



Girls' empowerment and well-being:
A pathway to sustainable and smart cities

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UNFPA and SNEHA were involved in an 18 month long journey with young adolescent girls from the slum communities of Kalwa in the Thane district of Maharashtra. This document attempts to celebrate the spirit of that journey by sharing the processes involved and the innovations and stories of change that emerged at the individual level. The stories compiled are those where girls have felt empowered, stories where girls experienced joy and happiness, tales where they have made an attempt to bring about small changes in the community and have become agents of change. These stories were collected in the last four months of the programme, between January and April 2018. Some of these are about lives of individuals while others are based on discussions with small groups of girls. These narratives aim to bring out the processes involved in implementing the programme. Consent of individuals was sought to include their stories, quotes and pictures.

UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) works towards delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action) works to build replicable, evidence based solutions with communities, governments and public health systems to improve health outcomes of vulnerable urban women and children.

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*Girls' empowerment and wellbeing:
A pathway to sustainable and smart cities*

Foreword

The international community is committed to achieving the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The Agenda seeks to benefit all people and leave no one behind by reaching out to vulnerable and marginalised populations.

Adolescents, especially adolescent girls living in vulnerable slum communities face the risk of being left behind as they lack information, are not empowered to take decisions, to exercise their rights and make their own choices. Evidence also shows that investing in the health and well-being of girls and equipping them with skills, both life skills and employable skills, contributes to greater economic growth, lower prevalence of disease, better health outcomes and more women in leadership positions within communities.

UNFPA has been working towards empowering adolescent girls and protecting their rights by building their social, health and economic assets and has supported community level programs in five States in the Country. One such program was implemented in the slum communities of Thane in Maharashtra. The program which was steered by SNEHA aimed to: enhance understanding of adolescent girls' on social skills; improve access to health information and services, enhance opportunities for continuation of education and increase the possibilities for participation in their communities. Engaging with adolescent girls and young women in these communities was complicated because of the high levels of violence and harassment in public places and reluctance of parents to allow their daughters to venture out. Nevertheless we have seen significant gains in their mobility and ability to take informed decisions. This, we hope will impact their future lives.

I hope the adolescent girls reached out through the project become true agents of change and take up leadership roles in their communities. Empowering them is indeed a key pathway to sustainable and smart cities.



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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere thanks to SNEHA for agreeing to partner with us to roll out this programme for building social, health and economic assets of adolescent girls from vulnerable communities of Thane. My gratitude to each and every team member from SNEHA for their dedication and involvement in the project. Special thanks to Ms. Rama Shyam for editing this compilation.

I would like to acknowledge the officials from the Thane Municipal Corporation for partnering with us for the program. Special thanks are due to Dr.Kendre, MOH, Thane Municipal Corporation, for his support and for enabling linkages with Health Posts: Dr.Sandhya Khadse, Dean, Rajiv Gandhi Medical College for enabling linkages with the Adolescent Friendly Health Clinic in Shivaji Maharaj Hospital, Kalwa, Mr.Khake from National Urban Livelihoods Mission for helping develop linkages with NSDC approved vocational training Institutes and Mr.Bagade, Senior Police Inspector, Kalwa Police Station for his involvement in the project and for creation of Police Mitras from amongst the trained girls.

Sincere thanks to all adolescent girls who were part of the programme and to their parents for their willingness to let them be associated with us.

I would particularly like to express my gratitude to the Canadian Government for their support to the programme.

My sincere thanks to the team at UNFPA, interactions with them helped shape the programme during the course of its implementation.



About the programme

The programme aimed at empowering marginalized adolescent girls living in vulnerable slum communities by enhancing their health, social and economic assets so that they can fulfill their aspirations and exercise their agency to make informed and responsible choices in relation to their health and well-being and also demonstrate leadership within their community. The programme used the following strategies for empowering adolescent girls:

- Sensitizing families and communities to create an enabling environment for girls to reach their full potential
- Equipping adolescent girls with information on physical, sexual and reproductive health and linking them to appropriate services
- Improving the skill base of adolescent girls by enhancing their life skills and linking them to vocational skills and
- Strengthening the public health system's response towards the health needs of adolescent girls



