



An Expedition to Safeguard the Rights of the Coastal Communities

SNEHA

2012

SNEHA (Social Need Education and Human Awareness) is a Non-Profit Organisations registered in India under Tamil Nadu Societies Registration Act of 1975

With a mission, to facilitate self-mobilization of marginalized workers in fisheries and allied fisheries of the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, SNEHA reaches out to 51 villages and hamlets in Karaikal and Nagapattinam Districts.

Intensive Field Activities across 51 Villages in Karaikal and Nagapattinam Districts

Advocay, Lobbying and Networking across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry

Field Based Support Activities in Cuddalore, Tanjore, Tiruvarur and Pudukottai

Strengthening Perspective of other NGOs in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry



SNEHA strives to work towards “A just society that is free of caste, class, religion, gender, language and age based discrimination through social transformation with peoples’ participation and participatory, consultative, transparent and inclusive system of governance, which ensures the protection and promotion of environment and sustainable development”

THE ISSUES

Fishing is a way of life and not just a source of income for the fishing communities. Initially, the small scale and artisan fishers have provided fishes exclusively for local consumption but now with its entry into global market and fish becoming scarce, it is increasingly becoming unaffordable to the local market.

In the globalization process the fishing communities are now displaced because of the emergence of various destructive development project across the coast. MNCs involvement in massive mechanized fishing has resulted in depletion of fish resources thereby depriving the fishing communities of their traditional livelihoods. The situation is further intensified by importing of subsidized fish from other areas that has sounded a death knell to the existing small-scale and cottage fish industries. With the fish workers losing their right to decide the price of their produce invariably results in chronic loss of their livelihood and it is estimated that over 10 million fish workers will be affected across the country.



With women playing an integral role in the pre-harvest activities like mending of nets, mechanization of the same has had a deep impact on women's economic empowerment. Likewise, women have also been involved in the various post-harvest activities that include marketing as well as processing of fish. With the trade becoming export-oriented, women are marginalized in the marketing as the trend of retail marketing is increasingly replacing the wholesale business. As fish processing has also become industrialized women involved in the cottage industry of fish processing are forced to close down their units and work as "cheap labourers" in the various industries that violates the labour laws.



"I am a fish vendor who walks more than 6 kilometers to sell fishes, yet I am neither recognised as a 'worker' nor do I enjoy the basic rights that a worker is entitled to. I earn about Rs. 150 to 200 as profit by vending fish. But my income is not stable as I sell fish for credit and people often repay me only with rices and pulses. There are other instances when I am forced to sell the fish for a loss because of the fear that the fish might decay before I could sell them. It is only by carrying the heavy load of fish on my head that I feed and educate my children. However we do not have the awareness or the access to the social security measures that enables us to upgrade our traditional occupation that is the source of our existence.

Our entire existence is now under threat because of the increasing destructive development projects along the coast. We fear the rapid depletion of the coastal resources and the dispossession of the fishers from the sea that will forcibly alienate us from our traditional livelihood. We will not give up. We will take every every measures to protect our sea and the coast." – Jeyaleshmi (45) from Seruthur.



The women had been pushed to the margins because of the privatization of wetlands and inland waters whereby they have lost their access to the commons. Women are losing control over the means of production in the fisheries and her rights are reduced from that of an entrepreneur to that of a labourer. They are denied of “profits” but are offered “security nets” that makes life a constant battle. There is no safeguard against sexual harassment at work place and occupational hazards.

Further the impact of rampant tourism and emergence of anti-poor development policies related to fisheries and the commons is posing a threat to the very survival of these communities.

OUR WORK

1.Ensuring Protection of Coastal Habitats and Environment by creating awareness among the communities about the impact of the Destructive Development Projects and the anti-poor policies related to the coast.



“Power plants are now set up over agricultural lands and water bodies. The people who were enjoying their customary rights over these natural resources are now being displaced in the guise of ‘development’. Development that result in displacement of agricultural labourers and depletion of coastal resources because of the thermal effluents from the power plant. People who where completely dependent on the natural resources for their suvival will now be ousted. We were producing rice and were involved in fishing.... With no access to these resources we will be left with no food, we wonder if we could feed on the electricty that is produced at the cost of trampling on our lives?” - Vedhavalli (60) President of the Karaikal District Fisherwomen Federation.

