

An Empowered Girl

creates an

An Empowered World

Success Stories of Married Adolescent
Girls in Karnataka, India





An Empowered Girl creates an Empowered World is the second volume of a documentation series on the success of the IMAGE project in Karnataka, India, showcasing stories of married adolescent girls who were part of the project.

IMAGE Team

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We thank our partner organisations for the photo documentation. Names of the girls have been changed to protect their identity.

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terre des hommes 
stops child exploitation

About Terre des Hommes Netherlands

Terre des Hommes Netherlands prevents child exploitation, removes children from exploitative situations and ensures children can develop in a safe environment.

Terre des Hommes works towards a world where all children have a decent life and can grow up to be independent adults.

A world in which children are no longer exploited.

Terre des Hommes will continue its work until this is accomplished.

About IMAGE

The Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment Programme (IMAGE) started in January 2018 in India across five districts in Karnataka. With Terre des Hommes Netherlands in India leading the front, the programme is technically supported by Children of India (CIF), capacity enhancement partner being Child Rights Trust (CRT) and implemented on field by five partner organisations; the lead partner as Vidyantikethan, REACH, SEVAK, Arpanam Trust, and PMSR.

IMAGE in India aims to empower women in Health, Education, Sexual Reproductive Health Rights, Social Protection and against Gender Based Violence. All interventions are aimed at addressing the five above mentioned themes. Partner Organisations are supported by local ASHA (Accredited Social Health Awareness) workers also called "change makers" in identifying early married girls. The project, as a term for empowerment, addresses each early married girl (EMG) as a 'Rajakumari'.

The programme currently supports 15000 girls across fifteen districts of Karnataka, India.



A DESPAIRED NAVYA SEES HOPE

Hailing from a village in North Karnataka, Navya was born and brought up in a poor family where her mother was the sole breadwinner; her father neither took any family responsibility nor went to work. The economic hardship resulted in Navya dropping out of school in 6th standard and she was married off to her nephew.

At the age of 14, she was sent to live in her husband's house. This only added to her challenges. She was harassed by her in-laws and her husband. All this caused severe depression in her which also led her in attempting to kill herself as she had lost all the hope in life.

Her life took a turn when she was identified under the IMAGE project. The IMAGE staff made frequent visits to her house and identified her mental health issues. To address this, the staff counselled her regularly, helping her open up about her struggles and instilling hope in her each day. With time, a new seed of positivity and faith was planted in Navya's life.



The counselling was extended to her in-laws and spouse too. After a few sessions, they realised their mistakes and were extremely regretful. They now treat her with dignity and respect.

Navya's home environment from being abusive is now caring and loving. She is now pregnant with her first child. The IMAGE staff is continuing to provide her with the knowledge of a rich and healthy diet during pregnancy. She follows the same.

"The IMAGE project has brought hope and happiness in my life again. From being a person who wanted to commit suicide, I have now gone to realise how much life has to offer. I am confident now and I'm never going to give up. I have developed the courage to face all my challenges", says seventeen-year-old Navya.



KITCHEN-GARDENING HELPS SARALA



Seventeen year old Sarala from Belagavi, Karnataka is a mother of three children. Marriage at a young age did not allow her to improve her economic situation.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, families from poor socio-economic conditions were worse affected than the rest. The same applied to Sarala's family. She was struggling to afford daily needs items, especially food.

The IMAGE project recognised that a lot of families were in a financial crunch which made it difficult for them to survive as they didn't have access to meals for basic survival. So, the IMAGE team decided to distribute kitchen gardening seeds to these families and help them plant it.

Sarala received the kitchen garden kits and planted the kitchen garden seeds near her home. The plants grew well and produced many vegetables such as tomatoes, brinjals, pumpkins, ladyfingers, etc.



She is happy that during this situation, she and her family are able to consume vegetables and greens while reducing their expenses.

As a mother of three children, she is delighted that her children are consuming fresh and nutritious vegetables which will help with their growth.

She and her mother-in-law both work together to maintain the kitchen garden plots. The kitchen garden not only provides food security during the crisis but also ensures nutrition which helps boost the family's immunity. Furthermore, the financial burden on the family has been taken off.

Sarala says, "IMAGE has helped me survive during a crisis. Through kitchen gardening I have learnt that we have the ability to take ourselves out from our problems."



DREAMS COME TRUE



Eighteen-year-old Umavathi grew up with a dream. She wanted to secure a good job.

While for most people this may seem like a normal aspect of life, for Umavathi it meant the world. A daughter to daily wage labourers, Umavathi's childhood saw poverty and despair. This dream kept her alive; one day she would get a well paying job and live well.

