspect was that they learnt the benefits of consuming them. Such awareness was a result of the training conducted by the organization, with regular follow-ups by leaders as well.

During interactions, it was also realized that the surplus produce of green vegetables was sold in the local market, thereby supplementing the families' income.

However, the activity that had spanned three years, was limited to the project period since beyond that point, the kits that were provided ceased to function. As the area is known to be arid, procuring water for kitchen gardening posed a major challenge for the kitchen gardeners.

On account of the **Eye Check-up Camp** held under the program, it was found that, of the 1,066 children from seven villages examined, 53 suffered from poor eyesight. Out of the 240 women examined at the camp, 202 had poor eyesight while 33 suffered from cataract. Having identified poor eyesight among children, the need for an ophthalmologist to examine their eyes was voiced. With assistance, the leaders and local communities addressed the situation as a result of which the ophthalmology section functions regularly at the community health center. More significantly, people's widespread belief that night blindness is normal during pregnancy was broken.

As Paluben of Dharavadi village in Radhanpur said, 'We started with the women of our villages and held meetings with them. Then we had meetings with members of the panchayat (Paluben is a sarpanch of Dharavadi). This was followed by meetings with officers up to the state level at Gandhinagar. We then finally got what we wanted.'

Thanks to the efforts of the project to demand **Public Healthcare** from the state, rural women of Radhanpur block gained access to the services of female health workers more easily. Additionally, they even had access to the services of

female health workers more easily. Additionally, they even had access to the services of a doctor at the local primary health center. As articulated in the FGDs, the community women on the whole are happy that childbirths are now attended and the chances of survival of both mother and child are higher due to the facility available under *Janani Suraksha Yojana*. But with regard to the sub-centers in the villages that were made functional, at present, not all of them necessarily function with the same effectiveness as was observed during the project period. This is mainly due to the varying attitudes and level of commitment among the health personnel recently recruited.

The project on **Mental Health** for women and adolescents is ongoing. The group therapy workshops have been highly beneficial in creating an impact by providing openness and acceptance of personal issues and dealing with them more effectively. These have equipped the affected women to:

- Start saying 'NO' to violence
- Learn skills to cope with and reduce the level of stress
- Gain better health through medical help
- Seek legal counseling

The resultant effects of interventions with adolescents are that the affected children, their parents and teachers have gained considerable awareness regarding the prevailing psychological problems. Moreover, they have developed skills to cope with their lives, wherein the children experience a warm, secure and healthy environment.

The community leaders have played a vital role in bringing about this change. Mental health does not generally elicit the same response and participation as physical health does. The act of bringing psychological issues to the fore and addressing them among conservative communities steeped in patriarchy implies a significant change.

Habitat Development

The physical gains achieved in interventions related to habitat development in the slums of Ahmedabad city are readily apparent. More significantly, the community leaders have established an identity and recognition in their communities. Their contribution has elevated their position in their hamlet and this in turn has boosted their own morale.

The tangible impact of this project lies in the outcomes from having accessed public utility services in these slum areas that faced gross neglect. Having tasted the fruits of these efforts, the communities access their due rights and services in consultation and coordination with community leaders and the local governing body.

In the FGDs that were conducted, the leaders concerned with this activity conveyed that most of them are active to this day in making facilities such as electricity, water and drainage available to people in their communities/areas. They also confessed that, while they have developed skills, competencies and linkages to work for the betterment and development of their communities, 'nothing comes free of cost!' So, if need be, they take a token contribution of 5 to 10 rupees per household in fulfilling a scheme for building toilets and bathrooms.



Drainage work undertaken by the municipal corporation through community pressure

Success Stories

Daniben Parikh is a native of Pedashpur village, who joined as a leader in 1997 in relation to activities pertaining to savings. Being remotely located from Radhanpur, no government personnel – teacher, nurse or Talati (secretary/bureaucrat), was ready to live in this village. There was no electricity or healthcare infrastructure. Even for minor ailments, people had to go to Radhanpur since the nurse never came to the village. Childbirths were often conducted at home by birth attendants since getting to Radhanpur during such times was risky and a tough proposition. Given this grim situation, Daniben held a meeting with the village people and the sarpanch (village head). After due deliberations and interactions, the nurse started residing in the village and the local sub-center started functioning regularly, whereby people could access health services at their doorstep. Gaining confidence with her feat, Daniben sought to procure electricity. She earned the local people's trust and soon she was successful in procuring electricity from the authorities.

