



ADVOCACY INSPIRES ACTION

Religious Leaders and CSOs

The logo for the Girls Advocacy Alliance, featuring the word "GIRLS" in pink, "ADVOCACY" in orange, and "ALLIANCE" in orange, with a stylized pink and orange graphic element.

The logo for terre des hommes, featuring the text "terre des hommes" in white on a black background, with "stops child exploitation" in black below it, and a red and black circular icon to the right.



Advocacy Inspires Action - Religious Leaders and CSOs is the second volume of a 4 book series highlighting the success of the Girl's Advocacy Alliance (GAA) project in India. Led by Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) with partners Shramika Vikas Kendram (SVK), FMMSSS, Scope RD, HELP, RAIDS, HANDS and Children of India Foundation (TdH-NL affiliate organisation) the project is operational in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

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"To speak up for
the *rights of a
girl* is to speak
up for a better
world "

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ABOUT TERRE DES HOMMES NETHERLANDS



Terre des Hommes - Netherlands (TdH-NL) prevents child exploitation, removes children from exploitative situations and ensures these children can develop themselves in a safe environment.

Operational in 18 countries, TdH-NL works on combating Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL), Child Trafficking and Unsafe Migration (CTUM), Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), Child Abuse and promotes Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

In India, the organisation works in states of Jharkhand, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, addressing issues of child exploitation in the regions.



ABOUT GIRLS' ADVOCACY ALLIANCE

The project Girls' Advocacy Alliance (GAA) focuses on **addressing and fighting the rising violence against adolescent girls and young women through lobby and advocacy**. We empower the girl child and the young woman by advocating for the prevention of child marriage and child trafficking along with the promotion of secondary education & job oriented vocational training.

We work in six districts across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with six partner organisations implementing the project at the grassroots; HELP (lead partner in Andhra Pradesh) in Prakasam district and the state headquarters Vijayawada; RAIDS in Kadapa district, HANDS in Anantapur district; SVK (lead partner in Telangana) in the state headquarters, Hyderabad and Nagarkurnool district; SCOPE RD in the district of Khammam and FMSS in Warangal.

We advocate with Community Religious Leaders, Civil Society Organisations, Government & Law Enforcement Agencies and the Private Sector. We also train young girls and boys as advocates.



ADVOCACY WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND CSOs

Community Religious Leaders and Civil Society Organisations/Child Safe Organisations (CSOs) play a key role in the prevention of child marriage and child trafficking.

Religious leaders are respected members of the community, their practices are adhered to and their messages are taken very seriously.

Civil Society Organisations have the bandwidth and the resources to facilitate programme activities for change.

Advocacy with these two stakeholders through sensitisation programmes, workshops and project activities helps initiate positive and influential action towards girl child protection.

I was Sold

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 Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
 Government of India
 New Delhi

STORIES OF ADVOCACY AND ACTION

Religious
Leaders





Folk Songs of Change

A religious leader mobilises priests who sing devotional ballads to convey the importance of child marriage prevention through their songs.

Even though we feel that child marriages are a thing of the past, the reality is far from it. As of 2019, 195 child marriages were reported in Warangal, Telangana. The main reasons cited for this by the parents of these children are caste based customs and poverty.

To overcome this pressing issue, Girls Advocacy Alliance approached religious leaders from various communities to help in sensitizing parents, men and women, through their preaching.

In these efforts, Sri. Bheemanna, a district level key religious leader from Warangal Urban district has taken the initiative of mobilising 200 *Oggu pujaries* from different villages for the cause. These *Oggu pujaries* are traditional priests who sing folk songs and narrate the stories of Hindu Gods to different communities while travelling barefoot. They devote themselves to the singing of ballads, and making patnas, a kind of praising the Lord and travel from village to village doing the same. To community members, these songs are pious and taken very seriously.

On *Shivarathri* in February 2020, Shri. Bheemanna mobilised these barefoot priests to play a vital role in spreading awareness on the prevention of child marriages. Around 200 priests now sing songs that convey how child marriages are harmful and should be prevented. Also, every Wednesday and Sunday, where public visits to the temples are large in number the priests sensitise the devotees on prevention of child marriages through their folk songs and storytelling. Through these efforts they have reached over 30,000 community members on the cause.



Religious Leader becomes vigil

After sensitisation by GAA, a religious leader begins age verification before conducting marriages and incorporates prevention of child marriages in his preaching.

Recognising the authority, influence, and the power religious leaders wield on people, GAA began conducting workshops with key religious leaders in Nagarkurnool district of Telangana from 2017.

Kapilavai Jagadeeswarachary is one of the key religious leaders from Sirsawada village, Thadoor Mandal. Mr. Jagadeeswarachary has been working as a priest since 1995 and has been solemnizing marriages since 2000.

Ever since his participation in the GAA programmes, he has become more vigil about child marriages. He has decided to prevent them by verifying proof of age for all the marriages he presides over. He further conducts grassroot level meetings with the community on the legal consequences of conducting of child marriages.

