

SCHOOLS BECOME SAFER AND FRIENDLY FOR GIRLS

INTERVENTION BRIEF – SAMATA: KEEPING GIRLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL



First we need to change ourselves as teachers and then our families. If we are supported to learn about initiating change in ourselves, then it is easier for us to do it our schools.”

S.P. JANGOWDAR, HEADMASTER, DISTRICT BANJARA EDUCATION SOCIETY HIGH SCHOOL, BIJAPUR

Samata works with 64 schools across 49 villages in two districts of Bagalkot and Bijapur in northern Karnataka. Teachers and members of the School Development Management Committee (SDMC) are given gender training, as they are key stakeholders in transforming schools into gender-responsive teaching and learning environments.

The Samata programme team developed a training manual that addresses:

- concepts of gender as a social construct and a product of patriarchy
- social institutions from a gender perspective
- gender stereotypes in schools
- ways in which teachers can promote gender equality and SDMCs can foster gender responsiveness

The module for SDMCs includes additional information on the roles and responsibilities of these committees.

How are the schools chosen?

For inclusion in the programme, the Samata team and advisors choose government or government-aided high schools and higher primary schools with Class 8 from the intervention villages.

In what ways does Samata engage the schools?

1. Teacher training

An external resource person developed the gender training manual and Samata organised a training of trainers for 20 experienced personnel from local NGOs, Karnataka State Trainers Collective and sociology lecturers.

A team – a mix of Samata team members and external resource people – facilitates non-residential training over three days. They use participatory activity and discussion-based methodologies.

Three teachers from a school are chosen at one time to be part of the trainee group. A total of 135 female and 296 male teachers from 64 intervention schools have been trained in phases.

2. SDMC training

The Samata team adapted the manual for teacher training to make it suitable for training SDMC members. All SDMC or Management Committee members from aided schools are selected but Samata makes particular efforts to ensure the participation of women members. Mobilisation includes an individual invitation letter from the school principal, followed by house visits by the outreach worker (ORW).

Resource people who conduct the gender training for teachers also facilitate the SDMC training. This takes the form of non-residential training over two days at the village cluster level.

A total of 180 female and 255 male SDMC members from all the intervention schools have been trained.

3. Career counselling

Samata organises career counselling for all Class 10 students, both girls and boys. External resource people, ORW supervisors or Samata’s District Programme Coordinator conduct the half-day sessions at each school, sharing information on:

- options for higher studies
- government support to pursue higher education
- job-oriented courses for those who do not wish to study further

A total of 3,817 girls and 4,523 boys received career counselling from 2013 to 2015.

4. Gender action plans (GAPs)

The objective of drawing up a gender action plans (GAP) is to make the school more responsive to the needs of the girls. Teachers and SDMC members draw up the GAP in a collaborative process with the adolescent girl and boys leader, the headmaster and the Samata ORW and Supervisor. They make the plan in a one-day workshop after all the teachers and SDMC members have received gender training. The GAP lists the needs of the girl students and sets targets for achieving them, including ways to mobilise resources for implementation.

As of 2015, a total of 49 schools had drawn up GAPs.

5. Safety committees

Samata works with each school to establish a Safety Committee, to fulfil the requirement stipulated in the 20-point programme by the Government of Karnataka. The main role of the committee is to ensure school safety measures and infrastructure as per UNICEF and WHO guidelines.

The process involves several steps:

- the Samata ORW and supervisor hold preliminary meetings with the headmaster and senior teachers
- the headmaster writes to the relevant government departments requesting a representative to be part of the committee
- the committee is constituted under the leadership of the headmaster and includes as members the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), Anganwadi worker, one representative of the policy and the Gram Panchayat, male and female teachers and students
- Samata's ORW, a crucial link between the children and the school, is also a committee member

As of 2015, 49 schools had formed safety committees.



SDMC MEMBER DELAYS HER DAUGHTER'S MARRIAGE

Vijayalakshmi, one of the SDMC members of the Adagal school, works as an ASHA in her village. She has a daughter who is now in class 10th. Vijayalakshmi was not convinced about the value of keeping a girl in school post-puberty until gender training and exposure to gender action and safety plans shifted her thinking. What made the most difference were frank discussions with ORWs about the negative impact of early marriage on girls and about the adverse health impact of early childbirth, which she witnessed as an ASHA.

Today, Vijayalakshmi encourages her daughter to continue attending school even beyond Class 10. She also tries to persuade relatives and neighbours in her hamlet not to get their daughters engaged or married early. Her decision not to marry her daughter till she turned 18 years old led to fights with her brothers and she lost their support. Her family refused to visit her for a year. But she stayed firm, not giving in to pressure tactics such as the promise of continued support for her daughter's education if she got her married. Vijayalakshmi attributes her resolve to the support of the ORWs and her husband.

How do Samata schools track girls' attendance and progress?

1. Tracking tool

The Samata team developed this tool as a way to track the attendance and drop out from school of each girl from a scheduled caste or tribe (SC/ST) in the Samata programme.

Laid out in the form of a table, the tool collates and helps track information on each girl's vulnerability profile, quarterly academic performance and any absence from school and reasons for it.

Samata's monitoring and evaluation officer trains class teachers to use the tool, which is regularly updated by the ORW as well as the teachers. Data from the tool is analysed once per quarter. Absenteeism or concern about a child's performance prompts action by the Safety Committee or the SDMCs, along with discussions with parents.

2. Absenteeism tracking tool

Until 2015–16, intervention schools used the tracking tool to monitor girls' discontinuation and dropout. But the potential delay of three months before responding to dropout made it difficult to bring girls back to school after such a long discontinuation. Instead, in the second cohort of the study, girls' absenteeism is tracked on a weekly basis, to minimise the numbers of girls who miss school or dropout altogether.



GENDER TRAINING INSPIRES TEACHERS TO ENCOURAGE GIRLS

Until September 2014, outdoor sports were considered largely as an activity for boys in the District Banjara Education Society High School in Atharga village, Bijapur. However, after gender training, teachers spoke to the school management and the students about the idea of having boys and girls play together. At first, students were surprised at the suggestion but ideas have changed.

Boys say: "We rarely played with the girls before. We thought that outdoor sports were only for boys. But they can also play just like us. They just need the chance."

Girls say: "Great! They see that we can do what boys do, so now we get more of a role in other school activities too. This will help address gender discrimination."

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