

# Leadership and Communication Camp A REPORT

**Empowered Sphoorthi girls set to ignite  
change in North Karnataka villages**





In a remote corner of Yelburga taluk in the Koppal district, a few school children neatly attired in blue T-shirts found a new spring in their step. They just landed back in their village, Dhammuru, in a mini-van, from a two-day Leadership and Communication camp, spending a night away from home, but wasted no time as they raised slogans and attracted the attention of the villagers. As soon as the crowd gathered, they did a quick intuitive skit, with a message to stop Child Marriages.

“Why tie the knot now, wait till 21? Stop them, stop ‘em..., stop forcing kids to marry,” is their clear message to the elders and parents as they raised slogans in Kannada. Dancing and singing, in just five minutes, they made their presence felt. It was not part of the module nor were they told to do so. But the improvised show sent a clear sign that a transformative movement has just begun. It is just a new-found skill they acquired in the camp, and they spontaneously implemented it in their own style.

“The villagers or the parents will not take them for granted, anymore,” said Sharadha, a Resource Girl and product of the Sphoorthi first batch in Koppal. “It is just a small dose of self-confidence and freedom, they want to inculcate in themselves,” she added.

One among the seven districts that organised the camps under the Sphoorthi Project was Koppal, which also saw a successful pilot at a small scale in 2016 that laid the foundations for the current camps that saw the participation of about 7,000 adolescent girls. They are from classes 8, 9 and 10.

“We encourage them to think on their own. One of the main goals is to spur their inherent talent and channelise it in the right direction for change,” said Prakash Marpady, Project Lead, Sphoorthi- Yadgir, who took care of the event at a school in Surpur taluk, who stopped a Community Organiser from prompting a young girl who was taking part in a video shoot for social media. Apart from Koppal and Yadgir districts, in the five other districts, Bagalkot, Vijayapura, Kalaburagi, Raichur and Belgaum, the project is supported by the Government of Karnataka.



# 1. Introduction

The upbringing of girls in India differs from that in the West, with the prevalence of disabling gender norms and the unfortunate perception of the birth of a girl child as an unwelcome event in many households. This hampers their development, while the birth of a boy child is celebrated. In rural Karnataka, similar trends persist, with 25 per cent of adolescent girls being married off before the age of 18, and 10 per cent between 15–19 years becoming mothers. Notably, these pregnancies occur after marriage, unlike in Western countries. Underdeveloped districts in Karnataka, such as Yadgir, Raichur, and Bagalkot, have low Gender Parity Index rankings (UNICEF). These regions, marked by high poverty rates and regressive social traditions, expose adolescent girls to school dropout, early marriage, and childbirth risks. Furthermore, they face severe restrictions on their rights and mobility, often justified under the guise of safety and protection.

## 1.1 Project Sphoorthi

The Sphoorthi project aims at empowering adolescent girls and transforming social norms by adopting a community-centric approach and striving to improve adolescent girls' overall quality of life by working with their families, boys and community groups. Through Life Skills-based interventions, the project helps adolescents gain self-confidence and self-esteem, which in turn helps them take charge of their lives.



### **Sphoorthi girls during an LSE session**

The project involved two stages: first, developing a group of rural girls as Role Model Girls (RMGs) equipped with the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills to challenge gender norms. Second, the RMGs and their parents worked with other girls, known as Peer Girls (PGs), and their parents in the villages, transferring these empowering qualities and fostering community-wide social change.

To cultivate critical attitudes towards gender equality, self-esteem, and confidence, the project

organises life-skill education sessions, Samvadas (dialogues), leadership and communication camps, and exposure visits for girls in the same age group. Parents and community leaders are engaged through these dialogues to address their roles in perpetuating poor gender norms and to garner their support for other peer girls. These efforts indirectly facilitated increased access to resources like nutrition and education for the girls through family and community support. Once trained, the girls and their parents held regular meetings to discuss issues affecting their lives.

Child marriage and early childbearing are closely-linked phenomena. In India, almost all teenage pregnancies occur within marriage due to societal pressure and a lack of sexual and reproductive health knowledge. “Besides the immediate and long-term health and psychological consequences, early marriage and childbearing often force girls to abandon their aspirations, such as education or economic pursuits. This can lead to financial insecurity, gender inequality, domestic violence, and mental health issues, negatively impacting the girls, their children, and the community,” said Mohan Chandra, who was part of the team that designed the programme. Moreover, at a macro level, these issues affect a nation's economy and development.