Currently, at the age of 52 years, Daniben is functional as a community leader in her village; guiding and helping people access their entitlements. In her words, 'I gathered this awareness, understanding and confidence through awareness-raising workshops that were conducted in my village by AWAG.'



Hemaben joined as a community leader in 1997. Along with her coworker Santokben, she was instrumental in organizing 120 women in the Self Help Group formed in her village. These women earned their living through sale of provisions and miscellaneous items in their handcarts in their village. Soon, Hemaben became a member of the village education committee. She took up issues concerning the functioning of the village school. Under her leadership, teachers who were not performing were transferred and new, dedicated teachers were appointed. She also ensured that women's attendance in village/council meetings increased, wherein problems such as availability of drinking water were also brought to the fore and resolved collectively. Clearing of dung heaps was also carried out widely under her leadership. Hemaben was sensitive towards women's issues and helped a number of women subjected to violence from their families and brought them to the organization for further support. Through her efforts, she has built understanding among women to develop their

Through her efforts, she has built understanding among women to develop their own identity, individuality and confidence in society. Both Hemaben and Santokben sought to ensure that the nurse resides in the village itself and performs her duty. The duo is still active within the village, with the same spirit that existed when they joined AWAG.



Salmaben lived with her husband in a makeshift hut outside the organization's center at Bapunagar. She attended a three-day awareness-raising workshop in the area and showed readiness to take on the role of a community leader. She soon grasped the realities of the various forms of violence inflicted on women in the communities.

Whenever there were conflicts among families, Salmaben would rush to the spot and resolve the matter amicably. Having gained some legal literacy, in severe cases of violence, she would take the victim directly to the police station to lodge her complaint. She also spread awareness among other women to start opposing violence.

In addition to this, Salmaben helped the local communities to demand and access primary civic amenities such as water, drainage and toilets from the local municipal corporation. With her rising confidence and influence among the community women, the local political parties would seek favors from her during elections, although she resisted their overtures.

To this day, community women confide in her and approach her to lend an ear to their problems. After the customary primary counseling, she accompanies them to the organization for further support and action.



Nadiraben (54 years) has studied up to Std. 7 and is associated with AWAG as a leader for the last 12 years. She had initially approached AWAG due to a mental problem she was facing, and with regular counseling and medication, she recovered.

Thereafter, she joined AWAG as a leader in relation to the savings and credit activity that was ongoing and gradually roped in other women from her locality. Over time, the participating women expressed concern about the clogged drainage and damaged roads in their area, the result of which would be heavy water-logging even in their homes during the monsoon season. Nadiraben took up the issue by organizing the women and presenting the matter before the local corporation. The resultant impact was that the road of the locality was paved and the drainage too was rectified.

Currently, in addition to the above tasks, Nadiraben is occupied with helping women who face violence through primary counseling and, in severe cases, she accompanies them to the organization for further treatment.



From being a victim of violence, **Champaben** rose to be a community leader. She was barely married for three years and gave birth to a baby girl, for which she faced immense harassment from her in-laws and was often overpowered with thoughts of ending her life. Despite the ceaseless efforts of the larger family, there was no improvement in her situation. Champaben had lost hope. Then she attended AWAG's awareness camp and joined as a community leader and decided to fight for justice. She filed a court case claiming maintenance. Yet her troubles from her in-laws did not end. They were neither ready to accept her nor to relieve her. At this juncture, AWAG helped her fight the case that spanned over 10 long years.

Exasperated with the situation, Champaben went to her maternal village and settled down independently with her daughter. She worked hard to educate her daughter. Soon, she was appointed as an Anganwadi worker in the village and busied herself so as to overcome her grief and trauma. She also realized that it is possible for a woman to live without her husband and served as a role model for other women.

Champaben strives to ensure that no woman in her village succumbs to death due to family abuse. When the situation gets serious, she accompanies distressed women to AWAG for further help and support. She is grateful to AWAG for creating an opportunity to help her build a sound understanding and confidence.

