

A Person is of More Value than the Whole World

- St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, Foundress



GSC

ANNUAL REPORT

2021 to 2022

Good Shepherd Convent – Salem

(Unit of Good Shepherd Convent - Chennai)

Nocipatti, Ayothiyapattinam Post – 636 103

Salem District, Tamil Nadu, India

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Vikashine

The program Vikaasine of Good Shepherd Convent, Salem focuses on the empowerment of children and women from the most disadvantaged communities of Ayodhiyapattanam Block through Supplementary Education for the children of non-literate parents and Vocational Training for young women. There are six (6) Supplementary Education Centres running in the most marginalised section of the Ayodhiyapattinam block, Salem. It focuses on uplifting the standard of education and involving in the process of drop-out reduction, elimination of child labour, child marriage and child abuses through various sensitisation programs and campaigns.

Major Events

1. World Day Against Trafficking in Person

Good Shepherd Convent, Salem in collaboration with the Police Department and ICDS Officials organized an awareness program on the “World Day against Trafficking in Persons” on 30th July 2021 at Good Shepherd Convent, Nochipatti, Salem. More than 180 women and children participated in this program.

Mr. Velmurugan, Sub-Inspector of Police from Karipatti Police Station was the Chief Guest of the program and other Guests of Honour were Mrs. Sathiya ICDS Block Coordinator of Ayodhiyapattinam, Mrs. Kalamani, Head Constable, Karipatti Police Station and In-charge of One Stop Centre (Women Helpline - 181), Fr. Alphonse, Parish Priest of Udayapatti.

Mrs. Sathiya, spoke on the important roles of parents in protecting their children from all kinds of abuses. She also explained about significance of the day and said that every child should be ensured to be safeguarded and protected, especially the girl children.

Fr. Alphonse spoke about the different types of trafficking and crimes taking place in our country and the need to be cautious to prevent these kinds of crimes taking place in the villages. He also shared about the importance of parenting and safeguarding the children from getting trafficked.

Sr. Aruna George explained about the importance of observing this day and what is human trafficking, purpose of trafficking and the consequences of trafficking. She shared some of the incidences of trafficking wherein the women were exploited in the name of love and luring them with material things etc. She also explained about the pain and suffering of the victims of trafficking. She called on all the women and children to be safe from these dangerous crimes.

Mr. Velmurugan, SI Karipatti Police Station, started his speech saying that women and girl children should doubt everybody then only they can observe how the men are looking and behaving with them. Human trafficking is well known crime and most of the time we think that it is happening elsewhere and unaware that it is taking place where we are and by known persons around us. Because now-a-days it seems to be more money-making crimes. Mostly persons are trafficked for organ trade and sex trade. Children should avoid misusing of mobile phones and he shared an experience how girl children are becoming more and more victims to these kinds of issues through known persons in the name of love. Finally, he alarmed all the participants to be safe and protect the family members from all kinds of abuses.

A puppet show was enacted to the participants by Mr. Sam the Coordinator of Inter-faith Peace Building Project about the life of a girl how she was trapped and trafficked by a known person in the name of love.

Mrs. Kalamani, introduced and explained about the toll-free number – 181. This toll-free number is especially for the women and girl children who are facing problem both in the family and in the community. This is the number to get justice for the women in various problems. It also has a provision for the short stay home for the women who come out from the house due to domestic violence. Counselling facilities are available to both the parties at any point of time too.

One of the participants Mrs. Sathiya shared about an incident that happened in her village. A girl from the village addicted to the phone especially taking photos and uploading in the facebook and whatsapp status. One day her photo was misused by the anti-social elements in the villages and finally she committed suicide. Through this sharing she advised all the parents to focus on their children and keep on encouraging them in the studies and other alternative healthy activities.

Output & Feedback:

- Women in the event shared, that this awareness was useful to them and gained lot of information about human trafficking
- Youth shared that, through the puppet show and other activities they were able to understand the implication of trafficking
- Women and children said that they learned the toll-free Women Helpline – 181

2. International Girl Child Day / Children's Day

“Digital Generation Our Generation”

As a part of the Good Shepherd mission, on 14th November 2021, Sisters and Partners in Mission organized a program on the occasion of Children's Day and also observed International Girl Child Day for which more than 200 children from 10 different villages including the children from Supplementary Education Centres in Ayothiyapattinam Block participated in it. The day was marked with meaningful events by children such as games, cultural activities and used this platform to convey their feelings and talents.

