

A Journey towards the Development of Coastal Communities

THE FOOT PRINTS OF SNEHA - 2014

1. Introduction:

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

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"

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.

2. The Issues SNEHA Seeks to Address

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.

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.

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.

3. Significant Activities /Interventions by SNEHA

1. Women's Day 2014 – Inspiring Change:

1.1 Signature Campaign to put an end to new forms of DOWRY as VAWG

2005 onwards Nagai and Karai Districts Fisher Women Federations and SNEHA conducted "16 days Activism" campaign in the Fishing villages. The campaign focused on different issues like child marriage, declining sex ratio, child abuse, etc. In 2011, during the campaign in the villages Thoduvai and Kottaimedu, men expressed that it was good to see and hear from women about the VAW and facing strategies. It is important to take

initiatives to stop distributing gifts in the rituals in the functions of puberty, marriage and pregnancy. And most importantly "SAMBANDHY SEER" - it is the gifts given at the time of Bride groom's in laws death. They realised, Dowry is extending till death through these practices. So federation took it seriously and structured their campaign in 2013 with the demands to insist the TGB to:

- Give attention to stop Sex Selective Abortions
- Prevent child and early marriages
- Stop child labour
- Give attention to protect women and children from sexual harassment/cheating
- Stop the bride groom prices at the death of 'In laws' and gifts given in rituals at the time of functions like puberty/pregnancy/marriage etc.
- Make active the standing committees in Local Governance Body and take actions to stop VAW

But in every village Traditional Governance Structures welcomed and appreciated the points to put an end to bride groom gifts at the death of 'In laws' and gifts for some rituals at the time of functions like puberty/pregnancy/marriage etc. They have suggested making a call to organize a District level meet for leaders in the Traditional Governance Structures and they promised to push this as an agenda in the meeting and to conduct a signature campaign on this. So this year, we planned to focus on these issues of new forms of Dowry Practices during death and functions in puberty/pregnancy/marriage.

As part of this campaign,

- Make 6000 members from 350 sangams take oaths vouching not to receive and give gifts during functions in puberty/pregnancy/marriage
- Get 15000 signatures from the community affirming to stop these practices.



SNEHA has planned in March 2014 to conduct Women's day Signature Campaign in all 45 villages for three months.



From April to June alone, the team had got approximately 5060 signatures and out of these 1721 Signatures were from men (3339 Women) through 24 campaigns in 24 villages. 133 SHGstook oaths vouching not to receive and give gifts during functions in puberty/pregnancy/marriage.

As a follow up the members of the CBOs monitored the functions and with the support of the panchayats, they have stopped such practices in 39 places (28 Nalungu and 11 seer at death)

1.2 54 fishermen Villages' TGB Meeting on 24th June 2014

In this month,Fisher folk community organized their District level Traditional Panchayat meeting for Nagai and Karai on 24th of June 2014. They decided to discuss the agendas related to their resource of livelihood and Prizes giving process at the time of "Nalungu" and "in laws Death". 3rdresolution of the meeting was STOP Prizes giving process at the time of "Nalungu" and "in laws Death" in all 52 coastal fishermen villages in Nagai and Karai districts.

During November-December 2014, the follow up of the '16 days' Activism of Violence Against Women' campaign was organised.

1.3 Sangam that Passed Resolution

S.No.	Name of Cluster	Total No ofSangams	No of Sangams that Passed Resolution	%
1	Vedai Keevalur	21	12	57%
2	Nagapattinam	70	33	47%
3	Karaikal	74	61	82%
4	Tranquebar	65	35	54%

5	Sirkali	71	46	65%
6	Kollidam	62	13	21%
	TOTAL	363	162	45%

CAMPAIGN IN THE MEDIA



2. Women Survivors benefit from the Social Security of their Spouses

The Social Security Programme implemented by SNEHA started in 2005. After we started working with ActionAid in 2011, we had a Strategic Planning in 2012. One of the recommendations was that we increase the spouses in the programme, so that women survivors are benefited by the programme.

“Following this we started discussing with our members in the members in the groups. Though there was some resistance and hesitation in the beginning, slowly it gained momentum and now in the year 2013-2014, 2398 spouses have been insured” says Mr. R. Devarajulu, Sector Head of the Livelihood programmes.

- On the death a spouse, the woman survivor, who is the member of the group gets Rs. 30,000/-

- In the year 2009-2010, it started with 649 spouses. Now it is 2398 in the year 2013-2014.
- In this period, 16 claims for the death of the spouses have been settled.