Waghoba Nagar,



Jaiiheem Nagar



Bhaskar Nagar



Bhaskar Nagar

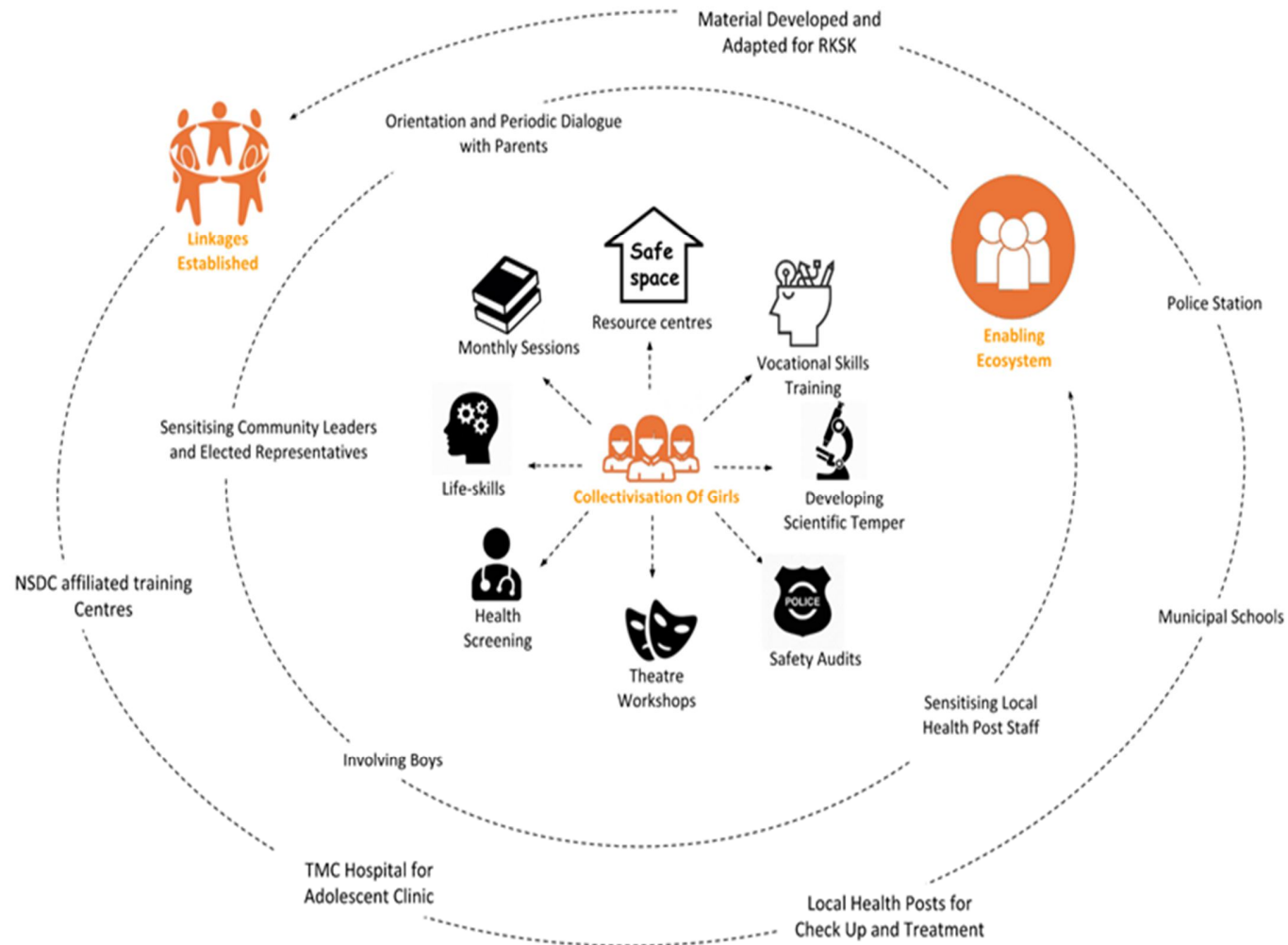
Geography and coverage

The programme was implemented in the vulnerable slum communities that fall within the administrative ambit of the Thane Municipal Corporation. Thane is a satellite town of Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra. In the last decade, Thane has seen a mushrooming of industry, planned residential localities and slums. As per the census 2011, Thane city is cited to house a population of 1818872, out of which a population of 326798 resides in slum communities, amounting to 17.75% of the total population of the city. The household size in the Thane slums is 4.45. The average female to male ratio in Thane city stands at 888 females per 1000 males. Adolescents and youth comprise little more than 1/4th of the city's population.