One of the key activities of SNEHA is to create rights outlook on the coastal resources and coastal lands by involving in various public actions and campaigns. The activities includes organizing training at various levels on the anti-poor policies; facilitate grass-root actions to challenge these draconian policies; organizing workshops and conventions with various civil society formations to strengthen the struggles of the people and finally to involve in large-scale campaigns to bring to the notice of the policy makers the view points of the communities. The key strength of SNEHA is to make use of the various democratic spaces like the gram sabha meetings as well as the public hearings to register the dissent of the communities.

Documentation and Dissemination of Information Related to Anti-Poor Policies and its Adverse Impact on the Communities:

SNEHA has been instrumenting in documenting and disseminating information relating to the various anti-poor policies and bringing forth discussion among the communities around the same. The efforts taken to spread awareness on the ill-effects of the newly introduced Coastal Regulation Zone Notification 2011 has resulted in building people's resistance against the same and demand for pro-poor legislation to safeguard the coastal ecology from the onslaught of destructive development policies. As a result of this initiative petitions were submitted to the concerned Government officials highlighting the various aspects of the legislations that will affect the ecological balance of the coast and disrupt the lives and livelihoods of the coastal communities.



Building Perspectives among Communities and Synergizing Actions across the State:

Two major events that over 80 community leaders from almost all areas of work of SNEHA had participated were the two Conventions on Right to Land held on 18th January 2012 and 17th December 2012. These conventions had been instrumental in training the community on various national and state level policies, bringing together community leaders and civil society formations from across the state where ideas were exchanged and solidarity expressed. People have also participated in national level forums to avail solidarity for the issues that are faced by the coastal communities in the areas of intervention of SNEHA.

Another landmark event in this year is the Cultural Rally to Assert for Land Rights that was organised across the various coastal districts in the state of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. In the areas of intervention of SNEHA, over 400 people from 5 villages in Vedhai and Kivelur Taluk had actively participated in this campaign. This rally had resulted in increased awareness about the various issues that are affecting the right to land of the coastal communities. The rally was organised by the traditional panchayats and the various sangams in the community.

Making use of Democratic Spaces:

In Karaikal, to bring forth progressive policies related to life and livelihood of the coastal communities, petitions were submitted to the various officials with clear propositions from the communities on 10th February 2012. In order to preserve the coastal ecology by minimizing erosion the community leaders had approached the Forest Department, availed plants and have also planted them across the coast. This initiative was geared towards promoting awareness among the policy makers the importance of social forestry and community ownership.

Facilitating People's Action Demanding Protection of Coastal Commons:

In the village of Chandirapadi in Tarangampadi, there was a proposition from the government to relocate the village because of expansion of the existing road. The Village Coordination Sangam (VCS) together with the traditional panchayat and support from the communities had resisted the relocation drive. In the village Kuttiandiyur in the same locality over 150 people have gathered to resist the drive of construction of compound wall for the Chettinad Power Plant on 10th September 2012. The struggle against the power plant stems from the fact that establishment of these plants will result in depletion of the marine resources in the area leading to chronic loss of livelihood, massive displacement of the communities in the locality and disrupting the entire coastal ecology. Petitions have also been sent to officially register the dissent of the communities regarding the same.



