Envisioning Girls of Today as Leaders of Tomorrow: A STRATEGIC APPROACH
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Contents

Foreword ................................................................................................................. 07
About The Report .............................................................................................. 09
Case Study of Village Arrai, Kaiserganj Block, Bahraich ..................................... 13
Case Study of Village Maucha, Tazwapur Block, Bahraich ................................. 19
Case Study of Village Singhparsa, Town Area, Bahraich .................................... 27
Case Study of Village Balapur, Visheshwaranaj Block, Bahraich .......................... 34
Case Study of Village Bhairampur, Block Uttaraula, Bahraipur ......................... 41
Case Study of Village Pachutha, Block Shriduttganj, Bahraipur ......................... 45
Adolescence is a very critical period in the life of a child, especially so if it is a girl child in India, with majority of them being out of school, having limited choices for the future, caught in the cycle of early marriage, repeated pregnancy and poverty. They are deprived of their basic rights to health, education, development and independence, with the psychosocial needs getting mostly ignored.

Undergoing a sharp transition into more restrictive roles and lifestyles, this stage also brings in constricted social, educational, and economic opportunities and lesser interaction with the outside world, leading to girls dropping out of school and getting more involved in household chores and sibling care. This impacts the personality of girls in terms of having limited exposure to dynamic world, a limited or no space for themselves.

In order to gain control over their lives, these girls need a foundation of knowledge, skills and experience. Providing adequate education opportunities and resources combined with leadership development, can help them to better articulate their needs, protect their personal assets, participate in decision-making, and most importantly shape their future, ultimately building a cadre of empowered girls.

CARE initiated a Global Campaign called ‘The Power Within’, a leadership initiative layered on CARE’s Education programme, aimed at equipping girls in the age group of 10-14 years with a set of skills, attitudes and competencies, amalgamated as ‘leadership traits’. It is believed that these will enable them to lead more informed, pro-active and empowered lives in their personal, social and community contexts, while ensuring that they access and complete primary education.

The initiative was implemented in 2008 in extremely backward villages of the two districts Bahraich and Balrampur in the state of Uttar Pradesh and thus involved several geographical and programmatic challenges. Four years later, an intensive qualitative documentation was undertaken to understand the journey of the girls who have been part of this initiative. A case study approach was best suitable to critically analyse the changes in the personal and public sphere of girls, how these changes were brought in and the extent of transformation in girls.

The qualitative documentation carried out by Prof Namita Ranganathan, from Central Institute of Education, Delhi University and Ms Nandita, has revealed substantial positive changes in the lives of the participating girls, whilst also identifying the challenges involved, making it a very interesting read.

Dr Suman Sachdeva
Technical Director, Education
About The Report

Context And Objectives
This report is an attempt to document some of the visible evidences and outcomes of the leadership development programme for adolescent girls called ‘Power Within’, that CARE has envisioned and implemented in 245 villages of Bahraich and Balrampur districts, Uttar Pradesh since April, 2009. The mode of documentation is a ‘case study approach’ in which the flavour of reporting is distinctively qualitative, with its prime objectives being, capturing of field realities as they exist, both in their overt manifestations and nuanced forms; factoring in the personal experiential life stories and narratives of key stakeholder groups and concerned individuals; and taking into cognizance both micro and macro issues of significance to the project goals. Although the report is not evaluative, it has a strong diagnostic element since one of its key objectives is aimed at identifying causal factors that account for the variations in the success or non success of the programme. All diagnosis has been located within the contours of the goals and targets professed in the Vision Document. Suggestions for strategic planning with their theoretical basis have also been proposed based on the emergent findings and trends.

The ‘Power Within’ Programme
This programme is best understood as a leadership initiative, aimed at equipping girls in the age group of 10-14 years with a set of skills, attitudes and competencies, unified under the umbrella of ‘leadership traits’. It is believed that these will enable them to lead more informed, pro-active and empowered lives in their personal, social and community contexts.

The concept of leadership has been defined from a behaviouristic perspective which rests on the underlying assumption that with training and effort, traits can be inculcated. Within this perspective, the visible behavioural manifestations of the traits become the representational measures of success. In the present programme, five traits have been identified as the constructs of leadership in girls. These are confidence, voice, decision making, organisation and vision. To enable smooth implementation of the programme, each of these leadership traits have been operationally defined.

Thus, confidence is the ability to express oneself without hesitation, analyse self strengths and weaknesses, participate actively in family and peer group contexts and be able to go to friends’ houses and the market area without any escort.
Voice is defined as the ability to express opinions with their underlined rationales, ask questions in the community and peer group meetings and be able to facilitate discussion on a given theme in a peer group context.

Decision Making is defined as the ability to analyse a situation critically, identify alternatives of a selected problem and assert oneself in the decision making process, concerning family and community.

Organisation is conceptualised as being better informed about self, local issues and significant others, the ability to collect and collate information, sequence the steps of a proposed event or activity, manage one’s schedule and time to incorporate all pursuits and activities and to be able to plan and conduct small group activities.

Vision is defined as the ability to formulate a simple life plan with short term goals for oneself, the capacity to motivate group members to take up collective action and to be able to guide one’s siblings and younger peers.

A detailed curriculum with a corresponding set of activities, based on these five traits has been developed, to facilitate programme implementation. For actual implementation in the village sites, a carefully orchestrated cascade flow model has been set in motion.

The overall strategy that CARE has adopted is to consider every village as an independent field site, within which the intervention is planned as a three pronged approach, of which the constituents are the local government primary school, setting up of a girls’ collective called the Kishori Samooh and adopting a community based initiative. Although each of these are structurally independent, in functional terms they are organically interlinked, since they share the common goal of facilitating and furthering girls’ leadership development.

The intervention in the local government primary school has been layered on the already existing ‘School Improvement Programme’ that CARE has been scaffolding in government primary schools, specifically with children in classes four and five. The key components of this programme aim at promoting children’s personality development through the ‘Bal Sabha’ which is a child centered school assembly meant for enhancing children’s self expression, confidence and creative abilities and a set of organized groups called Samitis, namely Library, Mid-day meal, Cleanliness, Sports and Bal Sabha which help children to develop decision making abilities and organisational skills. In the present programme, these are seen as potential sources of leadership development as well. The additional input specifically targeting leadership development is the strengthening of extra-curricular activities in the school. The literary and cultural components of these activities have been woven into the Bal Sabha and a special effort has been made to give importance to sports activities which are conducted in a gender neutral fashion. Boys and girls are, thus, taught and encouraged equally to play cricket, football, carrom, skipping etc. without gender biases influencing the choice of games. It is believed that this will contribute in a small but significant way to the development of an attitude of gender equity.

The girls’ collective or the Kishori Samooh has been conceptualized as a social network of girls outside the school setting, but within the village to which 25-30 girls in the age group of 10-14 years are given enrolment/membership. These girls maybe school going, early dropouts or non literate.

The six villages which constituted our final sample were selected on the basis of three criteria. Fundamental among these was the rating given to the Kishori Samooh as part of CARE’s in house grading system. It was ensured that samoohs rated as A, B and C were part of our sample since we were to showcase success and non success with supporting evidences and explanations.

The six villages

Envisioning Girls of Today as Leaders of Tomorrow: A Strategic Approach

Design, Tools And Participants

The report, as has already mentioned, adopts a case study approach. Each of the six villages which were visited and studied has been presented as an independent case profile. This was done since the socio economic and cultural contexts were seen to vary among them, as also the beliefs about girls’ education and development and the patronage given to them. Local contextual factors, thus, had to be given a lot of credence, especially for causal attribution. They had to be woven into the analysis of each village.

The village profiles have, thus, been consciously compiled as descriptive narratives which typify the special and unique features of each village, almost akin to the life story of the village as it unfolded before us. This style was adopted since it enabled us to incorporate the personal experiential aspects drawn from the lives of the different stakeholder groups and individuals with whom we interacted. There is also no denying that a descriptive narrative makes more interesting reading!

Since our mandate was to study the differences that the programme had made to the lives of adolescent girls, they became the main focus of our study and also the basis of sample selection. In fact in effect, the Kishori Samoos became the universe from where we drew our participants. The six villages which constituted our final sample were selected on the basis of three criteria. Fundamental among these was the rating given to the Kishori Samoos as part of CARE’s in house grading system. It was ensured that samoos rated as A, B and C were part of our sample since we were to showcase success and non success with supporting evidences and explanations. The other two criteria were accessibility of the village and adequacy of representation of varied caste and community groups. The final selection of the six villages was done for us by the in house CARE team. They took full cognizance of the criteria that we had laid out.

Of the six villages that were finally studied, four were located in Bahraich district and two in Bahapur district. The villages in Bahraich district included Arai, Marraucha, Singhaparasi and Balapur. The villages in Bahapur were Bhairampur and Pachutha.
The Kishori Samoohs constituted the core of our data collection efforts. We tried to document and capture what the girls could do and what they had learned as a function of the inputs that they had received. An interview guide with themes and tasks was constructed for the purpose. This included some situational tasks, some discussion questions, some feedback questions and some spontaneous questions for analysis that we devised based on the obtained responses. Girls’ singing, dramatics and dancing talents and displays were also observed and noted. Some evidences were collected in the form of drawings with follow up explanations and write ups from the girls. The questions were not standardized across villages since the range of variation was very vast. The interview guide is attached in the appendix.

From each samooh, some girls who showed visible signs of leadership, or potential for it were identified for more in-depth probing. In some samoohs, girls who seemed oblivious of leadership traits were also identified and interviewed to know why this was so. In each village profile, the specific mode of sample identification in this regard has been described.