The project envisions a future where adolescent girls are recognised as leaders and change agents, shaping inclusive and equitable societies within their communities.

## 2. Pre-camp preparations

Community Organisers (CO), the staff of KHPT, who were locally based, visited the villages and prepared the ground for the camps. Many of the girls were trained in life skills with stress on their physical and mental health, and awareness was raised about the importance of topics like freedom, leadership, attitudes, decision-making, problem-solving etc. Awareness was also created about physical health by discussing body mass, menstrual health, usage of pads, disposal of pads, keeping their houses and surroundings clean and other aspects of mental health like what 'Freedom' means to them in their local context and at home, who is controlling them, why they are controlling, and the resultant fear and the suppression of their feelings. Many adolescent girls attend these weekly meetings and girls from each of the villages were selected after convincing the parents which was a huge task but the hard work of the COs paid off, as the final numbers touched about 70 per cent of the total RMGs.

### 2.1. The Training of Trainers (ToT) at Dharwad

Prior to the camp, subject experts and facilitators participated in a Training of Trainers (ToT) session in Dharwad, where they discussed a detailed camp module prepared by external resource persons. The module contained participatory activities and an activity-based learning approach to effectively engage the girls. Project Staff, including the District Project Coordinators (DPC), Field Coordinators (FC), Taluk Coordinators (TC) and Community



■ Our staff with the trainer

Organisers (CO) from each district where the Sphoorthi project is being implemented, attended the Training of Trainers (ToT) at Dharwad.

### 2.2 - Making arrangements on the ground

The COs, many of whom were only recruited in late 2022, were based locally in the villages. They created awareness, and encouraged the parents to send their girls for the overnight camp. They identified the girls made arrangements for transport and coordinated with local community and Panchayat leaders. It was a thankless job as most of the parents initially refused to send their girls out, especially as it involved them staying out of home for a night, which is considered unsafe. "This is a new concept for them. They could not digest that girls could stay away from their parents on a strange and unknown school campus. How can I be sure they will be safe, almost every parent had the same question," revealed a Community Organiser.



■ Our staff making arrangements at the entrance of the camp.

# 3. Camp Design

The residential camp was organised for students aged 12 to 16 from 20 different Panchayats, including some urban Panchayats, across 11 taluks in seven districts of Northern Karnataka (Koppal, Yadgir, Belagavi, Bagalkot, Raichur, Kalaburagi, and Vijayapura). However, due to parental reservations about sending their daughters for an overnight stay, the attendance, as expected, fell short a bit. Nevertheless, the residential camp held at 19 government school venues from May 15 to 26 proved successful in sparking ideas and instilling values in the young minds.

Overall, the residential camps in Northern Karnataka served as a transformative experience for the participating students, fostering their personal growth, self-belief, and motivation to make them ready to create a positive impact in their communities.

Any attendance over 60 per cent was considered a significant turnaround in the lives of these rural students but the target of over 70 per cent was achieved. These RMGs are expected to play a crucial role in training their peers and influencing villagers, including their own parents. The experience of attending the camp was particularly impactful for these adolescents, as most of them had never spent a night away from their parents before. It provided them with a sense of achievement, and a taste of freedom, and significantly boosted their self-confidence.

For these adolescents, the experience at the camp was eye-opening. It provided them with a sense of achievement and a taste of freedom, even if only for a day, which greatly boosted their self-confidence. The project's key objectives resonated with the village girls, tapping into their immense potential.



■ Sphoorthi girls entering the campsite

By empowering these young girls and providing them with leadership and communication skills, the aim is to create a ripple effect within the communities, where they become catalysts for change and inspiration for others.

“The design of the camp was to make the girls come out of their homes to meet other girls like them, interact and share their stories with each other.” Mr Mohan Chandra, Resource Person

## 3.1 Objectives of the Camp

- ◆ Equipping the girls with leadership and communication skills.
- ◆ Motivating the girls to take up leadership roles within their community.
- ◆ Enhancing their organising skills, including forming groups, managing conflicts within groups, directing the group towards common goals, and addressing issues of concern among peer adolescent girls.
- ◆ Engaging the community to create an environment where individual girls overcome their fears and feel empowered to express themselves.



