



Rural kids the Government and the Concerned for Working Children in charge



Children of the Grama Sabha of Udipi District bettering their lives!

20,000 amazing village kids fight the FLOODS and win

Through the winter of 2006, the children of the villages of Udipi District bubbled over with excitement. Holding colourful hand drawn posters, hundreds of children marched in processions through the village streets calling everyone to join them. These children sang, danced, made speeches, and acted out skits to spread the message. They were eager to share ideas to improve life in their community.

Grown ups have always taken the lead, telling children what to do and how to do it. Deep in the heart of rural India, children coming under all 56 Panchayats of Kundapura Taluk in Udipi District are coming forward to better their daily lives. These children do not simply make demands according to their whims. They first organise their own meetings and discuss their problems among themselves. Then, they offer their ideas to the village leaders. The children work together to single out genuine problems. Most important of all, they try to find practical solutions acceptable to everyone.

Grown ups may have good intentions, but they cannot always see things from a child's point of view. "This

part of the road gets flooded during the rains," said a young boy from Hallihole village at the meeting of village elders. "We have to walk almost two more kilometres to reach our school. Our mothers also have to trudge far to fetch water." Wading through this flooded stretch during the rainy season was not a problem for the village men. They had never realised that the while the water reached only till their knees, it was neck deep for little children.

How could this problem be solved? "Please make a small footbridge over the flood prone place," suggested the children.

"We don't have so much money," said the elders of the Village Panchayat. "We only have enough to improve the important road leading to the village marketplace."

The children went about making a door to door survey. Which improvement would benefit more people? By asking everyone and tabling the facts and figures in an organised way, the children got solid proof. Many more children and women would benefit by the footbridge, compared to the few men who wanted the new market road. The men would also use the bridge and

so, it would help everyone. The children, with their natural sense of fair play and kindness, soon convinced the Panchayat elders.

Small steps such as these add up to improve life. Yet it was not easy at first for village children to speak up before their elders. The adults also doubted whether children could contribute anything useful. The first children's special Grama Sabhas took place in a few villages of Udipi district in 2002. Government authorities and the Concerned for Working Children, a social service organization, joined hands. Rural children were guided and encouraged to organize themselves and put forward their ideas in a reasoned, clear manner. When the children's efforts brought good results, the adults began accepting their ideas and seeing hope for the future. Since 2004, over 20,000 children have enthusiastically taken part in Grama Sabha meetings, and in related discussions and surveys. Efforts are on to encourage children to take active part in local self government in all the villages of Karnataka.

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