

**Society for People's Education and Economic Change
(SPEECH)**



**Annual Report
2023 - 24**

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(SPEECH)**

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Introduction

SPEECH is a secular, non-profit development organization established in 1987, primarily to strengthen Human concerns in civil Society at large, to address issues that hinder the growth process. Strengthening grassroots democracy and Good Governance by facilitating participation and promoting self-sustainable development of the vulnerable sections from rural Tamil Nadu are the prime visions of SPEECH. As a development organization, SPEECH commits itself to releasing human potentials of the weaker sections through a wide range of activities conducted by the communities themselves. Its approach is highly development issue-based, countering biases stemming from caste, religion, linguistic, or community identities. It recognizes the need for a two-way process of transformation, enabling both top-down and bottom-up approaches to strengthen democratic principles.

Vision

Strengthen human concern in civil society at large and to address issues that hinder growth process of the vulnerable, besides strengthening grass root democracy towards promoting sustainable development

Mission

To build an internal system for child protection, gender and social inclusion that is coordinated, integrated and holistic.

Organization Objective

SPEECH aims to:

Enable the underprivileged to release their human potentials and achieve sustainable use of locally managed resource bases, fostering a user-friendly service delivery system.

Partner with the developmental efforts of weaker and vulnerable sections for holistic improvement in society.

More specifically, SPEECH aims to:

- Facilitate self-actualization among agricultural laborers, small and marginal farmers, women, and children below 18 through partnerships and federating them towards building grassroots organizations and interest groups.
- Build awareness of exploitative and suppressive forces and enhance faith in democratic principles of Good Governance.
- Revive indigenous traditional knowledge and practices in various sectors, including health and agriculture, to conserve nature and sustain the treasure for future generations.
- Protect child rights in line with the UNCRC, enabling children to enjoy their childhood.
- Conduct action research activities to provide feedback on field realities and viable approaches into policy processes.
- Capacity building of various development actors and stakeholders at all levels by convening and facilitating training activities aimed at efficient service delivery.
- Respond to emergency situations including war victims, communal violence, and natural calamities/disasters, with special reference to the vulnerable (children and women) through relief and rehabilitation support activities.
- This holistic approach underscores SPEECH's commitment to fostering sustainable development and social justice in rural Tamil Nadu.

SPEECH Operational Coverage

1. Retrieving Hope for Child Rights Project (CB)

Kariyapatti, Narikudi, Aruppukotai and Thiruchuli Blocks

Total Coverage of the Villages: 34

Total population of the village: 15,900

2. Restoring Rights of Adolescent and Young women (APF)

Kariyapatti, Narikudi, Aruppukotai and Thiruchuli Blocks

No of Villages: 40

Total population of the village: 24,586



Project Title:

Retrieving Hope for Child Rights (RHCR)

Supported by:

Children Believe

Operational Areas: Kariyapatti, Narikudi, Aruppukotai, and Thiruchuli Blocks

Coverage: 34 villages, impacting a population of 23,200

Overview:

The RHCR project is a flagship initiative that aims to create a protective and empowering environment for children by dismantling barriers to education, health, and well-being. It also addresses critical issues like child marriage, gender inequality, and socio-economic vulnerabilities to ensure holistic child development and community transformation.

Key Activities and Achievements:**1. Education:**

- Ensured 100% school enrolment up to middle school across all intervention areas.
- Mainstreamed dropout students, achieving a 94% continuation rate for SC/SCA students and a 96% rate for female students pursuing higher education.
- Renovated five school infrastructures and established two tuition centers benefiting marginalized children.
- Formed Higher Education Assistance (HEA) committees in three villages, facilitating scholarships and other support for 20 girls' higher education.



2. Health and Sanitation:

- Addressed anemia among girls, ensuring 96% remained anemia-free through regular monitoring and health initiatives.
- Facilitated the construction of single-sex toilets in six schools, improving hygiene and reducing dropouts due to poor sanitation facilities.
- Achieved a 100% reduction in maternal mortality in SC/SCA communities through awareness campaigns and safe childbirth initiatives.

3. Child Protection and Participation:

- Stopped four child marriages in intervention villages, raising awareness through child protection committees and community engagement.
- Organized workshops for children and parents on topics like child safety, abuse prevention, and child marriage consequences.
- Ensured zero reported cases of child marriage in 27 project villages during the reporting period.

4. Gender Empowerment and Livelihood Development:

- Empowered adolescent girls through sports initiatives, including Kabaddi and Silambam, to foster confidence, address early marriage, and promote gender equality.
- Mobilized ₹1.24 crore through financial institutions, benefiting 376 community members and creating livelihood opportunities.
- Provided skill development training for 19 women, many of whom gained employment in supervisory roles or became entrepreneurs.



5. Youth and Community Engagement:

- Conducted capacity-building programs for youth, engaging 291 participants in discussions on education, climate change, and social issues.
- Encouraged children and youth to take leadership roles in child protection and advocacy through village-level committees.