Mr. Jagadeeswarachary is relieved that he was introduced to GAA. He notes, "We didnt know about the consequences of child marriage before the GAA programme. We did not verify any age proof certificates. After participating in GAA workshops, we have come to know of legal acts against child marriages. We now collect age proof of the boys and girls we marry. In our grassroot level gatherings, when we explain prophecies to devotees, we also explain the importance of girl child education and how child marriages affect them."

Initially, GAA began conducting workshops in Nagarkurnool district with key religious leaders alone. By 2020, the team had expanded their outreach and met nearly a hundred religious leaders, both at the district and block level.



Many Religions, One Voice

A Purohit, a Khazi and a Pastor join forces to spread awareness on the prevention of child marriages.

In the village of Polepally in Khammam district, locals were forcing their religious heads to solemnise child marriages. This led to the line departments filing a case against a religious leader who conducted one such marriage.

This incident made Mr Kasim, a religious leader, join forces with other leaders to educate the locals and stop child marriages. Block-level leaders from Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity went door-to-door to campaign against child marriage and its adverse effects. Their main goal was to teach the public that there no religion advocates for and encourages child marriages.

A Hindu purohit, a Muslim Khazi, and a Christian pastor doing the rounds made people take notice. They were informed that as per the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, not only religious leaders, but the parents and even attendees of child marriages are punishable. They requested the communities to give up and refrain from child marriages and to stop forcing the religious leaders to preside over and solemnise child marriages.

They distributed pamphlets and pasted posters in public areas around the village to create more visibility and cover a larger audience.



Notice boards on temples and mosques

'Child Marriage is strictly prohibited here'
- with the help of the government, religious
leaders help install notice boards in temples
and mosques.

Having met each other at a GAA orientation programme, religious leaders Mr Suresh Sharma, Mr Sreedhar Sharma and Mr Tajuddin united to take measures in dissuading child marriages. To do this, they met Mr Karnan, IAS, the District Collector of Khammam in Telangana.

They discussed their idea with him: to place boards at the entrance to temples and mosques displaying content that said, 'Child Marriages are strictly prohibited here'. Not only at religious places, but they also wanted these boards placed at marriage halls for both religions.

Realising that it was a good suggestion, the Collector responded positively assuring them that the concerned departments would be asked to use government special funds to display these boards. To this effect, he sent a circular (no: RC No. C1-1301-2020) addressed to the District Welfare Office (DWO), the Assistant Commissioner Endowment Department, District Minority Welfare Officer, Mandal Revenue Officers (MRO) of Khammam district and Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) of Kallur and Khammam. The circular directed them to: display standard boards on important sections of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) at all temples, mosques and function halls across the district, thereby preventing child marriages by bringing awareness to the public about existing child-related Laws and Acts.

On receiving this, the Assistant Commissioner of the Endowment Department, Khammam requested GAA to provide technical support in bringing awareness to the public along with designing the standard boards that needed to be displayed. The Endowment Department and the institution board members began to place the display boards at the temples and mosques. So far, 32 temples have been covered and a further 325 temples and 220 mosques are on the list to be covered shortly.



Devotion is meant for saving lives

Religious leaders sensitise communities on the prevention of child marriages during a mass gathering at a temple festival.

The Nrusimha Swamy Temple, Kommala, Geesugonda, Warangal Rural, functions under the Endowment department and is considered as a holy place to perform marriages. Schedule Tribe members often visit this temple owing to their faith in God and to perform their marriages.

Sri Venugopala Chary, one of the main priests at the temple, started preaching to the community on the prevention of child marriages. He addressed the mass gathering on the eve of Nrusimha Swamy Jayanthi in the temple premises by involving the block level priests as well on the subject. Nrusimha Swamy Jayanthi is a 3 day celebration organised every year in the temple and has many participants. The festival was used as an opportune moment to spread the message against child marriages.

This feat was possible thanks to Girls Advocacy Alliance which undertook several workshops, consultations and interface meetings at the district and state level for religious leaders. In these workshops, the leaders were made to interact with the youth advocates, who played a key role in influencing the different actors and stakeholders towards understanding the need of bringing equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women.

"Devotion is meant for saving lives", said Sri Vengugopala Chary and expressed his sorrow for life of a girl after child marriages.



Key religious leaders build peer support

Key religious leaders mobilise block level leaders into the movement against child marriages through training and sensitisation

Key religious leaders Mr Tajuddin, Mr Nagarjuna Sharma and Mr Venkateswara Sharma from Telangana's Khammam district got together to proactively conduct activities focusing on the eradication of child marriages in their regions. To accomplish this, they worked with religious leaders at all levels to curb the issue.

They distributed posters and pamphlets to religious leaders at the block level, opened discussions with them and motivated them to join the cause against child marriages. Some of the major resolutions taken in these meetings included preparing IEC material and pasting them at temples and mosques, preaching about acts against child marriages during rituals and ceremonies, campaigning at places of worship and door to door, and forming Child Safety Committees at the village level and block level.

Based on these resolutions, 575 priests participated in the block level meetings and undertook different activities to prevent child marriages within their congregation.

