



FOSTERING ADOLESCENT GIRL LEADERS

INTERVENTION BRIEF – SAMATA: KEEPING GIRLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL



Girls are equal to boys and have a right to study and work. We should exercise those rights. My parents are very supportive. If I don't study well and get a job, I will have to do hard agricultural labour in the field. I will be dependent on the landowner to earn money. But if I am a professional, I can lead an independent life because I will get a salary and be paid on time."

CHANDRAKALA BASAVARAJ ADVANI, ADOLESCENT GIRL, BAGALKOT

At the heart of the Samata intervention is the development of a cadre of adolescent girl leaders who will sustain changes in favour of girls' education and gender equality in their villages. The programme mentors girls to become confident and vocal young feminists, active in their communities and schools. Samata aims to equip them with the knowledge and skills to effectively negotiate a space that is hostile to women. Overall, the Samata programme has reached 3,600 girls across 69 villages in 2 districts of Bagalkot and Bijapur in northern Karnataka.

How are the adolescent girls identified?

The research team made a randomised selection of villages and collated a master line list of scheduled caste and tribe (SC/ST) girls in Class 7 from the schools in these villages. The team validated the line list by visiting the families to verify the girls' availability. At the beginning of each academic year in June, the team validates the list of Class 7 girls in the villages.

Researchers map the profiles of girls and families by collecting information on socioeconomic background, education of family members including any history of school drop out and details about each girl such as her age, marital status and the standard of education.

All girls from SC/ST communities who live in the village are listed for the programme, even if they attend a school outside the village or if they come from other areas but attend the village school as a residential student in government hostel.

What criteria are used for prioritising the girls for inclusion?

Girls are categorised as highly vulnerable if they are:

- from families with many daughters
- married and have not yet moved to the husband's house
- already engaged to be married

Girls are categorised as facing medium vulnerability if they are:

- from single women-headed households
- from families that migrate in search of work
- from families without a member earning an income
- orphaned

Girls are categorised as facing low vulnerability if they are:

- regularly absent from the school (at least once or twice a week)
- kept at home to do household chores
- showing disinterest in attending school



In what ways does Samata engage adolescent girls?

1. Outreach

Women outreach workers (ORWs) are recruited and given induction training on Samata's objectives and then a further four days of training on sex and gender. The ORWs make one-to-one visits to the adolescent girls at their homes, at school or during group meetings in the village. An ORW meets every girl at least once a month, and meets girls who are defined as highly vulnerable at least once every two weeks.

In these one-to-one conversations, the ORW and adolescent girl discuss health; education; social entitlements; instances of harassment at home, at school or in the community; and the girl's interest in participating in an adolescent girls group and her availability. During group outreach, the ORW and the girls discuss accessing Sneha clinics, availability of toilets at schools, any discrimination by teachers and girls' actions as a result of what they are learning in the group.

Each ORW is involved with between 90 and 130 adolescent girls from 3 or 4 villages.

2. Parivartan Plus

Parivartan Plus is a life skills education programme to build the confidence and self esteem of adolescent girls. Those girls who are in the line list and are in Classes 10, 9 and 8 are chosen to be part of a Parivartan Plus group, made up of 15 to 20 members.

Teams from Samata and the International Center for Research on Women worked together to develop the Parivartan Plus curriculum, based on the Samata theory of change and the social context of the villages. ORWs are trained as facilitators in a ten-day, three-phase process over one and a half months.

The ORWs hold Parivartan Plus sessions on the weekends at the village community centre or in the school in the evenings or at one of the girls' houses. After the first few sessions, girls who emerge as leaders take on the role of mobilising other girls to participate. For those girls who live on the outskirts of a village or in farmlands, Samata holds a condensed three-day residential training covering all the modules. The sessions focus on understanding values, enhancing self esteem, managing emotions, effective communication, assertiveness, conflict resolution, gender and sex, gender equality, gender roles and discrimination, masculinity and femininity, a healthy body and human rights.

Parivartan Plus is designed to equip girls to challenge social norms, assert their rights, address problems with parents and teachers, reflect critically, work towards change and challenge inbuilt stigma to create positive self images. Girls trained in Parivartan Plus share their learning with classmates.

As of mid-2016, 73 groups (1,263 girls) had been formed. Of these, 56 groups (918 girls) had completed all the sessions.

3. Community Advisory Board

Samata formed a community advisory board (CAB) in each district to ensure that girls themselves:

- have input into the programme
- sustain the adolescent girls' movement
- take their agenda forward even after the life of the Samata programme

Each CAB member is selected by her Parivartan Plus group to represent them in the district-level collective. Each CAB is made up of about 20 girls.

The Samata team developed CAB training on community mobilisation, volunteerism and creating action plans for projects. ORWs mobilise these adolescent girl leaders from the Parivartan Plus groups to attend a two-day residential training, based on real life stories and group activities, and conducted by the Deputy Director and Director of Samata at the district headquarters.