Manjuben has been involved as a community leader in the slum area of Ahmedabad since 2002. This was a period when communal violence had manifested in a brutal form across Gujarat. She lived in a communally sensitive area where Hindu and Muslim communities lived in close proximity. As part of the organization's communal harmony activities, Manjuben was active in gathering women and youth of the local communities and organizing them to attend awareness-raising workshops that were aimed at alleviating misconceptions, prejudices and animosity among the two participating communities.

Manjuben was also involved in identifying and helping women who faced trauma due to the outbreak of violence. She would accompany such cases to the police station, court and even hospitals, as per their needs. She also guided and supported women who were victims of domestic violence and brought them to AWAG for further treatment and action.



Gangaben Gothi has come a long way from being a young bride with an education up to Std. 3. She is now a person who can make her own decisions and can handle crisis situations adeptly. This is her story. She was married in the saataa custom. Her husband Dhanjibhai, who was twice her age, brought her to his home in Salari, Rapar, soon after she attained puberty and was pronounced 'fit to live with him'. This was the beginning of her miseries. He would often subject her to torture and severe beating. Gangaben's only road to salvation lay in returning to her maternal home.

She returned home twice, begging her family to keep her; but she was reprimanded and sent back with a clear instruction to consider her husband's home her only home. In yet another attempt, she left her husband's home for she was unable to bear the torment any further. This time, she went to her family friend's home. Her family friend got in touch with AWAG's community leader in the village. The organization offered her warmth, moral support and shelter. Her parents traced her and pressurized her to return to her husband's home. The saataa tradition, they argued, meant that she could not break her marriage under any circumstance. They also said that they were not ready to take a stand on her behalf at the caste council. They also warned her that, if she didn't return, her brother's marriage would also be in jeopardy.

At this point, Gangaben's brother, Hirjibhai who was married to Gangaben's husband's niece, came to her rescue. He persuaded Gangaben to stay on at AWAG's shelter at Ahmedabad. He then convinced his parents to break the custom and stand by Gangaben. Hirjibhai also approached the caste council and urged them to allow his sister to return and pay a fine of Rs. 10,000. Hirjibhai's marriage was also declared null and void. It was a bold departure from tradition.

Gangaben agrees that taking control of her own life has brought about a remarkable change in her attitudes and ability to deal with crises. Now, she says, she has gained the courage to say 'no' to a life of servitude and violence.



Premilaben, a resident of Kanmer village in Rapar block, was thrown out of her marital home by her husband at the instigation of his brother and sister-in-law. With the responsibility of three children on her shoulders, she confided in the community leader of the area who in turn helped her approach the organization for further guidance. The team at AWAG helped her restore her confidence and, as per her decision, filed a case claiming maintenance. To date, she receives an amount of Rs. 5,000 per month from her husband. Having gone through the legal procedures, Premilaben is actively helping other women in her village who face similar problems. In her words, 'While at my marital home, my husband would constantly beat me and would not fulfill even my primary needs. Today, he is compelled to pay maintenance for the upkeep of my children. I put in all efforts to ensure that they are well educated and lead a life of respect and confidence.'



Community Leaders at a Focus Group Discussion

Leaders' Views On Their Growth

The major parameters of their own growth after the intervention, as cited by the community leaders, are:

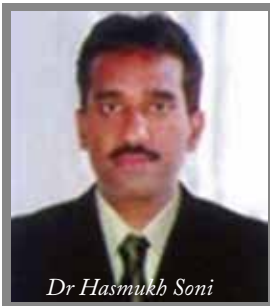
- Breaking away from barriers and stereotypes by stepping out as a leader has brought about a change in attitudes and perspective towards women's issues as well as the system.
- Reduction in fear and an increase in confidence has led them to being more vocal about violence inflicted on them and other women.
- At the individual level, there's a change in their mindset with regard to violence and gender that is reflected in their day-to-day dealings in their own families.
- Realization about their own individuality and purpose.
- Increase in understanding of police / court procedures and accessing entitlements and services from the system.
- Recognition of 'Strength in Unity', regardless of caste divides that have been created by the system at large.
- Establishment of their own identity in their communities also among allied service providers through linkages.