3. Trainings:

3.1 Training on Sea Erosion

“817sangam women from 223sangams in 35 villages participated in this training in this year 2014” says S. Rajendran, the training incharge and the Chief Coordinator. He adds, “In the training, we focus on the impacts of sea erosion, the causes leading to it and the ways of protection. Erosion is mainly due to manmade interventions like levelling the sand dunes, destruction coastal forestry, non dredging of the bar mouths of the estuaries and construction of hard engineering structures into the sea”

“I attended the Training on “Sea Erosion and Methods of Reducing it” conducted by SNEHACHiefCoordinatorand learnt that piling up stone on the beach is useless in preventing sea erosion. We understood that to prevent sea erosion we should not allow construction activities into the sea as they prevent the natural movement of sand along the coast. Where ever there are hard engineering structures there should be proper mitigation measures. Moreover we learnt that we should protect the sand dunes on the beach and we should grow trees along the coast” says Baby (51 years), from Vilunthamavadi.



3.2 Drawing Training for Sponsor Children

My name is Sriram and my father’s name is Saravanan. I belong to Pudhupettai village. I am studying in Std IV in Sharmila Goddess School, Porayar. I like games especially cricket and Karate. I also like to draw pictures. A trainer came from Chennai and gave us training in drawing pictures. He taught us the basics in drawing pictures. Formerly I thought that it was very difficult to draw pictures but now after undergoing training I have learnt that drawing pictures is very easy. From then on, I am very eager to draw pictures. I can draw exactly and picture that I see. Now I have drawn the picture of a thirsty crow from the chart. It has come out very well.



By drawing this picture, I have learnt that that if we do anything with understanding and do it happily with interest it will be very easy. Nearly 365 children were imparted such trainings.

3.3 Training to Monitor the Shoreline Changes in the Coast

Indian coastal area is suitable for mankind to live, but many industries have started to spoil this area. **Ms. Murugeswari, President of Chinnamedu** village said the women sangam of her village are trying to protect the beach in their area.

She further said that the training they received about the Coastal Environment and the rules controlling it is very helpful in monitoring and protecting the beach.



We have learnt to know about the changes in the beach and to measure them through the Emery Method with the help of SNEHA and volunteers, we have planned to monitor the changes in the beach continuously, document them and submit them to the Government. 73 volunteers from 11 villages got trained in documenting the changes in the shore.

3.4 Training for Cluster level VAW Committees

14 VAW committee members from 6 clusters have been given orientation through 5 trainings

- We conducted trainings in two clusters Tharangai and Kollidam. 20 participants participated in Tharangai cluster; they discussed deeply, questioned and answered sensibly. Everyone in the training liked the Case study of "Ten women by cycle". Women took Oath and drew the roles and responsibilities of VAW committee.

MONITORING COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE ON WOMEN (VAW COMMITTEE) In every village the committee will meet once a month

- Once in three months taluk level committees will meet
- In every Village Coordination Sangam meeting women's issues and process will also be discussed
- Committee will intervene and try to solve
 1. Family disputes
 2. Child marriage
 3. Sexual abuses
 4. Village level women issues
- Committee will monitor the families those who are conducting Nallungus and make aware to prevent the prizes and SammandhiVarusai at the time of death of in laws.
- Committee will make sure that the SHG will pass the resolution of Women's day
- Committee will attend the Trainings on laws related to VAW
- Committee will try to draw the attention of Panchayat and bring them to the Gender sensitivity and legal trainings.
- Committee will take supportive role to fish vendors issues
- Committee will ensure their solidarity for other village VAW committee if they face any problems.
- Committee will always get support from VCS and Federation

4. Monitoring Activities & Processes - VAW

Akkampettai: Elatchi one of the members of VAW Committee came forward to rewrite her will. Mrs. Elatchi, an aged widow from Ackampettai, Karaikal district, wrote a Will last year on her property. Now she has received "Patta" for the same property. Adv. Vinayak, suggested to strengthen the "WILL". The discussion was held on 9th may 2014.

On 10th May it was clarified with Adv. Karthikeyan that the will was not registered. Wills need not be registered. If she has the patta now, we have to discard the last will and make a new will according to the patta.