CAB members perform many roles such as advocating for children's rights with government departments at the district level, proactively using the Child Helpline to stop child marriages in their villages, giving peer to peer education, engaging with families and supporting ORWs to get peers who have dropped out back to school.

By mid-2016, 35 girls from 35 villages were part of district CABs.



GIRL LEADERS PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGE

Adolescent girls have stopped several child marriages and helped peers to return to schools. The leadership and life skills training, using the Parivartan Plus curriculum, have empowered the girls to take bold positive action to ensure that their classmates can continue their education. Other girls in the village, who are not part of the programme, reach out to Parivartan Plus girls for assistance.

In one of the Samata villages, an adolescent girl called Sahana was going to be forced to go to her husband's house as a result of the marriage that was solemnised when she was an infant. Sahana had attained puberty a year earlier and social conventions dictated that she must now assume the responsibilities of a wife. As the pressure to depart for her husband's house built up, she approached a Parivartan Plus member. The girl from the Parivartan Plus group took the issue to the CAB and together the girls involved the teacher and the outreach worker, called the government Child Helpline (1098) and accepted police assistance. As a result of these combined efforts, Sahana's joining her husband was postponed until at least after she completes Class 10.

This heartening success shows how an empowered group of girls can lead the fight to realise their own and their peers' rights.

4. Leadership training

Groups of Parivartan Plus and CAB members in each village undergo leadership training to create a cadre and spread the influence of girl leaders at the village level. For leadership training, ORWs select from amongst the girls who have participated in Parivartan Plus for six to eight months. The eight-day training is conducted by an external facilitator using a curriculum developed by the Samata team. Spread over three months, the training combines knowledge and skills, with take-home exercises for girls to put learning into action.



By mid-2016, 202 girls had participated in the leadership training, which is held at district level.

5. Tuition classes

Girls who under-perform academically are more likely to drop out. So, to support girls to improve on low scores in mid-term examinations, Samata organises tuition classes. After discussions with the family, girls and schools, Samata identifies teachers from the same village to offer tuition in Maths, English and Science for three months before the annual exam. The project pays the tuition fee of Rs.300 per month for each girl student. Those girls who fail in the main exam are given tuition for a month before the supplementary exams.

Over a period of three years, 1,188 girls have had this form of tuition. Of those from Class 10 who received tuition, 986 girls passed the exams.

6. Access to entitlements and services

Samata helps girls to access a range of entitlements and services from the government such as education schemes, hostel facilities, free bus passes, access to Sneha clinics and nutrition packets for adolescent girls. ORWs and their supervisor identify the girls who need services, and record the entitlements the girls have accessed or are yet to receive. They then liaise with the relevant government departments, schools, Anganwadis and public health centres to help girls access the benefits.

Samata has helped 389 families access their entitlements and linked adolescent girls to a total of 4,699 schemes.

7. Conventions and events

Samata organises conventions of girls and other events to mark the International Day of the Girl Child and Women's Day, for:

- celebrating the value of girls and their education
- sharing role models' stories
- the community to interact with the girls and the programme
- sports competitions
- street plays by adolescent girls
- street art by girls on themes of equality and gender discrimination
- speeches by officials from government departments
- parents, girls and families to share their stories

Other regular events include community dialogues at district or village level, as forums for adolescent girls to interact with other community members. Communities contribute in kind and cash and help to organise these events.

As of mid-2016, Samata had held a total of 46 events, with participation by 1,521 girls, as well as 69 community dialogues attended by 17,515 people.

How does Samata track the work with girls?

The Samata team fills in a number of key tracking documents

DOCUMENT	RECORDS
Outreach form	date, names and other information from and to families
Event register	number of participants, agenda and outcomes
Master line list register	unique id and vulnerability profile for each girl that Samata works with
Parivartan Plus group report	number of girls who attended and their names, facilitator's name, key areas of discussion, actions taken after the session
Individual files	a profile of each girl and her family, plus changes observed as a result of the intervention

Challenges

As Samata is a project-based intervention, it is a challenge to sustain the momentum of changes, large or small, after the life of the project. Even small sustainability mechanisms, such as creating a cadre of girl leaders to keep the knowledge within the community, requires continuous investment.

The migration of families makes it difficult to reach the girls and their families, and can disrupt or end outreach and programme services.

A complex web of vulnerabilities, working in tandem, mark the girls' lives – it is challenging for a programme to address so many of them simultaneously.



Acknowledgements

The Samata study is a project of the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust, a partner in the STRIVE research consortium, Tackling the Structural Drivers of HIV, supported by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies. The project is also supported by University of Manitoba and ViiV Healthcare.

This brief was prepared by Sriparna Chattopadhyay, Priya Pillai and H S Srikantamurthy with inputs from Parinita Bhattacharjee and Raghavendra T. Special thanks to Uma Patil, Kumar, Vadde and all the outreach workers for supporting the data collection. Thanks to Priya Pillai, N P Jayan and Annie Holmes for photographs.

© 2016 KHPT