To gauge whether the school leadership inputs were helping in the development of leadership skills and to get a reflected overview on this, the school teachers and shiksha mitras were interviewed. A thematic schedule was prepared which is also attached in the appendix A. Since the examinations had just finished and children had stopped coming to school, we could not interact with them or observe how the bal sabha, samitis and sports activities function. In village Pachutha however, some children had gathered and we were able to interact with them and gather some feedback.

For the community perspective, we interacted through sustained probing conversations with significant adult members of every village which included some mothers, fathers and elder siblings of the girls. Once again the specific details of these are given under each village profile.

Interaction with the CARE team in the GEP unit, the state team in UP and the field team of the project consisting of the leadership coordinators, village level workers and volunteers helped us to build perspective and sharpen our understanding and insights.

The report is an outcome of this collective effort. While this section has explained the context, aims design, sample and tools, what follow are the case studies of the six villages with a final conclusive section based on cross case analysis. Suggestions for strategic planning, with their theoretical underpinnings have been given in boldface text throughout the report and summarized as an overview at the end.
to traditional patriarchal beliefs in which the division of labour is gender stereotypical, though the services of women and girls are often commissioned to economic earning. As a consequence, girls are involved in household chores, looking after siblings (family sizes being large) and periodically working as underpaid daily wages on farms for sums ranging from Rs 25 to 50 per day! Their education thus takes a back seat. No value or importance is accorded to it for another significant reason that in both the communities, girls are married off at ages 15-16! Coincidentally, the day we visited the village one of the girls from the kishori samooh aged 15, was getting married and preparatory festivities were in progress.

Very interestingly, when the girls of the kishori samooh were asked to draw themselves in the context of their village and explain what they had drawn, most of the older girls drew themselves confined within the house. Walls and borders were used to symbolize boundaries and restrictions which they experience in their lives. These can be seen in the representative drawings given below. Many of them incorporated what they had learned in the samooh meetings in their drawings. Girls clearly seem to define their identity with reference to what their lived reality is.

Fieldwork In Arrai
We spent three hours in Arrai in which we engaged in the following:

- Interviews with the School Headmaster, Shahbaz Ahmed Khan and Shiksha Mitra, Kumar Shuprabatham Mishra
- Interaction with the girls of the Kishori Samooh
- Interview with the Volunteer Kusum Awasthi who conducts the Kishori Samooh and a brief interaction with her husband
- Interaction with some community members as we walked through the village
- A visit to the home of Vandana, whom we had identified as an interesting case study
- Interview with the Leadership Coordinator, Sarita

What The Interviews With The Headmaster & Shiksha Mitra Revealed
Most of the data and description about the village profile was provided through oral narration by them. The headmaster knew the pulse of the village, by virtue of his long experience and association with the village. He was a much revered man in the village community. He was of the view that CARE's intervention with the girls had brought fresh motivation and enthusiasm in their lives. Many a times, he found girls waiting eagerly for the samooh, wanting to leave school early to prepare for it and attend it!

For instance, he raised very real questions about where will the girls go after class 8? Where is the high school for them? Who will allow them to have control over their own lives? The community is so poor and so how can they wait to see the benefits of education and social learning that are likely to accrue to their daughters?

He left on a suggestive note that economic hardship has to be dealt with first before any scheme for girls' empowerment and leadership is contemplated.

"Many households cannot afford even two meals a day and so for the sustenance of the scheme, much more is required.” He pointed out, “Most houses don’t have doors because they can’t afford to build them.”

The Shiksha mitra also highlighted some visible changes that he had observed in the girls, after CARE's intervention in the school.

"At school, girls who are enrolled are enthusiastic about participation in the bal sabhas and in the samitis. They have got over their hesitation and tend to ask a lot of questions. The girls are particularly enthusiastic about participation in the sports and games and library committees. Boys and girls play badminton, ludo, carom, ring, bat and ball, skipping etc, together. Classes 3-5 play football and kabaddi in mixed gender teams. Girls are very enthusiastic about cricket! Earlier skipping was confined to girls, but now boys also play with skipping ropes!"

What are these experiences, if not small but potent leanings towards the development of a more androgynous gender identity among boys and girls who are at the beginning of the process of negotiating it. An androgynous gender identity in turn, supports the development of leadership.

An Hour In The Kishori Samooh
After a hot and bumpy ride, the refreshing sonorous voices and smiling faces of a group of 25 odd young girls singing a welcome song was indeed a startling experience.

The following was the gist of our interaction with them.

Us: “Thank you for the warm welcome. Now tell us about your group, introduce yourselves.”

Them: “We are the Indira Samooh and we meet once a week. We are about 28 girls enrolled in it and all of us go to school”

Us: “What do you do in the samooh?”

Them: “We sing and dance and play and plant trees and make charts and ‘chachi’ (this is how they address the volunteer) tells us about cleanliness of our bodies, our houses, about savings, and about the work that boys and girls must both do.”

This list of activities is supplied by a dominant group of 6 girls who study in classes ranging from 3 to 6. Initially they are shy, but as we interact, they open up and speak quite freely. There are 10 to 12 very young girls, who participate in singing rhymes and songs but are quiet, otherwise. The other 8 or 9 girls are also quite passive in the group.

The girls are particularly enthusiastic about participation in the sports and games and library committees. Boys and girls play badminton, ludo, carom, ring, bat and ball, skipping etc, together. Classes 3-5 play football and kabaddi in mixed gender teams.
We then focus our attention to more intensive interaction with these 6 girls and put a whole lot of questions about the village hospital, post office, bank, dealing with the illness of family members, what education means to them, their dreams and aspirations, how they can change their village, the nature of savings in their village and their perspective on gender both through an open dialogue with them and through situational analysis. At the end of an hour, we conclude that these girls are indeed potential leaders! They are:

- Inat Jahan who is 11 and studies in class 3
- Seher Banu who is 10 and studies in class 3
- Sakina Banu who is 12 and studies in class 3
- Sahina Banu who is 16 and studies in class 6
- Arbi who is 11 and studies in class 6
- Anjali who is 11 and studies in class 5

We identify them as potential leaders since they show self confidence, ask us many questions quite fearlessly, show evidence of voice, in that, they are able to express their views with clarity and some element of conviction, and can pose some basic questions about prevalent societal beliefs on issues connected to girls’ education, the freedom to work, the appropriate age of marriage, etc. We hurled a tirade of diverse questions at them and found that they knew about savings, making of a household budget, home remedies and first aid in dealing with the sudden illness of a family member, had basic knowledge about some public and civic institutions that they had been acquainted with, could debate about gender roles and tasks and could visualize priorities for the development of their village if made the Pradhan. They showed us the charts that they had made and found that they knew about savings, making of a household budget, home remedies and first aid in dealing with the sudden illness of a family member, had basic knowledge about some public and civic institutions that they had been acquainted with, could debate about gender roles and tasks and could visualize priorities for the development of their village, if made the Pradhan. They showed us the charts that they had made and displayed on the walls of the room, on themes such as: gender appropriate tasks for boys and girls, healthy nutrition, their village map, assortments of flowers, fruits, vegetables etc, with a sense of visible pride and ownership. There is no doubt that the Samooh gives them a sense of identity, belongingness and the joys of engaging with a peer group.

We are told about three success stories at this juncture by the Volunteer.

- “Six girls have opened post office savings accounts in which they put in Rs. 10 every month. This will help them to develop the habit of saving for life.” When we cross check this, sure enough, six hands go up.

- “When I organized a field trip to the village hospital, there was a lot of resistance from the girls’ parents, especially the older girls. The hospital was 2 kms away and that was a big deterrent. Yet 16 of the 28 girls negotiated with their parents, got their permission and accompanied me for the visit.”

- “The mothers of many girls tell me that girls are particular about keeping their homes clean, washing vegetables before cooking and bathing regularly and ensuring that they are neat and clean.” These do symbolize the process of change and show the beginnings of the development of some basic awareness and life skills.

This Kishori Samooh is rated as C grade because we are told that the attendance of girls becomes irregular in the sowing and harvesting periods, when their parents mobilize their services for agricultural labour. They stop coming to the school and for the meetings as well. The meetings, thus, have periodic phases of flagging attendance. The continuity of dialogue, discussion, perspective building, etc gets affected by this. We also felt that many of the girls were too young and probably could not relate to issues that were being discussed. They came for the singing, dancing, art work etc, and thus remained passive for a large part of the interaction. The activities of the samooh, especially the efforts to make girls more confident, articulate, form notions about social and civic issues, and lead more informed lives, somehow work better for the older girls and more significantly for those who attend school regularly and participate actively in school life, as well. We were told that parental support, particularly the supportive attitude and role of the mother was also a significant factor. This explains the case of the 6 girls identified as potential leaders in whose lives these were facilitative factors.

While interacting in the Kishori Samooh, it struck us that there were two other persons who merited independent case studies. One was the volunteer herself and the other was a 13 year old girl called Vandana. Their life stories and trajectories are very interesting. They are success stories in themselves.

Life Trajectory of The Volunteer, Kusum Awasthi

When she was contacted by the Pradhan to accept the task of becoming the Volunteer for the Kishori Samooh, Kusum Awasthi, the only daughter-in-law of village Arrai who was educated upto class 8, was very apprehensive about taking up the responsibility. In her maiden days too, she says that she lead a very sheltered life and had not really moved out of her home, apart from attending school. She never spoke in public, remained silent at home and interacted mainly with the female members of her household. Her husband left the decision to her. He neither encouraged her, nor discouraged her. As she says, “rokte nahin the par madad bhi nahin karte the.”