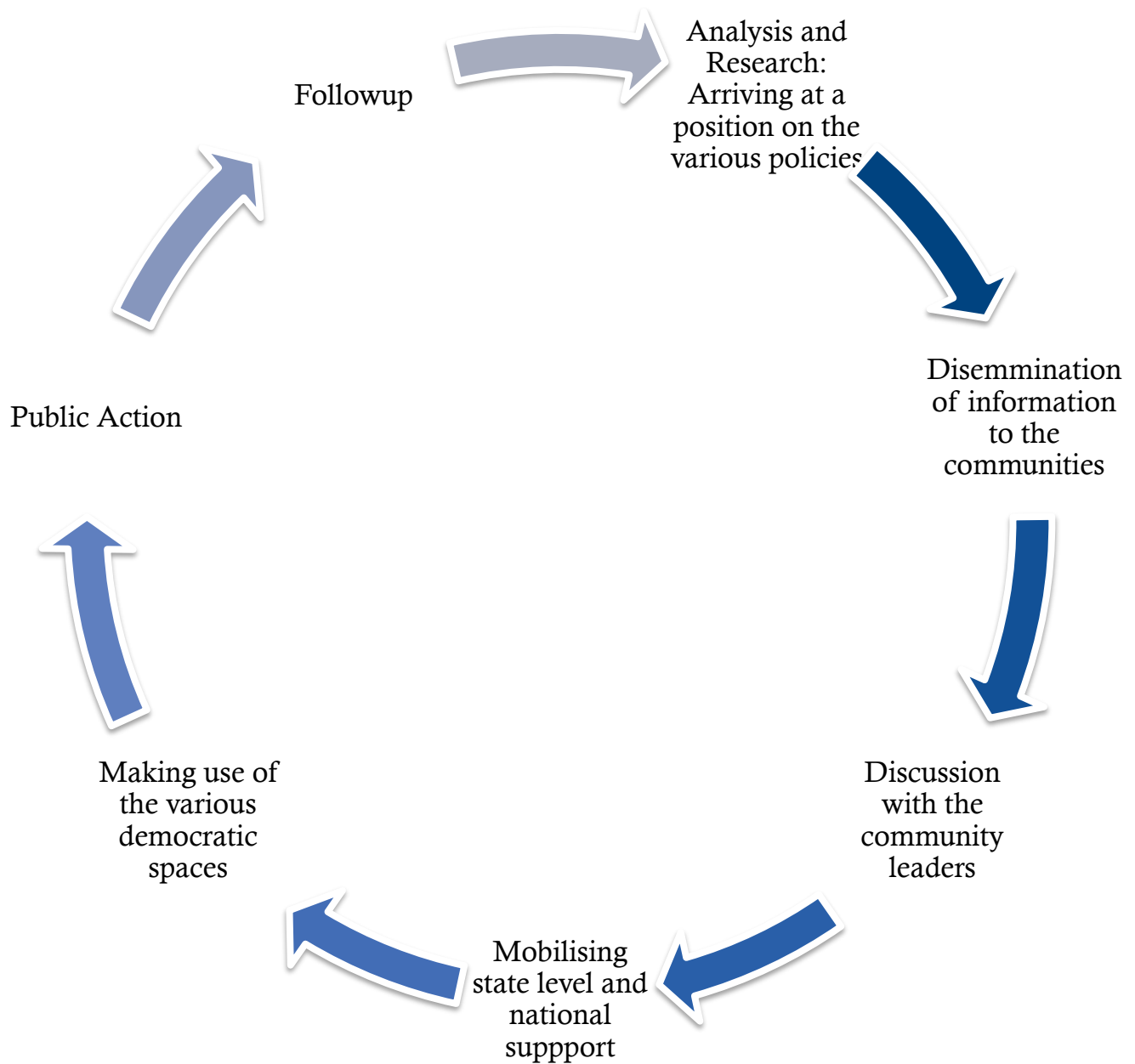
Making Optimum Use of the Democratic Spaces like the Public Hearings:

On 17th February 2012 at Perunthottam, the public hearing for establishment of the power plant was organised by the government. 1040 women and 920 men from the coastal areas had participated in the public hearing to officially register their dissent. The coastal communities have officially registered their opposition explaining through memorandums the impact on the power plant on the coastal communities.

The stiff resistance was posed because of the relentless campaigning and mobilization activities undertaken at the village level providing information to the communities about the adverse effects of the power plant.

The Dravida Kazhagam supported the resistances of the communities on the day of the public hearing. Over 2000 men and women along with over 500 children on 17th March 2012 had taken up a public demonstration and hoisted black flags in their houses and boats as sign of resistance against the power plant and a reminder for the government to take heed of the dissent of the coastal communities.

At a glance! Community Mobilization Process



2. Building and Capacitating the Women's Federations

“The continuous campaigns undertaken by the fisher women’s federation has resulted in reducing child marriages by 35%. The women leaders have interacted with the traditional panchayat leaders and have sensitized them about the issue of child marriage and its impact on the lives of the girl children. We were also successful in ensuring that the panchayat leaders had given their commitment in writing that they will not allow child marriages in their villages. Nearly 60 marriages have been stopped because of the various interventions undertaken by the federation”, says Kalaiarasi, 32, President Nagapattinam District Fisherwomen Federation



SNEHA believes in enhancing the capacities of women by enabling them to understand their rights over the coastal resources and the coastal lands. Special emphasis is provided on spreading awareness among the fisher women about their rights as women workers. The strategies include initiation of capacity building activities, strengthening of the women’s collectives at the village and taluk level and linking the federations with other regional, state and national level forums.

