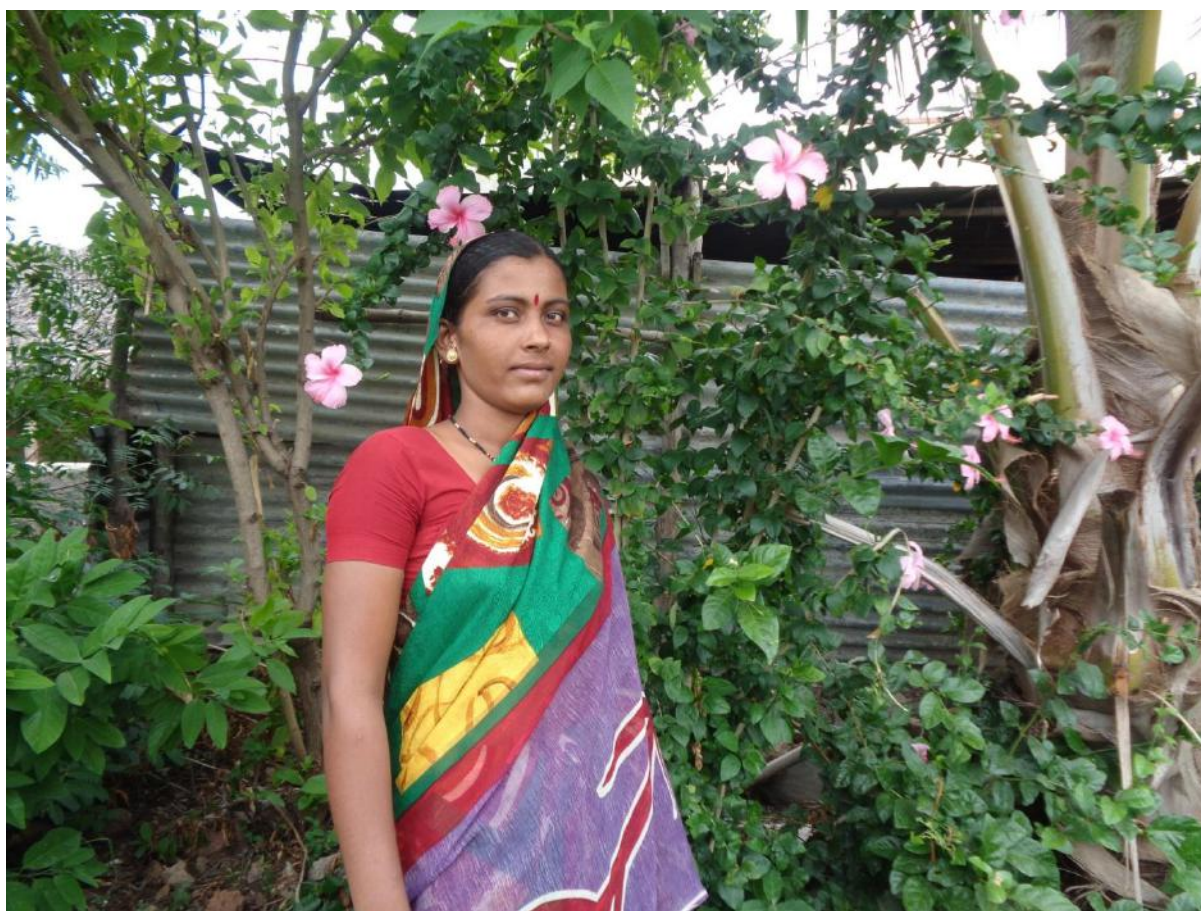


Best Practices in Engaging with Men and Boys in India

Samajdar Jodidar Programme, Maharashtra: Case Study

Crossing the Rubicon - No Going Back for These Male Feminists

Samajdar Jodidar Programme Implemented by Centre for Health and Social Justice and Halo Medical Foundation in Akkalot Block, Solapur District, Maharashtra



Pic caption: Sridevi Gajanand Bandgar, Kolekarwadi village

Introduction

The *Samajdar Jodidar* ('The Understanding Partner') project was implemented by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) and local partners in Maharashtra from 2010 - 2015, to address gender inequality especially in terms of poor socio-economic indicators and poor health outcomes of women, and to address domestic violence. CHSJ's long experience in working with men and boys to address violence against women led them to embark on this project. This included working with men to address women's subordinate status in society and issues that men face with respect to their own sexual and reproductive health. The *Samajdar Jodidar* (SJ) project was implemented in three districts of Maharashtra, namely Beed, Pune and Solapur.