Changes Influenced By Leaders, As Stated By Allied Service Providers

Interviews with allied service providers related to systems pertaining to health, police, law and local administration were conducted to gain a third-party view on the impacts created through the intervention of community leaders across all areas.

Health Personnel

Doctor – Hasmukhbhai Soni – Rakhiyal, Ahmedabad



I am serving at Ojas Hospital in Rakhiyal, Ahmedabad and am familiar with the organization's team. Women subjected to fatal injuries caused by domestic violence are brought here by the community leaders for treatment. The leaders' presence and sensitivity enables the victim to vent her pain and problem with ease, thereby facilitating her treatment. On the other hand, if the woman victim is alone or accompanied by her in-laws/relatives, she is unable to voice her feelings freely due to family pressure or fear and hence tries to conceal the reality behind her injuries.

In fact, I recommend that violence victims who approach me for treatment reach out to the organization for moral support and guidance. In the same vein, I too seek help from the organization's team to lend me a hand in handling the cases at my clinic. The skill with which they guide and counsel the women proves helpful in the course of treatment.

Many a time, even in serious cases wherein women have attempted suicide due to extreme abuse, the leaders and team members are always present to give the victim much needed warmth and support. Such interventions are helpful to society.'

ASHA worker – Hajraben – Taga village, Rapar

'My association with AWAG dates back to many years ago when I was selected as a community leader following my participation in the awareness-raising



workshops in my village.

During our interventions related to health, it was realized that there was no ASHA worker in the village. In fact, nobody was ready to take on the role because women were generally afraid to step out of their homes. Owing to the needs of the situation, and my readiness to work, the organization recommended that the health authorities consider me as a potential candidate. I was appointed as an ASHA worker and have been working as one since then.

My confidence grew considerably. Under my leadership, the spread of immunization among children increased over time. Initially, women would resort to superstitious practices during illness, but with the growing

awareness that was created, the people now visit the local health center for treatment. Similarly, deliveries at home that often posed high risks and mortality are now conducted at health centers, thereby lowering the maternal/child mortality rates. Earlier, the oppressive custom of saataa marriages led to a high count of unnatural deaths of girls. While we confess that we still have a long way to go, there has been a gradual decline in this custom through the community leaders' interventions in this regard. Let us not forget the kitchen gardens that brought about an understanding in relation to growing green leafy vegetables and the importance of consuming it. Overall awareness among women has increased through workshops that were regularly conducted in the village. Women have learnt to resist violence. Men-folk, too, have realized that they cannot inflict violence and get away with it. Women's confidence and respect, too, has increased.'

Nurse – Bhanuben – Subapura village, Radhanpur

'I am residing in this village and working as a nurse for the last nine years. In

my earlier working years (up to 2003), I stayed in Radhanpur and worked. During my interactions, through meetings organized by community leaders, we were informed that it was mandatory to reside in the village itself so as to effectively deliver services to the people.

Initially, we nurses were annoyed with the organization's interference in our functioning; but from within we understood the motive behind the insistence to do so. Therefore, to this day I still reside in the village itself and fulfill my duties. I have also realized that I should give my services to the community. This change in me has been influenced by AWAG.'

Anganwadi worker – Vejiben – Subapura village, Radhanpur

'I have been serving my village for the last 22 years. At one time, gender discrimination was widespread in my village, but through the constant efforts of the leaders, its extent has significantly reduced.

The regular meetings that were organized by the community leaders in my village motivated me to perform my duty in a sincere manner. This was a turning point in my working life. To date, I ensure that all the children and pregnant women in the village receive timely immunization and supplementary nutrition.'

Police Taskforce

Head constable – Bhagwanbhai – Rapar Circle

The community leaders are a medium through which women's cases are resolved easily. We understand that the police are not forthcoming in their approach with women victims, and the environment at the police station is not conducive for these women to voice their concerns. On the other hand, the leaders support the victim through primary counseling and link them with police to register their complaints.

Since these interventions, a definite change is visible in the area. Our work is also facilitated through coordination with the community. Our sensitivity towards women's issues has also increased.



Interview with a Head Constable in Process

‘In reality, the police and the community leaders play complementary roles and this eventually helps women victims resolve their problems. I have been serving at this police station for many years, during which I have gained much experience with the community leaders and fieldworkers of the organization who accompany the victims to the police station. These leaders have been able to bring about awareness, understanding and confidence among women who are illiterate, deprived and subdued. Today, these women are able to take their own decisions with regard to registering their complaints and even taking legal recourse if need be.