Simultaneously, Child Safety Committees are being formed in three blocks of the district : Thimmineniapalem, Kamala Puram and Banapuram. The committees are to have the sarpanch, secretary, ward members, religious leaders and medical practitioners among the prominent members to recognise and report child abuse and exploitation, preach against child marriage and sensitise the public.

With religious leaders speaking against child marriage, there is hope that the issue will be a thing of the past sooner rather than later.



A Religious leader stops a child marriage

Sri. Santosh Kumar Sharma through his sensitisation from GAA reports a case of a child marriage which is eventually stopped

Sri. Santhosh Kumar Sharma is a key religious leader in the state of Telangana. He works as a priest of a temple in Nagarkurnool district and is a social activist. Since 2017, Sri. Kumar has been a regular participant in the GAA religious leaders' meetings and workshops.

During his interactions with GAA, he got to know of the themes and objectives of the programme, particularly the attempts to curb child marriages. When he was shown the child marriage statistics in Telangana, he was so astounded by it that he started a grassroot level campaign to provide his support for the cause.

During his campaign, he observed that there was a child marriage about to take place in the Yenman Betla village of Nagarkurnool. He immediately informed the police, calling 100 and 1098 helpline numbers. Teams from the Intergrated Child Department Services (ICDS) went and counselled the parents of the young girl.

She is now able to her continue her education and aims to become a teacher. If not for Sri. Kumar, she would have been married and education would remain a far-fetched dream.



Government Officer issues circular to temples

The Endowment Department applauds GAA and sends a circular to temples with clear instructions on not to solemnise child marriages.

"Sensitisation of the community by the religious leaders is one of the best ways to prevent child marriages", said Smt. Sunitha, Assistant Commissioner of Endowment Department, Warangal.

Apart from approaching the religious leaders directly, the Girls Advocacy Alliance has also made effective advocacy with necessary departments to hike up their responsibility in prevention of child marriages.

Revered as one of the most dedicated officers who has made efforts towards seeing that the society is a safe zone that enables the protection of children, Smt. Sunita represents the Endowment Department, which is advisory to the Government on all religious matters. As it is known that religious leaders are most influential in society to bring about such changes regarding these problems, she issued a circular to the 8 selected endowment temples which are famous for performing such marriages, from Warangal Urban and Rural Districts.

This circular clearly carried instructions directly addressed to these religious leaders to not to solemnize any child marriage and to preach the community on prevention of child marriages. They were asked to enable the promotion of secondary education for girls and to address the incidents of child marriages by monitoring, preventing and reporting the incidents of child marriages to the respective authorities.

Ever since, leaders under Endowment Departments were stimulated to stop child marriages by declaring their commitment publically to solemnise marriages only at legal age, which is a big win!

STORIES OF ADVOCACY AND ACTION

CSOs



బాలల హక్కుల పాఠశాల
చేయి చేయి కలిపి మంచి జిల్లా కారకు
నవంబర్-10% బిల్లు
నవంబర్ 10% బిల్లు (Nov. 14 - 20)

'SHE' TEAM
KHAMMAM POLICE
STOP
HANDS

terro des hommes
stops child exploitation
Child Rights Celebration Week
World day for prevention
of child sexual Abuse



To be the change you wish to see

Smt. Aruna Kumari rises up against the odds and forms her own CSO which empowers girls and women with the help of GAA.

Pushed to the edges, Smt. G. Aruna Kumari was at what felt like the lowest point in her life when she decided to pick herself up to lead by example and support other women like her.

Ms. Aruna Kumari lost her husband to a heart stroke and shortly after developed a heart disease as well. She received no support outside the family, making her climb an upward hill as a single woman in society. But with spirit and verve, she decided to embody the change she was seeking and started an organisation named 'Mahila Mandali' to advocate on women and children issues in the Chennur Mandal of YSR Kadapa District.

"Practically, I know the challenges faced by a woman without support in this society. I decided to extend my support to such women like me to stand on their own. It's not a classroom lesson but a practical learning from my own experiences", she said.

After she joined Girls Advocacy Alliance and our Child Safe Organizations network, Ms. Arunima was able to educate herself on the issues and ill effects of gender based violence, child trafficking and child sexual abuse faced by girls and young women. Apart from learning about the issues, she also learnt on how these issues could be solved through secondary education and job oriented vocational training.

Soon, she began advocating with the police and district women and child development agencies to address the issues of child marriages and school dropouts. Until date, she has been instrumental in preventing 26 child marriages in the Chennur Mandal. She started also a jute bag making centre for single women who now earn minimum Rs. 6000 a month for their livelihood.



Rallies to prevent child marriages

Working with GAA, two CSOs organise innovative rallies to sensitise the public on issues of girl child exploitation.

Mr Arjun Rao from Suraksha Foundation and Mr Krishna from Nennuna Mahila Mandali, both GAA Network CSOs collaborated to come up with innovative ideas to spread awareness on preventing child marriage using GAA IEC material.

In Khammam district, Telangana, the duo selected the International Child Rights week as the most opportune moment for the dissemination of information. With a team of over 50 members comprising Youth Advocates, staff from the Suraksha Foundation and the District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) members decided that rallies were the best way to spread information.

