



Annual Report 2023-24



# ROOTED IN HOPE

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*Visthar*

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*Compiled and Edited by*  
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# PREFACE

## Empowering Change: A Year of Resilience and Hope

Our core pillars – Community Advocacy, Capacity Building, and Sustainability – continued to propel our work. Programs like Bandhavi and Kanasu Kishori Sanghatana empowered girls and marginalized communities by providing access to training and mentorship opportunities, enabling them to build take control of their lives. We championed education and child rights with initiatives like Samagra Sikshana Shale and CREA, while recognizing the need for more comprehensive support systems.

Shifting focus to Capacity Building, we equipped individuals and organizations for gender-responsive and inclusive change. Courses on Gender, Diversity, and Social Transformation (GDST), alongside training programs in Gender Responsive Planning and Monitoring (GRPM), aimed to address knowledge gaps. However, ensuring long-term implementation across diverse contexts remains a challenge. Programs like “Constitutional Values” and “Financial Management and Social Accountability” aimed to strengthen the perspectives and skills of educators, students, and NGO staff, highlighting the importance of continuous learning in these critical roles.

Sustainability remained a cornerstone. We partnered with corporate volunteers to promote environmental responsibility, integrating them into campus practices. Bhoomi Habba, the Earth Festival, fostered community engagement and eco-consciousness through interactive art workshops, music and theatre performances, exhibition and sale of organic produce and crafts. We acknowledge that driving long-term behaviour change requires deeper exploration and sustained commitment. Projects like Srujana Recycled, Manoranjitham Nursery, and Organic Farming all promoted ecological well-being. Though financially not viable, these initiatives underscore the need for broader systemic changes that incentivize sustainable practices.

Collaboration with stakeholders, including community organizations, educational institutions, and government bodies, proved invaluable throughout the year. However, fostering deeper partnerships and aligning goals remains an ongoing endeavour.

We are deeply grateful for the unwavering partnership of our donors. We extend our sincere appreciation to our board members, especially our Executive Trustee, for their strategic guidance and governance. Finally, a heartfelt thank you to our exceptional senior management team and staff, whose tireless efforts and passion propel us towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable world for all.

This report offers a glimpse into a year marked by resilience and hope. We invite you to delve into the detailed accounts of our work, encompassing both our successes and the challenges we encountered. As we move forward, these learnings will guide us in ensuring that ‘another world is possible’.

**Mercy Kappen**  
*Executive Director*

## **IN HOPE**

*“For all the ones  
who stood up  
and spoke out.*

*For the ones  
who are still struggling  
to find their feet  
and their voices.*

*For the ones  
who have nothing left  
to be afraid of.*

*For all the others  
who haven't yet begun*

*For you,  
In hope ...”*

**~ Imtiaz Dharker**

# COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

## i. Bandhavi – Empowering Girls at Risk

(<https://visthar.org/bandhavi/>)



### Residential Care and Education

Bandhavi provided residential care to 72 girls this year. Ten new girls joined Bandhavi, while one girl returned to her village and continued her studies there. All residents receive nutritious meals with menus adjusted seasonally by the Children's Food Committee. In terms of education, all 71 girls (except one) are enrolled in mainstream schools from 3rd to 10th grade. Fifty-nine children are enrolled in SSS (bridge course) classes this year. SSLC children received special tuition classes to prepare for their exams.

### Health, Well-being and Child Protection

Yoga is a regular activity for the girls to promote good health. Regular health checkups, weight and height monitoring, and individual counselling are provided. Additionally, three group counselling sessions were held on cooperation, coping with situations, and healthy peer relationships. Interfaith prayer is practised daily. Training on the Visthar Child Protection Policy was conducted. A Management Committee was formed, and a suggestion box is available for children's concerns. No major issues were found this year.



## Social Education and Leadership Development

Primary, high school, and SSS students participated in various competitions, and cultural meets, and received career guidance. A summer camp provided training on gender analysis, organic farming, arts & crafts, and theatre. Celebrations were held for major holidays and festivals. Children participated in social awareness activities and organized an awareness jatha against gender-based violence. Birthday celebrations are held monthly.

The girls actively involved in various committees to contribute to the smooth functioning of Bandhavi. They participated in a meeting with the Karnataka Chief Minister, a 30-hour theatre training program, and the formation of the Taluk-level Children's Parliament. They also received computer and tailoring training and showcased their talents during a stage performance.

## Collaborations and Networking

Regular government-related activities are important for Bandhavi. The District Inspection Committee for Childcare Institutions (CCI) visited the facility every three months to conduct inspections and offer suggestions. Additionally, Sr. Precilla from UNICEF, Mangalore, made quarterly visits to assist with upgrading the documentation system as per CCI rules. The District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) also visited Bandhavi, along with monthly visits from CWC members. Reports were submitted to the CWC and DCPO whenever requested. Bandhavi staff participated in trainings organized by the District administration, and the Bandhavi Coordinator attended quarterly district administration meetings concerning child protection.



## Challenges and Learnings

Bandhavi staff encountered a few challenges during the reporting period. One instance involved a new enrollee who swallowed medication upon returning from her village and expressed a desire to go home. Staff acted swiftly to take her to the hospital for treatment and contacted her mother. After discharge and with CWC permission, the girl returned home with educational materials to continue her studies.

Another challenge was related to documentation. The Child Welfare Committee (CWC) implemented a new system requiring individual files for each child. This meant compiling and organizing a significant amount of information for each child's file. The staff adapted to these changes and ensured proper documentation according to the updated guidelines.

A third challenge involved changes in house parents during the reporting period. Three house parents transitioned out of their roles, with replacements working for shorter durations (1-3 months). A new house parent joined at the beginning of this month. These changes can create adjustment difficulties for the children.

Despite these challenges, the Bandhavi staff identified valuable learnings throughout the year. The importance of building rapport with the mothers of the children, enhancing networking skills, and prioritizing the girls' cleanliness and health were some of the learnings. Maintaining proper documentation and remaining sensitive to the children's needs were also noted as crucial aspects of their work. Every activity at Bandhavi presents a learning opportunity for the staff.

## **"I Rise, I Rise, I Rise" - A Story of Resilience**

Nirmala comes from a marginalized background. Her mother, a Devadasi, faces social stigma. Nirmala herself has a physical disability in her right hand. These factors led to feelings of shame and isolation. Due to teasing and a lack of support, Nirmala's schooling was disrupted.

A visit from a staff member of the Bandhavi program marked a turning point. Despite initial hesitation about leaving her family, Nirmala found a warm welcome and supportive environment at Bandhavi. Although initially apprehensive about how other children would treat her disability, Nirmala received regular counseling and encouragement. She enrolled in the 7th grade and finally learned to read and write.

Nirmala's experience at Bandhavi extended beyond academics. She participated in yoga, organic farming, cultural activities, games, and developed leadership skills through the Children's Committee. This holistic approach fostered her confidence and talents, including singing, dancing, and theatre.

Nirmala embodies the spirit of resilience. The title "I Rise, I Rise, I Rise" captures her determination to overcome adversity. She aspires to become an officer and take care of her mother.



## A message to the children on the occasion of Bandhavi Day

December 10th is Human Rights Day. The theme for Human Rights Day 2023 is "Freedom, Equality and Justice for All". We have been celebrating this day as Bandhavi Day. I was delighted to see colourful pictures, telling vibrant stories. These are valiant stories. Your mothers are warriors of love. It is because of their love, fortitude and commitment that you experience a joyful and creative life. It was wonderful to see and read about Aiji, Smt. Yamunavva Yamanurappa Koppal, President, Hirebidnal Grama Panchayat who was your chief guest.

Your mothers trusted us, and we tried to return that trust by caring for you. In the early years, we had a newsletter that I compiled and edited. It was called Sambrama. It contained many stories of your Akkas, their dreams and aspirations. I remember many stories which included the mention of 'kasa'. Very moving stories. Yes, many children grew up on garbage heaps, breathing foul air, cutting themselves by kasa that is not sorted. While you demand your rights as children, guaranteed in the Constitution and other international documents, you must become aware of your duties. Duties to people in your village but more importantly the duty towards the earth: the trees that provide shade, rain that waters our vegetables, plants and the sun that gives us warmth. The earth and its bounty are God's gift to us. In like manner, we should become God's gift to the earth. This is the reason Visthar celebrates Environment Day. Yes through the Bhoomi Habba. Remember.



I am happy that Visthar could play a role in creating a safe and clean environment for you to grow up. As you enjoy this, I remind you of what I have said to your Akkas. Each of you will truly be free only when the devadasi practice, bonded labour, child marriage etc. is smashed. Our freedom and dignity lie in the freedom and dignity of all.