Primary counseling rendered by the community leaders has saved many women from ending their lives. Such initiatives are helpful and essential for society.’

Police sub-inspector – A.B. Devdha and assistant sub-inspector – Bharath-hai at Rakhiyal Police Station, Ahmedabad

‘The role of the community leaders and the organization’s team members is to bring distressed women affected by domestic violence to the police station. The presence of the leaders facilitates the process of laying a complaint because women victims who are already struggling get further intimidated with the language, appearance and mannerisms of the police officials. But the leaders’ presence creates an atmosphere of warmth and trust, whereby the victim gathers the courage to present her case.

On the other hand, when a woman victim approaches the police station alone, communicating with her and lodging her complaint becomes a tough proposition for us.

We have also experienced that, in cases of rape of minor girls, the police officer records the victim's statement in the presence of team members; because the latter are well equipped with skills by which they can elicit the necessary information from the victim. In our opinion, such linkages between the police and the team members are essential and helpful.'

Legal Workforce

Advocate – Nazmaben Pathan – Bapunagar, Ahmedabad

'I have been associated with AWAG for the last 23 years. Back then, I had approached the organization as a victim of domestic violence. With the guidance and encouragement of AWAG, I gathered my courage and pursued higher studies and have been practicing as a lawyer since 1998.



The community leaders in the area identify women that are affected by violence, conduct primary counseling for them and also bring them over to the organization for further support. The organization provides guidance and counsels the women victims to take charge of their lives by exercising laws that are meant for them.

During legal proceedings, the presence of community leaders or other team members, along with the woman victim, creates a feeling of warmth and security for the latter, wherein she can present her case confidently.'

'In my entire tenure with the organization, I have witnessed a number of women who have been victims like me, but have developed and moved ahead with their lives.'

Local Administration

Sarpanch (village head) – Laghubhai – Pedashpura village, Radhanpur

'Following the earthquake that hit Gujarat in 2001, the organization came to our village to work on rehabilitation. The philosophy and work undertaken by the community leaders influenced me and with the growing knowledge, I was motivated to become the sarpanch of the village. I felt that if an external agency could contribute towards the development of the village women, as a resident and head of the village I also could surely do something worthwhile. This has driven me to serve the people for the last 10 years. I earlier believed that a sarpanch had to make money at the cost of the people. But my conscience did not permit me to do so. This is the third term that I have been elected as a sarpanch.

I am grateful to AWAG for leading the way for me.'

Local Cooperative Society

President of Scheduled Castes' community agriculture cooperative society – Panchanbhai – Rapar Block

'Initially, the extent of unnatural deaths of women in Rapar was on the rise, since women in distress had no other alternative before them. However, with the intervention of AWAG, initiatives were centered on helping and comforting the women victims. Through the interventions of the community leaders, along with the team of fieldworkers, women victims were provided timely support and guidance by which the count of unnatural deaths gradually began to decline.

Through primary counseling undertaken by the leaders, the women victims gathered awareness, courage and confidence to voice their suffering. Awareness-raising camps and gatherings against the practice of saataa marriages that were organized by the community leaders have led people to start questioning and protesting against such social ills. Another change that has come about is that the male members of the community have also realized the legal implications of inflicting violence on women.

Such interventions by the organization are necessary to create a multipronged impact on the community at large.'

To encapsulate, the impacts of interventions through community leaders are:

- Women have become aware of their individuality and are raising a voice against violence.
- There is also greater awareness of their bodies and health that earlier rested on blind faith and superstitions.
- Women have mobilized themselves in relation to various activities undertaken through the leaders.
- Women's attendance and participation in village meetings has increased.
- There is a growing realization among women about their due rights which are being demanded by them from the system in the areas of health, police, law and local governance.
- Mobilization of government resources, accessing schemes pertaining to health, water, electricity and housing and also gaining their entitlements in terms of ration cards, job cards, widow pension schemes, etc.
- Oppressive customs and cultural taboos such as saataa are being questioned and opposed.
- Religious tolerance/communal harmony and acceptance have increased in the work areas due to the leaders' influence. Participation of men and women of all religions is welcomed and a harmonious environment is nurtured.
- There is a change in men regarding gender roles because of the leaders' interactions in the village. Their sensitivity towards women's issues and individuality too has grown.
- Leaders' intervention and the collective power of the female community have prompted people to pursue girls' education. Officers of the Government of Gujarat in two specific departments, police and health have become responsive to women.
- The environment in the court room is now becoming forthcoming to a woman litigant and a woman advocate.
- The community leaders' intervention on habitat development in the slums of Ahmedabad, has led AWAG to be one of the NGOs with which authorities of JNNURM in Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation consult in drafting new plans.