Impact Highlights:

- **Education Success:** Achieved a 97% pass rate in public exams, with 99% success among girls, demonstrating the program's impact on academic performance.
- **Health Achievements:** Improved health outcomes, including safe deliveries and the provision of essential health services to underserved areas.
- **Child Protection:** Established a robust system to prevent child rights violations, leading to a significant decline in child marriages.
- **Community Empowerment:** Strengthened grassroots governance and mobilized resources for sustainable development initiatives worth over ₹15 lakhs.

Conclusion:

The RHCR project has made transformative strides in advancing education, health, and child protection while fostering gender equality and socio-economic resilience. Through strategic partnerships and active community participation, the initiative has built a strong foundation for sustainable development and the holistic well-being of children and families in the intervention areas.



Retrieving Rights of Adolescent Girls and Young Women

Overview

This program addresses the prevention of forced labour by promoting worker collectives, enhancing social security, and establishing grievance mechanisms. It empowers marginalized communities by fostering labour rights awareness and building community-level governance systems.

Target Groups:

- Mill workers (current and former)
- Informal workers
- Adolescents and youth
- Children
- Women
- Differently-abled individuals

Coverage:

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):

CAG (741 members)

- WSG (453 members)
- AGG (740 members)
- ABG (732 members)
- EC (437 members)
- SHGs (140 groups)



Key Activities and Achievements

Labor Rights and Welfare

1. Worker Support Committees:

- Established in 40 villages with 662 members.
- Conducted monthly meetings to discuss basic rights like work hours, wages, and entitlements (e.g., ESI, EPF).

2. Internal Complaint Committee:

- Conducted seven internal complaint meetings in mills, training 185 participants on reporting mechanisms and addressing workplace sexual harassment.
- Strengthened safety measures for 2,300 workers across seven mills.

3. Health Camps:

- Organized medical camps in collaboration with Meenakshi Mission Hospital for 680 workers.
- Diagnosed and treated common ailments like anemia, respiratory issues, and malnutrition.

4. Labor Welfare Registration Camps:

- Registered 806 individuals for labor welfare benefits, providing them with access to government schemes and entitlements.



Child Protection and Participation

1. Village and District-Level Child Protection Committees (VLCPCs):

- Functioning in Tiruchuli, Narikudi, Kariyapatti, and Aruppukottai blocks.
- Facilitated support for orphaned children, such as a ₹4,000 monthly assistance for a vulnerable child.

2. Prevention of Child Marriage:

- Prevented 14 child marriages in intervention villages through awareness campaigns and Childline support.

3. School Dropout Interventions:

- Re-enrolled 41 out of 59 identified dropout students into schools and colleges.
- Conducted follow-ups for 18 remaining students under continuous monitoring.

4. Adolescent Groups:

- Formed 40 adolescent groups for boys and girls, meeting weekly to discuss health, education, and child rights.
- Collaborated with ICDS and VHN for health awareness sessions.

5. Child Development Centers:

- Educated 1,363 children through resource centers equipped with educational and sports materials.
- Provided mental health counselling for students and parents, especially addressing substance abuse and dropout risks.



Community Empowerment and Livelihoods

1. Women Empowerment:

- Trained 140 SHGs, enabling women to start small-scale businesses and improve financial independence.
- Provided financial assistance to SHGs for entrepreneurial activities like goat rearing and tailoring.

2. Infrastructure Development:

- Advocated for improved school facilities, including toilets and classrooms, benefitting 300+ students.

Impact Highlights

- Secured labour rights awareness and grievance redressal mechanisms for over 2,300 workers.
- Re-enrolled dropout students and reduced child marriage cases across intervention villages.
- Improved educational and health outcomes through targeted programs in adolescent groups.
- Strengthened grassroots governance through active participation of CBOs and SHGs.

Conclusion

This program has significantly contributed to advancing labour rights, child protection, and women empowerment while fostering sustainable community development. It serves as a model for addressing systemic issues like forced labour and child marriage in vulnerable communities.



Livelihood Development Initiatives

The program has focused on creating sustainable livelihood opportunities and empowering women and youth through targeted interventions in APF project villages. Key achievements include:

Livelihood Support:

- Provided **₹10,000 loans** to 47 beneficiaries for goat rearing under the **Meshavaram Agricultural Producer Company** initiative, enhancing their economic stability.
- Established **70 new women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**, with 40 groups receiving ₹10,000 each to initiate small-scale businesses.

Skill Development:

- Offered **free computer training** to 65 women, enabling them to enhance their employability.
 - Of these, 7 women secured employment, and one established an independent **CSC (Common Service Center)**.
- Trained **50 youth in driving**, out of which 14 are now self-employed and generating income.

Community Empowerment:

- Linked all newly formed SHGs to **Panchayat Level Federations (PLFs)** to strengthen their organizational support and access to resources.

Through these initiatives, the program has successfully empowered women and youth, creating pathways for self-reliance and sustainable income generation in the target communities.