I remember a line in a song that I used to sing. 'Freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give'. Whether it is freedom, the Constitution, safe and clean spaces, or a caring community; you have received much and the only way to say thank you is for you to share it with others. For this to happen, several have worked diligently and have made /are making sacrifices. Whatever work you might do, my prayers and wishes for each of you is that you will grow to be confident, creative, courageous, and compassionate young people and adults. Bandhavi is the training space for this.

Jai Bheem, and Jai Hind.

– **David Selvaraj**  
(Founder and Executive Trustee, Visthar)

## ii. Mobile Museum - Samagra Shikshana Shale (SSS)

<https://visthar.org/samagara-shikshana-shale/>



The Mobile Museum by SSS made a comeback after the pandemic. The program successfully reached various schools and communities, engaging with over 1200 people, including 600 children. This year, the 40-minute show included a Kolatta and, a play on challenges faced by children and their families in the villages. The poster exhibition highlighted the issues they brought out in the play. The play and poster exhibition effectively addressed crucial issues like coping with mainstream education, safety, and child participation rights simply and engagingly.

The program also provided a platform for SSS children to develop leadership, communication, and performance skills, while also raising awareness about important social issues. The mobile museum fostered interaction and knowledge exchange between SSS children and the communities they visited. SSS children visited 6 villages/towns as part of the programme.

The multifaceted approach of the Mobile Museum helps in addressing important social issues and empowering children. Here are some key takeaways from this initiative:

- » Engaging and impactful: The program effectively reached over 1200 people, including 600 children, through its engaging play, poster exhibition, and village visits.
- » Addresses crucial issues: The play tackled relevant topics like coping with mainstream education, safety, and child participation rights, raising awareness and sparking conversation for young audiences.
- » Develops children's skills: The program provided a platform for SSS children to develop leadership, communication, and performance skills, while also raising awareness about important social issues.
- » Fosters interaction and knowledge exchange: The mobile museum fostered interaction and knowledge exchange between SSS children and the communities they visited, promoting a sense of community, and understanding.

- » Positive feedback: The program received positive feedback from teachers, community members, and school headmasters, highlighting its significance and potential for creating a positive impact.

The SSS Mobile Museum was a great success in raising awareness about social and gender equality, both for the children involved and the audience. The programme helped children learn about important issues, fostering clarity on social and gender perspectives from a child-rights approach. Children felt empowered to raise their voices against child rights violations and contribute to building a transformative society. Participating in the activity boosted confidence, provided a platform for creativity, and inspired children through role-playing experiences.

The following areas were identified for further strengthening of the programme:

- » Impact Assessment: Conducting surveys or interviews with participating children, teachers, and community members could provide valuable insights into the program's long-term impact on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours.
- » Documentation and Sharing: Recording the performances and creating video tutorials or resource materials could help replicate the program in other contexts and reach a wider audience.
- » Sustainability: Exploring funding opportunities and partnerships with educational institutions or NGOs could ensure the program's long-term sustainability and expand its reach.



### iii. Child Rights Education and Action – CREA

<https://visthar.org/child-rights-education-and-action/>

Child Rights Education and Action (CREA) is a project initiated by Visthar. The project's goal is to ensure "Girls and boys enjoy a greater sense of well-being with food security, equality, and inclusive education in a safe and secure environment." Funded by KIA, this is the first year of CREA's fifth phase.

The specific objectives of this phase are:

1. 5000 girls and boys become conscious of child rights and take action to safeguard the rights of all children in project villages.
2. Girls and boys in the project villages enjoy better outcomes in food and nutrition.
3. All girls and boys in the project villages can access regular schooling.
4. Girls and boys in the project villages experience less gender discrimination and gender-based violence.

#### Details of Panchayats and Villages of the Project

Sl. No.	Name of the team	Total no of panchayats	Total no of villages
1	Task Force	12	45
2	Payana	10	52
3	Hosa Belaku	13	50
<b>Total</b>		<b>35</b>	<b>147</b>



## Summary of the progress made

The CREA project covered 147 villages of 35 panchayats of Koppal district during the reporting period. The project area was distributed between three teams for smooth functioning. This report summarizes the activities and key achievements of the CREA project in 2023. The project implemented a multifaceted approach to empower children, focusing on education, food security, and child participation.

### Enhancing Knowledge and Rights

*Extensive Trainings:* Over 6,000 children received training on life skills, child rights, gender, child nutrition, and constitutional values.

*Education Promotion:* An enrolment campaign raised awareness about the Right to Education Act (RTE) and encouraged school enrolment, reaching over 11,000 individuals.

### Promoting Food Security

*Training and Awareness:* Trainings and creative campaigns, including wall paintings, poster exhibitions, and auto-rickshaw jathas, addressed food security concerns in communities.

*School Gardens:* Children actively participated in creating vegetable gardens in 11 schools, fostering a connection with food production.

*Monitoring and Assessment:* Children's representatives monitored the quality and quantity of mid-day meals, while a social audit assessed the Public Distribution System (PDS) for effectiveness.

### Empowering Children's Voices

*Children's Parliaments:* After training, children formed parliaments at the panchayat and taluk levels, providing a platform for their voices and participation in decision-making.

*Leadership Development:* A dedicated study explored the impact of these parliaments on fostering leadership skills in children.

### Building Capacity for Sustainability

*Staff Development:* Project staff received ongoing training on gender justice, child protection, theatre skills, inclusivity, and other relevant topics.

*Child Resource Center:* A physical center with child development resources was established, with plans for online accessibility to expand its reach. A child rights training manual was developed, providing a valuable resource for stakeholders.

The CREA project's accomplishments in 2023 demonstrate a significant investment in children's well-being. By equipping them with knowledge, fostering leadership skills, and ensuring access to education and food security, the project empowers children to become active participants in their communities and build a brighter future.

### Challenges Encountered

The CREA project faced several challenges in its final quarter, impacting its overall effectiveness. These challenges can be categorized as follows:

*Limited School Engagement:* Revisions to curriculum and exam schedules restricted opportunities for project implementation within schools during this period.

## A Ray of Hope

Bhagya, a young girl from the Lambani community in Talakanakapura, knew the rhythm of the seasons well. Her family, nomadic migrant workers, traveled from town to town following the harvest. Sugarcane season meant long days cutting cane under the harsh sun. But unlike her parents and older brothers, Bhagya wasn't meant for the fields.

Until she turned 13, Bhagya cherished her days in the village school. However, her education was cut short with the sugarcane harvest. Traditionally, the eldest daughter, even the youngest like Bhagya, shouldered household responsibilities while the parents toiled away. Cooking, cleaning, caring for younger siblings – these chores became her new lessons, stealing away her chance to learn and grow.

Bhagya's silence spoke volumes. Withdrawn and burdened, she bottled up her pain, unable to voice her longing for school. One day, a ray of hope arrived in the form of the CREA team. A phone call, a choked sob, and Bhagya's story unfolded. It was a story of countless girls like her, their potential buried under the weight of tradition and family needs.

The CREA team didn't just listen; they took action. They met Bhagya and her family, patiently explaining the importance of education, especially for girls. It wasn't easy. Skepticism and the question of who would manage the household work loomed large. But with each conversation, a seed of change was sown.

Finally, after persistent efforts, Bhagya's parents relented. Now, at Irakalgadha High School, Bhagya, a determined student in the 8th grade, was catching up on lost years. Though challenges remained, her family and the CREA team were by her side, ensuring she received the support she needed. Bhagya's story was a testament to the power of intervention, the fight for girls' education, and the hope that bloomed even in the most unexpected places.

**Mala R**

*CREA Team*

*Training Session Dilution:* Participation by individuals outside the core CREA member group diluted the focus and effectiveness of training sessions for those most directly involved in the project.

*Parental Prioritization:* Prioritization of work by parents over child development activities led to issues such as child labor and a rise in the number of out-of-school children. This limited the project's ability to reach and engage its target beneficiaries.

*Meeting Scheduling Difficulties:* Scheduling regular meetings with project participants proved challenging due to a lack of awareness about CREA's purpose and the opportunity cost of lost wages for attending parents.

*Programmatic Hurdles:* Difficulties arose with the implementation of program organization advances, particularly related to a limited acceptance of online transactions within the target community.

*Staff Turnover:* The project experienced staff turnover after significant time and resources were invested in their training. This disrupted project continuity and required additional efforts for recruitment and onboarding of new staff.



These challenges highlight the complex social and economic realities within the project's target community. Moving forward, the CREA project will explore strategies to address these challenges, such as:

- » Collaborating with schools to identify alternative windows for project implementation outside of peak exam periods.
- » Developing targeted training sessions specifically tailored to core CREA members.
- » Engaging with community leaders and parents to raise awareness of the project's benefits and address concerns about child development.
- » Exploring alternative meeting times or locations to improve accessibility for participants.
- » Simplifying program procedures and potentially offering alternative modes of financial transactions.
- » Implementing strategies to improve staff retention and knowledge transfer within the project.