The work of SNEHA from its day of inception has resulted in formation of 460 sangams with a total of 6902 members. In the reporting year 2012 there were 2153 sangam meetings held. The village coordination sangams (VCS) have had 357 meetings where 4397 women had participated. At the cluster level 14 federation meetings were conducted in which 676 women leaders had participated. The main agenda of the meeting was on safeguarding the women’s right to the coastal common, enhancing the livelihood interventions and to address the issues of violence at the community level. 1271 women have benefitted out of the sangam level leaders training in the year 2012 of which 784 were trained on local governance mechanisms and 487 on food



Enhancing participation of women in the local governance mechanism

226 training programmes were conducted at the sangam level and 3432 women leaders were trained as a result of these training programmes. The key areas of training in this year are participation in gram sabha meetings so as to avail the basic entitlements and amenities for the village, food adulteration and on rights of children. To increase the participation of women in the local governance mechanism women are encouraged by the sangam to participate in gram sabha meetings. Women panchayat leaders meeting were conducted so as to empower the elected women

The Impacts

1.

Availing Basic Amenities

- Increased participation of women in the Gram Panchayat meetings
- Increased bus service in 1 village. Now there are 2 buses with 5 services each
- 11 villages now have hand pumps for availing drinking water and 1 village water is now supplied with water tankers
- Drinking water service availed in 2 village, 3 villages now have water, drainage and electricity as a result of participation and submission of petitions
- 1 village the roads are renovated and in another village new road facilities availed
- 2 village street lights are now being repaired and in another village street lights are now being installed
- 1 village now has a fish vending area allocated for the women

2.

Availing Basic Entitlements

- 1 ICDS center under construction
- Approval for construction of PDS outlets in 2 villages
- 3000 people benefitting from MNREGA
- 8383 people covered under LIC Policy
- 1775 women enrolled in LIC
- 1177 children availed scholarship for education
- 977 widows compensated during fishing ban seasons
- 317 Old Age Pension availed
- 25 women availing widow pension
- 162 families availed ration cards
- 18 persons with disability availed disability certificates
- 50 pregnant women enrolled in the maternity benefit scheme

In the year 2012, SNEHA was able to mobilize Rs. 1,35,68,400/- for the communities from the Government through the various social security schemes

Enhanced Interaction of the Federation Women with the Local Governance Mechanisms



- 10 Women elected as Presidents and Ward Members in the Local Government
- 5 women have filed cases under the DV Act
- 3 cases filed against teachers resorting to atrocities against children
- Justice secured for 3 girl children who had faced child abuse