## 3.2 Keeping the girls engaged

The camps in North Karnataka were meticulously designed to cater to the specific context and culture of the region, which is known for its backward districts. The project's Taluk Coordinators, Field Coordinators, Community Organisers and other staff, collaborated with expert resource persons to deliver training sessions focused on leadership and communication skills.



■ A government school in Koppal

The camps took place at government schools, primarily at Morarji Desai Residential Schools and other government schools such as Kittur Rani Chennamma schools. The accommodation provided was safe and secure, with female staff ensuring the girls' protection.

Apart from male KHPT staff and fathers of girls, no one else was allowed into the camps. The camps were organised across 11 taluks in seven districts, covering 1078 villages and 262 Gram Panchayats, including two Zilla Panchayats. Each taluk hosted up to five camps at two or three schools. The duration of each batch was spread over two days, beginning around 11 a.m. on the first day and concluding around 4 p.m. on the following day. On average, each batch consisted of approximately 80 to 100 girls.

The camp experience was an adventure into the unknown for the girls, but it proved to be rewarding and fulfilling. The girls actively participated and absorbed every aspect of the activities and teachings provided. The thoughtful lessons behind each activity, delivered with affection and concern,

created a unique learning experience distinct from their regular schooling. The girls expressed their enthusiasm and eagerness to attend more camps, highlighting the impact of the program.

The camp's design captivated the girls from the beginning and kept them engaged throughout the duration. The interactive and interesting activities were specially tailored to stimulate young minds and provided a safe space for participants to overcome their fears. Apart from mentors, and resource persons, former Sphoorthi girls acted as Resource Girls, to support and guide the participants. The exposure to new activities not only facilitated learning but also ensured an enjoyable experience. The camp sessions were predominantly activity-based, incorporating outdoor games, role plays, and theme-based games that fostered rapport, independent thinking, and public speaking. Some girls displayed immediate leadership qualities and excelled in their on-stage performances, while others took their initial steps towards development but became active and articulate by the end of Day 2.

The camp faced initial challenges in terms of low attendance, particularly in districts like Vijayapura, which are affected by backwardness. However, the Community Organisers worked diligently to spread positive feedback and video evidence of the camp's impact, convincing more parents to allow their daughters to participate in the subsequent batches. Initially hesitant parents, like Nandita's father, were convinced of the camp's safety by the coordinator, leading to a positive change in perception.

“Initially, we were reluctant to send her out. But the coordinator madam convinced us about the safety. Now my daughter plans to start a group,” said Nandita's father. The young girl is preparing to start a ‘Reading Club’ demonstrating the initiative and inspiration gained from the camp. She has already discussed it with her Granthalaya Palikaru, a lady who runs the local Panchayat Library in her village.

“These games are not just play, there is a thoughtful lesson behind every activity and the way they taught us with affection and concern, the understanding and experience is quite different from what we learnt at school. I loved it and am eager to attend more camps,” said Nandita, a Class 10 student from a Lambani tanda, Hebbala in Hunasagi taluk, Yadgir district.

### 3.3 Challenging the Status Quo

The Sphoorthi project is actively challenging the status quo with the support of caregivers and parents. It advocates for the safety and participation of adolescent girls in public spaces, aiming to change prevailing attitudes and perceptions about girls' capabilities and aspirations. The project recognises the need to empower girls to challenge the existing norms and practices.



**Sphoorthi girls in a group activity**

“Whether it is child marriages, discrimination of girl child or about superstitions, the girl children do not have a say in the family discussions and they are not allowed to comment, leave alone taking their own decisions. While boys are privy to all such matters, girl child's confidence takes a hit and over a period of time their voice is silenced,” said Drakshayani, a resource person.

“They also face stigma and discrimination related to menstruation, and often lack proper nutrition and healthcare, resulting in a sense of helplessness during their monthly cycles,” said Savitha, who actively involved herself in camp activities and encouraged a few girls to talk in front of the camera on the topics they discussed in the sessions. The camps have made provision for the supply of pads to the girls.

During the Leadership and Communication Camp, some girls actively engaged in camp activities and even encouraged others to express their thoughts on camera. They discussed topics such as child marriages, superstitions, self-confidence, menstruation, and the discrimination faced by girls within their own families and society. While videos were recorded for social media, they were kept on standby due to the

need for informed consent from the minor students and their parents.