## CASE STUDY

### The Power of Collective Action

In the heart of Karnataka, nestled amidst fields and dusty roads, lay the village of Karmudi. Home to around 4,500 people, it was a place where two main communities, the Lingayats and Kurubas, co-existed peacefully alongside Dalit and Muslim families. Education wasn't always a priority, but a turning point arrived on an unexpected day – Teachers' Day, September 5th, 2023.

The spark came from the village's youth and graduates. They decided to throw a grand celebration in the school, honoring every person who championed child education and protection. The energy was infectious, drawing nearly 100 villagers to the event. It was a celebration of knowledge and a silent vow to do better.

Energized by this collective spirit, Gowdappa, the SDMC chairperson, Mardansab Mulla, a Panchayat member, and Yamanurappa Hadimani, the school headmaster, called a meeting. They weren't alone; a group of villagers passionate about the school's development joined them. Together, they identified the needs of the school, making a list and prioritizing each point. It was a roadmap to a brighter future.

The villagers wasted no time. They pooled in money to repair the crumbling school wall, the authorities having turned a deaf ear to their pleas. With their own funds, they also painted the old buildings, transforming the drab exterior. An art teacher, brimming with enthusiasm, volunteered to create murals on the school walls. These weren't just decorations; they were vibrant illustrations, directly linked to the school curriculum, designed to spark a love of learning in young minds.

Recognizing the importance of nutrition, the community started contributing pulses and other healthy grains for the school meals. They even constructed a stage and installed a powerful sound system, turning the school into a venue for events and celebrations. Every classroom received a makeover – equipped with sound systems, whiteboards, markers, and most importantly, a reliable electricity connection. Gone were the days of dull classrooms; the walls were now adorned with colorful and educational paintings. To ensure safety, CCTV cameras were strategically placed throughout the school.

The committee, however, didn't stop there. They were keenly aware of child protection issues. They kept a watchful eye on dropout rates, ensuring every child received an education. They actively monitored the Anganwadis (rural childcare centers) to guarantee the well-being of even

the youngest villagers. Children's Gram Sabha, a village council meeting specifically for children, was taken seriously. Here, children could voice their concerns and needs, fostering a sense of participation and empowerment. The health of the village's children was another priority, with the committee addressing their specific needs.

News of Karmudi's transformation spread like wildfire. Neighboring villages began looking at them with admiration. Their model of community-driven child protection was a beacon of hope, inspiring others to replicate their success.

A key player in this journey was CREA, the child rights project of Visthar. One of their community facilitators, actively involved in the committee, had played a crucial role in mobilizing the villagers and continues to be a pillar of support. As they looked towards the future, the committee was already planning new initiatives for the coming year, their unwavering commitment to child well-being shining brighter than ever. Karmudi's story was a testament to the power of collective action, proving that when a community unites for its children, the possibilities are boundless.

**Basavaraj Baligeri**  
Coordinator, CREA

## A Reflective Analysis

The CREA project has achieved significant results, but continuous improvement is crucial. Here's a look at key takeaways:

*Project Redesign:* The current schedule needs adjustment to distribute activities more evenly throughout the year, considering school breaks and local events.

*Leadership Development:* While the project successfully fostered leadership within sangha and parliament activities, incorporating more community-based projects can further deepen these skills.

*Community-Driven Solutions:* CREA's success in empowering communities to address issues like Anganwadi effectiveness highlights the value of this approach. Future initiatives should prioritize such solutions.

*Sustaining Food Security:* The well-received food security campaign deserves continuation with a larger, networked approach for broader impact.

*Kitchen Garden Expansion:* The successful school kitchen garden project serves as a model for wider adoption. Promoting its replication in other schools can create a sustainable impact.

*Ensuring Safe Participation:* Concerns about children returning home late will be addressed by prioritizing completion of activities before dark.

## Collaboration with Local Stakeholders

CREA's success goes hand-in-hand with its strong collaborations with local stakeholders:

*Building Trust:* Initial resistance from families during home visits was overcome by clear communication about child protection. This approach fostered trust and family engagement.

*Community Recognition:* CREA's dedication to reaching children has earned respect from other NGOs, schools, panchayat members, and social workers, leading to growing appreciation for its interventions.

*Expanding Advocacy:* Participation in events with other federations broadened recognition and support for Visthar and its projects.

*Strengthening Alliances:* Collaboration with a field-based organization committed to social change allows CREA staff to participate in workshops by the Azim Premji Foundation, further strengthening their knowledge and capacity.

By incorporating these reflections and capitalizing on existing collaborations, the CREA project can continue to empower children and communities towards a brighter future.



*There shall be peace on earth, but not until  
All children daily eat their fill,  
Go warmly clad against the winter wind  
And learn their lessons with a tranquil mind.  
And then, released from hunger, fear and need  
Regardless of their colour, race or creed  
Look upward smiling to their skies,  
Their faith in life reflected in their eyes.*

**~ Dorothy Roigt**

## iv. Kanasu Kishori Sanghatana (KKS)

<https://visthar.org/kanasu-kishori-sanghatana-kks/>

The Kanasu Kishori Sanghatana (KKS) is a transformative program empowering adolescent girls in Kukanoor Taluk, Koppal district of North Karnataka. Over its first three years, KKS has built a strong foundation for girls' rights. This includes establishing 250 active "Kishori Sanghas" – collectives of adolescent girls – across 57 villages and 15 wards. To further support these girls, KKS has formed 60 "Kishori Nyaya Samitis" – committees of adult stakeholders who advocate for girls' rights. Additionally, 15 "Kishori Resource Centers" serve as safe learning spaces for girls within their communities.

KKS tackles critical issues like gender-based violence, child marriage, and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) through grassroots campaigns. They don't stop at awareness-raising. KKS empowers girls to hold local authorities accountable. A powerful platform is the Adolescent Girls' Parliament, where girls directly address issues like school sanitation and transportation with government officials.

KKS's impact goes beyond policy changes. By establishing peer monitoring systems for child marriage and collaborating with communities on issues like harassment, KKS fosters a supportive environment. This collective action, coupled with leadership opportunities, demonstrably boosts participating girls' confidence and self-esteem. Their success stories highlight the transformative power of empowering young women to advocate for themselves and their communities.



## The Adolescent Girls' Parliament: A Case Study



The adolescent girls' parliament, initiated as part of the KKS project, is now spearheading advocacy and bringing change at multiple levels. This is their story.

Our collectives of adolescent girls are federated at multiple levels – village, Panchayath and Taluk levels. Each level nominates representatives for the higher level. There are 220 parliamentarians at the Taluk level. All the parliaments meet regularly.

The parliaments have been trained to take up issues that emerge from the collectives. They study the issue, plan a strategy, and invite adults as allies. In their quarterly meetings, they review progress and revise plans. The parliaments constantly strive to put pressure on local authorities and community leaders to bring change.

For instance, they used the findings of our study on Menstrual Hygiene Management to push the district administration to take appropriate measures in schools like hygienic toilets, supply of menstrual pads, provisions for safe disposal of menstrual materials, etc. As a result of their persistent follow-up, the Deputy Commissioner, who is the administrative head of the district, wrote to all local governments asking for an "Actions Taken Report" on the findings and recommendations of the study. The parliament leaders also advocated with the education minister of the state for the supply of free menstrual pads in schools, when the Minister was visiting the district.

On November 18, the collectives held their annual Taluk-level parliament at Itagi. Over 350 people attended this day-long event that was organised and led by the girls. That included 220 representatives of the girls who came from across the Taluk. They called government officials, and community leaders to attend. 2 Panchayath Presidents, 15 Panchayath members, the Panchayath Development Officer, 20 Anganawadi workers, 25 ASHA workers, teachers and community members from all 60 villages attended this event.

The parliament was chaired by the speaker, Sindhu, a 15-year-old girl. She took up 22 issues that had been tabled before the parliament by different Panchayaths. She invited girls from the Panchayath to explain the issue, why they felt it was a priority and what needed to be done next. She also called on elected leaders and government officials to respond to the issues raised.

Girls from 6 different Panchayaths raised the issue of non-availability of drinking water and clean toilets in their schools. The speaker called on each school official and their supervisors in the local administration to respond. By the end of the day, all the schools had committed to resolving the issue within four months. The parliament has since been following up on those commitments. As we write this report, the Neljeri Panchayath High School has just completed the construction of new toilets for girls, following the Taluk Parliament in November. More schools are expected to honour their commitments to build clean toilets for girls.

The girls also took up smaller issues. For instance, children from one village had to cross a highway to go to the High School. The parliament demanded better road signage to enable children to cross the road safely. The local administration promised to address it this quarter.