The turning point in her life came once she said yes, and as part of her preparation for the position, went out of the village to attend trainings. She says she began to see many changes in herself. She discovered her own potential for thinking, serving society and ensuring a more informed life for the girls of her village. Today she stands as a role model, a mentor and a psychological anchor for the many girls in the village. With her very cheerful and inviting face, her commitment and concern for the girls and the sense of enjoyment that she derives from organizing and conducting the sessions of the Samooh (as recounted by the girls, members of the community and the school headmaster), she has helped many girls to come out of their shells and begin to enjoy a new phase of their lives. She has, over the last year, earned admiration and respect from her husband. When spoken to, her husband admitted that he was very proud of his wife and the good work that she was doing for the girls of the village. He admitted that he had never imagined that she
was capable of organizing drives, rallies, building up social and civic awareness, but now was convinced of his wife’s capability and talent.

Kusum Awasthi highlights that her own personality and identity has undergone a significant transformation. She now looks upon herself as both a professional and a person. What gives her a sense of immense satisfaction is that she has risen in the estimation of her husband, she has discovered an untapped potential in herself to serve the community, her ideas have become more progressive, and her own awareness and understanding about civic rights, public institutions etc has expanded considerably. She recalls that when she had initially taken up the task, she was very shaky about her skills at written record maintenance and had to be scaffolded by her son. Today, she manages on her own and is not intimidated by any written task.

The Leadership Coordinator and Village Level Worker, endorsed these observations and also reported the sea change that they had seen in Kusumji. Her success story is aptly summarized by her husband who now says that he will support her till her PhD!

One of the suggested strategies for sustained leadership development among girls in marginalized communities is creating local same gender models whom girls can relate to, identify with and then emulate. Kusum Awasthi has become one such avatar.

**Life Story of Vandana**

With a cherubic face and large expressive eyes, Vandana stands out in the Kishori Samooh for more reasons than one. At age 12, she is like a mother to her four younger siblings and an advisor and pillar of support to her mother. Vandana had to drop out of school almost as soon as she enrolled, since driven by economic compulsions, her father had to work in Delhi, Mumbai and Punjab leaving her mother to manage their household in the village. Being the eldest and a girl, she had to slip into the role of sibling care and household chores from a very early age. As she grew older she had to contribute to the family income by working as an agricultural labourer off and on.

When the Kishori samooh started, she attended a few sessions. She enjoyed the paper craft activities and envied girls who could read. When she shared this with the volunteer, she was persuaded by the latter to join school, even though she was over age, immediately. Vandana is now enrolled in class 1 and is more proud than self conscious about her decision. She has the support of her mother as well.

She says that after joining the Samooh, she learned how to improve her appearance, keep her home clean, organize its setting, develop courage to speak and manage her time better between familial and school related tasks.

We visited her house incognito and met her family. The house was quite untidy, but there were clearly demarcated spaces for cooking, hanging up clothes, tying the cattle etc. We were told by her mother that this was Vandana’s initiative. Her younger siblings were all very dishevelled, but she told us proudly that she ensures that they all go to school. She is bold and proud of her achievements and harbours dreams of being an influential person some day.

The pictures of Vandana’s home will serve to testify the text. Of particular importance is the picture of Vandana with her mother and grandmother, where the changing scenario across generations, is evident by grooming, dress and demeanour.

Vandana’s story reflects that the scope and possibility for change always exists, and given appropriate encouragement, opportunity and a supportive environment, late beginners can also bloom, catch up and lead. With reference to the leadership goals that CARE has identified, she shows evidence of voice, confidence and organisation. These are reflected through better articulation of point of view, boldness, taking small decisions and responsibilities, scheduling her day and coordinating school, home responsibilities, and work. However, only the beginnings of these processes are visible.
The Village Profile

Marraucha is quite distinctly an urbanized village. This stems from its location on the main highway. In addition, the village has medical facilities, a local hospital, a bank, a post office and access to a local shopping area. There are also private schools, an intermediate college and a degree college, located close by. A Navodaya Vidyalaya and a Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya are also situated, not very far from the village. We were told that it is a large village with approximately 200 odd households comprising of both Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus are the more dominant community by their sheer numbers and land holdings. There is a significant Brahmin population, typified by family names like Shukla, Awasthi and Vajpayee and an equally strong community support for girls’ education. Although the division of labour and gender roles is traditional, girls are not pushed into marriage before they are eighteen. In cases where they wish to study and work, the age of marriage is further delayed. There are role models to this effect in the village. (The village profile is based on what the older girls of the kishori samooh narrated to us, supplemented by information drawn from the village profile for girls’ education.)

The occupational profile of the village shows that agriculture is one of the main occupations pursued. Many families have self owned farmland which they till and cultivate. Both men and women work together in the fields. The farmlands, although not very large, are able to sometimes yield rich harvests, which are then sold commercially. In most households, there seems to be self sufficiency in food grains. Apart from agriculture, some households are engaged in petty business like running a small hotel or a small shop tractor dealership, a battery charging unit, providing generator services, etc. It appeared from the general occupational profile that there is no dire poverty in the village. On the other hand, neither can the village boast of prosperity. Those men, who do not have land holdings, work outside the village and a few have even gone to Mumbai, Delhi and Punjab for employment.

The primary and middle school are located in separate buildings in the same compound. The High school is situated in a building some distance away. Some children of the village study in private schools with fees ranging from Rs 60 to 200 per month.

Case Study of Village Marraucha, Tazwapur Block, Bahraich

The High school is situated in a building some distance away. Some children of the village study in private schools with fees ranging from Rs 60 to 200 per month.

in the village and thus we were unable to interact with the community or walk through the village, to make our own observations.)

Description Of Fieldwork

We spent 4 hours in the village, from 2.00 pm to 6.00 pm in which we accomplished the following:

- Interaction with the girls of the Kishori Samooh for almost two hours in which they showcased their talents and participated in a focused group discussion with us.
- Interview with the Head teacher of the primary school, Mrs Mira Singh where CARE’S school improvement and leadership programme were in progress. She made a special effort to make time for the interview inspite of a very busy schedule.
- Interview with the Volunteer of the Kishori Samooh, Roli Shukla and the Leadership Coordinator, Beenu.

Documenting Our Experience In The Kishori Samooh

A very enthusiastic welcome awaited us at the planned interaction with the Kishori Samooh. The entire group of girls sang a welcome song ‘Abhinandan’ with full gusto, accompanied by the powerful beats of a dholak. The age range of this very disparate group of girls seemed to be from 9. Our verbal interaction with the girls began with introductions, whereby one of the girls was randomly identified and requested to introduce her Samooh and tell us the names of all the girls who had gathered. She did this very confidently and competently. We were interrupted by the girls as this process was in progress and asked to tell them who we were and where we came from. We presented our identities falsely as bollywood actresses which initially baffled them, but later on they agreed to accept what we said. At this point we revealed our true names and told them that we were from Delhi.

With this, our rapport with them got immediately built and we found the girls very chatty, affable and forthcoming to whatever we asked them or discussed with them. Subsequently, we found that the older girls were giving all the responses, but later when we asked the younger girls specifically focused questions, they were also able to give answers and express their views, without much hesitation.

Us: “Okay, girls tell us what differences you have seen in yourselves after attending the Samooh meetings”

Them: “Earlier we did not bother about our appearance. We would come as we pleased. Now we feel good about coming neatly and well dressed for the meetings.”
The age of marriage was stated as 21 to 25. Only the older girls responded to the necessity for marriage. Many of them felt that marriage was essential since that is how society functioned.

The group was then given a situation wherein they were asked to visualize that there was a particular mother-in-law who did not wish to be observed by her daughter-in-law. If they were the daughter-in-law, what would they do? Some questioned whether such a situation would ever arise; few others felt that they would still observe it as if they were their family and traditions (sanskars). On repeated questioning of its correctness as a practice, one of the older girls threw back the question at us and asked us to consider. The girls did not perceive it as an act of subjugation when we presented it to us but agreed with our view of it as a source of discomfort in summer.

To see whether they have the capacity to take a proactive stand to crusade a cause, we asked them how they would convince their parents to admit their younger sister to the Navodaya Vidyalaya which is a residential school. To this there were many responses. Very compelling reasons of short term and long term benefit to the family were cited. Most girls were confident of being able to convince their parents.

The group was then given a choice of whether they would like to be reborn as boys in their next life. More than half the girls, the younger ones included, favoured being reborn as boys. Those who had been in support of their wish their response was, "Boys enjoy more freedom; they can roam around freely, they can stay out late, study as far away and as long as they want, and marry if they wished, of their own choice." Having examined their perspective on issues, the confidence with which they could express their views, understanding the extent to which they engage in rational analysis over blind conformity to societal beliefs, their ability to visualize, negotiate and take a position on a contentious issue, we then shifted to evaluating their organisational skills.

A situation was thrown to the group about budgeting a household in Rs 5000 per month and living as the newly married wife of a man working in Lucknow. Initially there were soft giggles and then Kamini decided to answer the question on behalf of the group. She apportioned Rs 2000 for rations and food items and then came to house rent. Here she exclaimed that with the present cost of living, it would be impossible to live there. Other girls raised costs of transport, entertainment, etc which take place in a big city and they all agreed that Rs 5000 was inadequate. Most girls evidently knew how household budgets were made!