Under this particular programme intervention, 2306 adolescent girls from four slum communities – Mahatma Phule Nagar, Bhaskar Nagar, Wagobha Nagar and Jai Bheem Nagar – from Kalwa area of Thane city were reached out to. The communities were chosen owing to a large migrant population living in unsanitary and unhygienic conditions here, amidst high population density. Discussions with the community as part of the micro assessment brought out that violence against women and girls, especially in public spaces is a huge cause of concern which severely restricts their mobility. Although there are three health posts, primary healthcare facilities under the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) in the area, their restricted outreach activities compel most residents to seek the services of private doctors practicing in the vicinity.

The programme called ***EHSAS(Empowerment, Health and Sexuality of Adolescents)*** was supported by the Canadian Government through UNFPA. It was implemented by SNEHA (Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action).

Design and components of the programme



Programme innovations and linkages

The programme demonstrated a richness of engagement where innovative efforts were made to collectivize adolescent girls and build their confidence to make informed choices on the one hand, while on the other, parents, families, community leaders, elected representatives and health providers were engaged to create a support network for these young people. In the due process, linkages were established with the local health posts and hospital, schools in the area, police and vocational training Institutes.

Interventions evolved in accordance with the context and need of participants. Creatively expressive activities like using theater as a means to build life skills; mapping gendered access to communities, workshop to develop a scientific temper and address superstitions, etc. were taken up based on discussions and interests of adolescent girls. The planned module for continuing education of girls had to be revisited on a couple of occasions, for e.g. the session on sexuality had to be stopped after transacting it with a few groups due to resistance from parents. This session was scheduled much later in the process when families had developed confidence in the process and demonstrated more responsiveness towards such topics.

Many creative efforts were made to keep parents engaged with the process and have their buy in at all stages. These included regular corner meetings; events to celebrate the mother-daughter bond through games and fun activities; organizing workshops on gender and discrimination with them to impact changes at the household level, inviting mothers to witness campaigns led by their daughters, home visits in a few cases, etc. In order to have a buy in from parents to enroll girls for vocational courses, a visit of parents to a few of the vocational training centers linked to the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) was organized.

An enabling ecosystem conducive to the programme was facilitated by engaging with community leaders and elected representatives from the area and discussing the importance of investing in and supporting adolescent girls.

A unique feature of the programme was the engagement of adolescent boys. The work with boys aimed at deconstructing issues related to gender, violence and masculinities and in the process, harbour respect for women and girls in their lives.

The Figure is a graphic representation of the project and depicts the activities / innovations undertaken in a nutshell.



Having a space that we can call our own.....

In order to provide a safe, friendly and accessible space for adolescent girls, two community based resource centers were set up in the geography covered by the programme: Mahatma Phule Nagar and Bhaskar Nagar. The spaces for the resource centers were identified with support from various community stakeholders. In order to ensure that girls co-own these spaces and access them on a regular basis, it was decided to involve them to do up the centres. The girls decided to paint the walls with pictures depicting their aspirations, questions, curiosities and rights. Based on their request, a workshop was organized with a group of girls to enable them to add finesse to the paintings.

When asked if they like the center, 14 year old Zoya points to a wall and says, “I painted this wall, I feel this is my own space and I love it”. 14 year old Simran Khan says, “I love this space, we can come here at any time of the day, there are so many books and other material which we can use”. 21 year old Radhika Verma on the other hand says, “this is one place I really like coming to, the *didis*’ (Kishori Mitras/Community Organisers from SNEHA) here are so friendly that if I have any problem I first discuss it with them, not even with my mother”. 17 year old Pooja Jaiswal says, “we like this space a lot, we get together here for our sessions, we come here to use books, we sometimes sit here and play and also chat with our friends”. She goes on to say, “this is the only place in the community where we can come freely and sit without any fear.” Priyanka Vishwakarma proudly adds, “You see the picture of Malala on that wall, I painted it with Anjali *didi* (SNEHA coordinator). I want to become like her and study a lot, and I also want to tell other girls from my community to continue their studies and not get married early”.

Anjali Pore, the Project Coordinator mentions, “a reference library with an extensive collection of books and CDs on issues related to health and rights has been created in each of the two resource centers, along with availability of games and other resources to keep girls engaged. We try to make these centres accessible to girls so that they are motivated to use them as spaces for studying in the evening”.

The bright smiles of the girls as they enter the centres each time, speak volumes of how much they associate with the spaces!



At the meetings we are told of many things we had never heard of...

