



Children Empowerment for Getting Out of the Devadasi System

Empowering Children of Devadasis

terre des hommes
stops child exploitation



The Problem

The Devadasi System is a traditional practice where postpubertal girls from socio-economically deprived dalit families are dedicated to Goddesses, post which they are forced to choose sex work as their livelihood. The children and young girls from the community are isolated, face stigma due to their status, and drop out from school. Due to lack of vocational skills, education, and alternate livelihood opportunities, they are highly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence. These factors also result in them being socio-economically downtrodden.

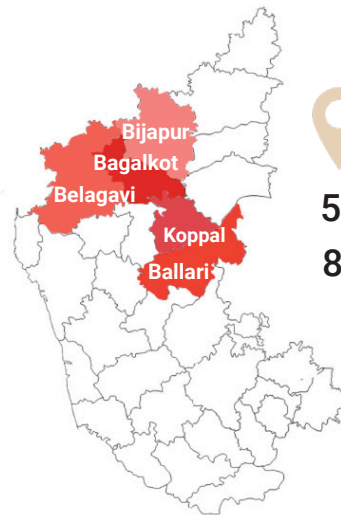
Our Action

We identify children of Devadasis in North Karnataka who are vulnerable to and victims of exploitation, and work to empower them. The project follows the Child Participation approach to facilitate empowerment where girls are trained in child rights, advocacy and research to help them voice out their concerns and bring about change. The girls are also provided with access to education and alternate livelihood opportunities. We also sensitise communities and advocate with authorities to include the Devadasis in their agenda.

The project began in 2019 and will close in 2022.



Dedication ceremonies where girls adorn green bangles as a mark of a Devadasi



5 Districts
81 Villages

Key Stakeholder Engagement

	4114 children
	9225 families and communities
	71 CSOs
	360 Government Officials
	342 Law Officials

Project Activities 2021

1. Child Participation

These set of interventions include identifying and enrolling children of Devadasis in Children's Clubs (Kishori Clubs) and training them in child rights, child protection mechanisms and advocacy. Child Led Research forms a main component where children are trained in research methodologies such as surveys, interviews, photography and videography to help document problems and present it to concerned authorities.

With **108 functional Kishori clubs**, the reach of the activities was the following :

2764	girls trained through Kishori Clubs		
1742	vulnerable girls	1022	exploited girls
380	girls trained in life skills and child led research		



A life skills training session on communication skills

2. Education

The project also works to provide children of Devadasis access to formal education through enrolling them in schools, providing study material and counselling families. The following is the reach of the activities.

2625 girls continue their schooling

9 girls newly supported

83 libraries were set up for girls with books on general knowledge, story books, puzzles and exam guides.



Libraries set up for the girls to access knowledge during the pandemic

3. Livelihood

To provide young girls with a choice of alternate livelihood, the project imparts job oriented vocational training courses, where the girls are trained in skills that are

in demand. Devadasi women were also provided training in financial management and a sum of Rs.30,000 each to invest in businesses such as vegetable sales, petty shop etc.



Girls displaying the clothes they designed and stitched.

255 girls undergo vocational training

135 tailoring and fashion design

104 computer skills

16 auto and 4 wheeler driving

75 Devadasi women invest in small businesses

4. Community Sensitisation

The project also sensitises relevant stakeholders such as temple priests and the larger community, on the rights of Devadasis and their protection systems, so as to create a community which



A large community sensitisation programme

prevents dedications and ensures that the Devadasis and their children are protected.

1641 community individuals sensitised

136 temple priests sensitised

229 para legal volunteers sensitised

1200 school children sensitised

67 media officials sensitised

5. Advocacy

Advocacy efforts involved organising interfaces with the Government and Law Enforcement agencies to enact/ amend laws/policies for the well being of the Devadasi community along with addressing their concerns.

217 government officials trained and sensitised

15 lobby and advocacy meetings held with the government



A District Level interface with the DLSA

Case Story

"After learning how to ride an auto rickshaw I feel I am no less than boys", says Rani (name changed), whose mother is a Devadasi.

Rani is undergoing an auto and car driving training upon which she will be able to take it up as a profession.

"If not for this training, I would have certainly fallen into exploitation. Now I have the option to earn a living with dignity and pride. There is a huge demand for female drivers and I am certain I will do well", she adds.



Testimonials



"The sensitisation programmes have made me feel responsible to protect children of Devadasis



Sri. Prasanna Swamiji
Temple Priest



"With the economic support, I have invested in vegetable sales and my income has increased by 20%



Lakshmi
Devadasi mother



"After awareness, our children and teachers are working to make things better for Devadasi girls.



Mr. Gopalaswamy
Government School Principal

Key Impact



275 girls
become secondary school graduates



Avg 15-20% increase
in Devadasi household income through livelihood support.



20+ civic issues
solved by Kishori Girls



28 girls rescued from
harmful exploitation

Best Practice 2021

Kishori Patrol

With training from the Kishori Clubs, the girls have formed a patrol group amongst themselves and monitor cases of child exploitation.



When the girls get to know of an impending child marriage, they call 1098 to stop it from happening. Officials visit the potential victims' houses and give a legal warning to their families issuing a written statement. In the case of dedications, girls in the group inform the project staff if they hear of/ witness any potential case. The staff then visits the respective girls' homes and warn them of the legal repercussions. **Following this practice has helped successfully stop 22 child marriages and 6 dedications in 2021 across all project locations.**