Since we had interacted for very long, the girls wanted to also show us their talents and skills. They asked if they could organize a small cultural programme for us to which we readily agreed. To our great satisfaction, we saw many evidences of leadership ability in the girls. Without the help of the Volunteer, they sang a group song, performed a dance and put up a skit on the theme of household savings. Usually one girl led, while the others followed. The remarkable feature was that lyrics of the song, crusading the cause of girls’ education, were written by the girls themselves. The volunteer and the leadership coordinator endorsed the fact. Likewise, they put up a skit in which how through a saving habit, a young girl produced sugar which she had quietly saved and came to her mother’s rescue, when the family had unexpected guests one day. Her mother had run out of sugar and had not succeeded in borrowing any from her neighbours. (Scanned versions of the song and play are attached in Appendix B.)
The fact that the girls wrote this play and the group song on their own showed confidence, a convincing flow of ideas, a perspective on household savings, ways of dealing with real problems through better household organisation and creative expression through the dialogues. The roles were enacted with great confidence. We realized that this was another manifest form of their leadership skills. They showed self confidence, elements of voice, some features of organisation and the beginnings of vision and the ability to motivate others.

We wound up the samooh meeting by asking girls to reflect to us through drawing, where and how they would like to see themselves 5 to 7 years in the future. It was interesting to find that all the older girls typified themselves as professionals, ranging from teacher, to doctor, to anganwadi worker, to shiksha mitra, to a kishori samooh volunteer, to a bank probationary officer, to a fashion designer! The scanned drawings below clearly illustrate this. All drawings very interestingly have supporting props.

It was interesting to find that all the older girls typified themselves as professionals, ranging from teacher, to doctor, to anganwadi worker, to shiksha mitra, to a kishori samooh volunteer, to a bank probationary officer, to a fashion designer!

Some Conclusive Insights Drawn From The Kishori Samooh

When we tried to analyse the factors that could have contributed to the development of some of the targeted leadership abilities in these girls, three factors struck us as the most plausible. Firstly, almost all the girls were from relatively better economic backgrounds, had a significant caste status and were continuing with their education. Secondly, most of them were in middle school or senior school and so in terms of age they were more representative of the 13 years to 16 years group. Since they were older, they could relate better to the curriculum on civic and social issues and build perspective on it. Education, social learning and leadership development seemed to facilitate each other. Thirdly, the village culture supported girls’ education and employment and the community did not insist on an early age marriage. Thus leadership development in girls clearly required a supportive socio cultural environment. It was not to be narrowly interpreted as the development of a set of behavioural traits and qualities in girls alone!

What also emerged was the need to extend the leadership programme to older girls since they seem to be better beneficiaries and more receptive to it. The younger girls cannot fully relate with the programme and tend to enjoy the space and opportunity that it offers for drawing, singing, playing and dancing much more than the social and civic issues that it addresses. The kishori samooh may be visualized as two sub groups of adolescent girls - one typifying early adolescence and the other typifying middle and late adolescence. The contents of the leadership curriculum can be positioned on a developmental framework in the form of a continuum reaching out to the needs of each of the two sub groups.

Another by product of CARE’s programme could be to build up agency and life skills contextualized in urban life in these girls, so that they can compete at par with their urban counterparts in neighbouring districts and towns. The girls have the potential for this. This may facilitate their occupational and social mobility.

Inputs for the section on the kishori samooh were drawn from the interviews with the Volunteer, who is herself pursuing her final year of graduation and thus, a significant role model for the girls of the samooh and the leadership coordinator, who on account of her sincerity, passion and commitment has carved out a special place in the community. She recounted the journey of the Samooh which commenced on a note of indifference, but is now a matter of pride for the community, almost making it the community hub. It is no wonder then that although on paper 35 girls are enrolled in it, more than 50 girls attend the meeting!

In the Marraucha Kishori Samooh, one could see a lot of adolescent bonhomie. Obviously coming to the Samooh meetings also satisfied their psychosocial needs for belongingness, self expression and togetherness.

A Dialogue With Ritu, Poonam, Geeta, Pooja And Ruchi. They Are The Older Girls, Who If Aptly Scaffaded Can Be At Par With Any Of Their Urban Counterparts.
The primary school of Marraucha we are told runs on very well oiled wheels. All the girls who are presently in the school and even those who were there and have now transited to the middle school talk about the love and devotion of the Head teacher, Meera Singh. Although she has been in this school for just over two years, she implements all the innovations and strategies that are suggested under the School Improvement Programme and Leadership Development Programme, suggested by CARE.

She is of the view that the Bal Sabha has enabled many girls who were extremely shy and passive to open up. It has definitely built up girls’ confidence, given them a forum for self expression and an opportunity to learn a number of activities which they perform with emotions (havbhav). This helps in their overall personality development.

She is also very appreciative of the system of samitis that CARE had introduced through a rotational mode, to develop the basic leadership skills of students of class 4 and 5. She felt that this made students feel more involved in school, take responsibility for what they were in charge of and also develop a less biased notion of the division of labour. Boys swept the school and served the mid day meal with competence, just as girls played outdoor games like cricket and celebrated their sports achievements with fervour. She highlighted that it was particularly beneficial for the Muslim girls who were often debarred from such activities because of community beliefs held about girls. Another point which she made was that the overall alertness of girls had improved and this also reflected somewhere in their academic performance. She named a few girls who had become so confident that they could run the school in her absence, if she was busy elsewhere.

Apart from the benefits to children, particularly girls, she felt that the interventions had invigorated her greatly. They gave her a better sense of school identity, fresh challenges and possibilities for promoting the all round development of children which she had learned as part of her pre-service teacher education. She admitted that although her work profile had expanded greatly with these programmes, the satisfaction that she derived from the changes that she could observe in the students, made her so happy that she never felt fatigued. School also became a mission for her and not just a teaching job!

We realized after interacting with her that when the schooling experience of girls is pleasant and motivating they are more involved in school, take responsibility for what they are in charge of. She admitted that in her previous work places she never felt that the children were ready to learn. However, these interventions had inbuilt such a potential in the students.

We also understood the genesis of the refrain voiced by the community members whom we met – “the school is as good as not there!”; “you can imagine what happens in this school!”; “children reach class 5 but cannot read or write!” We realised later when we interacted with some girls studying in the school, that on many days when the teacher is away on work, or on training or on government duty, the mid day meal worker

Our Fieldwork

As we reached Singhaparasi, our first impression as we disembarked from our vehicle was that it was a small urban settlement on the outskirts of Bahraich town. From the look of the houses, condition of the roads, very unhygienic surroundings characterized by human and cattle excreta, water flowing all over, garbage scattered here and there and stray cattle and dogs hovering around, it appeared to be a village severely neglected by civic and developmental authorities. Almost immediately as we alighted, we were ushered into a beautiful big shed which looked like a village community centre. We were told that the shed was used as a godown and later, also housed a small production business. It was now a vacant space which belonged to one of the influential families of the village. From the shed we could see some houses, a few green patches, but a lot of rugged, unutilized land. This shed we were told housed the kishori samooh, which is why we were brought to it.

Several requests had been made to post more teachers in the school but there was still only a single teacher. We understood the genesis of the refrain voiced by the community members whom we met – “the school is as good as not there!”; “the school is as good as not there!”; "you can imagine what happens in this school!"; “children reach class 5 but cannot read or write!” We realised later when we interacted with some girls studying in the school, that on many days when the teacher is away on work, or on training or on government duty, the mid day meal worker
runs the school, or some of the older children in class 5 help out. The leadership coordinator insisted that on days that she visited the school, it used to run quite efficiently, but we felt that since that was only once or twice a month, it was of little consequence. What typified the regular practice was far more significant. The leadership development programme and the school improvement activities naturally took a back seat, especially since there was so much pressure on a single teacher to keep the school functional, in the face of such a skewed teacher student ratio! One mother told us that children go, mark attendance, eat the mid day meal and then run away; they can be seen here and there in the village during school hours! Imagining us to be representatives of the government, the community pleaded with us to do something for the school and the future of their children. Their voices carried deep anguish and desperation.

Interaction With The Girls Of The Kishori Samooh

All the above interaction took place while we were waiting for the girls of the Kishori Samooh to assemble. We decided that we would interact with them and unravel details about the village profile rather than gathering information from other sources. We also decided to put three levels of questions to them — those which addressed their personal gains from the meetings, those which evaluated their knowledge and understanding of public services and institutions in the village and societal norms and those which required higher order situational analysis. The idea underlying this was that it would enable us to gauge how the five leadership dimensions that the programme was targeting were actually developing in them.

Within 15 minutes, a group of 20 girls along, with their Volunteer who had gone to call them, came in and we started our interaction with them. There was a group of five older girls who were about 16 years old, while the remaining girls seemed to be in the age group of 10 to 14 years. Most of the girls were Muslims.

We started with an introduction in which the girls told us their names, turn by turn. Most girls spoke out their names boldly. The only exceptions were a few very young ones, who sat passively. We then asked the girls to tell us something about their village. To this, the older group of girls told us that there are about 300 houses consisting of Hindus, Pathans, Muslims and Banjaras. The population of the Muslims was the largest. They then apologized for coming late, citing the reason for their delay as the marriage of one of their friends, who was also a part of their samooh. All the older girls looked very excited about the wedding and had decorated their hands with henna. We then remarked that their friend must be very young ones, who sat passively. We then asked the girls to sing their favourite song, they burst into the latest bollywood item numbers and sang with distracted and said what they enjoyed the most was chatting, listening to songs, watching TV etc. When we asked them to sing their favourite song, they burst into the latest bollywood item numbers and sang with great gusto.