The project coordinators understand the need to sow the seeds of change in the minds of these young girls. They equipped them with knowledge, awareness, and skills, to empower them to challenge the prevailing patriarchal norms in rural settings. The project seeks to create an environment where families can foster awareness and support without disturbing the existing harmony.

“The goal is to create awareness, provide resources, and foster a supportive atmosphere within families, ultimately empowering girls to advocate for their rights and aspirations in their communities,” said Nagesh, District Programme Coordinator, Raichur.

### 3.4 Day One - Not just fun, but a lesson to learn from every activity

The girls arrived with a warm welcome from the staff and resource persons at the schools. One of the first activities was an innovative piece of indulgence, on a paint-board, or painting on a cloth named, Chitara. It was a fun activity just to make the girls relax and get into a mood to express themselves ‘colourfully’. Many painted their initials or one or two words that meant a lot to them or painted different pictures or symbols.

In every camp, after the outdoor sessions that introduce the camp to the participants in an innovative way that makes them start thinking, the resource persons began the indoor sessions with an interactive session that sets the camp rules on discipline, paying attention, punctuality, reducing unnecessary cross-talk while the session is on, and about reporting or keeping a diary. The girls were divided into groups and they chose their own names for the group. Earlier at the registration, they were grouped into different colours and allotted numbers before they enjoyed a welcome drink, a glass of Rasna or lemon juice.

From the moment the girls arrived, they were encouraged to take risks and challenge themselves.



“The lemon juice not only warms up their hearts but quenches their thirst in the hot Sun,” said the camp in charge of Devadurga, Raichur district Anshu Kumari, who was seen throwing up high-fives with each and every girl that arrived as they lined up to paint on the cloth. Later, as they were waiting for the lemon juice, she danced to the beat, and in a small circle in front of the dining hall, made every girl dance with her, egging and goading them to join. In an accent that is quite different from the North Karnataka Kannada, she said: “I and all my colleagues at KHPT are with you. Not just during this camp, but always. You can ask us whatever you want. Don’t feel shy. We are your friends. We are here to answer you. My name is Anshu and you can call me Anshu.”

An innovative activity, Bhayanaka Marga,(Scary path) sets the stage. A signboard attracted the girls and reveals two paths to progress: ‘Entering either through the risky or the easiest way’. The girls have to think and choose the path. And it was time for decision-making by the girls. Some of them even waited at the entrance just thinking whether they should go inside or not, later beating their fears, the girls went inside the Gorilla’s mouth.

The design led the girls to an adventurous-packed game through the mouth of an artificial-made Gorilla-like entrance. The girls had to go inside the tunnel which had some holes... where the coordinators and resource girls tried to scare them, in some camps, horror music was played.

Surprisingly, most girls plunged into the risky route, demonstrating their courage but without realising much, the adventurous step they are about to embark upon, in their own lives. “The outdoor games teach them to take calculated risks. They also tickle them and force them to take a decision, either way and make them think. Later, these traits are reinforced in the classroom sessions,” said Mohan Chandra, one of the brains behind the design, who is fondly called MoCha.

Later, they had to mark their registered numbers on the number board. Then they had to pass through

the ladder hurdle and swing on a swing. Many girls fell down swinging but they really enjoyed the swing.

After that, they had to ring the bell. Or touch the ball. The bell was tied at a height so it was not easy to ring the bell. Those who failed at first, can discuss among themselves and find a solution. But they cannot go ahead without finishing the task. The girls helped each other and came up with solutions. It was fun watching them get excited every time, till they actually rang the bell. At one camp, there were small sticks and branches thrown around the activity spot. One girl tried many times but could not ring the bell. She thought for a while and picked up a stick, and stared at the CO hesitantly. A ‘smile’ was enough for her to get the clue and she ran and hit the bell. “I too completed the task,” said the diminutive Class 8 student, flashing a smile of joy and satisfaction at the Dhannur camp.



**The girls during the mathematical hurdle activity**

One more outdoor game involved mathematical hurdles, with variations at different camps. A calculative mental game where girls jump and step onto different spots (square boxes or onto flat stones). These boxes or stones were marked with different numbers which have negative or positive values. They should avoid the negative ones and collect as many points (or money in some camps) and count it themselves to get the reward after completion. “This teaches them to calculate and to increase their gains through hard work,” said a Field Coordinator, whose team invented ‘Sphoorthi Money’, some hand-made paper money, which could be redeemed later. At one camp the girls came up with an innovative idea to pool their money and exchanged it for small storybooks.