The day's events started by Sona College Students (NSS) with some indoor and outdoor games according to the age of the children.

Sr. Aruna George Project Director, GSC introduced the theme of the International Day of the Girl Child and Children's Day. This year's focus “Girls with Girls for Girls” denotes that all children especially girl children should work together for their own rights and also for their peers. In Tamil Nadu crimes are on the increase against the girl children and so, in order to reduce and stop this exploitation and abuses the girl children need to unite together and should take necessary steps to become aware of their rights.

Ms. Nirmala, Childline Coordinator, explained about the uniqueness of girl children such as girls can do many things at a time; they are both emotionally and physically strong enough to bare the pains especially while giving birth to a child. Girls need to be careful in using the digital technologies; it should be used only to gain knowledge & healthy things to achieve in life and not for unwanted things and relationship. She asked the children whether they are willing to be girls again in the next birth, for which many were willing and surprisingly, some of the boys expressed that they would like to be born as girls in their next birth.

Mr. Sam, Project Coordinator, GSC with the support of Good Shepherd Staff did a “Flashmob” and gave a short message on how to use the mobile phones and digital media platforms. He highlighted the two famous personalities from the recent digital media platform; Ms. Aarthi, youtuber shining and flashing in the digital media platform through her attractive short video clips on the small fun happening in our day-to-day life as a positive example and another person Mr. Pubgy Madhan who is now behind bars for making the children get involved in illegal activities as a negative example.

Sr. Rajakumari, CHALICE program Sub-site Director, GSC told the beautiful story of three monkeys denoting don’t tell lie, don’t hear negatives and don’t speak bad of anybody; likewise, they should be careful in their childhood relationship building process. This character will make them to lead a happy and enthused life.

Children expressing their strong feelings on this program...

1. Ms. Nandhini said that, both boys and girls are equal in this world and everyone should understand one another to share love as instrument of unity.
2. Mrs. Kavitha expressed that, every parent should give equal importance to both the boys and girls in the family without any bias. Children should be treated fairly without any discrimination.
3. Ms. Preethi strongly expressed her view about child labour; it affects the children as they go through all forms of exploitation and fail to achieve their dreams. She spoke about the malnutrition of children in the society and their sufferings.
4. Ms. Dhayana expressed her thought in the form of a poem representing the importance of children’s day celebration. She also spoke about how they can enjoy their beautiful childhood days in education and learning process to become successful persons in life.
5. Ms. Nadhiya explained briefly about the laws related to children like Child Marriage Act, Child Labour Act and POCSO Act.

3. Mission Partners Day

On 4th November the Good Shepherd Sisters and Partners-in-Mission celebrated Neuvillites day. Sr. Lucy, Superior, GSC, Salem welcomed the new staff members to the Mission Partners family. Sr. Rajakumari and Benito led a meaningful prayer service which inspired everyone to renew their promises. After the prayer service everyone enjoyed the fellowship meal together and spent fruitful time with each other.

On the same day all together attended a Zoom Meeting on the theme ‘making music together’ organized by the CEIN province. In this meeting the Sisters and Partners-in-Mission explained about the origin of the mission partners also their experience on ‘joy of working together in

partnership'. It enriched and extended the perspective of the Sisters and Partners-in-Mission on understanding the real mission of Good Shepherd. Videos were shared in the meeting prepared by Partners in Mission and Sisters from every GS community. It was followed by some fun activity together which brought happiness on every face and the Zoom meeting concluded with a hymn. This celebration helped the Partners in Mission and Sisters to exchange their gratitude and to extend their unity in the mission. Fourteen Sisters and Partners in Mission participated in this meeting and celebration.

4. Elimination of Violence against Women (Orange Day)

On 2nd December 2021 the sisters of the Good Shepherd and Partners-in-Mission along with the Police Department, Anganwadi Teachers and AVS College Students observed the orange day. The event began with a rally in the main junction of the Ayothiyapattinam check-post to Government High School at Masinayakanpatty with the slogan "Let us unit together to end violence against women and children". At the end of the rally an awareness program was organized for the students in the school. The children and the college students especially girl children expressed the issues they are facing in their villages and they were willing to collaborate with the Good Shepherd Team participate in the upcoming rights-based interventions. The girl children from the school said that this awareness has enlightened their thoughts to raise their voice for their rights. The school HM announced in public that he will ensure the rights of children and will take necessary steps if their rights are violated. In this event more than 150 children, students, teachers and women participated.