We then turned our attention to the younger girls.

Do they play, is what we asked them.

Yes… they play in their homes… In the Kishori Samooh they even play badminton and cricket.

Who should do the household chores-cooking, washing clothes, sweeping etc?

Boys or girls?

The girls felt that both boys and girls should be able to do it. Did they know how to handle money and buy daily provisions?

Yes they said they knew. However only a few of them could calculate transactions up to Rs 100, when we put some actual questions on purchases to them.

To know their wishes and aspirations, we then moved on to more imaginative situational analysis questions. These questions were thrown to the entire group. We asked them to imagine that they had recently got married and their husband had given them Rs 1000 for their personal expenses.
the eventuality of grave sickness. They and seen an aala (stethoscope), a sui (injection) and other simple medical apparatus. They formed the notion that an injection was administered in the village pradhan. Did they know about a ration card and the advantages accruing from it?

Almost all the girls, even the really young ones were aware that a ration card got them foodgrains, money, kerosene oil and that identity cards could be made through an agency. In fact, the mothers sitting around piped up that they all had BPL cards, as well.

At what age could a voter identity card be procured?

While some girls felt it was after marriage, the older girls were aware that it was after 18 years of age.

Had they seen a voter card? To this they said yes and were able to describe it with fair accuracy. Was there a doctor in the village? What did he do?

Yes there was. He treated illness. If they wanted to expand the facilities in the hospital, what would they do? The girls were clueless about this.

If their bhabhi wanted her delivery in the hospital and their own mother wanted the local dai (mid wife) to assist a home delivery, who would they side with? What was their view on this?

Girls were unanimous in supporting their bhabhi for a hospital delivery. And for this they said that they would explain things to their mother, convincing her that in a hospital the looking after and medical care of the mother and child is always better.

Incase their brother had fever and they had to deal with the situation in an emergency, the girls were aware that ORS had to be given. They knew that the whole body had to be sponged and that wet cloth had to be kept on the forehead.

Most girls had visited a hospital as part of the samooh activity and seen an aala (stethoscope), a sui (injection) and other simple medical apparatus. They formed the notion that an injection was administered in the eventuality of grave sickness. Many of them had received injections in their childhood. They were aware that vaccinations were essential to prevent a person from going lame and for the prevention of polio.

We then asked them to imagine a situation where a girl wanted to study and become a teacher. She faced a lot of parental opposition on this because they wanted her to get married. Yet she was firm and because her own teacher supported her decision, she moved ahead with her plan. Did they think she was doing the right thing? Was the teacher correct in supporting her knowing that her parents were opposed to the idea?

The girls felt that the girl certainly had courage. She was doing nothing wrong. Her parents should have been more understanding. The teacher they felt was right in supporting her. We felt however that since the girls of the samooh had no significant interest in studies or pursuing a career, the situation was of peripheral interest to them.

Wanted to focus on their awareness on civic and developmental issues, we then asked, if given an opportunity to become the Village Pradhan, what would they do for their village?

They listed construction of roads and drains and installation of taps. On a suggestion to mention something of significance for their mothers, they talked about installation of lights, gas stoves, more hospitals, and irrigation facilities for the fields.

The fun and entertainment part of our interaction included attempts at trying to get them to sing what they had learned at the samooh. However, the singing was in spurts and very patchy. Most of the girls were very hesitant and shy. It was obvious that the community does not encourage the girls to sing. This was endorsed by the volunteer, who is herself a young Muslim girl.

Most girls wanted to learn stitching and embroidery as a means of earning their living. They said that their mothers felt that though the girls were attending meetings, they were not learning anything. Owing to extreme dire poverty, issues of livelihood override long term gains of life skills.

The volunteer for the group is a girl who is pursuing her studies. She is in intermediate and attends classes regularly. She got married recently and has been able to, with the support of her mother, convince her conjugal family that she needs to finish her studies first. Her mother is a cook employed for the mid day meal. She is convinced that education for girls is absolutely essential and that there is no substitute for it. Despite all the hardships of poverty, she has with single minded devotion ensured that her children, particularly her daughters are educated. In fact, she already had a plan that after her older daughter left for her conjugal home, her younger daughter would take over the samooh.

The other mothers who came to the Kishori Samooh were keen to put forth a request for vocational training in the form of stitching and embroidery. They thought we were government representatives, so they appealed to us. One of them commented that when there was no water available in the village and when only one meal is what an average family could afford, issues of cleanliness, being taught in the samooh were meaningless. We then thought we would explore what they knew about the bank and savings. Did they know where they could money if their family wished to buy a house?

The girls were aware that a loan could be obtained from the bank. They also felt that they could approach the bank pradhan.

In case their brother had fever and they had to deal with the situation in an emergency, the girls were aware that the community does not encourage the girls to sing. This was endorsed by the volunteer, who is herself a young Muslim girl.
The Socio Economic Profile Of The Village

Our interaction with the community revealed that there was dire poverty in the village. There were no avenues of employment available in and around the village, not even daily wage earnings as labourers. In any case, as part of village tradition, women did not go out for labour or earning. There were very few exceptions. On an average, one meal a day was cooked in most families with few exceptions. The richer community was categorized as those earning around 3000 Rs per month, doing jobs like tailoring, cooking, shop assistance and daily wage labour. Since women were confined to the village and not allowed to go out, they were very keen to learn traditional embroidery (chikan, aari and kamdani) as a means of livelihood. They petitioned so by making it a point to come and meet us in fairly large numbers. Independent means of livelihood they said was the only redemption possible for them. They begged us to do something for them. They also told us that their Pradhan was from a different community and did nothing for them. Neither did any of the government welfare schemes reach them.

The Kishori Samooh meeting thus became more like an open house where all present reflected their views, shared their problems and difficulties and expressed their wishes and hopes. There was a particular young woman in the community who felt very strongly that interacting with the girls was not enough. She felt that we should actually do something for the economic betterment of the girls and women and offered to take responsibility for any such programme, particularly stitching and embroidery. She had worked for an NGO earlier. She gave us a lecture on how economic necessity and basic needs came first. Social education and awareness campaigns could follow. At present they had no relevance. In our minds we agreed completely with her.

Some Significant Insights

What clearly emerged from this interaction was that economic compulsions in this village took precedence over any other factor. The concept of a Kishori Samooh and its contributions to girls’ awareness and sense of identity were somewhat misplaced, since everyday survival was a major challenge for most families. The Samooh would begin to be valued only if it had better instrumental utility for girls, in their being able to learn skills which could then generate employment and earnings for the family. With this could be interwoven dimensions of awareness, life skills and agency.

Leadership Skills In The Younger Girls

Since our main mandate was to see which dimensions of leadership the girls in the 10 to 14 years age group had developed, we decided to do a group case study of four girls, drawn randomly from the kishori samooh, who fell into this age group. Our earlier interaction with the samooh had shown that the older girls were confident, their awareness levels were quite high, they could articulate a perspective, could engage in situational decision making and were able to organize their own daily schedules. Since they dominated the discussion, it was very difficult to say if the same was true for the younger girls.

The girls who were selected for the group case study were:

- Naseen, who is 9 years old and studying in class 4
- Priya, who is 11 years old and studying in class 5
- Reshma, who is 14 years old and studying in class 3
- Firdaus, who is 11 years old and studying in class 4

We basically wanted to know from the girls what the nature of their school related experience was. All four girls endorsed the community view that nothing happens in the form of studies in their school. They are often asked to sit and copy whatever they want to in their note books. The teacher is unable to attend to them. When asked about the Bal Sabha, they said it happened sometimes but none of them were involved in its organisation. When asked about the samitis in school, they seemed completely ignorant. They knew nothing about other co curricular activities, either. The one thing that they did say however was that they play in school sometimes.

We asked the girls to write a few lines about their experiences in the kishori samooh but were surprised to see that they did not know how to write full sentences. They just kept sitting and so we asked them to draw and colour whatever they wished, instead, which they were able to do. Their mothers who were standing around pointed out that this was the pathetic status of education in the village school!

We then made a few attempts to gauge their civic awareness, health and hygiene knowledge, and perspective on gender. They knew some very basic issues but had no perspective on anything. Somehow they came across as too young and childlike. They did not, in their interaction with us, show any spark of confidence, curiosity, voice or ability to wield any influence in their families. We wondered whether it was even appropriate to have any expectations from them. Had it been the older girls, then evidence of self confidence, simple perspective on issues, perceiving society as changeable etc was somewhat visible and also tenable, but not in these younger ones.

The reasons for the much to be done on the leadership development programme in the target age group of 10 to 14 years were clear. There were almost no inputs from the school; no appreciation or support from the community for the activities and curriculum of the samooh and the girls themselves were too naive and young to benefit from it. Moreover, the community mindset did not value having educated and aware girls. For them, what was of greater value was how the girls could contribute to the family income.
Case Study of Village Balapur, Visheshwarganj Block, Bahraich

The Village Context As It Unfolded

From Singhaparasi, as we drove to Balapur, we were briefed by the CARE team that we were heading towards a Kishori Samooh which was ‘A’ rated. This rating was given to it because the girls came regularly, the meetings were conducted efficiently by the volunteer, the community was supportive, most girls went to school, some of them to private ones and their interest and awareness levels were high. With this brief orientation, we decided to make the Kishori Samooh our base for understanding the village context and exploring the experiences of the girls and the community about the leadership development programme.