19th of May it was discussed with Adv. Karthikeyan and Adv. Vinayak, why it could not be made as a settlement. It is government property; they give to people with Right to live and only after ten years they can own and sell. So after seeing the patta and if it is possible we will register the will.

25th of May Elatchi requested Sneha to support her financially to register the will. Part of the expenses was paid by Sneha. She met Adv. Karthikeyan and he is taking steps.

Chinnangudi: Kalaiarasi is one of the members of VAW Committee; she sent two victims to SNEHA for support and counseling.

1. Kalaiarasi from the same village sought support to get "Destitute Women Certificate"

30th May Mrs. Kalaiarasi of Chinnangudi, a young divorcee came to office to get support to get a destitute women certificate from VAO. Adv. Vinayak verified the divorce order and suggested to bring the petition copy filed in the court. And also she explained the other petitions she wrote and the process. She accepted to bring the copy of the petition and the concerned letter from the Advocate.

2. An attempt to sexual abuse was brought by the victim Kasturi and we took her to SP, she did the needful to file a case on the culprit and put him in remand.

Chinnamedu:VAW committee women tried to stop the practice of SammandhiVarisai. **25thJune**the next day of DL TGB meeting there was a death in Nayakkarkuppam. Only Chinnamedu women bought sammandhivarisai. In Nayakkarkuppam, community discussed about the decision. But the women kept everything in their house. Finally Chinnamedu VAW committee met their TGB and explained them about the decision of DLTGB. They requested their TGB to announce the ban in Chinnamedu.

Karaikalmedu:

27th June:A Domestic Violence victim Mrs. Parimala (30) from Karaikalmedu came to VAW committee and asked their help on 27th June 2014. She wanted divorce from her husband.They asked her to contact TGB of Karaikalmedu, because after complaining he may go to Panchayat, then her decision may change. She has to think and decide correctly, so that we can support her and guide her.

28th June:She came to office and explained her situation. She prayed for her divorce and protection of her children and her. She was counseled and suggested to file a case under DV Act. She was sent to meet Adv. Karthikeyan at Karaikal. He accepted to file a case on Monday.

August:Karaikalmedu VAW committee and the staff team are following this case.

Mandapathur: VAW committee actively involved and identified a DV victim and they went with her to the PO and are following the case. She with the federation members went to AWPS, Sirkali.

Chinnamedu:VAW committee informed a case aboutSathyakala, a women separated by her husband due to suspicion. She has a son. Now he is with his father and they did not have clarity on whether to involve in the case or not.Counselingwas given and the case was sent to Nagapattinam PO for residential order. It is in under process.After a long time VAW committee convinced and they come forward and discuss the case and went to TGB, ashe went to Tharangai TGB. Both TGB discussed together and they joined her with her husband's family. Both the TGB knew about VAW committee's involvement and the court process. They asked us to wait for some time to withdraw the case, so that the husband's activity could be watched. Court is postponing the hearings.

5. Children's Panchayats in Action

At present there are 51 children groups consisting of 935 boys and 1012 girls as members. In this year, 235 meetings were conducted in which 3210 boys and 3223 girls had participated in the same. Children are given awareness on the importance of education, Right to

Issues Addressed:

- Water tap fixed, Drainage done, Bus extended at Chinnangudi village
- Awareness on Rain Water Harvest and Sand filled on water logging area at Kottaimedu village
- Eyelid issues were addressed through awareness on hygiene at Kottaimedu villag

Education Act, Right to Information Act, Gram Sabha Meetings and that of child line. Capacity enhancement training programmes were conducted both at the cluster as well as the district level. In this year, 6 cluster level meetings were conducted benefitting 62 boys and 65 girls. To capacitate leadership among children district level meeting was conducted for 22 boys and 24 girl children leaders. As a result of such trainings the children panchayat has been strengthened.



6. The Grama sabhas are Catering to the Need of the Villagers

Grama sabhas meet four times in a year. Women from the villages actively participate in these meetings. They have achieved some basic amenities for the community, by strengthening the participation of women in the gramasabha meetings. This year due to election and a national festival, two gramasabha meetings (May 1 & October 2) were not conducted on the specified dates. But special gramasabha meetings were organized later.