5. Christmas Celebration

Good Shepherd Sisters and Partners-in-Mission (12) together celebrated Christmas on 19th December 2021. It was a beautiful day with much reflection and sharing our thoughts on "who is God for me"; each staff with their excellent testimonies shared their experience of God in their personal and professional life. It was followed by fun games and activities which enriched the bonding and relationship between the Sisters and Partners in Mission. At the end of the celebration the Christmas Angels exchanged gifts with innovative approaches and had a wonderful time together.

6. Tailoring training and Covid-19

Due to Covid- 19 pandemic situation and restriction from the local structures the tailoring training could not take place. Two villages have been identified and having dialogue with the women and local leaders for the training room facilities and also analyzing their needs. The training will be initiated in the month of April 2022.

7. Supplementary Education Centers

S. No	Staff In-charge	Village	No. of children
1	Mrs. R. Kokila	Ottapatti	38
2	Mrs. M. Kokila	Varagampady	35
3	Mrs. G. Shanthi	Valasaiyur	35
4	Ms. J. Vincy	Udayapatty	23
5	Mrs. A. Bharathi	Perumal Kovil Medu	38
6	Mrs. Suganeshwari	Kasi Nagar	27

Six (6) Supplementary Education Centers are organized in 6 Village Panchayats, Ayodhiyapattinam Block, Salem District. The tuition centers have been resumed after the Covid situations from January 2022 onwards. These centers focus on the “Right to Education” and on the process of reducing the child labour, child marriage and issues which affects the rights of the children. The teachers are committed and taking many innovative steps to make the children interact for their rights and also providing time for recreation, thus, making the children responsible and responsive in the society.

World Day against Trafficking in Person



International Girl Child Day / Children's Day



Elimination of Violence against Women and Children



Christmas Celebration



Supplementary Education Center at Ottapatti Village



Interfaith Peace among the Religiously Diverse Communities in Salem

Introduction

Though India was historically known for its secular constitution and religious pluralism, religious fundamentalism has gained momentum in recent decades. Religion is mixed with politics in the form of cultural nationalism where many leaders from the ruling Government have publicly expressed their aim to make India as a 'Hindu Rashtra' (Hindu Nation). The result of such ideology and rhetoric is a context where persecution and discrimination of religious minorities and subaltern communities is widespread and being carried out with impunity. Unprovoked attacks against these groups occur daily, largely perpetrated by non-state actors. Adversely, both perpetrators and victims happen to be from the margins of society - Dalits, Adivasis, Backward castes, religious minorities etc. Communities are cultivated with antagonism, hate and intolerance leading to polarization. As a result, development issues are side-lined.

Peace-Building Initiatives in Salem

The journey of Interfaith Peace Building Mission in Salem District started from the month of July 2021. On the basis of the reports in the national level and at the district level happening Good Shepherd Sisters and Partners-in-Mission with the collaboration of "Mensen Meteen Missie -Netherland" started this Peace-Building Initiatives in 15 villages from 8 panchayat of Ayothiyapattanam Block, Salem District. During this 9-month period, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and their Partners-in-Mission were able to build a congenial working relationship among and with the local heads and people from villages. In the context of Salem, the religion and caste related issues are inter-related and most prevalent in the society. When it comes to gender, people are quite used to the discrimination practiced, and it has become a way of life.

Despite all difficulties, Sisters and Partners-in-Mission were able to form the target people into groups, facilitate their thinking, analyse the harmful conflicts and started intervention focusing on caste, religion, and gender discrimination. This Peace-Building Initiatives strives to address the issues related to religion, caste and gender through the medium of awareness creation, bringing together the leaders of different religions, caste leaders and duty bearers and attempts to create resilient community that which could bring in changes in the lives of the marginalised and also among the perpetrators of gender inequality, and the fundamental forces that maintain the caste-ridden society that continue to keep the marginalised as slaves and bring in change in the mindsets of the religious leaders to profess oneness and brotherhood.

Village-level Peace Committees

Members from village join together as an interfaith peace committee and were frequently trained on the Conflict Resolution Skills and peace-building activities / events. They are coming together to have dialogue with people on issues related to caste, religion and gender-based discriminations and also focuses on living with interfaith peace and harmony. They are

involving in interfaith celebrations and joint action for the common cause of the respective village. Fifteen (15) Village-level Peace Committees have been formed in 15 villages with 203 members.