Maharashtra is the third largest state in India both in area and population; it has a literacy level of 82.91% according to the Census report of 2011 (above the national average of 74.04%); only 78% of children aged 6-17 attend school (75% girls as compared to 81% boys according to the 2011 Census); only 70% of women as compared to 88% of men aged 15-49 are literate (NFHS-3); its sex-ratio (946) surpasses the national average of 940 by a few points; son-preference exists rampantly; for the majority of households (70%), the private medical sector is the main source of health care (77% of urban households and 63% of rural households); women bear a disproportionate burden of contraception; and about half (48%) of women (especially poorer women) in Maharashtra are anaemic.¹

This is a case study of the SJ intervention in Solapur district's Akkalkot block by Halo Medical Foundation (HMF). The methodology of preparing this case study included a) reviewing documents about the Samajdar Jodidar project and men and masculinities b) field visit including meetings with staff of Yuvagram, men in the community who were directly involved in the SJ project and other community members.

The Change in Gajanand

Returning from a friend's house where she had just spent two days, her friend's husband dropping her back home to her village Kolekarwadi, Sridevi Gajanand Bandgar, 23, thinks she could not have imagined a life like this just a few years ago. Her husband Gajanand, 28, a contract labourer, had accompanied her to a function hosted by her friend who lived in another village, and on the persuasion of her friend he had even agreed to let her stay behind while he looked after their two small children at home.

"He was not like this earlier," says Sridevi, recalling his violent, abusive behaviour. "I'd protest that I would leave him and return to my parents because of his behaviour, but he would not listen. The children were so scared of his beatings, they would ask me for money instead of approaching him." Gajanand was a Samajdar Jodidar group member in Kolekarwadi in Maharashtra's Akkalkot block in Solapur district. The rest of the group had become a cohesive set of 20 married men, taking up campaigns for girls' education, against sex selective practices, for women's participation in the public sphere and other community issues - save for Gajanand, who had joined the group on the persuasion of his brother, a group member.

Even two years after the group had been formed in 2010, Gajanand continued to abuse the group members for doing domestic work, ill treated his family and regularly got drunk and misbehaved. Says Kolekarwadi animator Sambhaji Kharat, "The group decided to take it up as a challenge to deal with Gajanand; I increased my contact with him, explained how his behaviour was disturbing his family and that his wife had equal rights." It took a year and a half for the change to take place, but now Gajanand contributes to all the housework – he brings grass for the animals, fetches water, sweeps the house, cleans the cattle shed and takes care of the children.

Happy to share this, Sridevi adds emphatically, "What matters most to me, however, is that he is calm in his behaviour with me. He listens to me, and I to him. When I am ill even with a cold now he accompanies me to the doctor, earlier he would not bother however unwell I was. Now our physical relationship is as per my desire, unlike before. He has even undergone vasectomy."

Gajanand has become close to his children. With peer support from the group, he was able to stand up against the taunts he received when he first started doing household work. He has given up

¹ *MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE CHSJ PROJECT ON ENHANCING MALE PARTICIPATION FOR IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY IN MAHARASHTRA (The Samajhdar Jodidar project) by Manisha Gupte and David Kadam*

drinking. "He should always remain like this," Sridevi says fervently, acknowledging, "If it were not for Sambhaji and the group, I would not be so happy."

No Livelihoods or Better Services Offered, Yet Project Attracted Group Members

It was tough, say the 20 animators of Akkalkot block where the Samajdar Jodidar programme had been implemented for five years from 2010-2014 by the NGO Halo Medical Foundation (HMF) in 20 villages, to overcome their own and the community's indifference to a project that did not promise any direct benefits. Says an animator, "We were not building toilets nor developing skills for better livelihoods or giving jobs or saying leadership would be built. In fact, it was a situation of comfort for men and this situation was being disturbed."

Sharing his own story, animator Sambhaji Kharat gives a glimpse into the combination of factors which helped constitute the groups, create the powerful collective support that the animators and groups gave each other and influence the group members so strongly that each of them feels inwardly stamped forever.

"When the project started I took the position of animator only because I was interested in getting the monthly payment of Rs 1000 offered with it. I went through 10 rounds of intensive training with other animators, and it was during the training that my attitude changed. The focus was on changing ourselves and then reaching out to others. The change impacted not only me but everyone around me.