3. Retaining and Gaining Greater Access to Primary Livelihoods

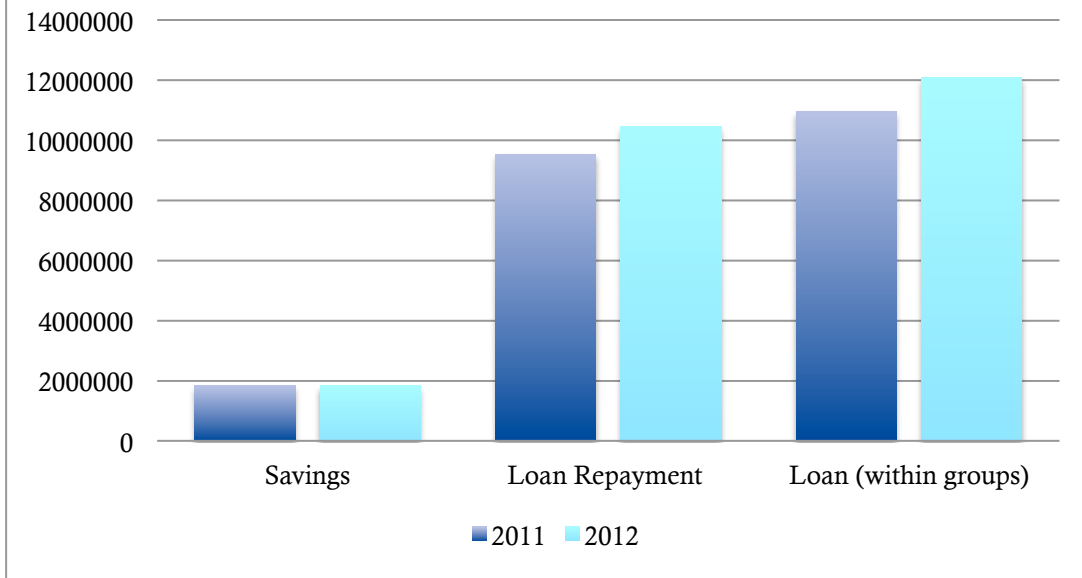
“My husband worked as a labourer in a boat. I have three children, two girls and one boy. My daughters are in +2 and 6th Std. My son is studying in 8th Std. Being oriented by Sneha, through their trainings, I joined the Social Security Scheme implemented by Sneha in tieup with LIC. Both my husband and me were insured. This helped me a lot when he suddenly expired last year. With the insurance amount Rs. 20,000/-, I was able to invest in my fish vending activities and earn my livelihood. My daughter Murugeswari, studying now in +2 received scholarship for one period. All this was possible only because of the Social Security Scheme and the support that I receive from the groups” says Sumathi (aged 35) a fish vendor from Kilinjalmedu.



One of the unique interventions of SNEHA is the initiation of the Samuthra India Producer Company Ltd., which was set up towards ensuring economic empowerment of women in fisheries and allied fisheries. This community-owned initiative is launched with an objective to strengthen the primary livelihood options for the women. This initiative also seeks to strengthen the food security at the local level and to ensure access and control for the women fish workers in the local market. The recent activities of Samuthra include that of float production, transportation facilities, vending vessels, flourmills, soap production, dry fish marketing, tea marketing, packaging and marketing chili powder.

1. The total revenue earned by SHGs and Federations promoted by Samuthra from 2006 till date is Rs. 16,13,577/-
2. 88% of the groups SHGs have maintained their books of accounts and has completed over 90% of the required documentation
3. Performance audit has been conducted for all the SHGs in the 51 villages that are affiliated to Samuthra. 80% of the groups are audited up to 2012
4. Client server based software has been designed and installed to ensure an accurate management information system of the SHGs
5. The micro insurance programme of Samuthra ensures that the members are insured against natural and accidental deaths, permanent disability due to accident and for education scholarship. This ensures that the members are able to cope up during personal emergencies

Performance of the Karaikal Sangams



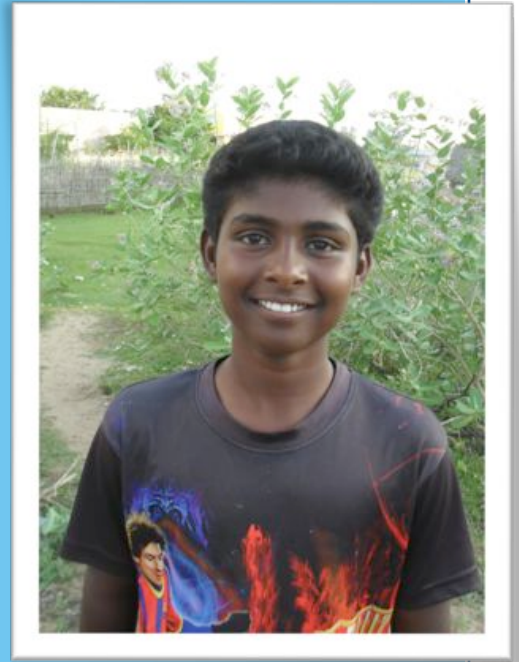
The above table explains the steady development of the sangams in Karaikal. The women are now happy that they are relieved from the debt-traps of the moneylenders.