Village-level Women's Groups

Fifteen (15) Village-level Interfaith Women's Groups have been formed in 15 villages with 231 women. They were trained on Conflict Resolution Skills and peace-building activities / events. They are united together and getting involved in joint actions on various issues prevailing in their respective villages.

Village-level Youth Groups

Fifteen (15) Village-level Interfaith Youth Groups have been formed in 15 villages with 202 members. Two trainings were organised on Conflict Resolution Skills and Peace-Building Activities. They are coming forward to organise and participate in some of the joint action programs for the cause of their respective villages.

Village-level Children Groups

Fifteen (15) Village-level Interfaith Children's Groups have been formed in 15 villages with 216 children. They were given training on Peace Education. They are enthusiastic in taking part in all the joint action programs, interfaith celebrations and common awareness campaigns on Social Harmony.

Major activities (Highlights)

1. Interfaith Diwali Celebration

Celebration of Inter-faith Diwali is a process and outcome of a network "Amaithi Sangamam" to build peace in their respective villages. On 7th November 2021, Religious Leaders and the Project Staff Team introduced this valuable initiative in Ottapatti Village to bring peace and oneness among the village community even though people are practicing different religions and traditions. Leaders from different religious practices breaking their restrictions encouraged the people to participate in the Diwali celebration. It was a joy filled celebration and experience of unity.



2. Interfaith Christmas Celebration

On 19th December 2021, “Amaithi Sangamam” Leaders from different religion along with Sisters of the Good Shepherd organized the interfaith Christmas celebration for the first time in Pallipatti village premises especially where there is high communal tension prevailing for long years. This was a beautiful and remarkable event took place in Pallipatti village by sharing positive notes by each religious leaders and local leaders towards peace and harmony on all occasions.



3. Interfaith Pongal Celebration

On 17th January 2022, the Peace Group members of different religion and caste from two villages (Kasi Nagar and Shakti Nagar) along with Sisters of the Good Shepherd organized an Inter-faith Pongal celebration for the first time in Kasi Nagar village.



4. IFD – Religious leaders

On 8th of February 2022, the religious leaders came together for the second time under the banner of 'Amaithi Sangamam' to discuss about how to address the common issues prevailing in the target villages in Salem district. The members of Amaithi Sangamam are resourceful and specialized in various fields to empower the people from many situations. They came forward to share their expertise for the welfare of the village community and accepted to stand united if there are any rights violation happens in the target villages on the basis of religion, caste and gender.



Joint Actions

1. **Kasi Nagar and Sakthi Nagar – Interfaith Pongal celebration and petition given to Ward Member by members from peace committee, representatives from women, youth and children groups regarding health and sanitation issues in the village**

On the day of Pongal celebration, the members from peace committee, representatives from women, youth and children's groups from Sakthi Nagar and Kasi Nagar along with the GSC, Salem addressed their needs to the Ward Member **Mr. Hari**. He expressed that Kasi Nagar people are his identity and he will surely fulfil all their demands for the development of the village.



2. Petition given to Ottapatti Ward Member regarding the lack of toilet facilities and playground in the village by youth, children and women group representatives.

The members from the Peace Groups expressed some of their issues such as lack of toilets and playground facilities in the group meetings especially the most affected are girl children and women because of the safety and health issues. In order to address these issues, they together planned to submit a petition to the Ward Member. Accordingly, they had an interactive meeting with the ward member Mr. Ragu and gave the petition to him asking him to take necessary steps to rectify these issues immediately. He promised to look into this problem with the Panchayat President and assured them to take the necessary steps immediately.



3. Rajiv Gandhi Nagar – Peace group members taking initiatives to build a united community

Rajiv Gandhi Nagar consists of people belonging to different castes and different religion. Most of the people are landless labourers living together for many years. A few Hindu fundamentalists living in this village are unhappy about the peaceful coexistence of the people. Hence, they have been continuously striving to disturb the situation, bringing in prejudices among the different sections of people. As part of their effort to create conflicts and division, they had planned and broke the idols of their own goddess in the temple on the same day of a training happening in the nearby CPM church organization (training centre) and put the blame on the Christian community. After this incident, the village community was divided and were filled with hatred in words and actions by the people belonging to both the religions.