However, this dream was crushed when Umavathi was married off as soon as she reached her puberty. Her parents' economic situation and societal pressure left her no other choice.

Umavathi knew that to get a job she would have to study. But after marriage, she was not allowed to attend school, and instead was treated like a slave with the responsibility of all domestic work on her shoulders.

Within a year of marriage, she gave birth to a child. This added even more pressure on her.



After a few months, she was pregnant again and the tiny hope of her dream becoming a reality slowly started fading away.

But, this was not the end.

When the IMAGE staff intervened in her life, she was told that she could continue her education. Her family was counselled on the importance of education and soon she was permitted to write her SSLC exam as a private candidate.

As the exam was during the pandemic, apart from regular study material and exam fee support, Umavathi was also provided with an e-tablet by IMAGE to give her access to the best preparation possible,

"I am happy that with the help IMAGE provided. I was able to write the SSLC examination well. The E-Tablet was a great source of help in my preparation. Both formal and informal education can give us a better life, she says. Now I will be able to apply for a job. My dream is going to come true", she adds





POOJA REALISES THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Pooja is a seventeen-year-old mother of two children who was forcefully married off when she was studying in eighth grade.

She decided to not go to school due to her added responsibilities after her marriage. Soon after, she became a mother of two children and took care of household chores.

She was identified as an Early Married Girl (EMG) by IMAGE. Initially, she was not ready to disclose information about her. With frequent visits and the efforts of IMAGE staff, she began to realise the importance of education and decided to write the SSLC exam. They supported her in paying fees and provided books for the exam accordingly.

It was difficult for her to manage classes until she received the Electronic Tablet from IMAGE. She said, "After receiving the E-Tab, I was able to prepare for my exam while taking care of my children. The E tab is



comfortable and I feel I am sitting in the classroom in front of teachers. It was a proud moment for my family that I went to Belagavi to take the exam."

Post her result, her husband, Mr Ravichandran said, "This time she was not able to pass all exams, but I will support her to give an exam next year too and I hope she passes all subjects."

Pooja never thought she would find the need to hold a pen and paper in her hand after her marriage. With the help of IMAGE she has not only begun to value education but also receives support from her family to pursue her studies.



“I AM NOT ANAEMIC ANYMORE”



Padma is a seventeen-year old who was married off at a very young age due to the economic constraints within the family as both her parents are daily wage workers and the meagre income wasn't enough to sustain the family.

When Padma became pregnant, she experienced fatigue and severe body pain, the doctors found out that she was anaemic with hemoglobin level 7, her blood count being extremely low. They asked her to incorporate leafy greens, vegetables and nutritious food in her daily meals. Due to the financial strain in the family, it was next to impossible to provide adequate nutrition to her during the pregnancy.

When the IMAGE project identified Padma and got to know about her situation, the team ensured that prenatal care was provided to her in terms of nutrition, health check-ups and counselling. The project bore all her health care expenses, leaving no strain on the financial resources of the family.



Soon after her frequent health checkups and provision of nutritious meals, her HB increased to 10 and she was able to give birth to a child weighing healthy 3 kg.

She expressed her gratitude towards the IMAGE Team saying, "I was able to receive the financial assistance for my medical expenses because of IMAGE. I was given access to adequate nutrition which ensured a safe and healthy pregnancy."

Her husband, Parashuram says, "I have realised that one should not get married before the age of 18 as a lot of health issues come up. I was so stressed about Padma's health but I'm relieved because of IMAGE's support."

Padma exclaims with joy, "I am not anemic anymore and I am healthy too."





NAYANA LEADS THE WAY

Nayana is a 17-year-old from a small village in North Karnataka. She got married at the age of 14 when she was studying in class nine. In the initial days of her married life, she faced a lot of challenges but that didn't stop her from pursuing her studies. She even secured 80% in the SSLC exam.

When the IMAGE team first approached her, she was hesitant and didn't open up but she gradually realised that they were there for her empowerment and she registered for the activities offered by IMAGE. Through the awareness, she was able to know about Child Rights, Child Protection Laws and the ill effects of Child Marriage.

As part of IMAGE activities, Nayana went to Bangalore to attend workshops on the ill effects of child marriage. "In that workshop, they provided some topics related to child development, child marriage, etc. and asked us to present in the forum. I went and gave a presentation for which I received a lot of compliments. There, I got to



know that like me there are many more early married girls undergoing struggle and hardship", said Nayana.

Due to her effective communication skills and confidence, she was given the responsibility of being a Movement leader of IMAGE, representing 15000 young early married girls.