Our Livelihood Initiatives: Snapshot



4. Protection and Promotion of rights of children and adolescents

“Now the teachers do not engage us for their personal work.” says Bhuvan, studying in 8th standard in R.M.A.S Packirisamy Pillai High school, Karaikalmedu village. “In our school teachers were using children to get their personal work done. Very often it is we the boys are chosen to buy food for teachers from the nearby shops, fill up air for their two-wheeler, take the teachers vehicle from the gate and park at the vehicle stand. Most of the time, we do such work unwillingly. We as part of the children’s panchayat have brought this issue to the notice of the school authorities and now the teachers are not resorting to such practices. Our school had a practice of heaping up the cooked rice meant for afternoon mid-day-meal on a bench. We discussed this problem in our children Panchayat and informed about this issue to the village Panchayat members too. We decided to refuse to eat that rice. The school management realised and now they store the rice in a vessel. We are now confident to get our problems solved through Children Panchayat.” Bhuvan



SNEHA is working towards strengthening the children panchayats at various levels and monitoring child rights violations by strengthening the child protection committees at the village level. Focus is given for educating the children about their rights and entitlements. SNEHA also involves in networking of children across village, taluk and district level and also engages in advocacy to ensure free, equal and quality education.



178 boys and 211 girls from the age group of 3-5 years are benefitting from the pre-schools run by SNEHA. The children are introduced to activity based learning so that they will be able to cope up when they are enrolled in primary schools. The education system adopted ensures holistic development of the children. There has been 12 trainings organised for the teachers to enhance their capacities to teach these children.



Another important activity undertaken by SNEHA is to provide awareness among the parents on rights of children. This is to ensure that parents understand the importance of education and refrain from practicing child marriages. In the year 2012, 86 meetings were conducted and total of 1542 parents have participated in the same. One key agenda of these meetings is also to sensitise people about the school monitoring committees (schools) and the mothers committees (anganwadis) and motivate the parents to participate in these processes.



The experiences of SNEHA with the communities reveal that the children find it difficult to cope up with the curriculum and they need support for the same. Hence evening centres are set up for these children in 11 villages that benefit 598 children. Priority is given for the drop out children and those who are in the brinks of dropping out from their classes.

The children have shown considerable development in their education as well as their extra curricular activities because of these evening tuition centres. In order to capacitate leadership among children, district and taluk level meetings were conducted for 99 boys and 103 girl children leaders. As a result of such trainings the children panchayat has been strengthened. At present there are 54 children groups consisting of 1101 boys and 1092 girls as members. In the year 2012, 281 meetings were conducted in which 3796 boys and 4194 girls had participated in the same. Children are given awareness on the importance of education, Right to Education Act, Right to Information Act, Gram Sabha Meetings and that of child line. This year 17 boys and 3 girls drop outs were enrolled in schools as a SNEHAs intervention.



There were efforts undertaken to stock take the implementation of the Right to Education Act and surveys were conducted in 27 schools of which 6 were Government primary school, 4 Government middle school, 5 Government high school, 5 Government higher secondary school, 3 government aided school and 4 private schools. The children groups have submitted petitions to the Education Committee leader related to provision of water and drainage facilities in 3 schools. As a result of the actions taken by the children teachers were recruited in one school in Pazhayar. Petitions were also submitted to provide better quality noon meal schemes for the children.

Moreover the children in these groups also monitor the surroundings in the village and bring to the notice of the panchayats the issues related to water stagnation, leakages of sewer water and awareness on dengue. As a result of the actions taken by the children, a PHC that was shifted from the village to another area was brought back to the same place. The children also have provided petitions on resorting the coastal ecology and against the destructive development projects that affects the community at large.



Successful Implementation of Childline in Karaikal

Sneha is implementing the Childline in Karaikal as a collaborative organization. Childline (1098) is a national 24-hour free phone emergency outreach service for children in need of care and protection and aims to link children to long-term services. Through this intervention SNEHA seeks to protect and promote the rights of children up to the age of 18 by linking with the various government department since 12, April 2012.



8 child marriage issues were brought to the notice of the childline, of which 5 marriages were stopped through District Administration and 3 by the childline team. 13 drop out children were identified, of which 5 children are now going to school, 3 children are in the process of enrolment and one child has been referred to the children home. 14 children have been referred for various treatments. 2 missing children were identified, 1 child was referred to childline of another district and another child was restored to the adoption centre. Children in distress situation including those employed as child labour, children as charity takers were identified and referred to various homes based on the need. SNEHA being part of the childline advisory board, that also includes representation from the various government departments and is ensuring, is playing a crucial role in ensuring the rights of the children.