On reaching the village, we were struck by the flourish of green fields and trees. The environment appeared very soothing to the eyes. The main road intersected the village, dividing it into two distinct hamlets. We could not see the houses situated on the other side, but we were told that there was a large concentration of more than 100 houses. There were a few small shops on the road and regular flow of traffic could be seen. Since our concern was mainly to interact with the girls of the Kishori Samooh and the community, we headed straightaway into this.

Focus Of Our Field Work

With the girls of the Kishori Samooh we wanted to specifically interact and see the nature and extent to which they had developed self-confidence, voice, decision making and organisational skills and also to observe what other distinctive forms of leadership traits and behavior they displayed. Thus an elaborated focused group discussion was planned and conducted with them. In addition, they were given a spontaneous writing task to do, in which they were asked to either describe, list out, or draw their experiences in the kishori samooh and also different songs, painting and craftwork. Evidence of their painting and craftwork was visible in the form of charts that they had displayed all around the room.

Girls And Their Mothers At The Kishori Samooh, Balapur

Documenting The Kishori Samooh Interaction

The Kishori Samooh was housed in one of the large rooms that belonged to the school. As we entered, we were struck by the air of vibration which greeted us. There were about 22 girls and 6-7 mothers, some with lap babies sitting neatly in a circle, some young boys and youth hanging on the window railings of the room and some fathers who peered and then went away. It seemed like we were visiting a community centre. In many ways, the meeting bore semblance to a road show!

Each and every girl of the samooh, including the mothers came and shook hands with us. Later, as we interacted with the boys, we found them repeat the same form of greeting. We were told by the Leadership Coordinator that this was his input in his quest to promote better gender equity and though initially he had encountered resistance, now everybody had accepted it. While he was very proud of his achievement, we felt that notions of gender equity and ways of promoting it needed to be understood with more sensitivity and seriousness by him. Congruence with the local culture particularly needed to be understood.

As the ice breaking activity of our interaction with the girls, we asked them to introduce themselves individually to us and also tell us what they had learned in the meetings. As the introduction took off, we were struck by the variation in age that we encountered. Some girls were very young and studying in classes 1 and 2. In contrast there were some grown up girls who were in classes ranging from 7 to intermediate! The younger girls wore fashionable frocks and skirts, while the older girls were in salwar suits and jeans and tops. It was very similar to what we had seen in village Marraucha.

We realized immediately that a number of girls would not fall into the age frame that CARE had circumscribed and so instead of throwing all the questions to the entire group, we distributed them, targeting some of them to the younger girls so that we could get a more comprehensive understanding and disaggregate the responses.

The girls told us their names and then informed us that they met every Sunday for their Kishori Samooh Meeting. They said that they learnt about cooking, cleanliness and hygiene and also different songs, painting and craftwork. Evidence of their painting and craftwork was visible in the form of charts that they had displayed all around the room.

As they announced their names we realized that there was a domination of Hindu girls in the samooh with family names like Tiwari, Vajpayee, Gautam, Maurya, Paswan and Prapapti. There were a few Muslim girls too although their number was less than what we thought it would be, given that the village had a near equal representation of Hindus and Muslims. We were happy to learn that the two communities coexisted harmoniously.

The main occupation of the village was agriculture. There was adequate water and soil facilitation also. The girls told us, prompted by the adult women that among the other professions in the village, there were some people in government service, some people engaged in small business ventures and some who were working in larger towns and sending money to their families. One mother present was the mid day meal worker in the school. Overall, there did not seem to be evidence of dire poverty. All development indicators testified this. There was enough food for daily household consumption, most girls...
Those girls who were in the local village primary school also shared that they learnt a lot in school and our interview with the shiksha mitra helped us to validate their experiences. He was very concerned and aware about their needs and the fact that they needed direction and scaffolding and actually understood why early beginnings in leadership development were important.

Having constructed the context of the village, we then decided to explore girls’ positions and perspective on various issues, gauge their understanding of civic and social concerns, public institutions and the role that they could play in this regard. We started with the situation where they were asked to imagine that they were the Pradhan and list out ways in which they would improve and develop their village. The responses which this exercise included, building balconies for the poor, giving security to the village, constructing drains in the village, building schools, roads, installing taps and maintaining cleanliness.

We then asked them what they would do for their mothers. To this there was one singular response which was “educate them and make them literate so that they can sign their names instead of using their thumbs, read sign boards on their own, do simple budgeting and accounts and feel more confident.” They obviously knew the gains from education.

To know their view on committing to marriage vis-à-vis a career, they took the position that the two are not mutually exclusive. They all saw marriage as inevitable but expressed determination to have a career as well. The popular options were government service, doctor, lawyer, teacher and swayam sevika. The girls showed a lot of assertion on this aspect and also told us with confidence that they would be able to convince their parents. The few mothers who were sitting with the group, nodded in agreement. Interestingly the younger girls also expressed their career dreams though these were limited to teaching. At this point we explored the girls’ perspectives and views of their own, could take a position, and express their opinion. They were thus more ready and cognitively receptive for the leadership skills that the programme was addressing.

To know their perspective on gender we decided to use a different approach. We raised a question about what they thought the key differences between a cow and bull were and who they thought was more useful. An active discussion took place and concluded with consensus on the importance of both the male and the female for work and toil, progeny and milk in an agrarian economy. To the question that followed about who worked more, an active discussion took place and concluded with consensus on the importance of both the male and the female in the sub processes of decision making before coming to a conclusion. Once again it was the older girls who could do this. The younger ones just sat quietly. The need to divide the samooh into two sub groups came up once again as it had in Marraucha. There was also the need to conceptualise leadership development as a continuous process which could be started in its elemental form at age 10, but needed to carry on till about the age of 18, so that the skills of self confidence, voice, decision making, organisation and taking social action could be better developed and internalized. From the responses of girls in the age group of 10 to 12 years, their naivety and innocence about larger issues in the world also raise questions about whether these would get understood by such young girls, who were developmentally more part of childhood than adolescence and that too in a culture which endows girls with a relational identity of someone’s daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. In the case of the older girls, there were evidences in our interaction with them to show that they had ideas, perspectives and views of their own, could take a position, and express their opinion. They were thus more ready and cognitively receptive for the leadership skills that the programme was addressing.

We then proceeded to exploring what they knew about savings and whether they had made any initiative in this regard. Some girls claimed that they had bank accounts. 75% of the girls in the samooh mentioned gullak savings. They claimed that these savings helped in difficult times in their homes. As exemplars, Neelam gave Rs 400 to her parents for house construction, Sanju gave Rs 300 for her sister’s wedding and Gunjan gave Rs 500 for her mother’s treatment. Many other girls also shared how they had helped. What was important was that girls felt good about this and realized the importance of savings.

To know their understanding of the value of money and the importance of budgeting expenditure, we asked them two questions. The first was that we gave them Rs 1000 to buy, whatever they wished and they were to tell us what they would buy. The responses were, ‘paying for our tuition fees, buy dresses, shoes, eatables and save the rest’. The second question required them to make a monthly household budget for two persons within Rs 2000. They immediately said that Rs 500 would be spent on vegetables, Rs 50 on mobile recharge, Rs 200 for miscellaneous expenses and the rest would go into savings. They reasoned that food grains are anyway procured from their own agricultural produce and therefore did not factor them in for allocation of expenditure. Here it was the older girls who were dominating the discussion.

To know their ambitions and aspirations, we asked them if given an opportunity, would they like to re locate in a big town like Lucknow. Instead of giving a straightforward answer, they got tangled in a debate on the advantages of living in a village as opposed to a town. Their answers remained mixed in terms of their preferred choice, backed aptly by well thought out reasons. What was impressive was their ability to engage in the sub processes of decision making before coming to a conclusion. Once again it was the older girls who could do this. The younger ones just sat quietly. The need to divide the samooh into two sub groups came up once again as it had in Marraucha. There was also the need to conceptualise leadership development as a continuous process which could be started in its elemental form at age 10, but needed to carry on till about the age of 18, so that the skills of self confidence, voice, decision making, organisation and taking social action could be better developed and internalized. From the responses of girls in the age group of 10 to 12 years, their naivety and innocence about larger issues in the world also raise questions about whether these would get understood by such young girls, who were developmentally more part of childhood than adolescence and that too in a culture which endows girls with a relational identity of someone’s daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. In the case of the older girls, there were evidences in our interaction with them to show that they had ideas, perspectives and views of their own, could take a position, and express their opinion. They were thus more ready and cognitively receptive for the leadership skills that the programme was addressing.

To know their perspective on gender we decided to use a different approach. We raised a question about what they thought the key differences between a cow and bull were and who they thought was more useful. An active discussion took place and concluded with consensus on the importance of both the male and the female for work and toil, progeny and milk in an agrarian economy. To the question that followed about who worked more, an active discussion took place and concluded with consensus on the importance of both the male and the female in the sub processes of decision making before coming to a conclusion. Once again it was the older girls who could do this. The younger ones just sat quietly. The need to divide the samooh into two sub groups came up once again as it had in Marraucha. There was also the need to conceptualise leadership development as a continuous process which could be started in its elemental form at age 10, but needed to carry on till about the age of 18, so that the skills of self confidence, voice, decision making, organisation and taking social action could be better developed and internalized. From the responses of girls in the age group of 10 to 12 years, their naivety and innocence about larger issues in the world also raise questions about whether these would get understood by such young girls, who were developmentally more part of childhood than adolescence and that too in a culture which endows girls with a relational identity of someone’s daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. In the case of the older girls, there were evidences in our interaction with them to show that they had ideas, perspectives and views of their own, could take a position, and express their opinion. They were thus more ready and cognitively receptive for the leadership skills that the programme was addressing.