These rallies were held in a number of localities, from the District Zilla Parishad Office to the bus stations. To reach a larger number of people, they employed innovative activities like bicycle rallies and balloon rallies among others to gather crowds and sensitise them on the rights and safety of girl children.

During the rallies, GAA IEC material designed by GAA Youth Advocates (YA) was distributed to the public to sensitise them on girl child issues. Posters were pasted in the rallies' surroundings, brochures were distributed to passersby and placards were held.

During the course of the rallies, over 6,000 people were exposed to the activities of GAA and encouraged to prevent child marriage and child trafficking.

"Working through a network gives a lot of enthusiasm and result", said Mr. Vanam Balraju, Secretary of Indian Social Service Society, one of GAA Network CSOs from Warangal Urban, Telangana.



The Quest to create a Pro Child Village

A GAA Network CSO initiates activities in a vulnerable village to make it child friendly.

Non Governmental Organizations are imperative in holding the values that make us human and doing the right thing for those in need. And the larger our community is, the more people we can help through crisis.

Through training from GAA, a network NGO Swayamrukshi selected a village, namely Laknepally from Warangal Rural where child marriages and child trafficking rates are very high in communities of migrant families. There was also a high frequency of child abuse and sexual exploitation of the girls in this community.

To address this, the NGO decided to make the village 'pro child' by initiating awareness, sensitisation and advocacy training programmes with the community, school children, SHG Women, ASHA Workers and Anganwadi teachers on the need and ways to prevent child marriages and other forms of child exploitation.

With the initiation of the pro-child activities in these villages, girls have started reporting incidents of child marriage and child trafficking to the CHILDLINE - 1098 and with their help, such activities have been curtailed.

All these efforts were made so as to realise the dream of a village free from child marriages, child trafficking, child vulnerability and making sure to get a 100% enrollment of children into secondary education. "

My dream is to see a society where every child is grown in a safe and secured environment, which can be considered as 'pro-child', says Mr. Bejjanki Prabhakar, Secretary of Swayamkrushi NGO.



Support in the COVID crisis

The GAA Network of CSOs protects and provides for vulnerable children and their families during Covid-19.

One of the key strategies of the GAA programme is to strengthen the capacities of Child Rights CSOs for their effective action against girl child exploitation. In the wake of the Covid-19 lockdown, gender-based violence, girl child abuse and exploitation & school dropouts were on the rise. This demanded an immediate action from the GAA Network CSOs.

Child Rights CSOs of the GAA Network from Prakasam District extended their helping hand to the people adversely affected by the pandemic. Organisations like Good Help, APMSS, Swayam Krushi Seva Samithi, FRIENDS and Aadarana Service Society reached out to vulnerable communities in the red containment zones whose mobility and access to basic necessities of food, medicines and hygiene kits were severely limited due to the high cases of Covid-19.

Further, the CSOs worked in collaboration with the line departments such as the Police, Department of Women and Child Development to ensure fruitful results with timely delivery of services to the people in need. The CSOs have distributed groceries/provisions, hygiene kits, rice bags and vegetables, along with education material to children.

Mr. Venkateswarlu from FRIENDS said, "The situation demanded us to initiate an appropriate emergency intervention with support services to these vulnerable communities to safeguard and protect children. We worked together and mobilised funds from possible resources to cope up with the challenges that emerged due to Covid-19 in regards to child protection."



Schools for children of migrants

GAA through its network CSO contributes to providing work site schools for children of migrant labourers working in construction jobs

In a country whose backbone is borne by the working class, it is imperative we take care of their families with the same grit with which they build our homes and facilitate our lives. These migrant workers consistently move from one place to another working in various jobs such as construction, brick kilns and similar job roles. Their families are vulnerable due to their unstable jobs, be it in their home town or while travelling with them from town to town.

The children in these families are more vulnerable to exploitation. Their parents have jobs that involve consistent moving, and as a result, they are made to discontinue school repeatedly. Once they discontinue their studies, these children get dragged into labour, or even worse due to their continuous migration they are more prone to being trafficked. Since there are many such communities in Warangal Urban, Telangana where migrant workers live, Mr. Mandala Parushuramulu, the Secretary of Abhyudaya Seva Samithi, one of Girls Advocacy Alliance network Child Safe Organisations, initiated his advocacy efforts. He did so with the Labour Department, Municipal Corporation and the District Administration in establishing work site schools for such vulnerable children.

"I want every child to be in the lap of education to build a strong nation", says Mr. Mandala Parushuramulu.

His efforts then resulted in the creation of 9 worksite schools by the District Administration and Labour Department. This initiative resulted in the owners of the respective worksites also extending their support in providing the basic necessities and provisions required for establishing a functioning school. This also helps the worksite be safer for everyone and allows the parents to work stress-free without worrying about their child's well-being.



Covid-19 Help Desk

GAA CSO forms a Help Desk during Covid-19 in collaboration with the town police.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr Rambabu, a representative of the Sai Neha Foundation from the GAA Network CSO collaborated with the Khammam town police in Telangana to arrange a helpdesk in the main junctions of the town.