Date of Grama Sabha	Village	No. of Participants	Issues
15.08.2014	Chinnangudi	7	To repair cyclone shelter building, street lights For drinking water connection for ICDS Centre
15.08.2014	Kallar	4	Roads and a building for Anganwadi

15.08.2014	Akkaraipettai	9	To increase the No. of visits of the PHC doctor, To keep a dust bin and to build a cyclone shelter building
15.08.2014	Madathukkuppam	10	To setup a Centre for drinking water purification To install solar lights on the beach To form a committee for protection to the girl child and against killing of female foetus
15.08.2014	Nayakkarkuppam	5	To setup a Centre for drinking water purification To install solar lights on the beach To form a committee for protection to the girl child and against killing of female foetus
15.08.2014	Pudhukkuppam	15	To repair the inner road and to arrange for clearing of garbage.
15.08.2014	Poombuhar	10	Drinking water connection for the middle school and a drinking water tap in the light house area
15.08.2014	Palayar	5	Patta and forming a committee for protection to the girl child and against killing of female foetus
15.08.2014	Thoduvai	6	MNREGS and drinking water
15.08.2014	Thirumullaivasal	10	MNREGS and drinking water
15.08.2014	Chinnakottaymedu	5	Community Centre

7. Building and Capacitating the Women's Federations

SNHEA 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 cluster 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 376 active sangams with a total of 5640 members. In the reporting year 2014 there were 1903 sangam meetings held. The village coordination sangams (VCS) have had 385 meetings where 4350 women had participated. At the cluster level 17 federation meetings were conducted in which 329 women leaders had participated. The main agenda of the meeting was on safeguarding the women's right to the coastal common, drinking water problems, enhancing the livelihood interventions and to address the

issues of violence at the community level. About 817 women have benefitted out of the sangam level leaders training in the year 2014 of which 931 were trained on Sea Erosion & mitigation measures needed, 41 members on local governance and 73 on Beach profiling.

- 1814 men and 3244 women have availed the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension
- 293 men and 219 women have availed the Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension
- 1103 women have availed the Indira Gandhi Widow Pension
- 6 Man and 1 woman have availed the Destitute Differently Abled Pension
- 33 women have availed Destitute Widows Pension
- 54 women have availed Destitute, Deserted Wives Pension
- 334 women availed marriage assistance

8. Ensuring Protection of Coastal Habitats and Environment by creating awareness among the communities

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.

Facilitating People's Action Demanding Protection of Coastal Commons: SNEHA has been launching several campaigns in the year 2014 in coordination with Coastal Action Network (CAN), Karaikal District Fisher Women Federation, Dalit and Farmer Movements, Consumer Federation and the National Fish Workers Forum towards safeguarding the coastal environment and habitats. The campaigns were against the Coal Based Thermal Power Plants, atrocities if Sri Lankan Navy on the Indian Tamil Fisher people and strengthening of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification. These campaigns have been instrumental in building perspectives among communities synergizing actions among various stakeholders to oppose these destructive development plans.

SNEHA has motivated the CBOs to meet the leaders of the different political parties and present their memorandum with demands to withdraw the CRZ notification 2011 and stalling of the coal based thermal power plants.

Documentation and Dissemination of Information Related to Anti-Poor Policies and its Adverse Impact on the Communities: To challenge the various destructive development initiatives like that of the Coal Based Thermal Power Plants, SNEHA had collected the relevant documents including the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), Clearances Documents Issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forest and the Consent documents of the State Pollution Control Board. The Right to information Act, 2005, was used to collect some of these documents. The experts in the field critiqued the EIA and reports were generated based on the critiques. Based on the above, preliminary study reports were carried out in Nagapattinam District on the impact of the proposed thermal power plants. The findings of all these processes were disseminated to the

communities who are to be affected and their objections through petitions were also documented.

Making use of Legal and Democratic Spaces: SNEHA has motivated the communities to take up Legal actions challenging the onslaught of the destructive development forces that seeks to ravage their lives. These cases are at different stages and one of the key outcome of the legal actions is the verdict issued by the National Green Tribunal to the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), Government of India to commission Cumulative Impact Assessment Study of all the proposed thermal power projects in the area within a period of one year from the date of judgment. CAN has also been involved in constant monitoring and submission of representation to the Secretary of the MoEF, Government of India regarding the same.

As a result of the constant participation in the public hearings organised by the government, initiation of legal action and legislative advocacy, support from scientists and scientific institutions, public actions and protests and the support from Media few projects have been temporarily stalled from the year 2009 onwards. The standards for conducting public hearing has been detailed in the order of the National Green Tribunal in the litigation filed by Representatives of the Fishing community from Nagapattinam District along with Coastal Action Network.