The Taluk parliament also became a forum to share success stories. Girls from Masabinchanala village shared that after they repeatedly faced sexual harassment from boys on their way to school, they discussed it in their collectives; the next day, the girls together confronted the boys and demanded why they were being harassed. Taken by surprise, the boys backed down. The girls shared they have not been harassed since. The collective has also reported these incidents to the Justice Committee in their village.

We are quite excited by the achievements of the Adolescent Girls Parliament. Over the last 18 months, a lot of work has gone into the formation of these parliaments. The confidence and strength the girls demonstrated in the parliament did not emerge overnight. That is the result of sustained work with the girls from their collectives in the village onwards.

The nascent success of the parliament encourages us to move strongly in this direction. We see the parliaments building the leadership skills of adolescent girls, fostering civic engagement, and building solidarity among the girls. That's the change we would like to see and share.

## Kishori Voices Rise Against Gender-Based Violence

16 Days Activism by Kanasu Kishori Sanghatana (KKS)



KKS spearheaded the 16-day campaign from November 26th to December 11th, in Koppal. The campaign, aptly titled “16 Days of Activism,” coincided with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Human Rights Day. It served as a platform to address prevalent issues like gender-based violence, child rights, and caste discrimination.

Each day of the campaign was filled with thought-provoking street plays, awareness rallies, workshops, and interactive sessions. Local artists, activists, and community members came together to raise their voices and inspire action. From highlighting the importance of girl child education to advocating for fair wages for agricultural workers, the campaign touched upon a diverse range of concerns.

### Breaking the Silence, claiming their Space

One particularly impactful initiative was the “Safe Space” program, which provided a platform for women and children to share their experiences and access vital support services. The program fostered a sense of community and empowered girls and women to break the silence surrounding sensitive issues. A young Kishori, her eyes sparkling with defiance, declared, “We girls are not less in anything. Yet we are not getting opportunities. So, we must boldly come forward and speak.” Her words resonated with a group of fellow Kishoris, each one adding their own stories of struggle and resilience. The Kanasu Kishori Sanghatana (KKS) became a symbol of their collective strength and a platform for amplifying their voices.

### The Burden of Tradition, the Fight for Education

Another revealing moment came when a woman shared her childhood experiences. Recalling how girls had to juggle household chores, school, and studies, often succumbing to exhaustion before even starting their homework, she poignantly remarked, “We, the parents, are the ones who discriminate against girls in this way.” Her words served as a stark reminder of the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that contribute to gender-based violence.

The campaign aimed not just to raise awareness but also to inspire action. Parents and guardians were urged to re-examine their attitudes and break free from discriminatory practices. The message was clear: true equality can only be achieved when girls are given equal opportunities and treated with respect and dignity within their own homes and communities.

## Breaking the Cycle, Embracing Change

The campaign's success stemmed from its collaborative spirit. Visthar partnered with local NGOs, government agencies, and educational institutions to amplify its reach and impact. Beyond raising awareness, the "16 Days of Activism" campaign laid the groundwork for concrete action. Several initiatives, such as self-defence training workshops for women and skill development programs for marginalised communities, were set in motion to create lasting change.

"The 16 Days of Activism in Koppal have come to an end, but the echoes of the Kishori voices and the calls for change continue to reverberate. Their stories serve as a powerful testament to the transformative power of activism and the unwavering spirit of young girls determined to rewrite their narratives and pave the way for a brighter future", reiterates Asha, Project Manager of Kanasu Kishori Sanghatana (KKS), a project of Visthar in Koppal.

### Deepening Awareness and Agency

3,500 girls and 1,500 boys increased their knowledge of child rights, including their rights to food and nutrition through the various sessions we facilitated for them.. Additionally, 925 girls have spoken up about menstrual health management (MHM) and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) in the adolescent girls' parliament and collectives after participating in these sessions.

In our annual outcome survey, 2,400 girls reported experiencing greater confidence and self-esteem. This increase is attributed to the training and opportunities they received in public speaking and advocating for their rights within the collectives.

A total of 220 girls led collective actions and advocated with local government authorities through the adolescent girls' parliament that we initiated. They undertook 251 initiatives to address issues in their schools and communities.

Children's collectives successfully intervened to prevent four child marriages. Furthermore, 346 girls were involved in submitting 16 memoranda to local authorities, urging them to take a more active role in preventing child marriages. Following sessions and discussions on gender-based violence (GBV) during Sangha training and parliament meetings, 84 girls shared examples of responding to sexual abuse.



## v. Empowering Women Migrant Workers

During 2023 we embarked on a crucial initiative to empower women migrant workers. We began by identifying 11 villages with high migration rates, collaborating closely with government health workers and our local facilitators. This collaborative approach led to the recruitment of two dedicated community facilitators who will work directly with women migrant workers in these villages. To ensure their success, a senior coordinator provides ongoing support and guidance.

### Raising Awareness and establishing collectives

We conducted a comprehensive study in all 11 villages. This involved meeting with key stakeholders and most importantly, every woman migrant worker currently back home. Their valuable insights shaped the development of a powerful street theatre campaign. Our talented theatre troupe, comprised of young women and men, then actively engaged with the communities. These performances raised awareness of the critical issues faced by women migrant workers and their children, including labour exploitation, gender-based violence, school dropout rates, and sexual and reproductive health concerns.

Capitalizing on our existing presence working with adolescent girls in these villages, our community facilitators embarked on door-to-door outreach campaigns. This strategic approach, coupled with the groundwork laid by the street theatre, fostered a sense of trust and solidarity. By the end of the year, we successfully established 11 collectives with over 200 women migrant workers.

### Advocating for Change

This is just the first step in our journey towards empowering women migrant workers. We are committed to strengthening these collectives, raising their awareness of their rights, and equipping them to advocate for themselves. We are actively collaborating with established migrant worker organizations to learn from their expertise and build our capacity to offer even more comprehensive support. As a next step, training sessions on the rights and entitlements of women migrant workers are scheduled for both our staff and the leaders of these collectives.



## vi. Visthar Ranga Shaale (VRS)

Vistar Ranga Shale has had another impactful year, utilizing the power of theatre to educate, empower, and entertain communities across Karnataka. This report highlights our key achievements and the lasting impact of our programs.

### Building Skills and Raising Awareness

- » We provided 15 trainees with theatre skills, including Kolata and theatre. These trainees facilitated campaigns in food security with awareness marches and theatre performances in villages and schools, reaching over 10,000 people.
- » The trainees also tackled child marriage through street play campaigns in KKS villages, reaching 5,000 girls and 8,000 community members.

### Empowering Women and Children

- » Six students, trained in street theatre, performed powerful pieces on women migrant worker empowerment in 10 villages, reaching over 6,000 people.
- » The Rangada Rangu program brought theatre activities to government schools, while the SSS mobile museum used theatre to promote safety and equality concepts, reaching over 3,000 children. This program also extended its reach to bonded children, with students creating and performing dramas based on children's texts.
- » The Dussehra camp provided theatre training to children, culminating in a performance focused on environmental conservation. Youths from KKS also received street theatre training and staged a play on girl child safety.

### Repertory

- » Ten apprentices underwent a rigorous theatre training program, resulting in the formation of a repertory team that presented the thought-provoking play "Kaggattala Dariya Maha Chetana" (Ocean of Change) in 13 villages. The play raised awareness about the importance of education among over 15,000 people.

Visthar Ranga Shale prioritizes continuous learning and improvement, adapting performances and overcoming challenges to ensure maximum impact.



## Theatre for Social Transformation

In CREA villages, a new form of engagement emerged – theatre for social transformation. Unlike dusty textbooks, these plays were vibrant and alive. Young women and men, their faces painted with purpose, brought social issues to life on makeshift stages.

The power of theatre was undeniable. It gave voice to the voiceless, sparking conversations that might otherwise remain buried. Laughter and tears mingled as the plays tackled difficult themes: exploitation of children and women, violation of rights, and the desperate need for change.

The troupe, a whirlwind of creativity, traveled to 45 villages, reaching over 6,000 people – children, women, and men. Their presentations were more than entertainment; they were catalysts for action.

The students of Visthar Ranga Shale, the theatre group, poured their hearts into each performance. They crafted stories, dialogues, music, and dances that resonated with the audience. They watched, they listened, and they learned.

After each performance, a vibrant discussion erupted. The silence that often cloaked social problems was shattered. People shared experiences, debated solutions, and even made decisions. In some villages, elders took a stand against child marriage, child labor, and gender discrimination, that had long festered in the shadows.

The power of the plays wasn't limited to sparking conversation. A massive banner became a symbol of support for child protection. As a testament to the impact, 3,875 signatures adorned the cloth, a collective pledge for a brighter future.

However, the journey wasn't without challenges. In some villages, a veil of ignorance shrouded the audience. Issues like child marriage and malnutrition remained sensitive, met with reluctance and a lack of awareness. But even here, the seeds of change were sown. Open discussions after the performances chipped away at the walls of ignorance, paving the way for a more informed future.