There was an awareness drive initiated to create awareness about Childline to children and adults across slums and villages across Karaikal District. 18 public awareness programmes were organised that had reached across 6000 people. 1694 children across 15 schools were also provided awareness about the helpline. 58 awareness programmes were organised for SHGs that reached out to 389 women. Apart from this, awareness was provided for 50 members of the Lions club members, 370 NCC students, 2 NGOs and to 11 marriage halls. 6 open house programmes were conducted that reached out to 296 children. In these programmes open discussion were held on the issues including child labour, child marriage, right to education, health issues and environment degradation.



SNEHA has also presented cases in the child rights violation public hearing held at Chennai and has also played a crucial role towards ensuring the rights of the girl children by its active participation in CASSA (Campaign Against Selective Sex Abortion). 2171 children have been administered polio drops by linking with the Health Department.

In order to enhance the capacities of the youngsters SNEHA has mobilized 33 adolescent groups consisting of 550 girls. This year 120 meetings were conducted whereby 1501 young girls were provided awareness on various issues concerning their health and education. Skill training was also provided for 71 adolescent girls.

5. Water and Sanitation Initiatives



The intervention of SNEHA for the last few years in the community has resulted in stalling of the practice of open defecation in 3 villages among 909 households. According to the local PHC and sub centre “The prevalence of diarrhoea has reduced from 10 cases in a month to hardly one in these villages”. This has been the result of the various community-led and community-based monitoring and evaluation processes are carried out in these villages and households who adopted all the parameters listed for sanitized living are motivated by lighting of the sanitation lamps and by awarding them golden stars that are pasted in their doorsteps. In these villages the 30 trained hygiene promotion volunteers and the “balarpadai” (the children health battalion) facilitate the entire work under the guidance of the registered community based group called the Grama Nala Sangams (GNS).

Two hamlets show road to better solid waste management

“What started as a campaign to train fisher folk in the use of toilets in 2008, spilled over to create a culture of sanitation and hygiene in 2010...The three-year initiative has created a sense of participatory ownership in the community especially for women, says K. Vedavalli, secretary, GNS. “Toilets were unheard of in our village as late as 2008, and today, we have come a long way”... Today, into its third year of solid waste management, SNEHA – is at crossroads, looking for government support...”

- The Hindu, August 13, 2012



1. As a result of the community-based solid waste management initiative now all these 3 villages have generated around 25 tonnes of compost in the past 2 years. As a result of the sales of these compost and recyclable waste the GNS of each village is now able to get an average income of Rs. 3000/- on a monthly basis in the year 2012
2. As a result of the awareness the WASH BRIGADES were able to file a petition under the RTI on the standards of water supply to their villages, based on the answer they were able to identify the deficit supply and demand for the same. As a result a water tank of 2 lakh capacity is now established in their locality benefitting over 5 villages
3. The Municipality of Karaikal has acknowledged the villages of Kilinjalmedu and Karaikalmedu as model villages and views that these models could be replicated across Karaikal. From the month of April 2013 the Municipality of Karaikal will be supporting Rs. 16,100 for this initiative in the village of Karaikalmedu and Rs. 14,300 in the village of Kilinjalmedu for about a year. This is the first step towards making the government understand the importance of Community-Centric WASH Initiative. Efforts are being taken to construct toilets for over 210 houses in these villages by linking with the existing government schemes
4. The work of SNEHA has resulted in empowering the women to take up leadership positions. This intervention has capacitated the fisher women on par with the men in the community and is an integral part of the decision making process at the public domain.



District Collector Visits to Oversee the Model

**For further information
kindly contact us:**

Ms. Jesu Rethinam,
Director
SNEHA,
30, Kariyangudi Chetti Street,
Velippalayam,
Nagapattinam – 611 001.
Telephone Numbers: (04365) 248622, 248675
Mob91 9443316738
E-Mail: snehangt@gmail.com

SNEHA is striving towards asserting the customary rights of the fishers to the sea and the coast. There are many challenges in the process yet the journey towards envisioning the rights has begun and it will continue. We seek your wishes and support to enable us to continue our mission.