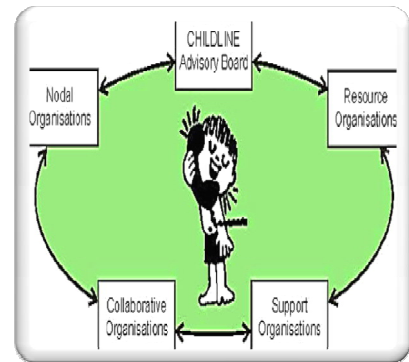
World Fisheries Day Nov-21, 2014: VMTS, CAN and Fish workers of Nagapattinam and Karaikal organised a Consultation on to Protect Rights of Coastal Defendors. More than 150 persons including fishermen panchayaths, fisherwomen and fisher youth participated from Nagapattinam and Karaikal districts of fishermen villages.

9. Reaching out to children living in distress situation through the Child Helpline Initiative



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 departments since 12, April 2012.



There was an awareness drive initiated to create awareness about Childline to children and adults across slums and villages across Karaikal District. 14 public awareness programmes were organised that had reached across 4485 people. 4706 children across 43 schools were also provided awareness about the helpline. 65 awareness programmes were organised for SHGs that reached out to 565 women. 9 open house programme were conducted and 786 children have participated in the programmes. Apart from this, special awareness programmes were conducted for students and the general public covering 1599 individuals.

- SNEHA has addressed 196 cases in the year 2014 of which 70 were calls from outreach
- 9 child marriage issues were brought to the notice of Childline, of which 5 marriages were stopped through District Administration
- 35 drop out children were identified, of which 13 children are now going to school
- 4 children have been referred to the children's home
- 2 children have been referred for various treatments
- 4 children have been rescued from begging
- 3 child sexual abuse cases were taken
- 5 children were reintegrated with their families
- 112 children provided with emotional support and guidance
- 4 children have benefited out of referral service
- 5 missing children have been traced
- 8 children have been rescued from various distress situations
- 12 children were produced to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC)



Some of the key achievements of the year 2014 includes the following:

- The Childline Advisory Board (CAB) was formed and 4 meetings were conducted at the District Collectorate
- 4 internal trainings & 11 external trainings for the staff were held to develop the staff's perspective on childline network
- The Childline team conducted regular begging raids in Thirunallar area with the support of Police Dept.
- Childline Se Dosti was observed as 6 various programmes at major public junctions like Akkaraivattam, Cluny school, Children rally, Poster release, Child school Thammangudy, Karaikal beach.
- The RTO took initiative of sticking 1098 sticker on buses, auto and tempos in Karaikal Bus stand, auto stand and tempo stand.
- On 12.06.14 the Anti-Child labor programme was conducted by Karaikal Childline at ThanthaiPeriyar Hr. sec. School Karaikal. The school principal, protection officer and police sub inspector participated and gave special addresses about child labour.
- The Karaikal Childline conducted two days' workshop on 03.11.14 & 4.11.14 to ANM staffs of Karaikal. 50 ANM staff participated in the programme. The Deputy Director Immunization inaugurated the programme. The Childline Member secretary Mrs. Shantha Williams and Assistant Director P.Sathiya from Social welfare Dept. were invited as special guests. The training focused on Childline 1098 activities and Child Marriage Prohibition Act – 2006.
- The Special awareness programme and children rescue camp was conducted by Karaikal Childline at Thirunallar on 15 & 16.12.14. This was jointly organized by Lions club of Karaikal Kings and Karaikal Childline. The Thirunallar police sponsored 50, 1098 banners for this programme. The Lions club of Karaikal Kings sponsored 1000, 1098 Notice and two Banners. The Childline team members distributed 6000 notice to public.
- Childline Logo is launched at Karaikal Website.
- Got the Award from Rotary club of Karaikal for best social service.
- 1098 visibility board erected in 4 places & wall painting completed in 8 schools.
- Broadcast and telecast in the AIR and local T.V about Childline in Karaikal district by the District Collector.

SNEHA being part of the Childline Advisory Board (that also includes representation from the various government departments) is playing a crucial role in ensuring the rights of the children.

4. Significant stories of change

1. The High School in our village has good standards Our Panchayat supports our education.....

“Due to the efforts of our village panchayat, we have a good High School in our Chandrapadi village. I am studying in Std IX in that school. I am also a member of the Children’s Panchayat” says Suraga.