The theatre troupe of CREA wasn't just performing plays; they were weaving a tapestry of social transformation, thread by thread, village by village.

**Dharmaraj Gonal**

*CREA team*



## CAPACITY BUILDING

### **i. Course on Gender, Diversity and Social Transformation (GDST 2023)**

In May 2023, Visthar's flagship program, Gender, Diversity and Social Transformation (GDST) returned after a three-year pandemic hiatus. This intensive 18-day course was not just about academics; it is about sparking transformative journeys for individuals and communities alike. Let's delve into the essence of GDST and its enduring impact.

#### **A journey of self-discovery:**

At the heart of GDST lies an introspective quest. Participants embark on a journey of self-discovery, examining their own identities and how they are shaped by socio-economic and cultural forces. This personal exploration forms the foundation for developing an intersectional lens. Through this lens, participants learn to critically analyse contemporary issues like gender justice, masculinities, LGBTQ+ rights, disability, and empowerment, understanding how they interweave and impact lives.

#### **Empowering agents of change:**

GDST doesn't stop at introspection. Equipped with critical awareness, participants hone their planning and leadership skills. They learn to navigate complex social realities, facilitating positive transformations within organizations and communities. The program delves into the policies of governments and UN agencies, equipping participants to engage with these structures meaningfully.

The 2023 edition of GDST saw vital updates, reflecting the ever-evolving landscape of diversity and social justice. Participants grappled with the intricate impacts of globalization, pandemics, and other disasters on gender and social relations. This dynamic curriculum ensures that GDST remains relevant and impactful in a world constantly in flux.

#### **A transformative experience:**

Over 250 participants from 30+ countries have participated in GDST over the years, forging a dynamic network of changemakers. These alumni have gone on to become gender specialists, facilitators, program managers, and leaders in their respective fields. Their stories speak of shattered glass ceilings, transformed organizations, and empowered communities.

This intensive program isn't just a course; it's a transformative experience. It invites you to confront your own biases, develop critical thinking skills, and emerge as an agent of positive change. From understanding self and identity to navigating intricate social dynamics, GDST equips participants with the tools to contribute to a more equitable and just world.

## What participants said :

"GDST has changed the lens of my view on issues of gender, caste, class, disability, and sexuality through building an intersectional perspective. The deeply reflective, participatory, compassionate, and feedback-driven pedagogy made the learning effective and comprehensible. Thank you, Mercy Kappen, Roshen Chandran, and all my co-participants for supporting me in my learning and for all the love and laughter. What an enriching time I had after a long time. Eternally grateful." Malini Krishnanunni, GDST 2023

"I feel proud to have completed this intensive course, which was very transformative. It helped me to reflect deeply on many personal stories. We also listened respectfully to each other's stories. The course was designed to discuss real-life case stories of gender inequality, and social injustice and how they were interconnected in different ways"/ Imma Mary, I4connect, GDST 2023

"A new generation of leaders from Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia re-imagine what a world of equality/justice and love looks like for all of us. Amazing journey with some very talented folx. Refreshing and eye-opening. Despite trying to coordinate many other things during the series, it was a great refresher to unlearn, learn, and prepare for the next few years. Also, art-based facilitation is the best. I am glad I trusted the facilitators and their methods". Meghana Rao, GDST 2023.



## ii. TOT in Gender Responsive Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Visthar held the second part of the inter-modular Training of Trainers (ToT) residential workshop for KIA partners themed Gender Responsive Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation on its Bengaluru campus from July 24 to 26.

The ToT programme aims to facilitate creative gender sensitisation; train in-house staff on gender-responsive planning, monitoring and evaluation; and develop gender-responsive indicators for programmes. The programme comprised two three-day modules with a gap of a few months. The Perspective Development Module to strengthen perspectives on gender, intersectionality, and gender-responsive indicators was held in April this year. The Facilitation Skills Module to practice leading sessions and getting feedback from peers was held this month. The workshop was facilitated by Roshen Chandran, Mercy Kappen and Raaj.

### Participant experiences

*"Now when we form CBOs we see to it that we have equal participation of women and men in the group. We focus on gender issues and try to understand the problems of women. We need to mainstream gender in all our projects. And now we have the indicators that make our work more defined."*

Harshan, Eficor

*"Our work also involves working for the rights of the girl child and this workshop has equipped me with gender-sensitive tools. Now I have a better idea of how to make parents and the school authorities responsive to girls attending school and not being forced to do housework. Like her brother, she too should get leisure time."*

Rajshekar, MV Foundation

*"We have to know how to mainstream gender concerns. The workshop is helping me understand exactly how to be gender inclusive in cross-cutting themes. We can see our projects with a gender lens and weed out from the start what could be counter-productive to gender equality".*

Mayank Tomas, CNI-SBSS

*"Now I have understood how gender sensitisation is involved in every project. I will focus on these indicators more. Initially, my understanding of gender issues was superficial but now it is more in-depth".*

Merina, Priscilla Centre

## iii. Course on Gender Responsive Planning and Monitoring (GRPM)

For over 25 years, Visthar has been working on mainstreaming gender and diversity. We have partnered with countless CSOs, building capacities and perspectives to integrate gender into their organizations and programs. The GRPM workshop was a natural extension of that journey. We realise that transformative change doesn't happen automatically or by chance. We need intentionality, a conscious effort to weave gender into our life and work.

Why Gender Responsive Planning and Monitoring? Achieving inclusive and sustainable development demands that we integrate gender justice into every facet of our work. The GRPM course was designed to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to do just that. Our objectives included:

- » Strengthen participants understanding of gender and diversity, fostering a deeper and more nuanced perspective.
- » Equip participants with the concepts and methods for gender analysis
- » Developing an intersectional lens to analyse and respond to gender inequalities acknowledging the interconnectedness of various social identities and institutions.

This intensive program, held from January 8-12, 2024, brought together 26 participants from 15 diverse organizations across 10 Indian states + Maldives & Sri Lanka! Their insightful debates, unwavering commitment, and passionate reflections were truly inspiring. GRPM was a testament to the transformative power of learning, a space where knowledge was co-created and solutions were forged.



Here's what participants had to say about GRPM :

- » "The facilitators expertly guided us through a dynamic mix of practical exercises, insightful case studies, and thought-provoking visualizations. These innovative methods challenged our assumptions and sparked critical thinking, leaving a lasting impact on our perspectives on gender and diversity."
- » "The highly relevant content, coupled with interactive activities, fostered a strong sense of ownership among participants. We didn't just learn - we actively co-created knowledge and practical solutions."
- » "This empowering approach, minimizing lectures and maximizing critical thinking, equipped us with the skills and confidence to drive positive change within our organizations and communities."



Another world  
Is not only possible.  
She is on her way.  
On a quiet day  
I can hear breathing

- Arundhati Roy



A visioning exercise  
by GDST 2023





## iv. Mainstreaming Gender in Education

### Gender Sensitization Workshops for St. Joseph's University

Visthar facilitated a series of workshops for professors at St. Joseph's University in Bengaluru. Over three batches, we engaged with over 300 professors and staff members, aiming to create a more aware and sensitive teaching community. These workshops were conducted in response to the mandatory guidelines set forth by the UGC (University Grants Commission) of India.

### Concepts of Gender, Diversity and Inclusion

The interactive workshops explored concepts of gender, diversity, and inclusion. We delved into real-life scenarios faced by educators through a combination of approaches, including screening an episode of *Satyameva Jayate* featuring Kamla Bhasin's insightful conversation on masculinities. This discussion sparked a deeper understanding of how traditional notions of masculinity can negatively impact both women and men. The workshops emphasized that the gender debate is not a fight between the sexes, but rather a clash between two ideologies: one that upholds equality and one that perpetuates stereotypes and inequalities.

Beyond the film screening, we also utilized quizzes and interactive sessions to foster engagement. These sessions explored unconscious bias, the importance of inclusive language in the classroom, and strategies for promoting respectful interactions among students.

### Gender Diversity in Classrooms

One of the challenges encountered during the workshops was addressing the confusion expressed by some participants regarding the focus on gender diversity. Questions arose about why so much emphasis was placed on this issue in our educational institutions, and whether we should focus on helping students conform to traditional gender roles.

This presented an opportunity for a valuable exchange of ideas. Another participant eloquently pointed out that gender and sexual minorities have constitutionally guaranteed rights, and that educational institutions have a responsibility to recognize and respect these rights. The discussion highlighted the importance of creating a safe space for all students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. We explored the concept of a gender spectrum, moving beyond the traditional binary view and fostering a more inclusive understanding of gender.

The workshops ultimately fostered a spirit of collaboration and a commitment to creating a more inclusive learning environment for all students at St. Joseph's University. The enthusiasm of the participants were truly rewarding aspects of this experience.