Some camps also had a water jump. Bricks were placed in between. The participants can think and find out ways to cross the water even without jumping. But they have to think and come up with a plan.

A few other outdoor activities were adventurous and offered the girls to do activities that they were usually not allowed back home. These activities aimed to break gender stereotypes and empower girls to participate in sports and adventures traditionally considered off-limits for girls. The response from the girls was overwhelming, as they surpassed expectations and proved their competence and abilities.

“She was so short but she did not stop till she touched the ball. In her third attempt, she not only hit the ball but later climbed the tree to free the entangled ball in a jiffy. Then I told myself, I will also try again and did it,” said Merlin, a sturdy 9th-class girl, who did manage to jump again and touch the ball after taking a long, speedy run. “Inspiring girls to reach greater heights,” is one of the key objectives of the project, said Prakash Marpady, who was visibly pleased looking at the way the girls performed.



### Girls at another outdoor activity

After playing these outdoor games, the classroom sessions were held after lunch. The activities were designed in a way to ensure the full participation of the girls and make their journey exciting as well as a learning experience.

Many thought-provoking posters helped the girls understand the activities and visualise the issues.

They exposed the girls to think about the solutions to a problem, and the many sessions taught them structured thinking as a group, and as individuals. Some games helped them to think of various alternatives for solving a problem. The Pig story is a case study. After the before sessions, the girls made a chart with different solutions.



### Gallery walk activity

The posters displayed outside their classrooms covered issues like child marriage, child labour, eve teasing, child pregnancy, child abuse etc.

The staff at every centre worked hard to get the venues ready and all the placards and classrooms ready for the activities. Some like the paper chain and the balloon game helped the girls realise the power of the group and how with proper leadership the group can benefit and overcome new challenges was experienced practically. The balloon also taught them that one negative thought or action can spoil the good work of the whole group.

## 3.5 Inauguration

After lunch, the inauguration ceremony of the leadership camp was held with all the girls in a single hall. While the inauguration started with the welcome song, some camps began with watering the flower pots while some were inaugurated by lighting the lamp. Usually, the resource persons or project leaders welcomed and exhorted the girls and initiated them into the camp. Later, the girls were divided into different classrooms according to the colour of the badge/ band given to them.



### ■ Girls being welcomed at the inaugural session

Throughout the camp, sessions on leadership and communication were conducted, covering topics such as understanding challenges faced by girls, strategies to address these challenges, and the qualities of effective leaders. The facilitators ensured a girl-centric environment by inviting the RMGs to inaugurate the camp and deliver the inaugural remarks.

Around 80-100 girls were present for each camp on average and were divided into four colour-coded groups. The facilitators included resource girls, former Sphoorthi girls or those who attended the ToT, the master-trainer workshop. In each classroom, the girls were further divided into groups and the sessions started. The different groups selected their own names and were given a topic each. One group had to keep a record, a sort of diary while one had to keep track of the timings.

Splitting the girls into different colour groups and mixing them with other village girls while registering and forming groups helped them learn from each other. “The girls made new friends and they left the camp with long-lasting memories, and

more importantly, lessons for life,” said a father, who works in Channuru Tanda village Panchayat, Hunasagi taluk of Yadgir district. “I sent my girl too,” he boasted when asked for feedback.

Later, exciting and thought-provoking activities like Dream Board, Sphoorthi Wallpaper, Ring game, Shooting-the-Ball game and finding the treasure on the tree kept the girls occupied in the evening after the classroom sessions.

## 3.6 Camp Fire - A Special Attraction

The Camp Fire session at night helped the girls to experience the beauty of coming together and enjoying it during night time. Many of them danced, singing songs in joy to the beat of Kannada songs creating an atmosphere of delight, mingling with staff and swaying together in fun. “It is a new experience and we never had such a chance to come out of our homes after evening,” said Annakka, Class 8, from Chikkamagi village in Bagalkot district.