It was followed by a murder by few anti-social elements who had murdered an old lady near the church for the financial purpose (to grab her wealth). At that time, the CCTV camera in the church premises was not working and the Christian community was blamed again for this murder and created a religious issue in the village. This issue became the talk of the village. Due to the continuous hate filled actions by the Hindu fundamentalist, the communal tension was going on in the village for many years. After this issue an elderly lady from the church told the people that, since they are not supporting the people belonging to this church even though they know the truth and facts, not to utilize the church or its premises for anything. The common people in the village are also hesitating to utilize the church premises which were used for the education of children and by the members of two families who don't have electricity in their houses. Now the people from both the groups are realising the facts and feeling bad for their action. The peace groups meetings and trainings have paved the way for a reconciliation process. This issue was slowly brought into the interfaith peace group meetings and the people are realising the truth and started to involve in the process of conflict resolution in a peaceful manner. At present the people are willing to come together and in the near future, there is a hope for a peaceful resolution of this religious issue.

4. Sakthi Nagar Interfaith Peace Committee members join together for the campaign of “Say no to Open Defecation”

Interfaith Peace Group members join together for the campaign activity against “Say NO to Open Defecation”. Earlier, there were no toilets in the houses as well as the common toilets in the village. After a long time, the panchayat has sanctioned the budget for toilet facilities and the construction had started and will be completed soon. So, the peace group members came together and created a public awareness on the safety, health and hygiene through IEC material. They are educating the whole community towards the behavioural changes from open defecation and to use the toilets.



Identification of Issues and Interfaith groups in the process of Resolving

Members of Interfaith Peace Committees have identified 6 conflicts in five villages, took initiative to analyse them and they are in the process of having dialogue towards resolution; these conflicts are related to religion, caste and gender and are very much in the community/families for a long period of time. Through mediation, and counselling, the Interfaith Peace Committees are striving to resolve them. Three issues are related to gender-based violence, two issues based on caste and one issues based on religion.

Target Group (s) (max. 5)	Number of Women	Number of Men	Children	Total	Actual Number Reached	Explanation of major differences (>20%)
Village-level Interfaith Peace Committees (VIPCs) – (in 15 villages, 15 VIPCs with 12 members each =180)	135	45		180	203	
Religious Leaders of Different Faith	25	05		30	22	
Women Groups	00	150		150	231	
Youth Groups	120	30		150	202	
Duty Bearers	35	10		45	39	
Members in Children's Peace Clubs	100	140		240	216	
Members in College Students' Peace Clubs	20	20		40	50	

Challenges

- People from different religions and castes find it difficult to come together in one place for the meeting on the concept of peace;
- In the beginning, women and youth were unwilling to gather as a group to discuss on the topic of peace building;
- Difficulties were faced in finding a common place for the people of different castes and religions coming together for a meeting; this is because of the untouchability being practiced among the different caste sectors, even today;
- Sisters and their Partners-in-Mission were often mistaken as people who are planning to convert people to Christianity and it was very much posing a threat among the Hindu people, especially to their leaders;
- As some of the harmful convictions are very much ingrained into the minds of the people, it is not an easy task to bring in change in a shorter time;

- The concept of Interfaith Peacebuilding is quite a new one for the target people and it would take more time than we expect to understand and work on the same;
- Enabling the common people to work for a 'Common Cause' is a tough task, the people have lot of doubts in connection to the same; and
- Men's mindset is that women will not be safe if they are out of their house.

Strategies Adopted

- ✓ Interaction with various key stakeholders, formal and informal;
- ✓ Building rapport with the individuals, families and communities;
- ✓ Frequent visit to the village communities;
- ✓ Building trust among various groups and communities;
- ✓ Formation of community groups;
- ✓ Enthusing into the minds of different stakeholders on the relevance of peacebuilding in the context of increasing communal violence in the country, State, and at the local-level;
- ✓ Networking with the existing structures in the village;
- ✓ Strengthening bonds between the group members; and
- ✓ Change of mind-set.

Visible Positive Effects

- ✚ People practicing different religion and belongs to different castes coming together for the meeting in the villages for the first time
- ✚ People are now slowly coming to the group meeting regularly
- ✚ First time in the history of Ayothiyapattinam block the inter-religious dialogue is taking place in the villages and also the interfaith celebrations
- ✚ Sisters and Partners-in-Mission working towards Peace-Building in the communities was encouraged by Salem Bishop Aruselvam Rayappan at the District Interfaith forum on Social Harmony Day - 2022 (Good Shepherd Sisters and Partners-in-Mission released the Poster on "Interfaith Peace-Building and Social Harmony)
- ✚ People referring their friends to the peace groups for the common cause
- ✚ People of the village started to understand the concept of peace building and their roles in creating peace
- ✚ People from peace groups slowly started their work of fact finding of the issues they have at the community level
- ✚ After frequent visits of the staff, now the people and duty bearers are coming together for the common interfaith celebration and common development actions
- ✚ People are now started to visualize where they are with the problem they have and finding the way to address it.
- ✚ Elected members after GS intervention in the villages they are supporting the team in all the events and celebrations
- ✚ People practicing different faith realising their differences and started to come forward to live in peace and harmony