Gender sensitization in educational institutions is crucial for building a future where young minds are equipped to challenge stereotypes and advocate for a more equitable society.

## **v. Mainstreaming Gender in Social Work**

### **For MSW students of Kristu Jayanti College**

A two-day training program on mainstreaming gender in social work was held for 40 MSW students from Kristu Jayanti College on February 26th and 27th, 2024. The program aimed to equip future social work students with the knowledge and skills to address gender issues and promote social justice.

The opening session set the stage for the workshop by outlining its goals and objectives. An interactive activity then explored participants' existing perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes. This session challenged preconceived notions and introduced key concepts like gender identity, sex assigned at birth, and gender expression.

### **Understanding Gender Dynamics**

The program delved deeper into the societal forces shaping gender. Participants explored how institutions like family, education, religion and media contribute to the "gendering process" and perpetuate inequalities. The session that followed focused on understanding power dynamics and the concept of patriarchy. Participants analyzed different forms of power and how patriarchal structures disadvantage women and marginalize certain groups. Discussions aimed at recognizing these systems' impact on social work practice.

### **Addressing Gender-Based Violence**

A dedicated session addressed the various forms of gender-based violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. It explored the root causes, consequences, and available support systems for survivors. Participants learned strategies for recognizing and responding to gender-based violence.

### **Intersectionality and Women's Empowerment**

The concept of intersectionality was then introduced, highlighting how social identities like caste, class, and gender are interconnected. Participants explored how these identities can further marginalize individuals and how social workers can adopt an intersectional approach in their interventions. Key concepts related to women's development, including empowerment, equality, and equity were also dealt with. Participants discussed strategies for promoting women's rights and participation in all aspects of society.

The concluding session explored how to integrate a gender perspective into their social work practice to address inequalities and promote social justice. Participants learned methods for advocating for policy changes and creating inclusive programs that cater to diverse needs.

This training program provided a valuable foundation for the participating MSW students. By equipping them with a deeper understanding of gender and its impact on social work practice, the program empowered them to advocate for inclusivity and become agents of positive change in their future careers.

## vi. Leadership Training for Garment Workers

This two-day residential workshop, facilitated by Visthar, aimed to empower garment worker leaders with the skills and knowledge to conduct similar workshops on key topics for their fellow workers at their respective Worker Resource Centers (WRCs). The workshop was held on 5th & 6th, August 2023 at Viothar. . There were 25 participants (15 Garment Worker Leaders + 10 Field Staff)

The following topics were dealt with at the workshop:

*Effective Communication:* This module explored various communication methods (verbal, written, visual) and their strengths and weaknesses. Participants learned to choose the most appropriate method for different situations. Additionally, the distinction between active listening and passive hearing was addressed, with participants practicing active listening techniques to improve communication effectiveness.

*Leadership Development:* This module delved into the concept of leadership, exploring various definitions and the qualities that make a successful leader. Key leadership qualities like communication, delegation, problem-solving, and decision-making were discussed, along with the different functions leaders fulfill within a group or organization. Participants also gained insights into various leadership styles and how to identify their own preferred style.

*Negotiation and Dialogue Skills:* This session equipped participants with the skills to effectively negotiate with employers, brands, partner organizations, and other stakeholders.

The workshop was delivered entirely in Kannada to ensure clear and concise communication with all participants. To promote active learning and participation, the workshop incorporated interactive activities, group discussions, and role-playing exercises throughout the two days.

## vii. Networking and Capacity Building of CBOs

We supported 4 grassroots organizations to raise funds for collectivizing adolescent girls in North Karnataka. In the last few months, we have been supporting them to raise their capacities in feminist analysis and organising. We conducted two workshops for them. The first workshop with 20 teachers focused on integrating gender equality concerns in their classrooms. The second workshop tried to increase the gender justice consciousness of grassroots community organisers from these organizations.

We continued to facilitate sessions on gender justice in various forums and conferences. This included sessions on "Intersection of Ecology and Economy" and "Feminist perspectives on Ecology and Economy" for youth leaders from India and Bangladesh during the 6-day "Youth Consultation on Ecology and Economy in South Asia Region" organised by the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI).

## viii. Fostering Civic Consciousness

### Workshops on Constitutional Values for Educators

The fundamental values enshrined in the Constitution – equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism, and justice – often remain abstract concepts for students, confined within the pages of textbooks. Recognizing this gap, Karnataka State Higher Education Academy (KSHEA) envisioned a series of trainings that would equip educators with a comprehensive understanding of these values and also the tools to translate them into tangible experiences for their students.

Visthar was invited to develop a curriculum and train professors from government colleges in Karnataka. The training delved into the very essence of the Constitution, dissecting the Preamble's powerful words and unearthing the values embedded within. Each core principle – equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism, and justice – was discussed in dedicated session, allowing for in-depth exploration and nuanced understanding.

To bridge the divide between theory and practice, the trainings were conducted using creative and participatory methodologies. Case studies presented real-life scenarios, challenging participants to critically analyse power dynamics and potential violations of constitutional rights. Games and quizzes sparked lively discussions, while theatre and role-play exercises provided platforms for experiential learning. Group discussions brought out diverse perspectives, as educators grappled with complex issues and sought solutions rooted in constitutional principles. By equipping educators with frameworks and tools for analysing social realities through the lens of the Constitution, the Visthar team, comprising Mercy Kappen, Nazar P.S. and Asha V enabled them to become facilitators of civic consciousness within their classrooms. The goal was not just to impart knowledge but to ignite a passion for social responsibility, nurturing future generations of informed and engaged citizens.

The echoes of this workshop will undoubtedly resonate far beyond the confines of the training room. As educators return to their classrooms, they carry the knowledge and skills to translate the values enshrined in the Constitution into the lived experiences of their students. They will ensure that these fundamental values not only shape curriculum content but also permeate the very fabric of the educational environment.

From November 2023 – February 2024, Visthar facilitated training for five batches covering 300 educators. As these educators step back into their classrooms, the seeds sown during the workshop will take root.



## Constitution Day Celebrations

Visthar – Koppal organized a vibrant celebration of Constitution Day on November 26, 2023 at Yelaburga, with the theme “Safety, Equality: Our Fundamental Rights.” The day’s events aimed to raise awareness about the Constitution of India and its importance in ensuring the safety and equality of all citizens, particularly women and children.



The celebrations commenced with a grand procession led by city council officers, town panchayat officials, and representatives of women’s organizations. The procession paid homage to Hazrat Tipu Sultan of Yalaburga through a garlanding ceremony, followed by similar tributes to statues of other prominent leaders. A large vehicle prominently displayed the Preamble of the Constitution throughout the procession, serving as a powerful visual reminder of India’s foundational document.

Children, youth, community leaders, representatives from various organizations, and government officials all actively participated in the procession, showcasing a united commitment to upholding constitutional values. The celebrations culminated in a stage program held at the Government Pre-University College, Yalaburga. Esteemed guests including Ms. Saroja Bhakale (CWC member), women’s rights activist Jyothi Hitnal, Taluk Panchayat officers, Town Panchayat Chief Officer Mr. Nagesh, and representatives from various movements graced the occasion.

The program featured enlightening speeches on the topics of “Women and the Constitution” and “Children and the Constitution,” emphasizing the importance of safeguarding the rights enshrined in the document. A reading of the Preamble further reinforced the significance of the Constitution in ensuring a just and equitable society.

A pivotal moment of the program was the launch of the Taluk-level Children’s Parliament, empowering young minds to understand and engage with democratic processes. Additionally, the day marked the beginning of the “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” campaign, highlighting the ongoing fight for women’s safety and equality.

The event drew an impressive crowd of approximately 500-600 people from all walks of life, signifying the widespread interest in understanding and upholding constitutional principles. Children and staff enlivened the atmosphere with patriotic songs and cultural performances, adding a celebratory spirit to the occasion.

The Constitution Day celebration in Yalaburga proved to be a resounding success, raising awareness about the Constitution and its significance in ensuring a society that upholds the rights and safety of all its citizens. The active participation of children and the launch of the Children’s Parliament promise a future generation well-versed in their constitutional rights and empowered to contribute to a just and equitable India.

## ix. North Carolina University – An Immersion Programme

An enthusiastic group of social work students and faculty from the University of North Carolina recently embarked on a transformative journey to Visthar. They were part of a two-week educational program at St. Joseph's University in Bangalore, India. The UNC team's time at Visthar resonated deeply with the broader theme of their Bangalore program: "Reflecting on Issues, Envisioning Possibilities."