They circulated information on Covid-19, primarily covering the details of the virus, its transmission, common symptoms, safe practices such as hand wash, wearing of masks and social distancing. Toll free numbers directing people to the Police, Child Line and the local Health Department (100 for police, 1098 for Childline, 104 for local health department); and the general do's and don'ts to combat Covid-19.

As people were confined to their homes, the possibility of domestic abuse on women and children was higher. Recognising the dangers of violence on girls and women, the Help Desk advised people to report these matters, seek protection and other safety measures.

Nearly 1,500 people were sensitised through these Help Desks. They were asked to seek help and be careful in interactions with others. Safe practices in the community were stressed upon and encouraged while also stressing the urgency of reporting domestic violence.



Drawing Attention through Art

A drawing competition is conducted by an NGO in the GAA network to spread awareness on child protection.

Even before COVID struck and the lockdown became the new normal, crimes against children were rampant. The biggest weapon that is used against children is their own innocence and sadly, children are not even aware of some of the abuses that they are subjected to.

With this increasing threat to children's safety and their exposure increasing exponentially by the day, it is imperative that children and parents identify threats to child protection to be able to effectively tackle child abuse.

Mr. Srinivas, the Secretary of the NGO Vijaya Sankalpam, a part of the Girls Advocacy Alliance Network from Warangal Urban is a strong child rights activist. He took the initiative in conducting a drawing competition on the topic, 'Child Protection' for children in the district which he announced in a press meet. This was undertaken to help children understand child protection better along with identifying and reporting different violence and abuses against them.

"I want every child to know their rights and be safe from the abuse and crimes against them", says Mr Srinivas affirming the intentions for the competition.

With around 300 children at the event on 1st Dec, 2019 at Public Garden, Hanamkonda, Warangal Urban, there was a huge response from the public and the event was a grand success.

"During my preparation for the drawing competition, I learnt so many new things about child rights and safety measures", said Ms. Deeksha, a 7th standard girl, one of the participants and prize winners.



Menstrual Health Awareness

GAA Network CSO addresses high dropout rates through menstrual hygiene and awareness support.

One of the major reasons for the high rate of girls dropping out of schools is the discomfort and outdated beliefs in regards to their monthly menstrual cycle. Discomfort arises because they do not have access to or do not use sanitary napkins and lack of bathroom facilities. Outdated beliefs that influence them staying home include being told not to come into contact with others. Missing a few days a month makes them drop out and remain at home, making them more vulnerable to child marriage.

With this view in mind, Mrs Madireddy Sridevi, a GAA networking CSO, the President of My People Welfare Organisation, began the initiative to educate adolescent girls and young women about women's health and hygiene along with awareness and utilisation of sanitary napkins. Through her organisation, she educates others about personal hygiene while regularly distributing sanitary napkins at no cost. She employs the use of LCD displays in schools, distributes pamphlets and explains clearly the importance of health care to the girls.

She conducts her work primarily in five mandals in the Khammam district: Nelakondapalli, Raghunadhapalem, Sathupalli, Kallur and Thirumalayapalem, all places with a high incidence of school dropouts and child marriages.

Her constant efforts to improve welfare of adolescent girls and promote secondary education has minimised the rate of dropout of schoolgirls. Through support from GAA individual toilets for girls in the schools have also been constructed. She has won numerous awards including an award from Ms TAMILISAI Soundarya Rajan, the Governor of Telangana and an award from Mr Karnan, the collector of Khammam district.

Ms Sridevi has distributed over 12,000 sanitary napkins and motivated almost 3,000 girls to continue their education, strong in the belief that every girl/woman is a nation builder contributing to a better tomorrow.



A Drop For Drop Outs

A GAA CSO is succesful in reinstating a bus service within the village which ensures that children can continue going to school.

One of the largest hurdles children in rural districts have in accessing education is transportation. Many children, especially girls, drop out as they are unable to access their schools due to long walks, bad weather conditions, unpaved roads and lack of safety.

In Warangal Rural district, Telengana is a village called Dabarpeet that had no bus services for upto a year due to a bridge reparation project that obstructed the way for children to reach their school. Very few families had private vehicles that could maneuver the diversion road. However, there were many families that could not offer even the minimal transportation facility for their children to reach schools and unfortunately, there was no Government High School within the village. In order to study at the secondary level, the children had to go to the neighbouring village.

All these factors considered along with the lack of the bus facility culminated in six girl children belonging to the poorest of the poor families in this village dropping out from secondary education.

Mr Kota David, Secretary of Chaya NGO, (one of Girls Advocacy Alliance Network's Child Safe Organisations) from Warangal Rural decided to change the status quo and was successful in advocating with the Transport Department in restarting the bus facility to the village. Notably, as one of the most dedicated persons towards child protection, Mr. David immediately contacted the TSRTC Depot Manager and they responded swiftly in providing a bus service through the alternate road available.