“When I joined the *kishori* (adolescent girls) group after filling the form, I kept wondering what we would be doing here”, says 14 year old Kajal Sharma, a student of standard nine, and associated with the project since its inception. “Later I realized that the meetings were very useful and we were told about many things we had never heard of or felt awkward to discuss...like changes in our body, menstrual hygiene, eating nutritious food, discrimination between boys and girls and our rights”, reflects Kajal. When asked what rights mean to her, Kajal explains, “I and other girls have a right to go to school and study, we have a right to take decisions, we have the right to come out and play and we have the right not to tolerate harassment at the hands of boys in our community”.



“In one session we learnt about mental health, in this lecture we were told that if we ever feel very depressed, tensed or sad, we should always tell someone we trust, like our parents, teacher or *didi* from SNEHA”, recounts Kajal. I liked all the sessions but enjoyed those in which our role as change maker was discussed. In this session we were asked what would be the one thing we would do for our community, and she goes on to add proudly, “I talked of the garbage and pig menace in our area”. She narrated how garbage is strewn all over the streets and not collected on an everyday basis. “This attracts a lot of pigs who keep following us, they are very dirty and we are very afraid that they would bite us. After the session we were told to do something in our areas to address the problems we shared. I and my friends got together and decided to go to five houses each and tell residents not to throw garbage on the streets but to throw it in the *Ghanta Gaadi* (garbage collection van) when it comes. At first people commented saying I was acting very smart, but over a period of time many of them actually started throwing the garbage in the van”. She however adds that there is a lot more to do on this front, “because our streets are still strewn with garbage....”

Speaking on a key learning from the project, Kajal’s friend, 16 year old Shimpi Paswan says that the information on good and bad touch was very useful. She goes on to explain that, “we were told that good touch is one where we feel happy and bad touch is one where we feel uncomfortable. We were also told that if we ever experience a bad touch, we should immediately confront the person and tell him/her that we did not like it”. Neeta Karandikar, the Project in charge from SNEHA, adds, “their inquisitive faces, their constant questions, their excitement at getting information, their desire to know more are proof enough that they enjoy the sessions”!



My friends ask me where I have got so much courage from...



15 years old Kajal Jaiswal is one out of five siblings and she and one of her sisters joined the *kishori* group and have been part of it for a year and a half now. “Our father who is a vegetable vendor is very strict but our mother allowed us to be part of the group”, says Kajal. “We used to have regular monthly meetings. At these meetings I learnt a lot of new things like how we grow up, the changes in our body, how to keep ourselves clean during periods, discrimination between boys and girls, etc.”, she goes on.

After a few months of her joining the adolescent girls’ group, “we were told there would be a theatre workshop”. Kajal enrolled for the workshop and narrates her experience about her enthusiasm “I gave my name but at the workshop when I was told to introduce myself, I almost became numb. I was very scared to speak. I kept thinking what others will say....after some persuasion from Sir (facilitator for the theatre workshops), I mustered the courage and mentioned my name. After four days of the workshop, I was a changed person. At the workshop we learnt how to speak in a loud voice, how to maintain eye contact with the audience, how to stand while delivering dialogues and how to be confident while speaking...after this experience, I participated in the school elocution competition and spoke about Savitribai Phule (one of the earliest woman reformers in India who strove for equality for women and the downtrodden). I want to become like her, and do some good work, I even lead my school parade now... My friends now ask me where I have got so much courage from”.



I was happy to be part of the Ganesh Utsav campaign...

13 year old Shabnam Feroze Khan was part of the programme since its inception. She says she learnt a lot from the monthly meetings. She however enjoyed the theatre workshop the most. Shabnam says, “initially I was very skeptical of attending the workshop because I had never spoken in public, leave alone perform a play. I did not enjoy the first day because I felt uncomfortable speaking in front of others and I sat quite through the session, but from the next day when we were given activities I started enjoying. In four days time, we prepared a play *Main chalti hun ghar se nikalti hun* (A play on discrimination and mobility of girls). Later, we rehearsed during many practice sessions and perfected the play, after which we performed the play many times in the community. My mother was very reluctant to send me for the performances because our neighbors brainwashed her and told her that by participating in such activities I was getting out of control. *Didi*, however, persuaded my mother and also asked her to attend one of the community performances. When my mother attended the performance and saw that other girls are also involved, she let me go.



“A few weeks later, we were told that we will perform at Ganesh *pandals* (venue that hosts the festival of the Elephant God). We performed the play at three Ganesh *pandals* and also at the Kalwa Hospital Ganesh *Pandal*. I was very happy to be part of this campaign. She proudly adds, “we even scripted a play on mental health on our own and performed it during an event”.