Through insightful sessions on "India Today: Issues and Challenges" and "Gender and Diversity," they gained valuable perspectives on the unique social landscape of India and the challenges faced by marginalized communities. These were facilitated by David Selvaraj and Mercy Kappen, senior faculty at Visthar. Stepping beyond theory, the UNC team embarked on nature walks around the campus and the neighborhood, connecting with the local environment and engaging with the people who call it home. These walks weren't just scenic; they served as opportunities to observe and gain a deeper understanding of the context in which Visthar operates.



Art and creativity took center stage next, with the students and faculty participating in pottery and art workshops facilitated by the talented artists, Sonu Pujarand Mahesh Pattar at Visthar Academy and Jeena Gii and Steven Paul at the Srujana Recycled. These hands-on sessions not only fostered cultural exchange but also served as a powerful tool for self-expression and connection. Witnessing the transformation of raw materials into beautiful creations resonated with the group's mission of social transformation.

The UNC social work students and faculty returned from their Visthar experience not just with valuable knowledge and a deeper understanding of India's social landscape, but also with a renewed commitment to social justice and a strengthened sense of global community. The sessions, workshops, and interactions served as a powerful catalyst for learning, reflection, and personal growth.

This visit wasn't just a cultural exchange; it was a testament to the transformative power of social work in bridging geographical and cultural divides. The UNC team, forever touched by the resilience and spirit of Visthar, carries the lessons learned and the inspiration gathered back to their own communities, determined to continue making a positive impact on the world. Mercy Kappen



## SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

### i. Visthar Eco Sanctuary: A Living Learning Space

<https://visthar.org/eco-sanctuary/>

Visthar Eco Sanctuary transcends the boundaries of a physical space. It's an embodiment of inclusion, sustainability, and conscious living. The sanctuary has an organic farm, butterfly garden, and Manoranjitham herbal nursery and facilitates hands-on learning experiences.

#### Eco Education for Children

At Visthar, children aren't just passive learners; they're actively involved in becoming eco-warriors. They get their hands dirty in the farm, their creativity flows as they transform paper into masterpieces in the recycling unit, and their senses awoken to the wonders of nature during captivating eco walks. This experiential approach ignites their imagination and fosters a deep commitment to protecting our planet.

Manoranjitham Nursery: Manoranjitham, a verdant nursery teeming with vibrant life, offers a variety of plants for sale. Whether you're a seasoned gardener, a landscaping expert, or simply seeking a touch of green, Manoranjitham promises to bring nature's beauty into your space. But it goes beyond aesthetics and creates organic fertilizers and potting mixes to support plant enthusiasts to develop their own organic gardens.

#### Making a Difference Together

Visthar Eco Sanctuary welcomes not just children and plant enthusiasts, but also corporate volunteers and event organizers. The impactful collaboration with Cisco's 600+ volunteers stands as a testament to the collective power for positive change. While the pandemic paused eco-camps and CSR programs, the spirit of the sanctuary remained strong. The team meticulously maintained the organic farm and nurtured Manoranjitham and were able to welcome back schools and corporates for eco campus and CSR volunteering.

Visthar Eco Sanctuary is an invitation to reconnect with nature, embrace sustainability, and empower the next generation of eco-conscious stewards.

## ii. CSR Volunteering at Visthar

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) isn't just another checkbox on a corporate agenda; it's an opportunity to connect with communities, cultivate meaningful change, and make a lasting impact.

Over 600 Cisco employees, from diverse departments and backgrounds, embarked on a transformative journey at Visthar. Leaving behind their usual boardrooms and laptops, they donned gloves and hats, trading spreadsheets for spades. They got involved in Visthar's sustainability and educational initiatives.

### Planting Seeds of Change:

The volunteers weren't just planting seeds; they were sowing the seeds of change. They learned about organic farming practices, compost creation, recycling wastepaper and hand-built pottery first-hand. They worked alongside the Visthar team, sharing their skills and experiences in a spirit of mutual learning and respect.

They also learned the art of pottery making, shaping lumps of clay into beautiful planters. This hands-on experience provided a unique avenue for relaxation, focus, and artistic expression, while also supporting sustainable practices.

The volunteers also delved into the world of recycling and upcycling at Visthar's paper recycling unit. They transformed discarded materials into vibrant and functional art pieces, learning about sustainable waste management and giving new life to unwanted objects. The process wasn't just about crafting; it was about fostering innovation, resourcefulness, and a deeper appreciation for environmental responsibility.



### A Ripple Effect of Impact:

The 2023 Cisco-Visthar partnership wasn't just a one-time event; it was a catalyst for lasting change. Cisco volunteers returned to their workplaces imbued with newfound perspectives, a deeper understanding of social issues, and a renewed commitment to sustainability. They became champions of CSR within their teams, inspiring others to get involved and make a difference.





### iii. Bhoomi Habba, The Earth Festival



Bhoomi Habba, The Earth Festival, is an annual event organized by Visthar. The Habba aims to increase public awareness of the environmental crises and showcase inclusive and sustainable alternatives. The thematic focus of Bhoomi Habba 2023 was #OnlyOneEarth. Bhoomi Habba is a day-long celebration filled with environmental campaigns, exhibitions and shows, art workshops, theatre and dance performances, storytelling, folk music, and much more. The Habba also promotes the exhibition and sale of eco-friendly crafts, organic farm produce, and traditional and millet foods from all over the country.

The 15th edition of Bhoomi Habba held on 10th June 2023 brought together the Bangalore public including collectives of artists; painters, sculptors, terracotta artists, and others who displayed their creations for a better earth. Other offerings include a theatre/movement piece choreographed by Asha Ponikiewska on the interconnectedness of all beings. It explored the connections, disconnections, or divisions within relationships, within the self, and larger structures. A poetry performance by Visthar Ranga Shale directed by Hartman D'Souza and *Bhootatva*, dances with found materials, choreographed by Nakula Somana, "Listening to the pot", musical storytelling by Sumana Chandrashekar and Sangeeta Jawla were some of the unique features this Habba. Anish Victor facilitated a theatre workshop titled "We Are All Stories". As always, the festival featured music, folk dance and theatre celebrating the earth.

The festival featured diverse activities for children and adults to participate in. These included workshops for *cartooning, pottery, theatre, traditional games, warli drawing, and handmade paper making*. There were also events around *community painting, and storytelling*, throughout the day. Charumathi, a "treeveller" facilitated Treevellers' Katte, a multi-art event around stories of trees. All the workshops were themed around ecological concerns – they were both educative and interactive.

The wide range of traditional foods served at the Bhoomi Habba has always been a major attraction of the festival. This year, we showcased traditional *North Karnataka Khanavali* cuisine at the Habba. As in previous years, we continued to serve traditional cuisine from the *shores of Kerala to the mountains of the Northeast* of India.

The decorations of Bhoomi Habba also reflected the ethos and spirit of the festival. The handmade coconut palm decorations that beautify the festival all return to the earth as compost. Other decorations and installations were made from the earth and painted with natural colours. These included beautiful pot installations and earthen lamps. The earthy, rustic pavements, the unique architectural spaces, the iconic well and the lush green environs at Visthar were themselves 'decorations' inviting visitors to explore and celebrate the earth.

Bhoomi Habba seeks out individuals and collectives promoting sustainable and ecological ways of living – in food, clothing, crafts etc. There were 60 stalls showcasing eco-friendly arts and crafts, organic farm produce and traditional foods by farmers' collectives, women's cooperatives, and individual entrepreneurs and artisans.



#### iv. Eco-Art Exploration

The Modern Classroom brought 50 curious and joyful sixth-graders from Euro School to the vibrant Eco Sanctuary at Visthar. Guided by our dynamic and creative artists and facilitators at Visthar, the children embarked on a creative journey. This wasn't just a field trip; it was a transformative journey that ignited a passion for art, sustainability, and the natural world.

The children delved into the rich heritage of Warli painting, a traditional tribal art form. With each stroke, they connected with the cultural tapestry of the region. This artistic exploration was followed by a unique movement art dance session. Guided by the rhythmic whispers of nature – rustling leaves and chirping birds – the children's bodies became instruments of expression, mirroring the harmony of the ecosystem.

But the magic didn't stop there. Our paper recycling unit, Srujana Recycled, had a special surprise in store – the art of recycled papermaking! This hands-on session not only fostered creativity but also instilled a valuable lesson in sustainability. The children learned how to transform everyday waste into beautiful sheets of paper, a powerful reminder of the importance of responsible resource management.

The day wasn't complete without a deep dive into nature itself. A nature walk, surrounded by the symphony of nature, became a living classroom. It was a powerful reminder of the delicate balance of the ecological system and the responsibility we have to protect it.

The engaging sessions, the serene ambience of the Eco Sanctuary, and the seamless organization ensured an enriching experience for everyone involved. The appreciation expressed by the children, teachers, and organizers alike was a testament to the program's success.