CASE STUDY

Interfaith Peace Committee works for Peace

Name of the Village: Kasi Nagar

Nature of the Conflict: Caste related issue

Background of the issue: Kasi Nagar is like a settlement area with the majority of the people from Dalit community (landless labourers) and the people are under the control of one family that is Kasi Udayar (BC - Udayar) who is owning a 'Stone Crusher Plant' and possessing lot of wealth and property. Even in the time of election, this family will make the people promise in front of the temple to vote for the person whom this family wants to win in the election. The people cannot oppose or disobey or demand for their needs to them.



Now the Interfaith peace groups members after the regular meeting and training they have started utilizing the common awareness platforms to raise their voice through petition to the elected member. The people of Kasi Nagar village were frequently raising their issues such as lack of sanitation, drainage facilities, un-timely sending of drinking water (In the Dalit area the drinking water was sent at mid-night or early morning without any prior information to them) and unmaintained common toilets. These were put down in a petition and the group members utilized the opportunity of Pongal celebration to come forward to submit it to the Ward Member Mr. Hari. In the meeting itself he promised saying, that Kasi Nagar is his identity and it's his duty to do it for the betterment of the village people in his jurisdiction. Within a week, under the monitoring of the Ward Member all the necessary facilities that were requested were fulfilled and also changed the timing for the drinking water.

The demands of the Kasi Nagar people have been slowly rectified and the mindset of the people have been changed too from keeping quiet when their rights are violated and demand for their rights to the concerned person. At present, the problems have been settled and the SC Communities got confidence to raise their voice in the public platform for their rights.

Way forward

- ❖ Regular follow-up and capacity building training on harmful conviction and Conflict Resolution Skills are needed
- ❖ Strengthening of peace committees, women, youth and children's groups by making them understand their roles and responsibilities.
- ❖ Increase the bond between the persons of different faith and caste among the peace group members
- ❖ Preparing a strategic plan for the village development and social harmony with the community peace groups
- ❖ Listing of issues in the village communities
- ❖ Peace groups involving themselves more in the joint action for the common cause
- ❖ Linking with the existing Government and Non-Government structures in the community for the betterment of the people.
- ❖ Building up of sustainable resilient communities to face and peer through in a peaceful manner
- ❖ Increase the bond between people and the elected representatives and duty bearers
- ❖ Changing the mindset of youth and helping them to come out from all their superstitious beliefs prevailing in the community regarding caste, religion and gender towards peace-building
- ❖ Conducting interfaith competition at the block-level
- ❖ Formation of cluster-level peace groups federation and synergising their unity for the common development and welfare of the people

Photo Gallery Village-level Women's Group Meeting





Village-level Peace Committee Meeting



Village-level Youth Group Meeting





Village-level Children Peace Club Meeting



International Peace Day Celebration – 2021

Rally on International Peace Day



Public awareness Campaign on International Peace Day by Kasi Nagar and Sakthi Nagar village groups



Safe Space Created for Vulnerable Children in Need of Care, Protection and Development

January 2022 to March 2022

Children are 'at risk' and child marriages are on the rise in four districts of Tamil Nadu State, namely, Salem, Dharmapuri, Ramanathapuram, and Dindigul. Among the four districts Salem has highest number of child marriages. This has been well-reported in the leading daily newspapers and a point of discussion among the social activists. During the COVID-led lockdown period, these issues were away from the eyes and attention of the officials and non-governmental organisations; whereas young girls were forced to marry in many places as the schools were closed down. This issue is connected to many other associated problems and customs such as 'denial of right to life for the girl children, gender disparity, denial of right to education and development, practices of dowry, denial of right to choose life partner, and denial of right to participation in the decision-making at home and in the community. This Covid situation also enforced the parents to provide the communication gadgets to their children which paved way to the misuse of social media and neglect of their duties. This situation has adverse effects on the children like self-isolation from the families, conceited behaviour and also affects their health in many ways – lack of eye sight, memory loss, addiction towards gadgets, lack of concentration in academic performance, lack of self-confidence and involving themselves in anti-social activities. There is a strong need for the children to be protected and eliminated from all forms of discrimination and abuse and need to protect and create a sustainable environment for the children free from all kinds of addiction and to promote their rights. Based on the reports and the reality of the region, the Sisters of Good Shepherd and Partners-in-Mission with the funding support of MISSIO Austria initiated the Child Rights Initiatives in 20 Panchayat of Ayothiyapattinam block in Salem District.