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could infer that the meetings had more recreational value for them. What they enjoyed were the fun and friendship dimensions.

What The Community Had To Say
Six women participated enthusiastically in a discussion with us. Of them only one, a young widow had studied up to class 5. The remaining five had never been to school. Because they had remained angootha chaap, they were clear that their daughters will not be so and so they went all out to ensure this. When asked whether the kishori samooh was of any relevance to their daughters, they unanimously said ‘yes’. They felt that their girls had learnt social and communication skills and gained immense knowledge, “bahut buddhi milat hai jo inhi ke saath rahegi.” Since they themselves had never had such opportunities they had learnt the hard way. When asked if in their view some emphasis should be given to teaching vocational skills like stitching and embroidery, they answered in the negative. They felt that embroidery and the making of craft items could be learnt in the homes from mothers, aunts and new daughters-in-law; why waste the meeting time on them. They wanted the meetings to focus on knowledge and smartening up of their daughters. They felt that household chores could wait or be delayed if their girls had to attend a kishori samooh meeting. All of them wanted their daughters to work, the choices being teacher, sevikas and possibly doctors. These were the only role models before them!

What emerged from our interaction with them was that if the community understands and appreciates the relevance of the programme, it gets further synergized. In Balapur, the visible success of the programme came from the fact that the school inputs, the kishori samooh inputs and the receptivity of the community had all been worked upon. Here, for the first time we encountered a community which was so supportive because they had been well sensitized and held some dreams and aspirations for their daughters. What also probably contributed was the fact that they were relatively stable economically, While they had no semblance to being rich, most of them had farmland or employment which ensured a regularity of food supply and basic funding for the education of their children. Many of the men were working outside and with them also came some progressive ideas. Although this was not the case in all the families, it was so in 50% of them.

Case Profile of Julie Prajapati and her Family
Julie Prajapati is 10 years old and studies in class 5 in the local village school. Her father is a graduate who apart from owning land and cultivating it, also has a petty business which he described as a trade activity. Her mother is illiterate but very supportive of her children’s education. Julie has two elder sisters, Suman aged 16 and Neetu aged 14 - both of whom are studying in class 8. They also attend the Kishori Samooh. Her brother is 20 plus and was recently married without taking any dowry. This was something her father emphasized to us several times and also showed us an anti dowry pamphlet that he had helped to compile. He however voiced apprehension at whether he would be equally successful in marrying off his daughters without dowry.

We selected Julie as our case study since she had a very supportive home environment and was identified as very regular and serious in school, as well. We basically wanted to explore that when the home factors are conducive and school also contributes to the girl’s development, do these become adequate conditions to produce the development of leadership skills and abilities in girls. Since Julie is 10, she also fell into the target age group.
Interaction with her revealed self-confidence and awareness about simple health and cleanliness issues, about the functions of a bank, post office, the notion of savings, what happens in a village primary centre, etc. However, she had no perspective on issues of gender roles, ways in which she could change her life, improve her village, etc. She had no clue about career options either. With much prompting she thought she might want to be a teacher. We felt that because she was so young, she could not even reflect on such issues. Had she been older, she probably would have been able to have more reflection, analysis and ideas of her own. This we also inferred from the fact that her elder sister Suman had been very active throughout the interaction that we had with the Kishori Samooh. She was loud, expressive, took a position, raised counter questions in some of the situations and seemed confident of her views. Julie in contrast was very innocent, soft and tentative. Somehow it appeared that she was under a self-created pressure to be ‘the good girl that society upholds’.

Societal conformity is a real challenge that has to be tackled in any leadership programme. In many ways, Julie’s case reiterated that being too young was the deterrent despite all other factors being facilitative that had led to very elemental manifestations of leadership in her. Some aspects of voice and organisation could be seen.

The Village Narrative

Our first impression of the village was similar to that of Balapur. There were lush green fields around, many mango trees laden with fruit and a water body replete with a motorised pump for irrigation. Although the village was slightly inside the main road, access to the main highway was not difficult. The population of the village was predominantly Muslim, though there was a sizeable Hindu population too. What was striking about this village was that there were no obvious signs of dire poverty. The girls were well-dressed, many of them were studying in private schools in classes 6 to 9, for which they had to travel some distance, but were supported by their families. The young boys who hung around were also neatly dressed. All of them wore slippers or shoes. The houses had a pucca finish. When we probed about the dominant occupations of the village, we were told that some families had farms with reasonably high yields, there was animal husbandry, some men were taxi drivers, they had small shops, and some of them worked in the city as carpenters, masons, electricians or as semi-skilled labour that gave them a steady source of income. A few girls told us that their fathers were school teachers. In some households we were told that the men had moved to Saudi Arabia for employment and repatriated money to their families regularly. We had seen an economically disadvantaged Muslim community in Village Singhaparsi which stood in sharp contrast to Bhairampur where there appeared to be much more economic stability. Although Bhairampur could not boast of wealth either, yet the sense that there was enough to eat, there were sources of occupation and income, girls were not married until they were 18 at least and that they were encouraged to study and work, if they wished, suggested that this was a progressive village. (Reconstructed on the basis of interaction with the Kishori Samooh, Shiksha Mitras and the CARE team.)

Focus Of Field Work

The main thrust was on interacting with the girls who attended the kishori samooh, once again to see what manifest forms of leadership traits they displayed. Since the Volunteer was away in Balrampur where she was appearing for her MA examination, we interacted with her parents. The Kishori samooh meetings were held in the front verandah of their home and thus it was easy to access them. We also interviewed the two shiksha mitras who run the primary school. The community was not available since most of them were working on their fields, or had left for their workplaces. We had reached in the middle of the afternoon.

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What The Interaction With The Girls Of The Kishori Samooh Revealed

As we stepped into the verandah of the Volunteer's house, where the Kishori Samooh meetings are held every week, we were struck by the robustness of the girls. They had been waiting eagerly for us and gave us a very warm welcome. The girls were friendly and very comfortable in introducing themselves. It struck us that in Bhairampur too, the age category that was targeted for the leadership programme, did not exist. Only 30% of the girls appeared to be in the age group of 10 to 14 years. The remaining girls were older which could be inferred from their dress, demeanor and level of engagement. Moreover, they were studying in classes 7, 8 and 9 and said that they were 15 or 16 years old.

Before we could start on a focus group discussion with them, they asked us a number of questions. The following was the actual introductory interaction.

Girls: “Tell us your names and why you have come to our village.”

Us: “We have come to interact with you and know something about your village.”

Girls: “Which place have you come from? How many children do you have? What are they doing?”

Us: We gave them all the information that they wanted. When they discovered that one of us has only sons and no daughters, they commiserated with us and expressed the view that a family without daughters would have something missing in it and less support for the mother. Moreover, they wanted to know the amenities that are available in their village.

Girls: “There is a government school, a private school some distance away, a post office, a primary health centre, an anganwadi and a bank close by”. All this was rattled off without much prompting. The girls also gave us many of the demographic details of their village which have already been woven into the introductory centre, an anganwadi and a bank close by”. All this was rattled off without much prompting. The girls also gave us many of the demographic details of their village which have already been woven into the introductory centre, an anganwadi and a bank close by”.

The younger ones sat quietly, sometimes nodding in agreement, but mostly uninvolved in the proceedings. The younger girls who had been silent spectators all along then volunteered to sing a group song for us which they did with full enthusiasm. With that we thought we would leave, but the girls said that they wanted us to play cricket with them and show us how well they had picked up the game. Imagining that the community would disapprove of a public display of the game, we tried to divert them but they said that they could play undeterred, in the village. We found this once again a radical and proactive step. They then escorted us to the garden patch which they had collectively sown where there were brinjals, tomatoes, chilies, gourd and ladies finger growing in neatly made beds. They watered the plants turn by turn and also shared the produce in turns. There was a reflection of organisational skills, once again a significant component of leadership. In this village in those ten girls particularly, we found many evidences of leadership skills and abilities.

Since their boldness and initiative taking behavior was so prominent, we thought we could ask them to demonstrate whether they could initiate social action and change processes which are higher order leadership traits, as well. We asked them to make a formal request to us for any developmental need of immediate concern to them, in their village. A group of five girls enacted this by coming forward and crusading the cause for a high school for girls in the village, so that the continuity of girls’ education is ensured. It was done in formal language with great competence, imagining us to be the administrators and sanctioning authorities.

In the other incident, they enacted a play on the theme of a Muslim man marrying twice. The first time he married an uneducated girl but lost interest in her soon and went on to marry an educated girl, the second time. The play was about how the first wife asserts for equal rights since she was also his lawfully wedded wife, irrespective of her lack of education. The dialogues were bold and confrontationist. The theme they said was their own idea, as was the storyline and script.

For the first time in any Kishori samooh we saw evidence of a rights’ perspective and the ability to confront and take social action. We concluded that these girls had developed many leadership traits and if encouraged and supported further, could go a long way. In trying to analyze the reasons that accounted for this, we could identify age and developmental maturation being primary. Further, the fact that all of them were from relatively well to do families where their fathers were educated and encouraged them to study also contributed. Another very potent factor seemed to be the Volunteer who led their samooh. She was doing her MA in Sociology and seemed to be a role model for them. She herself is a Muslim, unmarried and in pursuit of a career. Discussions with her as they told us also led them to think more liberally and analytically and understand issues in society. Her subject expertise evidently helped in this regard. The brief interaction with her parents revealed that their daughter was passionate about the samooh and worked very hard with the girls.