We are a 16-member joint family but we never used to eat together. I changed this practice; it was also a way of seeing that the women in the family were getting enough to eat and that it was nutritious food. This had an impact in improving their health.

It took me more than a year to change, but then I started doing domestic work, making my own tea, cooking *roti* and *dal*. I bathed and dressed all the seven children in our house. I washed my own and the family's clothes and did it publicly, going out to the hand pump in the yard. I had to face difficult situations where my mother would say, "You have become *joroo ka ghulam* (wife's servant)" and she would scold her daughters-in-law for getting their household work done by me.

I used to be very hot tempered and would fight with everyone, my mother, wife, others in the village, and would beat up the children. After this, I was able to control at least 75 percent of my anger, and even during the times that I did feel angry I did not take it out on others instead I would move away and occupy myself in something else like watching TV or listening to music.

I also gave up drinking. Though earlier I was frequently upset with my wife and mother for not giving me food or not doing things properly, there was no question any more of getting angry in domestic relationships. All this improved the environment at home a lot. It set an example for other families. Some group members joined because in SHGs (self help groups) and other women's groups in our village the women would discuss these changes and then persuade the men in their families to join the group.

It was difficult to form the group, which was the animator's responsibility, because most men and boys did not understand the value of gender equality. I explained that it would benefit the entire village. It took time to get members to join but once the group was formed the members' found they developed an identity in the village. Many issues were discussed in our monthly meetings and the group members developed knowledge and gained information about the community and its issues, as well as about schemes, services and entitlements, they interacted with service providers and community leaders, they became visible in the community.

The project helped them attain negotiating skills and gave them a platform for taking up issues, because of which they became respected in the village and were motivated to remain in the group. Their personal relationships also improved greatly, they developed close emotional bonds with their children and wives, which compensated for the mockery they faced from others.



Pic caption: Sambhaji Kharat (centre) with his wife (in purple) and other family members

The project also had strategies to inspire animators and group members and keep them together. The Annual Adhiveshan or animators' meet organised by the project was an occasion for felicitating us and celebrating the personal changes we had brought about; all of us animators with our wives were brought together as couples on the stage and felicitated publicly, which was a big encouragement.

At the group level, we would visit any member who dropped out, try to understand his problem, help him in addressing it and thus restore trust in the group. We held a few outings and picnics for group members and their wives, which strengthened our bonds."

Anatomy of Gender Change: Strategies that Worked

It was a challenging area in Akkalkot block where the villages for the project had been selected, challenging because the society here was highly patriarchal, says Gourishankar Gouda, earlier the animator of Chapalgaonwadi village and subsequently the Samajdar Jodidar facilitator in HMF.

The powerful upper caste Maratha community forming approximately 70 percent of the area's population had rigid gender stereotypes. The birth of girls was not welcomed while boys were given every advantage. The community had a lot of barriers to gender equality and questioned the need

for it. Gouda says he himself, till he joined the project, never worked at home and would always eat first, others would eat after he finished.

Change Spread from the Individual Onwards

Describing how the change process took place - spreading from the individual to the family and community and then to village level institutions – Gouda says he got married during the course of the project, and his relationship with his wife greatly benefited because of what he had understood from the project about being an understanding partner. "Now, even though the project as such is over since 2014, my morning begins with doing 'jhadu' (sweeping) at home. Those were difficult days, when other men would laugh at me and taunt me, but I would deliberately go into the front yard and put out the broom there so that everyone knew I had swept the house. Then one day I heard a woman in our village tell her husband, "If he can do the cleaning why can't you?" In families, there used to be no father-son communication. Eating together has a lot of benefits for bonding in the family and overcoming the communication gap."



Pic caption: In a home in Chapalgaonwadi – it is common now to see boys doing domestic work

Self example was the most powerful and effective. A mentor appointed by the project for the area, a retired college principal, played an important role in guiding the groups and advising them to first bring about self change and then go for changing others in the community.

Campaigning for Awareness

From group members, the change spread to the community. To convey the message, the groups adopted many strategies. They put up street plays (nukkad natak) in the villages on the consequences of domestic violence, child marriage etc; rallies (Prabhat Pheri) were held to mobilise people and bring attention to social issues during 16 Days of Activism period as well as at other times; wall paintings were done with messages on violence against women, dowry etc were an important form of visibility to these issues; film screenings were held followed by discussions; games like Snakes and Ladders that had been developed as resource material by the project were played in the community; and local festivals were utilised to spread the message in innovative ways. Messages were painted on the backs of bulls for instance during a popular local festival in which the animals are decorated and celebrated. The project let the community decide its own methods.