These impacts are best examined from a relative perspective.

In areas that were overpowered with patriarchal, conservative views and

deprived of basic facilities and understanding, women have stepped out of their homes, have started saying 'no' to violence and even approaching the court if required.

Reflections

- Violence is deeply embedded in the social system. While awareness-raising workshops have created a significant impact, there is a tendency to slip back into patriarchal structures. Future projects could provide scope for a spread to boost women's morale and reinforce a woman-centric ideology by grooming them to develop as community leaders/change agents.
 - Over the years, the behavior of the police and other government officials towards women has improved. They are no longer abused or laughed at, instead they are heard and their complaints are lodged. The healthcare providers and the local municipal corporation too are more responsive.
 - The fact that a number of community leaders have secured jobs as ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers and link workers, and they are even establishing linkages with political parties is a sign of the competency and identity that they have established.
 - Whilst tangible activities have led to immediate impacts, it is awareness and understanding developed among community leaders and their communities that has led to long-term, sustained effects. However, some interventions could not be sustained with the same intensity after the cessation of the project. This may be attributed to change in political leadership as was witnessed in the case of some health centers in Radhanpur that reverted back to their erratic functioning. Another contributing factor is that the community leaders are not as active as they were during the project.
- Nonetheless, sensitivity has been deeply internalized and has been well-sustained among the participating communities. This is clearly reflected in their confidence and women-centric approach in dealing with their families, communities and service providers.
- 'One man's loss is another man's gain.' Therefore, attitudinal and ideological changes that led to changes in power equations were naturally opposed by those in power; be it at the family level, or otherwise. Ways and means of trying to break the morale and unity of the participating group were adopted. More often than not, the community leaders and the entire team got together and faced the challenges.

Conclusion

The impacts presented are based on data/responses derived from project-level documents as well as those articulated by the various project stakeholders such as community members, service providers, victims of violence and of course the community leaders themselves.

By virtue of the intense awareness-raising workshops conducted widely, women became conscious about themselves. They gained insights into the importance of their existence, their rights and gender equality. Their determination in not succumbing to abuse was strengthened. They started overcoming the beliefs and stereotypes that prevailed in the existing system. Women started registering cases of domestic violence with the police or contacting local voluntary organizations. They also grew in awareness regarding their local concerns and rights.

'Is it viable to expect voluntarism from poor, deprived communities on a long-term basis?' The interventions so far have served as models of development, but sustaining them at the same strength poses a challenge and requires sustained support.

Overall, one can modestly say that the strategy of building community leaders through awareness-raising workshops has borne fruit. For any activity to be effective, community participation is imperative. For this, the real thrust and spirit came from the leaders who were instrumental in mobilizing their community members to develop awareness and change their mindset towards issues concerning women's rights and dignity to the extent that they could.

AWAG has played a catalytic role in the entire process and continues to strive towards the emancipation and empowerment of deprived women and recall the words of its founder member.

'Silence Is Not A Virtue; Break The Silence Of Oppression.'