### ■ A campfire for the girls



## 4. Day two begins with Trekking & Treasure Hunt

Both the Camp Fire on the previous night and trekking, on the second day morning, were two new experiences for the girls and first-time exercise for many girls who were usually not allowed to go out early in the morning back home. While the boys have the freedom to climb trees and play outdoors, the camp offered the girls these experiences and provided them with the chance to experience the joy of freedom in doing little things that they were prohibited from doing at home. Despite the sweat and the tiring activity, it was also time for fun and to enjoy the new locales.

After trekking and Treasure Hunt, the girls get ready and assemble for breakfast and are all set for the morning session. There was a discussion on developing problem-solving skills.



**Girls at the trekking spot**

Apart from the sessions on leadership, communication, gender equality, social norms, superstitions, discrimination faced by girl children, child marriages, school drop-outs and facing challenges including being aware of helpline numbers, outdoor activities like trekking in the second day morning and campfire on the first day-night held the girls together.

Every activity had a tale to tell and a moral or a lesson to learn. Some of the topics specifically dealt with by different activities are Child Marriages, School Drop-outs, Moodanambike (blind faith) Muttu (Menstruation) and Freedom.

### 4.1 Focus on Preventing Child Marriages

One of the key areas that the two-day camp addressed during the camp is to make the RMGs understand the context. Other activities supported developing other skills that are necessary for the girls to develop leadership skills and other traits like decision making which will ultimately help them to address issues like gender equality and child marriages.

Right from the speeches at the inaugural function to the sessions and various activities like the posters, skits and street plays dwell deeply into educating the girls about the prevalence and causes of child marriages, with specific reference to the cultural aspects of North Karnataka. The girls got a chance to understand the cultural, social, and economic factors that contribute to the problem.

A lot of age-appropriate educational materials were developed and used during the camp. The posters, presentations and games conveyed the message against child marriages in an easy manner and got the girls involved in the inter-active sessions where real-life examples were used.

The posters had thought-provoking visuals, some gory, that tickled the girls' minds and made them think about the importance of education, child rights, and gender equality, and convinced them about preventing the evil practice.

Many of the first-batch girls, who were in their early twenties, were also involved as Sphoorthi ambassadors and they doubled up as facilitators during the camps. Also known as Resource Girls, they were enthusiastic and motivated students to become ambassadors against child marriages. Mingling with them and talking in their North Karnataka dialect,

these girls who went through similar training earlier, provided a personal touch by creating a quick rapport with the girls.



**A poster on child marriage which was stuck at campsites**

The sessions also dwelt upon the importance of engaging parents and other elders in the family. “I will tell my parents that I too can get a good job if I study well and can take care of them. It is not just boys girls too can study and get government jobs,” said Nagamma of Siddapur. “

The sessions in the camp also highlighted the negative impact of child marriages on children’s future prospects and emphasised the importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty. “My eldest daughter was not interested in studies. She wanted to stop after the 10th but I forced her to study PUC. After that I got her married because of safety reasons. But the younger one is very much interested and I will send her to college until she says enough,” said Mahantesh, a coolie, the father of Annakka.

The girls are expected to go back to their villages establish peer support groups and train the peer girls. With the encouragement of the COs peer support groups openly discussed the issues at least once a week as the girls learnt that there is strength in unity and solutions to their own problems can be found through collective brainstorming. “The pig story is very interesting. Many ideas on how to kill the pig came up and we realised that if we all come together and discuss, we can find solutions,” said Rakshita, a class 10 student.

Finally, the girls also learnt ways and means to report child marriages and are well aware of the child helpline number 1098. They also know the police helpline number. “Police came to our school and held an awareness camp and we can call 112. But before that, we will try to talk to the girls’ parents and other elders as a group. If it fails, we will call the police,” said Ambika of Usmanpur, Surpur taluk.

## 4.2 Valedictory

The valedictory function was the most anticipated event. In many camps, it gave a chance to the girls to give a speech for the first time in their lives. Despite having stage fear and doing it for the first time many found their articulation and delivered memorable quotes. They praised their teachers, and the local Coordinators and identified their role models. They made new friends and were all happy.

The street plays, the speech sessions by girls and also the experience shared by the girls saw many overcome their fear of public speaking and garnered courage and confidence to come up with stunning insights about the learning which took everyone by surprise. Muslim girls clad in Hijab, Lambani girls articulating their thoughts and some narrating the entire experience in a clear nutshell, the talent was on display and leaders were made. “If nurtured properly, the girls will come out flying and go places,” said a resource person.