Pic caption: HMF Facilitator and former animator, Gourishankar Gouda in front of a wall message in Chapalgaonwadi against gender based sex selection

Utilising Village Institutions

Village level institutions were activated in favour of gender equality. At the time the project started, none of the institutional structures in the villages meant to empower women were functional. Women members of Chapalgaonwadi's seven member gram panchayat committee, for instance, never attended the monthly meetings. The Mahila Gram Sabha had not even been constituted. After

some time, when a group member was elected Sarpanch (village head) he ensured that the panchayat committee meetings did not start till the women members joined, and for the first time in the village the Mahila Gram Sabha was constituted with its meetings being held regularly.

A state government order on joint ownership of property between husbands and wives was enforced actively by the groups, and in Chapalgaonwadi and the 12-13 villages around it there is 80-100 percent joint ownership of property between husbands and wives not only of the houses but also of agricultural fields. Eighty percent of the households here also have a joint bank account in the name of both partners.

The Samajdar Jodidar group used the village level Tanta Mukti Samiti or local dispute redressal committee in favour of women's rights. Traditionally, this Samiti dealt with quarrels over property or fights between villagers. Issues of domestic violence were never brought before it nor any other social issue. Group members became part of the Samitis – at least one seat is automatically reserved by the community now for a SJ member whenever the Samitis are re-elected annually and often a group member is president of the committee. The committees have been shaped into a strong community force for taking up issues like underage marriage, domestic violence, dowry and marriage by choice. Three years ago the state government gave an award of Rs 2 lakh to the Tanta Mukti Samiti of Kalegaon village, recognizing its efforts towards ending the practice of child marriage which was the social norm in the area.

Kalegaon village animator, Dyaneshwar Patil, has been elected as head of the village Tanta Mukti Samiti consecutively for five years now. "I've handled 136 cases during this time," he says. The community members say of Patil, "As animator he has a lot of respect and authority in the village." It does not matter to them that the project is otherwise closed. Patil describes some of the disputes he dealt with.

"A case was brought before the committee in which a woman who was educated and working said she wanted to leave her husband and in-laws because she was burdened with too much of housework. We counseled the family members on equal distribution of domestic work and asked the woman to stay for a few months to see if there was any change in the situation." He denies that the Tanta Mukti may try to 'settle' cases by making women compromise on their rights for the sake of peace and family stability, saying the Samiti has supported a woman to file a case of domestic violence with the police.

Identifying Community Concerns: From Individual to Community Aspiration

Members of these institutions and group members have become a positive influence in the villages for maintaining the social changes. The area is now considered dowry-free, whereas earlier taking dowry during marriage was "not just accepted but was considered a necessary function of being a groom." It was, however, causing immense hardship to girls' families. Members say that the dowry free status of the villages has been maintained even three years after the project came to an end, citing a recent case. Samajdar Jodidar group members and panchayat members went together as a team to counsel the family of a girl who mortgaged part of their land to raise dowry for a match with a boy from a well-off family. "We explained to the girl's side that there was no demand for dowry from the boy's side, and that the girl would not face any problem after marriage if she did not bring dowry. This was a powerful signal to the entire community against dowry," says Vilas Kadam, animator of Shirasi village.

Patil says the group took up the issue of farmers' suicides, an issue of great concern in the region. Tragically, Maharashtra has the highest number of farmers' suicides in India. During the project period from 2010-2014 the number of suicides in the state went up from 1741 to 1981 and has since only increased steeply, reaching 3052 in 2016. The group started with doing a small role play on the

issue of farmers' suicides and then launched a full campaign on the issue, taking up aspects of gender and masculine stereotypes that put intense pressure on men. He says, with some irony, "During the project period only four farmer suicides were recorded in Akkalkot block."

Shirasi group members share that at one time girls in the village were not allowed to study beyond Class 4 or at the most Class 7 because beyond that they had to go school some distance away from the village, now all 18 schoolgirls above 15 years in this village of 450 people are studying. The programme also achieved success in raising awareness about early marriage; while earlier the norm was for girls to be married by 15 years now for several years no marriage has taken place before the girl is 18. The group took up the issue of women's safety. Boys and men would be hanging around in groups on the main road of the village, because of which girls would feel unsafe going out. Basui says, "Now girls don't fear to walk on the road."