“Formerly there was only a Panchayat Union Primary School in our village. Children had to travel nearly 5 Kilometers with difficulty to places like Tharangambadi and Porayar to join Std VI. Due to the efforts taken by the Panchayat, the school in our village was upgraded as a Middle School” adds Gopika, another member of Children’s Panchayat.



“If the number of children studying in this school is less, the Government will reduce the number of teachers. So in the panchayat, it was decided that all the children of the village should study in the village school till Std VIII. To ensure the quality of teaching, we visit the school whenever they get time. So the teachers teach well and the children also study well” says Pandurengan, the village leader from the panchayat.

“The interest shown by the village Panchayat in the education of children have given us an idea that we study well with determination’ adds Suraga.

2. Now we have the bus facility..... We are able to go to school in time.....

“I am very happy that my studies which was stopped due to lack of bus facility, continues now because of buses coming to my village. Not only me, but also other children who go to Akkur for higher education are happy that their Right to Education is fulfilled. I am happy that I am one of the person who is responsible for this” says Meena.

Meena lives in the coastal fishermen village of Chinnamedu in Tharangambadi Taluk in Nagapattinam District. She has 3 elder brothers and 2 elder sisters. She is the last girl child in the family. The family depends on fishing as its only source of livelihood. She studied up to std VIII in the middle school at Kumarakkudi near her village and studied up to std XII in Akkur.

Chinnamedu village is 5 kms from Akkur. There was no bus facility to this village. Bus came only to Chinnagudi, a nearby village. People of Chinnamedu had to walk 1 km to catch the bus at Chinnagudi. As Acacia trees had grown thick on the way, people were

afraid to walk alone on that path. One day when Meena got down from the bus and was walking along that way to her house, the young men sitting on the short compound wall made fun of her. So she got angry and scolded them. Moreover she phoned up from her mobile phone to the Sembanarkoil Police Station and lodged a complaint against those young men and told them that she would have to stop her studies because of that incident. In order to take action against those young men, the police at Sembanarkoil Police Station called her to the station to give a written complaint and to give details about the incident. Only at that time Meen's parents came to know about this matter and they took her to the police station. The police men called those young men and gave them a warning that if they indulged in such actions again, they would take severe actions. Though the cops took action, Meena's parents and elder brothers stopped her education with Std XII. They were afraid that as she had to go to the young men's village to catch the bus they might harm her.

Meena shared about it in the Adolescent girl's meeting. They said that their right to education was denied to them because of lack of bus facility to their village. They decided to submit petitions to the panchayat union president and M.L.A to find out a solution to this problem. This problem was also discussed by the Children's panchayat members. Office bearers of both these outfits spoke about this



problem to the Traditional Panchayatars. Office bearers of the children's panchayat and Adolescents and the Traditional Panchayatars together submitted petitions to the Panchayat Union president and M.L.A and as a result a Government bus plied 4 times to Chinnamedu village. Again they met the M.L.A and requested for more number of trips and as a result 2 buses ply to the village 6 times. As there is bus facility to the village Meena's education which was stopped with Std XII continues now. Now she is studying II, BSC., and goes to college safely by the government bus that comes to her village. About 70 children who study after Std VIII also go safely by bus now.

3. Happy to Get a Common Toilet

"I am **Kalaiyaras** living in **Keechankuppam** village. I am 34 years old and I have studied up to 8th Standard. I am very happy to be the Secretary of **Chembaruthi Sangam**. We are 550 Families living in our village. As there was no public toilet in our area for women, we faced a lot of difficulties. So all the women came together and discussed this matter in the Village Coordination Sangam" says



Kalaiyarasi.

"We also decided to participate in the Grama Sabha Meeting to be held in October 2013. Members from our Village Coordination Sangam participated in the Grama Sabha meeting and submitted a petition to the panchayat president regarding this" adds Rajalekshmi, from Keechankuppam. Kalaiyarasi adds, "Now we are very happy because a common toilet is being built for us and it is nearing completion. The women in **Keechankuppam** will benefit by it".

4. Sathyakala - Action Against Domestic Violence

My name is **Sathyakala** and I live in **Chinnamedu** village. I married a person belonging to the same village 13 years ago. We have a son aged 12. My husband worked in a foreign country for the past three years with the money he sent, I added more rooms to the Tsunami house given to us by his grandfather. The younger sister of my mother-in-law, with the bad intention of taking the house for herself, poisoned my husband's mind and turned him against me. She told him that I had an illicit affair with another man and had squandered his money and had borrowed heavily. Believing her lies, my husband refused to live with me and drove me out of the house.