Dr Ila Pathak (1933–2014)

Founder, Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG)

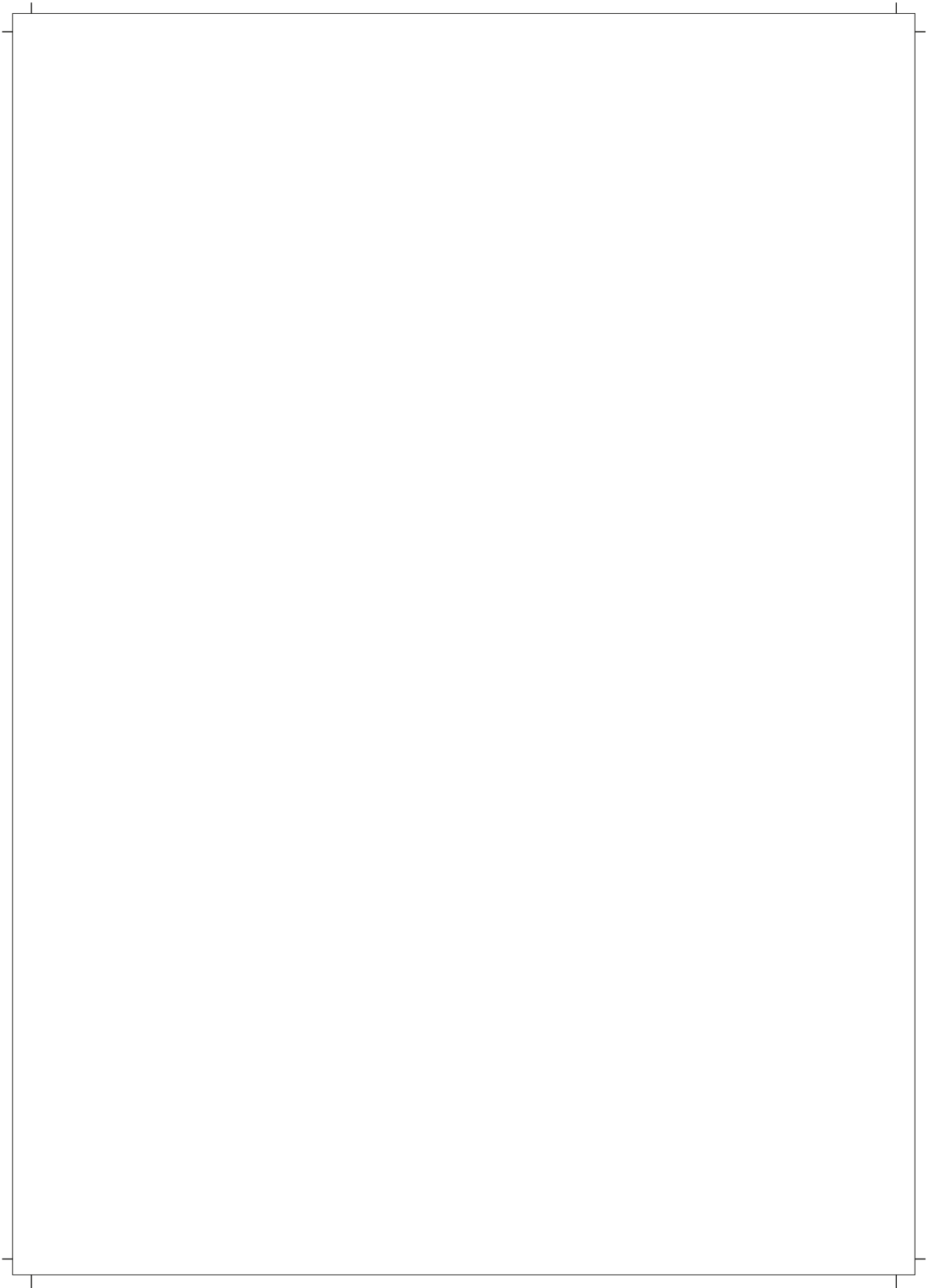


The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records in a laboratory setting. It emphasizes the need for clear labeling and consistent data entry to ensure the reliability of experimental results. The text also touches upon the ethical considerations of data handling and the responsibilities of researchers in this regard.

In the second section, the author delves into the technical aspects of the equipment used in the study. A detailed description of the calibration process is provided, along with a comparison of different measurement techniques. The discussion highlights the challenges associated with precision and the steps taken to minimize errors.

The third section presents the results of the experiments. The data is organized into several tables, each accompanied by a brief analysis of the findings. The author notes significant trends and correlations, supported by statistical analysis. The results are compared against theoretical models to assess their validity.

Finally, the document concludes with a summary of the key findings and their implications. The author suggests areas for future research and provides a list of references for further reading. The overall tone is professional and objective, focusing on the scientific process and the evidence gathered.





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