Kalegaon village group member Srisal Basui says the group and rest of the community has profiled the 20 single women (Ekal Nari) living in the village and ensured that they receive their entitlements. Gangabai Murgai, 68, says, "I started getting my old age pension after these people took it up." Group members now actively participate in other village level programmes. During the recent drought they ensured that the single women in their village received their due entitlement of grain from relief agencies. "The group sees that its power is not misused," says Kadam.

Subhash Mendapurkar, director, SUTRA, who mentored the project throughout, says, "The project made sure that violence against women became an issue of public concern for communities." In a shocking incident in 2014 in Dudhani village, the police did not take any action when a woman was stripped naked and paraded in the village. Basavraj says, "All animators went together to the police and threatened that the communities would launch a big Andolan (protest) if action was not taken against the perpetrators. They also visited the woman and assured her of support. This was followed up with each animator going with his group members to the police station in their areas and giving petitions protesting the incident and stating that there should never be a repeat."

Impacting Villages Beyond Samajdar Jodidar

Their influence is beyond the 20 Samajdar Jodidar villages. Gourishankar says each animator and group member interacts in various ways with communities from at least three different villages, having an influence there too. The group members are in demand for handling issues going beyond their own villages; they are aware of entitlements and services due to the community, have good negotiating skills and have developed a rights based perspective that the community relies upon. Basui says, "We often call up 102 to summon the ambulance from the government hospital for taking women in labour for their delivery. Even people from other villages (not in SJ) ask us for help and advice, such as the monitoring of service providers like ANMs, ASHAs and AWWs. For instance, we have been asked to join the monthly meetings held at a sub centre in one of the neighbouring villages. In another instance, recently we were asked to intervene when the son of a woman Sarpanch from a nearby area refused to allow her to attend meetings."

BOX Increasing Women's Autonomy and Dignity

A study was carried out by CHSJ in 2015-16 in Samajdar Jodidar project areas to map the change in men's attitudes and behaviour from the women's perspective, specifically in the personal domain - in spousal relationship and in relationship with other women in the family. It emerged that change in men's attitude and behaviour because of their orientation on engendered roles and responsibilities as a husband, directly caused change in women's life. This change can be seen at two levels: outside the four walls of the house and inside the house.

Respondents observed changes in their husband and men in the family very clearly. They explained the difference they felt, for example men started spending more time with the family, became sympathetic towards women in the family, listened to and shared with wife and understood her needs. Respondents shared that now they are consulted while taking any decision in family, small or big, unlike before when they were not even counted. Change was not only seen in violent behaviour of husband but they remarkably addressed the gender based discriminatory practices in family and village.

Among the most visible change was that men started sharing the domestic chores, which women felt reduced their burden to some extents and made space for them to take part in other village level activities without being stressed for home chores. Respondents felt that due to change in the men's attitude and behaviour, they got opportunities to be part of some other activities run by other organizations or by some other agency. It opened a window for them into another world. This exposure proved useful for them in gaining knowledge and confidence. But they did not limit this change to themselves, rather they started sharing with other women in their family/neighbourhood and in women's group meetings.



Pic caption: Yogita Martand Koli with Shirasi village group members

Yogita Martand Koli, 30, was able to set up a small shop by taking a Rs 2,000 loan from the 20-member Mahalaxmi Self Help Group (SHG) set up in Shirsi village in 2013. Koli, who stays with her mother, says they have no land and their only sustenance was the Rs 1500 monthly pension her mother receives. Says Koli, "There was no SHG in the village earlier, and even after this SHG was formed the other group members were not being allowed to go out of the homes by their husbands. Kadam and others went house to house persuading the men. Now, our SHG has savings of Rs 25,000. All the members and their families have benefited, five women have bought goats which add to the household incomes, others have used the money for medical needs."



Pic caption: Nikita and Vilas Kadam

Newlywed Nikita Vilas Kadam, married for six months to Shirasi animator Vilas Kadam, says what particularly strikes her is, "There is no *gussa* (anger) in Vilas, unlike other men. And he has the strength of being able to understand the other person." She says he makes sure he shares a lot of things with her, "We till the land together and keep talking while we are working." Vilas does a share of the domestic work, as do all the other men in their joint household. "In this family, I get treated with a lot of respect by my husband and in-laws," says Nikita. **BOX END**

Personal and Political Challenges

HMF facilitator Basavaraj Nare who succeeded Gouda, says the project was very clear from the beginning that political parties' interests would be resisted and their power would not be used to further the Samajdar Jodidar project's goals.