## v. Celebrating Life, Relationships, and Hope!

Our annual team retreat at Koppal wasn't just a getaway. It reminded us of the power of collaboration, the importance of celebrating our achievements, and our commitment to making a difference in the world. The retreat strengthened the links between Bangalore and Koppal teams, reminding us that we are a community bound by a shared vision.

The true magic of the retreat lay not just in the planned activities but in the moments of genuine connection and shared purpose. The open exchange of ideas, the infectious laughter, and the unwavering support we received from each other created an atmosphere of belonging and mutual respect. One of the highlights of the retreat was the recognition of colleagues who had woven their lives into Visthar's fabric for ten years or more.

And then there were the Bandhavi children. Their voices, once hesitant whispers, now rang with confidence and joy. Their faces brimmed with unbridled creativity. They sang and danced reminding us that hope can bloom even in the harshest terrains. As the retreat concluded, we were more connected, inspired, and committed to the symphony of change that Visthar orchestrates.



## IV

# STUDIES AND PUBLICATIONS

## i. A Long Way to Go: The State of Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools in Koppal, Karnataka



'A long way to go' is an appropriate title for this research report on the state of menstrual hygiene management in schools in Koppal, Karnataka. Based on an assessment of 171 government schools in Koppal district of Karnataka, the research reveals that there is indeed a long way to go for menstrual hygiene management.

The Indian government issued the National Guidelines on Menstrual Hygiene Management in 2015. The guidelines required the governments and all stakeholders to ensure 4 aspects around menstrual hygiene for adolescent girls, women, and their families. Building awareness, knowledge, and information to manage menstruation with dignity is the first among four aspects. The second is that there should be easy access to sufficient, affordable, and hygienic menstrual absorbents during menstruation. The third aspect calls for separate toilet with private space for cleaning, washing with water supply and soap. The last one is about ensuring infrastructure for disposal of used menstrual pads and clothes.

The Guidelines clearly explain how the lack of toilet facilities affect the education of students and their overall development. It says the dirty restrooms can cause students to be absent from school due to transmitted diarrhoeal diseases. Girls have to miss school during menstruation if the restrooms at the school are inadequate. Many children with disabilities might avoid drinking or eating throughout the day so they don't have to use the toilet, and that can lead to serious health issues. The guidelines also point out that poor school toilet facilities affect personal hygiene of the students.

This research is done as part of strengthening Kanasu Kishori Sanghatane (KKS), an empowerment program for adolescent girls in Kukanoor Taluk of Koppal district. 5000 girls between the ages 13-18 are part of 250 sanghas in 53 villages and 19 wards of Kukanoor taluk. This research looks closely at the schools these girls study in.

This report outlines the steps the government, the community, and other NGOs need to take for ensuring the rights of adolescent girls.

## ii. Gender Responsive Planning, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning – A Training Manual For Facilitators

Traditionally, planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems have tended to be insensitive to gender and other social inequalities. Over the last few decades, there has been persistent efforts to address that shortcoming. This training manual emerges from that search for a gender responsive approach to planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL).

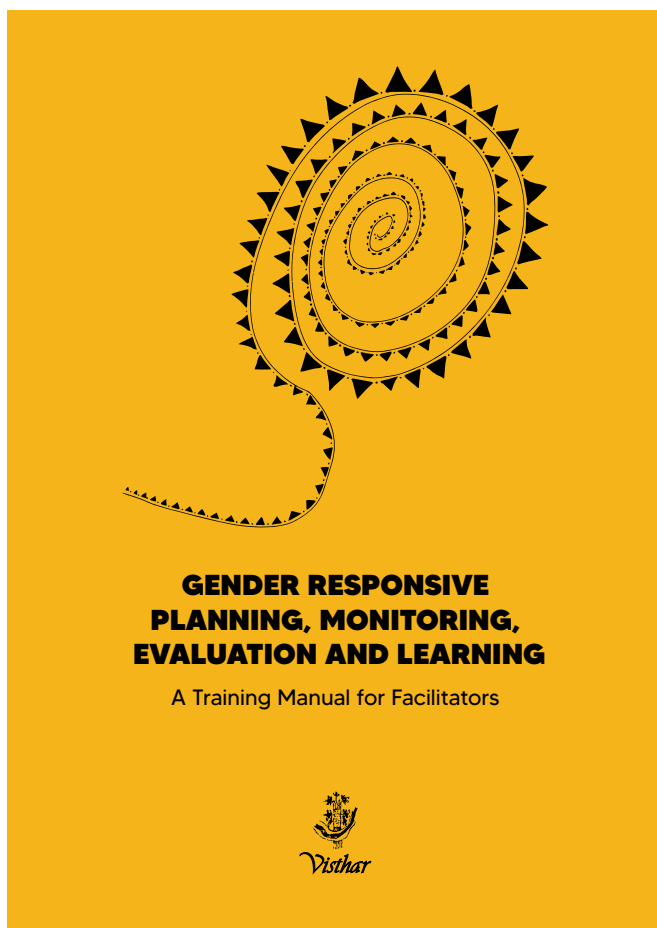
This manual is built on the experiences shared by development organisations working in the field in India. Visthar has been facilitating trainings on PMEL for over two decades. In 2023, with the support of Kerk in Actie, Visthar brought together participants from 14 organisations to look at processes for engendering PMEL systems.

Participants acknowledged the need for ongoing gender sensitisation of all staff – especially staff involved in PMEL. Gender responsive PMEL can only be built on that foundation. This training manual sprouted from that understanding.

The first few sessions focus on sensitizing participants to gender and how it intersects with class, caste, disability and other inequalities. It then introduces participants to different enquiry areas and tools for Gender Analysis, using the CARE Framework for Gender Analysis as the basis. With that foundation in place, the training manual shows how to train participants to engender their PMEL systems. Following a gender critique of traditional PMEL, the manual also addresses persistent myths and misunderstandings about feminism.

Each session takes about an hour to facilitate. Wherever possible, it is best to conduct all sessions in the given sequence. However training situations could vary; so this manual has been designed such that facilitators can pick and choose sessions, depending on their assessment of the training need, the time available, and other factors.

We thank Kerk In Actie for initiating this process, and supporting the development of this training manual. We thank Equality Fund for supporting the work of Visthar that enables us to focus on mainstreaming gender and diversity in organisations and programmes.



### iii. Launch of Gender - Responsive Shelter Homes: A Trainers' Manual



LCN (Lam-lynti Chittara Neralu) is a national network working towards improved and rights-based shelter homes for women, queer women, and trans- persons who are survivors of gender-based violence. The network was formed in 2016 by women's rights, human rights, and feminist organizations across India. Our aim is to reimagine shelter homes as transformational and survivor-centric spaces with an enabling ecosystem.

A research conducted by LCN highlighted the need to strengthen the perspectives and capacities of shelter management and staff, as well as those of NGOs that run shelters and other institutions/ departments that work with survivors of GBV. With these objectives in mind, Visthar, a member of LCN network, developed a training manual through a collaborative process that included online and offline discussions, reviews at every stage, and a Training of Trainers. The purpose was to develop a rights-based, survivor-centric, intersectional perspective among the staff of shelter homes.

Recognising the need for training resources in local languages, we have developed a gender sensitization trainer's manual in Hindi for those working in the grassroots. The training manual has 8 lesson plans that can be used with adults in Hindi-speaking villages and small towns. The training manual will be made available for free download on our website after it has been designed and laid out.

We acknowledge all LCN members for their contribution and involvement, and AJWS for their support and solidarity.

## CONCLUSION

Visthar's 2023-24 report showcases the impactful work we've done to fulfill our mission. We actively engaged in community advocacy, capacity building, and sustainability initiatives. Our community work aimed at empowering marginalized communities, particularly girls at risk, through projects such as Bandhavi, Samagra Sikshana Shale, CREA, and KKS.

Our commitment to capacity building is reflected in the numerous courses and workshops conducted throughout the year, equipping individuals and institutions with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote gender equality and social transformation.

Visthar's focus on sustainability is evident in our organic farming practices, recycling and upcycling waste paper through Srujana Recycled, and community events like Bhoomi Habba, demonstrating a holistic approach to environmental and social well-being. The CSR volunteering in our eco sanctuary enabled us to raise resources for our educational initiatives for vulnerable children.

The development of research papers and training manuals positions Visthar as a thought leader and resource provider in the areas of gender, social justice, and sustainability. Building strong connections with other organizations allows us to amplify our impact and collaborate on initiatives for lasting change.

This report serves as a springboard for Visthar's continued efforts. By building upon these successes, the organization can further strengthen its impact and contribute significantly to building a more just and equitable society. Looking ahead, we plan to launch the Summer Intensive program for children from vulnerable communities and establish a NIOS coaching center in 2024-25, providing them with strong foundations and brighter choices. Through these efforts, Visthar remains dedicated to fostering sustainable futures.





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