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Leadership Development At School: Perceptions And Views Of The Teachers

To know the contributions of the school towards leadership development of girls in class 4 and 5, the reflected views and experiences of the teachers and students were tapped. There were two shiksha mitras, Poonam Srivastava and Ram Naresh who were available for interaction. They had been associated with the school for about 8 years. They told us that the total number of students was 153 and the boy-girl ratio was 55/45. The dropout rate was very low. As far as the interventions suggested by CARE were in progress, the bal sabha was fully functional and in their view, it helped children overcome hesitation, develop confidence and also discover their talents, particularly the girls. It also promoted more healthy interaction between boys and girls. The samitis were fully functional and were changed every month. An equal representation of boys and girls was ensured. They felt that girls were very enthusiastic about participating in the samitis. They also enjoyed the activities like story narration, poem recitation and drama that were done. Through the samitis, children had learned organisational skills, cooperation, cleanliness and were also able to feel a greater sense of belonging to the school.

We drove to Pachutha in the quest to actually see a school implementing the school based initiatives that were part of the leadership development programme. We specifically wanted to know students’ experiences about it and the perspective and views of the teachers. Apart from this we wanted to interact with the Volunteer of an ‘A rated’ Kishori Samooh and to profile the case of Anita, who had been identified by the CARE team as a significant prototype of an adolescent girl who had imbibed leadership skills. These tasks constituted our focus and the nature of our field work.

The Village Profile

We were told that the village was susceptible to flooding during the rains because of the gushing overflow of water from the river close by. In fact the teachers and community told us that it used to get cut off for some period of time, including children not being able to access the school. There were about 300 households, with a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims in which, more households belonged to the former. In terms of its economic status, the village was fairly stable since 60% of the men worked in Saudi Arabia and Mumbai and sent money home at regular intervals. They also flooded their homes with high end consumer products like video players, television sets etc, which were operated through batteries, given the uncertainties of electricity. At present there was reasonable patronage given to girls’ education in the village and to substantiate this, there were cases of girls studying in higher classes in private and government schools, travelling what in village estimation was a fairly long distance to get to school. The average family size was 6 to 8 persons per household. Most children talked of having 4 to 5 siblings. Women did not work outside and so there was a traditional pattern of gender roles.

Leadership Initiative As Observed In The School

Since the school was our main research interest, we interacted with the students of classes 4 and 5 and also interviewed the teacher Dilip Kumar Yadav who was present on that day. As we entered the classroom, we found the children of both the classes sitting in neat rows, according to the five different samitis that they were currently working on. We asked them to introduce themselves and tell us what work they do in their respective samitis. They were able to do this with difficulty and a lot of assistance from the CARE Leadership
It is important to understand two developmental facts about this age group which were brought up in the case studies of Village Marraucha and Bhairampur, earlier in the text. In class 4 and 5, the growing child is still in the category of late childhood. Adolescence as defined by western societies has not yet commenced. Secondly, just by intervening with class 4 and 5 girls, how can it be assumed that there will be an automatic transfer of the skills that were initiated at this stage, to girls who move on to classes 6 onwards, without any support from the school.

Perceptions And Views Of The Teacher

We were able to interact with the Shiksha mitra who had trained with CARE as part of the school improvement programme. He felt that it was a “mental and physical activity based programme” that was very good for the children. Regarding gains from the programme, he felt that CARE had sensitized him well towards dealing sensitively with girls and keeping their motivation to come to school sustained. He highlighted that girls participated fully in all school activities, be it the bal sabha, the samitis or games. They demanded to play cricket, kabaddi, kho kho, carom and badminton with the same enthusiasm that boys did. He highlighted that girls participated fully in all school activities, be it the bal sabha, the samitis or games. They demanded to play cricket, kabaddi, kho kho, carom and badminton with the same enthusiasm that boys did.

What The Volunteer Of The Kishori Samooh Had To Say……

Mrs Geeta Jaiswal is a middle aged motherly looking lady with a very warm and inviting face. She was very happy to share the newly found personal identity that she had developed. She felt that vocational skills like tailoring and computers would augment the value of the Kishori Samooh both for the girls and the community. Many girls she felt were ambitious and aspired for careers like teachers, doctors, anganwadi worker, administration, etc and so she felt that the Samooh, along with their formal education should provide them facilitation and support for this.

Case Profile Of Anita

Anita is 12 years old and studies in class 6 of the government middle school, which is some distance away from the village. She goes cycling by herself every morning and is considered heroic for this reason. She is the oldest among five children of whom, two are younger sisters studying in the village primary school and two are brothers who are at the pre-school stage. Her father is a carpenter and based in Saudi Arabia from where he sends money regularly to his family. On account of this, there is economic stability in Anita’s family and access to electronic goods. Her mother looks after the home and family. Although they live in an extended family system, each household is a nuclear unit for functional purposes. The family belongs to the Vishvakarma Community.

Anita was identified as one of the girls in the target age group who was very active in the text. In class 4 and 5, the growing child is still in the category of late childhood. Adolescence as defined by western societies has not yet commenced. Secondly, just by intervening with class 4 and 5 girls, how can it be assumed that there will be an automatic transfer of the skills that were initiated at this stage, to girls who move on to class 6 onwards, without any support from the school. In fact the abrupt discontinuity that girls face as they enter middle school can pose major adjustment difficulties because suddenly there school life changes so radically. Why CARE has not contemplated carrying the programme forward to the middle school, needs to be known. If the belief is that the Kishori Samooh takes care of it, then the problem of the domination of girls beyond the age ambit of 10 to 14 also arises, as was seen in all the villages. Secondly it is important to assert that school and the kishori samooh are seen as synergising experiences and not substitutes for each other.

Geeta had never worked earlier, but agreed to take on this responsibility since she had a daughter in the same age range. Initially, she found it difficult to mobilize girls, but now she says there is a thumping response and she is forced to admit girls who are slightly older, as well. At present there are 25 girls enrolled in the samooh. She has covered issues on cleanliness, nutrition, health, disease, savings, the nature of public utility services like bank, post office, primary health centre, the gram panchayat etc. Girls were also made to participate in a rally on girls’ education and collectively they planted a kitchen garden and some trees.

Since she has older girls who are the friends of her daughter, she has had discussions with them on menstruation and its allied issues as well. In fact, she held that not only girls but even their mothers came to her to seek information.

She was very happy to share the newly found personal identity that she had developed. Suddenly she felt that she had become a professional whom people were seeking out. Earlier she says she had only a sense of social identity which came to her on account of family lineage. She also feels a fresh lease of confidence and a sense of joy in the new status and respect that she has acquired in the village community, particularly among the womenfolk.

She felt that vocational skills like tailoring and computers would augment the value of the Kishori Samooh both for the girls and the community. Many girls she felt were ambitious and aspired for careers like teachers, doctors, anganwadi worker, administration, etc and so she felt that the Samooh, along with their formal education should provide them facilitation and support for this.

Although she was not specifically able to state the leadership qualities that the girls had developed, she could identify changes in their behavior like ability to speak with more confidence, ask questions, do tasks on their own, improved communication skills and renewed interest and enthusiasm about education. Many of these are preliminary manifestations of leadership.
In the kishori samooh and a potential leader. We thus had an in depth interaction with her to probe how leadership development was unfolding for her and getting reflected in her personality. We began with questions rooted in the curriculum that had been covered by the volunteer in the samooh meetings. We found that she had the requisite basic knowledge about the functioning of a bank, post office, savings, health, nutrition etc, but whenever we put a situation or context to her requiring application of this knowledge, she was not able to respond.

There was a map of the village which the girls had drawn and put up on the wall. We asked her to explain it with reference to where we were currently sitting, but she was not able to do so. She, however, told us in general about the significant landmarks in her village topography. This led us to think that the capacity for abstraction and application based thinking which involved complex mental operations, had not probably developed in her. In visualization tasks where she had to imagine herself in positions of power in her village and in her home, once again she was not able to respond. We inferred that at age 12, she was not cognitively ready for this. When we shifted our probing to Bollywood films which she claimed to watch very often on video, we found that she was greatly interested in them and could answer a wide range of questions on stories, heroes, heroines, their popularity status, relationships etc. Interest emerged as a very strong factor that accounted for this.

The CARE team and the Volunteer had identified Anita as a leader, but we felt that she was yet to show manifest forms of leadership. She was too young for building perspective on issues, to show decision making, to assert voice or initiate social action. But on the other hand she had grown in her self confidence, was able to cycle to school on her own, could also stop at the shop to buy groceries for her home, was able to organize her daily schedule better where she could weave in home, school and the kishori samooh requirements. In a sense these can be perceived as the development of life skills which after a certain level of acquisition and internalization, will translate into leadership traits. This should become an acknowledged dimension of the leadership development framework. If leadership development has to be commenced at age 10, then the target should be to first expand girls’ knowledge and awareness, then build on their life skills, then hone some of these further as they grow older and become developmentally ready, into specific leadership traits (as the present programme has defined) which they want the girls to imbibe. It is a slow process which requires internalization for sustainability, for which the developmental readiness of girls is a critical factor.

As we were walking through the village, we saw a group of young men in the age range of 18 to 25 years, sitting together and playing cards. We were told that some of them worked in Mumbai and were visiting, while others were unemployed. We were of the firm view that this is the group that CARE has taken the initiative to start boys groups in some schools with the hope that boys would be sensitive to their sisters.