The project started attracting the attention of local political leaders as the impact of the groups' work started becoming evident in the villages and the group members developed a standing in the community where they were being approached for solutions to many issues including availability of water, rations and various entitlements. "The local politicians felt threatened and did not like us taking on the role of bringing better services to the community. There were times when we had to tread very carefully. Dominant political outfits also occasionally tried to influence group members' to their ideology," says Nare. During the project however no member became affiliated with them as they realised that it would dilute the common moral authority of the group. "Animators and group members understood that they had respect and status in the community because they did not speak on behalf of anyone or any party but only what was just. Now that one or two of the group members have become politically affiliated we make the best of it by trying to see that they use their position wisely keeping in mind the SJ influence on them."

The programme has made the animators leaders of their community, and some animators in Akkalkot stood for and won Sarpanch elections. "We regularly keep interacting with them to ensure they do not misuse their authority," says Basavaraj.

Animators faced intense personal challenges. Sangavi village animator Shivanand Sonwane, who belonged to the SC (Scheduled Caste) category, faced opposition from within and without. He not only encountered resistance from the dominant upper caste community but at home too. In 2012, upset with the changes in Shivanand, his father wanted him to break off his marriage saying he suspected Shivanand's wife of infidelity and went to the extent of calling a village meeting to pressurize him. "I stood by my wife and announced publicly that I trusted her," says the animator. In fact, reduction of sexual jealousies by husbands and improved closeness with their wives has been a major gain of the project.

The facilitators say some issues that could not be taken up in a big way include issues of sexual minorities, for instance.

Lessons for a Lifetime, Say Adolescent Groups

Every Samajdar Jodidar village also constituted an 'unmarried men's' group comprising 20 adolescent boys under the guidance of the same animator as the married men's group. They've grown up during the project and in the three years since, and remain staunch gender champions.



Picture Caption: Ingre with Kadam, in Shirasi village

Bhim Swaminath Ingre, 20, of Shirasi village, was part of the adolescent group and recounts their visit to the PHC (primary health centre) where they met the medical officer and went over the medical facilities available. "It was a way of community monitoring of health services for women and children." The group discussions influenced him deeply. "I am about to be married and I have pledged not to take dowry. Neither did any other group member who married," he states, adding the group still interacts regularly and takes up issues of concern. "Every girl in our village is supported for continuing her education. No family is allowed to let their daughter stay at home after Class 4, which was the norm earlier. We visit the families and speak to them, putting social pressure."

Sanjay Yadav, 19 years, member of the Bavkarwadi village unmarried boys' group, tills the family's land and is a second year college student. His parents and younger sister say that from being a rowdy, quarrelsome troublemaker at home, he has completely changed. Sanjay and another unmarried group member, Aakash, 16, say, "Our animator Babasaheb Mane is our inspiration. Some years ago, he started cooking and looking after the house, and now his wife gets the time to go out and work." Sanjay says earlier he never helped in the house and would fight with his sister and take away her food for himself. "After the interactions in the group and with Babasaheb, I now see that my sister eats well and has milk too. And both of us help in the house." He's become a champion for girls' education in his village. "Many families here stop their daughters' schooling after they reach adolescence, believing it is not safe to send them out. I personally visit the families and tell them my sister is also going to school and she can accompany their daughters."

Gender and More: The Intersection with Other Changes

Satish Kumar Singh, additional director, CHSJ, says, "The inputs that we gave were meant to raise awareness on gender, but gender is influenced by caste, class, religion and other divisions that impact all other social formations too. Reflecting on their own gender construction through the socialization process and their role in perpetuating patriarchy, the groups started to analyse the root cause of injustice and discrimination. They looked at masculine privileges and the sources of power, and were able to understand use of other forms of power too in social relations."

The project has helped to break religious and caste boundaries that existed in the area. Hindu and Muslim animators and group members began working together and were eventually accepted by the communities. Caste divisions were overcome. The villages here now celebrate both Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti. "It was a deliberate strategy in this area to choose several animators who belonged to the OBC (Other Backward Caste) or belonged to the minority Muslim community. We saw their status go up before our eyes." Basavaraj gives the example of Gourishankar Gouda.