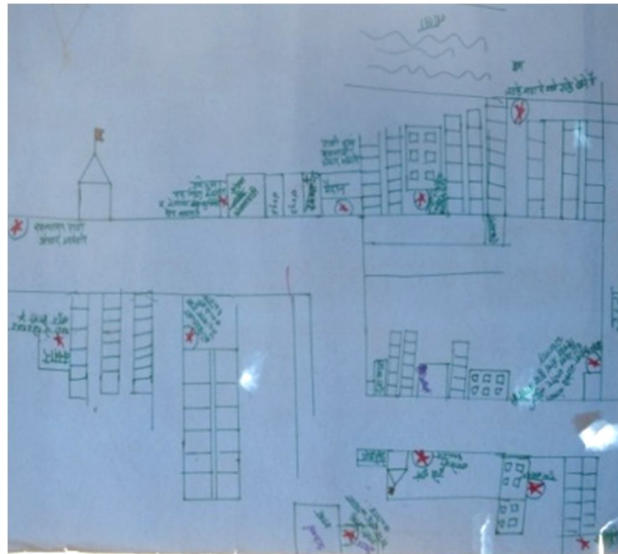
I want to look good and make others look good...



19 year old Durga who has completed her standard 12, confidently says she can now bear the cost of her higher education, thanks to the vocational training courses which were part of the *kishori* project leading to her taking up a job at a beauty parlour.

Durga says she had a dream to wear beautiful clothes of her choice, look good and make others look good. In pursuit of her dream she had earlier joined a beauty course but had to give it up, as the class was far away from her community and her grandmother was completely against her going out of the vicinity where she resided. “When SNEHA started the courses within the community, I was elated and joined the beauty parlour class. Here I learnt several skills, but there is a lot more to learn in this field and I wish they also start an advanced course here”, encourages Durga.

Durga says she has wonderful memories of her association with the project. The most memorable one is when she got to play a game with her mother as part of a mother-daughter bonding session, right at the beginning of the project (Meetings like these were organized to create an enabling environment and motivate parents to allow their daughters to enroll for the project). Durga recollects, “I never had a chance to play with my mother as a kid, she was always very busy doing the household chores, looking after us and also working as a domestic help”.



I am now a police mitra and not afraid of going out anymore...

Ranjana Upadhyay takes great pride in stating that she is one of the 12 girls selected as a Police *Mitra* (friend of the Police) to inform police about any case of harassment from their community in Jai Bheem Nagar.

With great enthusiasm, Ranjana talks of how she got associated with SNEHA under the adolescent girls project. Sharing her story she narrates, “my parents did not allow me to be with friends or play outside with others because girls in the community are often harassed by boys”. She was therefore scared to tell her mother that she wanted to be part of the group. “I was also scared of going out”, she says. “Then, one day”, she recalls how the *didi* from SNEHA “organized a meeting with parents from the community and my mother was called to attend the meeting. After she heard what girls would be taught, she allowed me to be part of the group”.

In one of the sessions for change makers, Ranjana and her friends were asked to go into their communities, and draw a map that would depict safe and unsafe spaces. Safe spaces were to be marked with a green star, and unsafe spaces with a red star. “We discussed amongst ourselves and mapped the community toilet, the cigarette store, the liquor shop and the old peepal tree as areas where we felt most unsafe because groups of boys collected here, generally to drink together or comment on girls passing by. We also felt that the crematorium, the horses’ stable are not safe spaces as they were dark and isolated, making it easier for boys to harass us. Being isolated spots, boys used these spaces to whistle at us and also try to touch us inappropriately. Based on this, 21 of us wrote a *nivedan* (petition) and gave it at the local police station and invited the police inspector to listen to our problems”, explains Ranjana.

She goes on to narrate that, “after a couple of weeks, Police Inspector Sir came to our meeting, and heard all of us patiently. He gave us his number and said that if ever we face harassment we should call him. At this meeting, we also performed the play ***Chhed Chhaad Kyon*** (Why the harassment?). Police Sir then told SNEHA to identify some girls who could be Police *Mitras*”. Ranjana proudly says, “Now that I am a Police *Mitra* I am not afraid of going out anymore.”





I don't feel tired and lethargic like I used to...