In order to create a Safe Space for Vulnerable Children in Need of Care, Protection and Development the project initiated three-layered implementation.

1. Supplementary Education Centers
2. Children's Parliaments
3. Training to Adolescent Girls and Boys on Life Skills.

Supplementary Education

The Supplementary Education Centers are the disciplinary and multidimensional centers where the children studying from 1st standard to higher studies could develop interest in education. Day by day it reduces the dropouts from the schools and vocational centers. The Supplementary Education Centers are organised among the most backward communities in Ayothiyapattinam block. The Supplementary Education Centers activities are as follows:

Activity + Outputs			
Activity	Outputs		Indicators
Supplementary Education Centres	Name of the Village	Membership details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bringing back the interest on Education among the children after Covid situation. ➤ Striving to achieve the Zero dropouts from Schools and Vocational Centers.
	Adhikaripatti	38	
	Vellalagundam	32	
	Pallipatti	42	
	A. N. Mangalam	43	
	Poovanur	44	
	Total	199	

Children's Parliament

Education alone is not an only shield to protect a person from the Social Problems. First of all, one needs to know the social atmosphere and its structure to change it or to go against it. In order to know the social values and its biased practices against the children we need to have a certain institutional structure. This institutional structure should show them how to build their personality and decision making in their day-to-day life. The Second-tier of the project is the Children's Parliament. Where the children from 6th to 8th standard learn to adjust to one another and discuss their own problems in transforming their own villages to child friendly villages. In this process our activities are as follows:

Activity + Outputs			
Activity	Outputs		Indicators
Formation and Training of Children's Parliaments	Name of the Village	Membership details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ All these village level Children's Parliaments members have attended two sessions in its formation process. ➤ At present, the Minutes books of the Children's Parliaments have been maintained by the children. ➤ Inaugural sessions of Children's Parliaments were attended by the Ward Members or Village Panchayat Presidents.
	Masinaikenpatti	20	
	Adhikaripatti	26	
	Udayapatti	24	
	Chinnagoundapuram	28	
	Vellalagundam	26	
	Valasaiyur	24	
	Pallipatti	28	
	A. N. Mangalam	30	
	Poovanur	26	
	Total	232	

Adolescent Girls and Boys Groups:

One of the key predictors of a successful adolescence is having an adult mentor to talk with. This relationship may not be possible between parent and child. The main objective of this initiative is to address the felt needs of adolescents and try to resolve through constructive strategies and activities. In this regard the project team has started forming the adolescent girls and boy's groups in 9 villages out of 20 working villages. These adolescent girls and boys have felt the real need of Education and Life Skills. When both Education and Life Skills go together, they lead them to have a fruitful life. The Third-tier of the project is the Training to Adolescent groups on Life Skills Education.

Activity + Outputs				
Activity	Outputs			Indicators
Formation and training of Adolescent Groups on Life Skills	Name of the Village	Girls	Boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Life Skills for an abuse-free village. ➤ Eradication of child marriage. ➤ Adolescent girls and boys learn to cope with their stress and emotions. ➤ Adolescent girls and boys have self-awareness and interpersonal skills.
	Masinaickenpatti	25	24	
	Adhikaripatti	28	22	
	Udayapatti	20	18	
	Chinnagoundapuram	20	18	
	Vellalagundam	18	13	
	Valasaiyur	18	10	
	Pallipatti	18	15	
	A. N. Mangalam	20	15	
	Poovanur	28	20	
	Total	195	155	

Capacity Building Trainings

Two capacity building trainings have been organised for the Staffs and Volunteers on the following topics:

1. Good Shepherd Sisters origin, St. Mary Euphrasia Pelletier, the Foundress vision and mission.
2. The concept of Children's Parliament
3. Children and Child Rights
4. Laws and Acts related to Children
5. Child Protection Policy and Child Safeguarding Policy of the Good Shepherd Organization.
6. Basics of Life Skills Education

Challenges

1. Many of the Elected Leaders of Village Panchayats did not welcome the project staff team as they are from the Christian organisation.
2. Due to Post Covid situation the staff team had a struggle to gather the children for the programs.
3. Since the school reopened after the Covid lockdown and as the academic year 2021-22 was going to end, the staff team had difficulties in gathering the adolescent girls and boys with the permission of their parents as they had pressures from the schools.