"It was the happiest moment for me to see a bright smile on the children's faces while they were off to school", says Mr David. He expressed his highest gratitude to Girls Advocacy Alliance for forming the great network of Child Safe Organisations.



Wedding photographers stand guard

GAA with the help of its network CSOs involves wedding photographers and videographers in ensuring the prevention of child marriages.

Observing that photographers and videographers have become vital to weddings, GAA network CSOs My People Welfare and Diksuchi in Telangana decided to conduct an outreach programme involving them. They interacted with the president of the Photographers and Videographers Association, Khammam, to discuss the adverse effects of child marriages.

Favourably reacting to it, the president of the union offered his cooperation by organising a workshop for the members on 15 March 2019. There were 2,000 photographers and videographers in attendance at the workshop where they were apprised on the situation of child marriage, and the vital role they could play in preventing this.

The team further lobbied with the president to pass an official circular to the members of the association to always verify documents before getting into an agreement with parties conducting the marriage. Documents issued by the government certifying the date of birth, SSC memo, Aadhar or others that would provide proof of age would be valid.

The result was that the Association President and executive members agreed and sent the circular to the association members insisting they verify documents. They further instructed the members to report any information on child marriage without fail to the concerned authorities. The GAA CSOs are in regular contact with the association to monitor these practices.



Building better lives

One of GAA's network CSOs initiates the construction of a government high school where there was no school before.

GAA has numerous partnerships and associations with organisations and government officials to achieve its goals of preventing child marriages, stopping child trafficking, and promoting higher education for girls.

Mr Sadhiq Pasha, as a representative of Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF), one of GAA CSOs network, focused on tackling these issues in Shivaigudem, a village in Khammam district, Telangana. There was no high school in the village which was causing over 250 children quitting schools and halting their education. As most of the parents in the village had not been to school, they were already unwilling to send their girls to school and without one nearby, the girls became extremely vulnerable to child marriage.

Mr Pasha mobilised VLCPC members and heads of Shivaigudem village, and the group approached the higher district officials in June 2018, requesting them to establish a high school in the village. They laid their concerns and showed how the lack of a school in the surroundings was the cause for children missing out on higher education and being victims of exploitation.

The collector Mr Hanumanth Kudimba, the Joint collector replied optimistically and assured he would resolve the problem as soon as possible. The group took the initiative to also approach other concerned departments to share the plight of their village and speed up the process when it reached the officials.

Eventually, the Education Department sanctioned a high school near the village in November 2019 which is under construction. With this, the children of Shivaigudem village have the chance to continue their schooling and with more children at school, the chances of child marriages lessen.



CSO stops Child Marriage

A GAA Network CSO's training on child reporting mechanisms pays off in stopping a child marriage during Covid-19

"I would not have participated in our group meetings and continued to attend my school without Laxmi akka's (sister's) interaction with my parents", says Mohini (name changed to protect identity), a girl studying in the ninth grade in ZPH School in Gottipadu Village, Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh.

Ms. T. Laxmi represents a GAA network CSO, Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society (APMSS), and works closely with the families in the villages of the Markapuram block. Adjacent to a forest where the Maoist influence is rampant, the block is one of the most backward. Laxmi formed and strengthened adolescent groups in these villages and created awareness on the issues of gender-based violence including child marriage, child trafficking, child sexual abuse and exploitation while also discussing the ill-effects.

Simultaneously, she has oriented the girls on state-run child protection mechanisms that inculcated a reporting system among those adolescent groups.

The parents of Mohini were arranging her marriage during the lockdown when the girl was home as schools were closed but Ms Laxmi's training paid off and the group members informed her about the impending marriage to take place on 15 August 2020, and also informed Childline 1098 and the CMPO. Laxmi's team immediately visited Mohini's house and counselled her parents, educating them about the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. The parents realised the situation and decided to let their daughter complete her education.

Laxmi says, "We don't hesitate to meet and counsel parents or guardians of children to stop such social evils; simultaneously, we don't hesitate to facilitate legal action against those who neglect our mission, for the greater cause of protecting children."



Postcards help transform VLCPCs

GAA CSOs initiate a postcard campaign for the restructuring of Village Level Child Protection Committies.

The Village Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs) have a crucial role to play in the protection and promotion of child rights. Recognising this, GAA CSOs network ARADM, Nenunnu, CRADO, Memunnamu Meekosam and Sai Neha foundation, SCOPE-RD GAA religious leaders and youth advocates in the Khammam district of Telangana collaborated to identify, redesign, and restructure VLCPCs at the base level to rapidly strengthen them.

Emails, SMSs, Whatsapp are the norm of the day, but the team proposed a fresh and original strategy to capture attention by opting to use the quaint postcard. The postcard campaign involved writing personal notes to all 586 village sarpanches in the district, appealing for the reformation of the committee.

This personal touch of handwritten postcards made the recipients take notice. The overwhelmingly positive response encouraged CSOs to be present there physically to assist in the smooth transitioning. The reformed VLCPCs were to constitute the Sarpanch as chairperson, religious leaders from each religion, two children – one from each gender, a CSO, a Panchayat Secretary, ward members, an anganwadi member, ANM and SHG leader among the primary members.