The closing session also saw the girls making new friends and ended in a bit of a sad mood after the camp had ended. They all felt that the inputs from the camp had made long-lasting impressions and they wanted more camps.





Girls during the valedictory

## Challenges

The teams met several challenges while organising the camps.

- ◆ It took a lot of time and effort to convince the parents of the girls to send them to the camps. The ground staff made several home visits, built rapport with them, assured the safety of their children and only then the parents agreed to send their girls.
- ◆ Since this was organised during summer holidays, many girls had gone on vacation to nearby villages. The ground staff was unable to reach out to these girls and mobilise them to the camps. Also, continuous camps at various locations gave little time and space for the ground staff to mobilise the girls more effectively.
- ◆ The camp had to be organised in a short period of time as the state elections were held in May and it was also time for schools to reopen after summer break.
- ◆ The soaring temperature and heatwave across North Karnataka in May posed a challenge for making arrangements for the camp.
- ◆ In a few locations, the campsite was far from the villages. It was difficult to transport the girls from their homes to the campsite. Also, it was difficult to organise food for two days as no one was willing to travel long distances to deliver food.
- ◆ Finding a big, safe and secure location to organise a camp took some time. Contacting the school authorities and getting an acceptance from them posed a challenge. Despite this, the schools which were selected were safe and had all the facilities.
- ◆ Adolescents also migrated to other villages for work resulting in low attendance at a few camps.

## Innovations

- ♦ Videos of the ground staff talking about the significance of the camps, arrangements and safety at the locations were recorded and circulated among the girls' parents, which eased mobilisation
- ♦ In Hukkeri taluk, Belagavi district, the ground staff conducted the camp in Marathi as a majority of the girls spoke Marathi.
- ♦ In Yadgir, 'Sphoorthi money' was given to girls who won the tasks at the camps. Using this, they purchased books, instead of hairbands, clips, or nail paints.
- ♦ In Koppal, a health drink named ShaktiVita was given to the girls as they arrived at the campsite.

## Impact



The number of girls who attended the camp: **10,070**



Total number of GPs covered: **262**



Total number of villages covered: **1078**



Total number of camps: **94**

## Learnings

- ♦ The L&C Camp should be seen as an 'integrated activity' of the project, not a stand-alone activity.
- ♦ Pre-camp orientation to the RMGs and their parents is important to ensure participation. Also, delegating the responsibility to the RMGs to deal with the rigid parents.
- ♦ Conceptual clarity among the team enhances the impact of the camp.
- ♦ Specialized expertise is needed to facilitate the session.
- ♦ Engaging with the community stakeholders increases the participation of the RMGs.
- ♦ Building rapport with the panchayat members and other government officials is necessary. They could support us in implementing the project.
- ♦ The girls who attended the camps, went back to their villages and motivated their peers to step out of their homes and benefit from the camps.



## “ Lakshmi

Lakshmi, a role model girl from the Waganagera village gram panchayat, shared her experience, saying, “The leadership and communication camp is memorable in my life because I am staying away from home for the first time in my life. The activities are highly educational, which helped me gain confidence immensely. Now I understand the freedom I have and that I am no less than the boys.”

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## “ Soundarya

Soundarya, a Role Model Girl spoke confidently in the valedictory function, her first speech on a stage. “I learnt about freedom. But I also understand that it comes with a responsibility. Right from the day the 10th results were out, many parents were looking out to get their girls married. Now, we have to create awareness and tell them that just like boys, we too can bring name and fame to the family. I too can study well, and get a good job. I can take care of my parents too,” she said to a huge applause.

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## “ Suhana

Suhana, a participant from Ranganpet village, expressed her gratitude saying: “I have learned not only about the problems that adolescent girls face but also how to deal with them with the help of other girls. I understand that there is great strength in unity. I would take everything I had learned back to my village and share it with my friends.” Suhana is keen to continue her studies and dreams of becoming an IAS officer.

”

## “ Bhagyalakshmi

I am proud to be a Sphoorthi girl and very happy to be selected for the camp. I want to convince all the girls in my village. I want to create many other role model girls like me in my village. I thank Malashri, our community organiser, from the bottom of my heart. She is the reason that we are having a wonderful time at the camp.

”

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