Celebrations and observation of National and International Important days

National Girl Child Day

National Girl Child Day was celebrated on 24th of January 2022 at Pallipatti village Panchayat. More than 50 children were gathered and received awareness on importance of Girl Children. The highlight of the event was that the children who were gathered came to know that there is separate day for girl children. They were very happy and filled joy, and also expressed that they learned about our rights. Now-a-days girl children are welcomed by their family members they said. Some of the children shared their own experience of how girl children and mothers are treated in their family. The event concluded with the positive vibes of children with their thought filled sharing.

International Women's Day Celebration and Training to Adolescent Girls on Life Skills

On 19th of March, Good Shepherd Sisters and Partners-in-Mission celebrated the International Women's Day along with the 151 Adolescent Girls from different villages of Ayothiyapattinam Block. The Chief Guest for the program was Mrs. Vijayalakshmi, Counsellor, representative from The District Child Protection Office, Collectorate, Salem, insisted the children to be optimistic and be fruitful in life. This age focuses on enjoyment without any responsibilities and at the same time, it is a time to pass through many issues especially girl children like marriage at the young age, abuses and so on. As a Child Protection Wing in the District, we are ready to support at point of time and so, make use of the opportunity to become achievers in life she said.

The Guest of Honour Mr. Manosuriyan, Karipatti Village Panchayat President clearly explained about the stages of women in their life time as an Adolescent girl, wife and mother. Then he narrated the importance of women in the growth of a family respectively, and how she plays various roles successfully for the betterment of the family. He wished all the girl children to be healthy, strong and bold enough to raise their voice against the violation of their rights.

Sr. Aruna George, Project Director, and Sisters from Good Shepherd Convent, Salem addressed the gathering with the inspiring words on women empowerment on the basis of GSC Foundress St. Mary Euphrasia in today's context. Finally, Ms. Nadhiya, one of the adolescent girls from Kasi Nagar village, voluntarily came forward and spoke about her "mother's pain

and struggle as a widow in the society and at the same time as a single parent bringing up her children”. She expressed that she will not get married until she achieves her dream in life and also insisted and invited all the girls to take an oath not to get married in a premature age and she requested them to love their family members.

Lesson learned

“Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world” said by Nelson Mandela. To elaborate, it is the foundation of the society which brings economic wealth, social prosperity and political stability. It gives power to people to put their views and showcase their real potential. It strengthens democracy by providing citizens with the tools to participate in the governance process. It acts as an integrative force to foster social cohesion and national identity. Thus, The Education is most powerful tools to create Social Harmony among the human beings.

In this path to create a Child Friendly Village, with the guidance and constant support of Sr. Aruna George, Project Director and the support from Sisters and Partners in Mission, this project will achieve its goal. After seeing the project staff team’s work and the concern they have for the children and the betterment of the society, they are welcomed by all the village level Elected Members and Government Officials. As the team sits back and reviews their works for the past three months, they confidently say that they are in the right path with the focus of creating Child Friendly Villages. The Staff Team is ever grateful to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and MISSIO Austria the Funding Partner.

PHOTOS of the Activities



Children’s Parliament session at A. N. Mangalam Village



Inaugural Session of Children's Parliament attended by Mr. Eswaran, Ward Member at Ambedkar Colony, Adhikaripatti Panchayat



National Girl Child Day Celebration at Pallipatti Village



Capacity Building Training for the Staffs and Volunteers



Best Practices from Children's Parliament



Women's Day Celebration and Training to Adolescent Girls on Life Skills

Mr. Manosuriyan, Karipatti Village Panchayat President receiving an Appreciation Award for his interest, involvement and commitment for the betterment of the children in the village



Mr. Prabhu, Project Coordinator hands over the Appreciation Award to Mrs. Uma Maheshwari, DCPO, Salem for their cooperation and collaboration to take forward the best interests of children, especially of girl children



Supplementary Education Centre at Ambedkar Colony



Life Skills Education to adolescent girls in Poovanur Village Panchayat