Since anaemia is a major health issue amongst adolescent girls, anaemia screening camps were organized for them in the community. During the course of the project, three such camps were organized. One camp was conducted by staff from the Department of Health, Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) and two were conducted by medical staff associated with the SNEHA-SIEMENS mobile medical van. A total of 285 girls were screened for anaemia as part of these camps. Gynecologists helped in conducting detailed check-up of the girls. Around six percent of the total girls screened were found to be moderately or severely anaemic. These girls were then connected with the local health posts with regular follow up visits to ensure treatment compliance.

Sharing her story of dealing with anaemia, 13 year old Ruchi Gupta from Bhaskar Nagar says, “when I attended the health camp, I was told that my haemoglobin (Hb) levels are very low. I was given medicines for de-worming and other tablets which I was told to consume for three months. My mother was a little skeptical of whether I should take the tablets or not, so the next

day she asked *didi* about them, who explained to her that the medicines will help to increase my Hb levels. She also said that in the long run, this would make me feel more energetic and prevent diseases. My mother was still not convinced, so she took the medicines to the local private doctor and asked him, it was only when he said they were good for me that she let me eat them. I took the medicines regularly, *didi* also told my mother to take me to the Antkoneshwar Nagar health post and get my check-up done regularly, so I have been there twice”. Ruchi adds after six months of taking the medicines, “I don't feel tired and lethargic anymore like I used to earlier”.

Megha, SNEHA's *Kishori Mitra* proudly chips in, “because of our intervention, Ruchi's hemoglobin levels have increased from 6 to 11 in just six months. She emphasizes that, “although the project will phase out, we will continue to organize follow up anaemia camps for the girls”.



Breaking gender stereotypes through Gaana rewrite...

“We had a lot of fun activities as part of being associated with the *kishori* Project...but the activity we enjoyed the most was the *Gaana rewrite* workshop”, say a group of girls from Mahatma Phule Nagar and Bhaskar Nagar. When asked what this workshop was about they all speak together excitedly, “at this workshop we had an external facilitator, she first asked us if we like songs from hindi movies and we all said yes. We also said we keep singing and humming the latest songs and those with catchy tunes. She then asked us if we had ever paid attention to the lyrics of these songs. She gave us many examples of Bollywood songs where girls are referred to as a *cheez* (commodity). For example, the song **तू चीज़ बड़ी है मस्त मस्त तू चीज़ बड़ी है मस्त... नहीं तुझ को कोई होश होश उस पर जोबन का जोश जोश** (you are an object to be relished....you are not in your senses in the exuberance of your youth)...We were later told to rewrite the lyrics of the song in a manner where girls are not looked upon as commodities or items but with respect. We were helped to rewrite the lyrics and we changed the song to **मैं चीज नहीं हूँ मस्त मस्त, मैं लडकी बडी हूँ मस्त, है मुझ को पुराहोश होश, हर दम मैं हूँ होश मे** (I am not an object to be relished...I am a girl with courage, in my senses and alert always)...We were also given another example of the song **तू हाँ कर या ना कर.... तू है मेरी किरन** (whether you say yes or no...you are mine, my ray of sun)...the facilitator told us that this song gives a message that boys need not be concerned about a girls desire or consent. We were then divided into four groups and told to select a song that is derogatory to women and rewrite the lyrics”.

16 years old Pallavi Paware and Adela Sinhalkar from Mahatma Phule Nagar who were a part of the workshop reflect, “It was only after this workshop, that we realized that the songs we used to listen to so often and dance to are so insulting to us. We also realized that there are no such songs written for men and boys. Now when such songs are played we get angry and ask our friends not to play them”.



Developing a scientific temper and dealing with superstitions

“The local community believes in a lot of superstitions and people visit quacks and faith healers for various illnesses, especially for those related to mental health”, say Anjali Waghmare and Leena Rokade, *Kishori Mitras* with the Project. “These healers charm community members with magic, link them to diseases, conduct rituals to drive away evil spirits and fleece the community. We therefore discussed this internally and decided to invite members from the *Andha shraddha Nirmulan Samiti* (Committee for eradication of blind faith and superstitions) to talk to our girls”.

13 year old Neha Singh and 14 year old Vandana Pal who attended the workshop, enthusiastically narrate details, “it was very interesting. We were shown various tricks and magic and told that these are just illusions and that a lot of the *Babas* (quacks and faith healers) use these as symbols of illness. We were shown one trick where a black ribbon is pulled out from a coconut. The facilitator later told us that the ribbon is inserted through the coconut’s eye and pulled out to symbolize that a person is affected by evil spirits. The *Babas* then misguide and exploit us in the name of driving away these spirits. We were shown many other tricks like burning of camphor on the hands, lighting a traditional lamp without oil whereas the truth was that the cotton wick already had a chemical substance applied to it”!