I approached the **VAW Committee** in our village and got guidance from **SNEHA**. Through the Protection Officer, I went to court. Both of us were given counseling twice. However since the Panchayatars have changed in the village, the VAW Committee met them once and explained to them my condition and the steps taken by them so far. The Panchayatars called us thrice for the village meeting and spoke to us about our loan responsibility and suggested that we live together. But he refused to accept their suggestion. I handed over my case to **Tharangambadi Panchayatars** and was waiting for their action.

The next day the Panchayatars from **Tharangambadi and Chinnamedu** met together and took me and left me in our house. Till today my husband, son and I live in the same house. But he does not take food in our house and takes food in his mother's house. As the Panchayatars have taken steps to solve my problem, I have requested the court and requested another hearing in December. If my problem is not solved fully, I will continue with the court case.

Following the court counseling, when the village Panchayatars took me to be left in our house, at first he did not accept me but beat me and threw me out of the house. I am in our house without any problem for the past 15 days. Though my husband does not eat in the house, he has bought gas for cooking. The situation is improving now.

5. Getting a Part-time Public Distribution Shop

Ms. Shakila, age 35, is the president of **Thideerkuppam** Bay of Bengal Fisherwomen Association. She says, "**SNEHA** has helped us to claim our basic rights and to get the welfare schemes of the Government. By citing examples of various occurrences, they have strengthened the Fisherwomen". **SNEHA** has helped us to form a sangam and claim our rights and get what we need. Now we have grown to claim our rights.



There is a population of over **Ten Thousands** in our **Akkaraipettai Panchayat**. There are small villages named **Kallar, Keechankuppam, Thideerkuppam and Akkaraipettai** in this panchayat. There is only one Public Distribution shop at Akkaraipettai for all these villages. So people have to wait for a long time to get things from the shop.

As there are more than **500 Family cards** in the **Thideerkuppam** area, we thought of requesting the Authorities to

open another Public Distribution shop in our area. We discussed it in our village coordination sangam and submitted a petition in the Grama Sabha meeting held at **Akkaraipettai panchayat** on January 26. Moreover we met **Mr. Manoharan**, Panchayat president and pressed our request.

Ms.Shakilasaid that they are very happy now because a part-time public distribution shop has been opened in our **Thideerkuppam** area and they are able to get things thrice a week, namely on Monday, Wednesday, Fridays.

5. Major learnings /Challenges

1. Major Learnings

- Community participation in addressing the development projects that affect their livelihood concerns is highly visible.
- Understanding of their livelihood and environmental issues and its linkage with land rights is appreciable and women's involvement in politicizing the men leaders is also visible.
- The adults and panchayats support to children related issues is also increasing as these issues are brought to them by the children.
- The children panchayats are functioning effectively. They meet regularly and take up issues related to children.
- The members elected in the local body election require more training regarding panchayat proceedings, standing committees and acts as well as on Government schemes and the means to obtain them.
- A strength is that gender issues are not addressed by women, but also children, adolescent girls groups and adolescent boys. But there are new emerging trends of gender discriminative practices sprouting in the community, like the expenses (seer) on death. These issues need immediate intervention.
- The number of adolescent boys groups is too small and the work is also limited to a few villages. Further the strength of programs with children depends on presence of a full time staff, who are in place only where sponsorship is operational. The work with adolescent groups is very essential in addressing the issue of declining sex ratio and increasing instances of sexual abuse among children. The increasing trend of eve teasing and use of abusive languages among adolescent boys is an issue that demands immediate intervention.
- To address the issue of land alienation due to the upcoming of industrial projects in the coastal villages, mapping the panchayats and developing village development plans is an appropriate strategy. But this needs specific funds.

2. Challenges faced.

1. The impact of the political parties on the communities results in political divide of the local community leaders.
2. The local community leaders at times become hindrance in the mobilization process. They also try to control the groups at times.
3. The private forces also adopt various economic arm twisting strategies to ensure their plans succeed. In order to quash the community forces the international finance institutions involved in the tsunami housing projects use the housing schemes as a pretext for relocating the communities
4. The Government Officials threaten the people and provide confusing and diverging views to the people.

Jesu Rethinam

Director
SNEHA