The campaign followed GAA orientation for elected sarpanches and monthly meetings that GAA CSOs conducted for sarpanches in their blocks.

So far, 8 VLCPCs have been restructured in their respective panchayat villages, with solemn oaths taken to abide by the rules of the committee and make resolutions accordingly.



Motoring awareness to the remote

CSOs organise a vehicle campaign in remote villages to spread awareness on child protection.

Good Help and Sneha Hastham are the GAA network CSOs in the Kanigiri division of Prakasam district. The surrounding areas primarily comprise of forest and agricultural fields. The agricultural labour from the surrounding villages would go to work and remain there depending on the demands of the work. When they did so, they would leave the children behind with the older people as there was a lack of facilities at their workplace.

The children remain at home, and this increases the scope of gender-based violence against children including child trafficking, child sexual abuse and exploitation. Child marriage also becomes prevalent as parents do not want to leave their children alone.

As the region is a remote terrain, access to the villages was difficult. The roads were only partially developed and not even public buses went by. The only way people travelled was by using autos from the closest bus stands. Due to this, people were not well informed about child rights and creating this awareness had also been difficult.

The team resolved to conduct a vehicle campaign involving likeminded CSOs and Youth Advocates using the IEC material developed by GAA. They hired a vehicle, a minivan, which motored across one village a day. On this van, they pasted posters, and in each village, they distributed the pamphlets to the public. These posters and pamphlets contained information on the issues and ill-effects of child marriage and child trafficking, including the legal provisions of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) 2006, and the need for promotion of secondary education for girls and vocational training for young women.

So far the team has covered nearly 20,000 people from 10 villages in the Kanigiri block through this vehicle campaign, bringing awareness to communities. Furthermore, they expressed their immense gratitude to GAA for aiding in capacity building and using their efforts for a noble cause.



Auto and Lorry drivers fight child trafficking

GAA through its CSOs ropes in auto and lorry drivers to ensure prevention of child trafficking enroute.

GAA CSOs network, CRADO and EFFORT observed that auto unions, lorry unions porters in bus stands and railway stations should be roped into the fight against child trafficking. This could help in preventing child and human trafficking where traffickers used autos, lorries, or trains.

In the Khammam district in Telangana, the team planned to involve 15,000 auto drivers and 5,000 lorry drivers working in the district. On 29 March 2019, they initiated a dialogue with Mr. Krishna, the President of Auto Union, and Mr. Srinivasa Rao, President of the Lorry Association and highlighted the crucial role these drivers could play in their capacity as civilians to stop child trafficking by acting as informers to the police and vigilance departments.

Taking into consideration the issue at hand, both the union presidents acquiesced to have an orientation programme for the union members. GAA CSOs conducted the orientation on child and human trafficking and the laws related to it, the vital role the drivers could play in preventing it. IEC material was also distributed. They also requested them to paste posters on the sides of their vehicles.

Engaging in the orientation boosted and motivated the drivers to work against trafficking. There was additional training by Mr Vinod Kumar, Secretary, District Legal Service Authority, on identifying vehicles that were being used for trafficking, as well as being able to spot traffickers. The Association presidents and executive members further instructed all association members to spread awareness camps by distribute IEC materials to passengers and the public about the consequences of trafficking.

This ensured that all auto drivers and lorry drivers of Khammam are conscious of child rights. It facilitated a system among them to report trafficking cases. Their participation and degree of accountability as community protectors have increased and are appreciated by the District Administration of Khammam district.



Uplifting a tribe

A CSO working closely with GAA provides education support to children from a tribal community who would beg on the streets.

As a community in urban or even rural societies we are not exposed to the sensitivities or the nuances that go into living as a nomadic tribal group in our country. This is especially true for tribal children who are unable to access decent education, a good standard of living and as a result do not come up in life. It is unfair that not all children are given equal access to opportunities.

Prabhath Rural Education Development Society (PRDS), working closely with GAA, addresses the issue of tribal childrens' education in the Kotta Cheruvu block, Anantapur District. In this block, there are few tribal villages where families do not educate their children due to poverty and lack of awareness.

"These children are discouraged from being educated and sent for begging by their own parents and guardians who are basically not educated," commented Ms. Sreevani, representative of PRDS, on how these families have to resort to sending their children to beg in the nearby pilgrim spot Puttaparthi.

Begging on the streets increases their risk of being trafficked. Being in school ensures that the children are protected. To change this status quo, the CSO mobilised resources to support the education of children in these communities by providing them with books, bags, pencils, slates, uniforms and shoes. Parents of the children were also counselled on the importance of education. A supplementary education centre where volunteers would help with subject-related doubts, moral stories, english grammar and fun math sessions was also instituted in the vicinity of these tribal villages.

The CSO also took it upon themselves to ensure these students were healthy by providing milk and bananas every day to each child who is attending the centre. Now close to 50 tribal children can proudly say they are on their way to being educated citizens of our country.



Aiding a local hero

GAA imparts advocacy skills to a CSO member with which he empowers tribal women.