Vandana however rues, “while we understood that these are only tricks, our parents do not believe us when we tell them”. She says, “my mother infact told me not to act very smart by telling her all this”. She strongly feels that a similar workshop should be organized for parents to enable them in seeing through the eyewash that is prevalent.



And now meet some of our change makers...

An attempt was made to ensure sustainability through community development and creating social capital by comprehensive capacity building of a select number (50) of adolescent girls who demonstrated leadership qualities. It is hoped that the line of leadership built in the form of change agents in the community would lead to improved health status of adolescents, uphold values of gender justice, challenge the norms that perpetuate violence and continue advocacy on issues concerning adolescents. Presented here are stories of a few adolescent girls who have made a beginning in doing just this.



We got together and put a dustbin in the toilet for disposing sanitary napkins...

16 year old Sagina Sheikh who completed her 10th Standard is the youngest of five siblings among three brothers and two sisters. She lives in Jai Bheem Nagar. Her father is a vegetable vendor. Sagina has been associated with the SNEHA project for a year and a half. She says she learnt a lot from the group sessions organized under the project. “I however liked the session on violence and harassment the most, because this is a reality in our community and girls like me are often harassed by boys who make lewd comments, whistle at us or call us names”, stresses Sagina. Being an active member of her group, she was selected as a change maker under the project. She takes great pride in adding that she is also one of the 12 girls to have been selected as a police *mitra* to help inform police about incidents of harassment and violence in her community.



Sharing about life in her community, Sagina states that, “we do not have independent toilets and use public toilets to relieve ourselves”. She mentions that these toilets and the areas surrounding them are perpetually strewn with sanitary napkins and soiled cloth...”this makes me and my friends feel embarrassed”. As a change maker she says she made an effort to tell girls from her community not to throw sanitary napkins and soiled cloth in the open. She narrates how, “we got together and placed a waste bin – cardboard box – in the toilet for disposing napkins... but this was also not cleaned for long durations”. Sagina adds, “I then asked *didi* (SNEHA Coordinator) if we could together go to the *Nagar Sevak* (elected representative) from our community and tell her about this problem and also request her to place dustbins in all public toilets and ensure that they are cleared regularly. I am waiting to go and meet the *Nagar Sevak* madam. I have decided to take up this issue and also talk to my friends in school so that we make a small beginning by not disposing napkins and cloth in the open”.



How can menstrual blood be impure if we are born with that blood...



“I thought we only get taller as we grow up, but when I joined the adolescent girls group started by SNEHA, I learnt about several other changes that take place in our body”, says 17 years old Rupali Chaudhary, who lives in Mahatma Phule Nagar, with her parents and two siblings. Her mother works as a domestic help and her father makes a living by painting houses. Rupali mentions her biggest learning from being associated with the group was on the issue of menstruation and the myths associated with it. She says that every time she used to get her periods, she was told by her mother not to touch the pictures of the Gods, not to touch the pickle bottle and sit in a corner. She adds that she used to feel irritated with these restrictions as she anyways felt very drained out and lethargic during her monthly cycles and her periods were very painful.

As part of SNEHA’s sessions, she learnt that menstrual blood was not impure and girls could lead normal lives even during these days. “*Didi* (SNEHA Coordinator) asked us to reflect on how menstrual blood could be impure if we were born with that blood”, she recounts while sharing that she experimented by once lighting the lamp in front of the God...“nothing untoward happened to me”!

Being an active member of the group, Rupali was selected as a change maker. She now actively shares her learning’s from the SNEHA sessions with other girls her age. She says she makes many efforts to dispel myths around menstruation by telling her peers that it is alright to go to the temple or work in the kitchen during these days. “I tell them that even the women who make garlands for the Gods outside temples or the women who work in pickle factories must be menstruating...do they stop work on these days of the month?”, Rupali questions.



Leaking taps make the area messy...

16 year old Sunaina Kanojia from Bhaskar Nagar has been associated with the programme right since the beginning. Sunaina was selected as one of the 50 change makers and underwent a series of workshops aimed at providing information, skills and building perspectives on social issues faced at the community level. These change makers were encouraged to identify issues that they connect with and apply the information provided and try to initiate change within their community.

An excited Sunaina has many anecdotes to share of her association with the programme, her learnings, her feeling empowered and being recognized in her family as opposed to times when they resisted her association with the programme.