"When Gouda started in the project as an animator many of the open category (higher caste) group members refused to go to his house or eat with him. However as the discussions and trainings progressed, the divisions disappeared. At the time Samajdar Jodidar began in this area, the most obvious challenge was of caste. Those from the open category used to prevent entry of other castes into temples; however, we insisted that group meetings must be held in the Hanuman mandir or other temples in the villages as they have large courtyards and space for gathering, and gradually this division too came to an end. In Motyal village where 80 percent of the population is Hindu, we appointed a Muslim animator Yakub Kurne."

With Akkalkot situated on the border with two other large states, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, leading to a mix of populations, Basavraj says there are multiple other forms of discrimination in this area – be it discrimination based on language, food, lifestyle or other affiliations – and along with becoming aware of gender divisions the project managed to raise awareness about all other forms of division as well.

Sustaining the Change

Says CHSJ's Maharashtra state programme manager, Shakti Jamdade, "We've achieved our dream of giving opportunities and creating a pool of at least 100 local level change agents in these districts who will spread the change from themselves to their families and communities and then to a wider level. They have understanding and can work on a variety of social justice issues in their villages without the need to induct resource persons from cities." In the course of the project, many group members became animators and several animators themselves were capacitated enough to become facilitators employed with the partner organisation.

"Earlier, we inducted trained staff from outside; they were generally unhappy to be in a rural area and quite distracted, spending their time looking for other jobs. Now we depend on the group members and animators since they have better knowledge, negotiation skills and grasp of local issues and are a stable resource."

The group members say they have integrated the learnings from SJ into subsequent development projects being implemented in their villages and surrounding areas. For instance HMF has been implementing the community based health monitoring (CBHM) of services under NRHM in 40 villages and SJ group members are always the first to be included in any such community programme. HMF also implemented a project aimed at preventing farmers' suicides and ensured that issues of masculinity and gender were integrated into it. Group members are regularly invited for public functions not only in the project villages but also surrounding areas where they are felicitated and their achievements showcased; they are also invited to address youth and other groups on issues of gender.

BOX: Change Is On the Road



In Chappalgaonwadi village in Akkalkot block, Samajdar Jodidar group member Ratnakant Pattanshetty says he and other group members regularly discuss and take up issues of concern. "A



'rasta roko' protest was organised on June 1, 2017 (photo above) when it was found girls from our village and the neighbouring village were not able to attend school because the road to their school had broken down after the rains due to which the state transport bus had stopped plying on the route. We gained support from the Sarpanch and the media and with the help of the students themselves and other community members a strong message was sent out to the authorities. Following the protest, the road has been repaired and the bus service restored," he said. Over the past two years the group members and others have also helped ensure the allotment of 45 cycles for the girl students of their village by approaching the panchayat Samiti and the zila Parishad. **BOX END**

Basavraj says, "In the beginning the animators may have joined because of the nominal monthly stipend, but now they are so committed and understand the value of what they have gained, they are eager to participate in and offer to travel

at their own expense to meetings and sessions where HMF invites them. Many of them have more influence in their villages than the Sarpanch. Animator Babasaheb Mane of Bavkarwadi, for instance, has ensured sex selective practices in the village have stopped and the community has great respect for him."



Pic caption: Samajdar Jodidar group members regularly meet still; HMF facilitator Basavraj Nare (in blue on right) with Shirasi village members

In all 20 Samajdar Jodidar villages, animators and group members have a mandatory presence in every village committee – Tanta Mukti Samiti, VHSNC (village health, sanitation and nutrition committee) and Balak Palak (child care) committee. The community elects unopposed at least one Samajdar Jodidar member.



Pic caption: Group members in Shirasi monitoring health services, interacting with ASHA worker Kalpana Jadhav at the sub centre in the village

"Not a Project but a Movement"

HMF founder and president Dr Shashikant Ahankari says, "Samajdar Jodidar gave us the opportunity to work on addressing the link between women's health and violence, which our previous work on health had established. Till then, HMF had engaged with men only in development projects, for the first time we involved them in gender. The unique thing was, it was done through self-transformation for ending violence against women and it also helped men emerge from the burden of patriarchy. More than a project, it became like a movement and significant gain has been made in reducing male dominance, bringing women and girls out of homes through emphasis on education and women's participation in Gram Sabhas – which has increased by 30 percent, and creating a cadre of community activists cutting across caste lines with such high profile that even MLAs' invite them to their areas."

Written by Rimjhim Jain

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