A local hero and a member of the GAA-CSO family, Thota Lakshmi Narayana from the Railway Koduru block, YSR Kadapa District, has been serving the people from tribal villages in the block for 15 years. However, he realised he did not have the necessary skill sets to advocate for their well being, so he attended orientation and sensitisation workshops on advocacy and lobbying skills after he joined the GAA network.

"There is a need for constant advocacy efforts to fulfill the needs of tribal people, for their socio-economic and political upliftment," he said.

After being appropriately equipped with the necessary skill sets from the GAA workshops, he began advocating on tribal women and children issues. He sensitised the parents of tribal families on the issues and ill-effects of child marriages and importance of promoting education of the girl child. He lobbied with officials of the National Skill Development Corporation and through them, started a training center for the young women of tribal villages in Railway Kodur town.

Thanks to his efforts, 525 women in the village are now supported through tailoring, embroidery and handloom work. Now, the women are self-employed and earning Rs. 5000/- per month. Through Mr. Laxmi's work, they are also able to avail of Government schemes to support the education of their girl children.

"I am thankful to GAA – TdH-NL for providing me the opportunity to participate in the invaluable training and workshops. Due to these programmes, I was able to learn and act for the benefit of children", he added happily.



A Rainbow In the Gloomy Sky

GAA helps a transgender woman take her advocacy a notch higher.

"No matter what your gender is, where you are from, what your religion is, what your profession or your qualification is, you are living in a society with others. And you must give back something you can to help those in need," opined A Sarika, a transgender woman belonging to Kadapa District. She is a Bachelors degree holder in the fields of Science and Education, qualifying her to be a teacher in a government school. She went on to work in a private school in the district headquarters but faced stigma and discrimination which led her to resign.

Not letting such events douse her fire to make a change, Sarika went on to start the HASINI Association for Transgenders Welfare in Kadapa. She then began to participate in Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) network programmes, workshops and activities and realised the need for creating awareness on the ill effects of gender based violence and promotion of secondary education for girls and job oriented vocational training for young women.

She started sensitizing adolescent girls and parents on ill-effects of child marriages in ASR Nagar, Kadapa, which is a notably vulnerable slum in the town for child marriages. She also supported the Women and Child Development Department to prevent 8 Child Marriages in this area. As the President of the Transgender Association, she also passed a resolution in the Association that all members should be bound to creating awareness on the issues and ill-effects of child marriages and on importance of education for the girl child.

She took her efforts a notch higher by advocating with the government officials of respective line departments on the issues protection and welfare of children and women. As a result of her efforts and good rapport with officials, the judiciary selected her as a Para Legal Volunteer and made her a permanent member in the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA).

THANK YOU GAA

A note from Terre des Hommes Netherlands

Dear Religious Leaders, GAA Network CSO Representatives, Youth Advocates, respected partners and our beloved project team members in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana State,

From the bottom of our hearts, we extend our gratitude and convey our regards to one and all of you for extending your unstinted efforts in substantiating the marvelous mission of our GAA programme in India. We would not have achieved such splendid success and noteworthy progress without your sincere support and fierce commitment. We would like to reiterate that, there is your presence either directly or indirectly in every bit of our achievement during the programme tenure. Your auspicious association has made our journey memorable and fun. The contribution made by each and every one of you is invaluable and any amount of praise would be an understatement. Every moment that we have worked with you is a milestone towards a more secure, protected and nurturing world for the girl child.

We hope our association continues for further great assignments towards the gracious cause of providing equal rights and opportunities to girls and young women

Mr. Thangaperumal Ponpandi
Country Manager, India
Terre des Hommes Netherlands

Mr. Subrat Kumar Panda
GAA India Project Coordinator
Terre des Hommes Netherlands



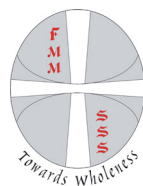
OUR PARTNERS



Shramika Vikasa Kendram (SVK) works to eradicate child labour, universalise elementary education and empower women socially.



Society for Community Participation and Education in Rural Development (SCOPE-RD) registered in the year of 1992, works towards the welfare of children at risk.



FMMSSS (Fransican Missionaries of Mary Social Service Society) promotes the development of women, youth and children through awareness activities on various socio-economic development interventions.



RAIDS works for the alleviation of child abuse and exploitation in Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh. It also works to prevent child marriage.



HELP works for the rescue and rehabilitation of victims, especially children in Andhra Pradesh, who are trafficked for sex.



HANDS in Anantapur district works towards addressing child trafficking and child marriage in the state of Andhra Pradesh through awareness and advocacy.



Children of India, a non profit organisation registered in Coimbatore engages in work related to education, health, livelihoods and emergency response.



Advocacy Inspires Action - Religious Leaders and CSOs is the second volume of a 4 book series highlighting the success of the Girl's Advocacy Alliance (GAA) project in India. Led by Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) with partners Shramika Vikas Kendram (SVK), FMMSSS, Scope RD, HELP, RAIDS, HANDS and Children of India Foundation (CIF) the project is operational in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.



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