She shares, “at the change makers workshop, we were all asked to identify one issue that we would like to work on in our community. I took up the issue of leaking taps and taps being left open. The community taps from where we all get our water used to drip even after being closed and as a result, a lot of water used to collect around the place and made it mucky. Initially, we thought we should repair the tap but did not know how we could do it, so we decided to cut a clean plastic drum and place it beneath the tap”. Sunaina further explains how, “I took didi’s help and urged all my friends from the street to first use this water and then fill more if we needed. This worked well sometimes as people did not have to wait to fill water, but later the drum was removed by someone”. She adds, “we need to find a permanent solution to this problem and all of us girls have decided to meet our *Nagar Sevak* (elected representative) for this. “I have also told all my friends not to leave the taps open in the toilets as it makes them very dirty and messy, besides resulting in water wastage”.





I taught my mother to sign her name...



Fifteen year old Vishal Verma migrated from Allahabad with his parents and sister and they settled down in Mahatma Phule Nagar, a slum community of Thane, an urban agglomeration of Mumbai. Vishal goes about his daily tasks including attending school where he studies in Grade Nine. The only difference is that he now finds some time to help his mother and sister to do the dishes or sweep the house.

Vishal confesses that till a few months back he believed these tasks were only to be done by women and girls, as he shyly adds “I always thought how could a boy do such things?”.

“Sometime back SNEHA collectivized us boys and asked us if we would like to be part of their activities. At the beginning, I thought that this would be boring and a waste of time..... (जब SNEHA Sansthan वाले हमे एक साथ ले गये तो मुझे लगा कि वह खाली फोकट होगा और हमे पकार्येंगे)

but I and a few friends decided to give it a try. In the first session, the *didis* talked to us about the different roles of boys and girls, they asked us if we have siblings and/or friends from the opposite sex, asking us how we behave with them. In the next meeting we discussed issues related to masculinities and the general understanding of how boys and girls should behave, what they should do etc.”. Vishal then recounts his increasing interest when the *didis* mentioned a theatre workshop coming up. “In interim meetings, we also learnt about harassment of girls, as we discussed how girls would feel if harassed. We shared that they would feel just the same way as we would if we were teased. We were taught that if we were to see a girl being teased or harassed in our community we should raise our voice. We were also informed that if the harasser is older than us or they are in a group we should collect nearby people to intervene and stop the harassment. In later meetings we underwent the theater workshops and developed a play titled “*No means no*”. This was on the issue of consent. We performed this play in the community a few times and elders appreciated our efforts. I now realize that girls trust me more and I have made more friends who respect me”.

Talking of changes at the personal level, Vishal says he asked his younger sister for the first time if she was ever teased or harassed when she was outside the home. He now makes an attempt to share her work because he feels by doing this she would be able to spend more time on her studies. Vishal however takes most pride in mentioning that he has taught his mother to sign her name. He wishes to continue to be associated with this project.



Only when I played the role of a girl being harassed on the streets did I realize how girls would feel when bullied...

17 year old Kadar Sheikh says, “I joined the boys group only because I wanted to know what my sister does as part of the group meetings organized by SNEHA! I have been part of the group for almost a year now and beyond my sister’s association!

“A series of meetings were arranged for us boys, where there were discussions on discrimination between boys and girls, different roles boys and girls play, how they behave differently, etc. In one of the meetings we were divided into groups of three and asked to perform a role play on violence faced by women and girls. We thought for sometime and enacted two scenarios, one of a drunkard husband who beats his wife and takes away her earnings to trade for liquor and one on how boys tease girls on the streets. In this role play, I enacted the role of the girl being teased. It was only then that I realized how girls would feel when they are teased, bullied or harassed on the streets, when boys whistle at them, when they call them names or touch them inappropriately.”

Kadar, in a demure manner reflects, “I come from a family where women cover their heads, for the first time I also realized how difficult it would be for my mother to cover her head at all times and continue to work. I was also part of the theater workshop where we developed a play titled “*No means no*” on the issue of consent.

“I have now started sharing some of the responsibilities at home like fetching water, something that I had never done before. Since my marks in school are good, I have also started giving tuitions to smaller children. I teach 15 students and make Rs.1500/- every month. I feel the workshops have made me a more responsible person.”







Bhaskar Nagar, Thane, Maharashtra

As the developing world becomes more urban and as the focus of poverty shifts to cities, the battle for sustainable development will have to be waged in the world's slums.