She says, "Now, I have a responsibility to build a child marriage free society. Together, we can fight against child marriage. I will build a strong movement against child marriages with the support of girls like me."

Recalling her journey since IMAGE, she also added, "Now, I am able to compare myself with the past and present. I am becoming a more knowledgeable person, gaining confidence and courage. Now, I feel more powerful and capable. I am proud to be a young leader and a representative for 15,000 early married girls. I believe in the power of unity to fight against child marriage. I will help build a child marriage





BREAKING FREE FROM PATRIARCHY

Kaveri is a seventeen-year old who fell in love, when she was studying in 9th standard, with Umesh who lived in the same village in Karnataka. Both of them eloped together. After a week, their parents found them and took them back to the village. Concerned about their respect and honour because of their elopement, they decided to marry them off.

Soon after marriage, Kaveri found herself in a struggling situation. Her husband became addicted to alcohol and started to harass and beat her every day. She felt even more helpless when her parents were not willing to help because she married according to "her choice". At the age of seventeen years, she became a victim of domestic violence from her husband. All this caused depression in her.

IMAGE Team identified her as an Early Married Girl (EMG). She was given awareness on child rights, skill building, etc. She was also given counselling.



Her husband was approached by the IMAGE Team and was counselled too. He also realised his mistakes about how he treated his wife. He is now a part of the Spouse Club which engages the husbands to fight patriarchy and the actions that follow from it. It has been an eye-opener for him and he is consciously rectifying his mistakes.

Currently, both Kaveri and Umesh live happily. Kaveri is completing a computer course by IMAGE with the support of her husband. She is also taking saree designing courses and has started earning too.

She also wishes to take the SSLC exam next year and complete her studies and is content knowing her husband is willingly supporting her.

Kaveri says, "I can't express how thankful I am to IMAGE. If I hadn't registered under the IMAGE programme, I would have been suffering harassment all by myself without sharing with others. Now, I am happy that my husband takes care of me very well and that he has realised his responsibility towards his





BLOOMING TO BECOME A LEADER

Mangala is a fourteen-year-old from a village in Karnataka who was married at the age of 9 years when she was studying in 3rd standard. Her family has 9 members, Mangala being the third eldest daughter out of seven. She was married off at a very young age like her elder sisters because the family lives in abject poverty as her parents are small farmers practising rain-fed agriculture. They are seasonal construction labour migrants to Udupi and Mangalore.

After her marriage, her father decided to drop her out of school and planned to send her to daily wage work for earning. During this, she and her elder sisters were identified by IMAGE (Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment - Karnataka) Team, Bagalkot in the year 2018.

The IMAGE staff frequently made visits to their home and convinced her parents to not stop their education assuring them about the finances.



Now all three early married girls are continuing their studies and have also enrolled in vocational training. The staff also convinced the parents to not send their daughters to the husband's home till they turn 18.

IMAGE provides for their tuition fees, books, etc. Now Mangala is an active participant in all the meetings about Child Rights, awareness programs on Child Marriage and Gender-Based Violence. In February 2020, she participated in the district level quiz competition and the science exhibition at Bagalkot district. She also participated in the workshop on child marriage at Bangalore conducted by IMAGE.

Her confidence, leadership qualities and determination to fight against child marriage resulted in her becoming a Movement leader. She is now taking the responsibility to spread awareness against child marriage, child rights, child labour and education in her community. She is also stopping child marriages from taking place in her village.

She adds, "I want to become a scientist and as a Movement Leader, I want to contribute my best towards building a society which is free from child marriage and child labour. I also aim to reduce the dropout rate of girls in my village."





CARE IN THE TIME OF NEED

Devamma from South Karnataka is an extremely young mother at the age of fourteen. From her father leaving her mother due to giving birth to three girls to her mother taking her own life when Devamma was at her grandmother's house and then her grandmother marrying her off after attaining puberty, Devamma has been in a constant state of struggles since childhood.

Devamma's grandmother passed away within two months of her marriage. Devamma's struggles didn't stop after marriage as she faced harassment from her mother-in-law. When she became pregnant, she was further denied all the health services as the doctors filed a case against her husband under child marriage.

Through the intervention of IMAGE project, she received the Mother card which would ensure that all the health, check-ups, etc. are given to her. The team supported her and provided clothes, food and all necessary things for the newborn baby.



She was also able to receive the grant amount Rs. 20,000 from the District Child Protection Unit of Department of Women and Child Welfare.

After receiving counselling from Field Coordinators, her mother-in-law also accepted her and took care of the child.

She says, "Now I feel I have gained confidence to live like others and I have become emotionally stronger. I will educate my child, I never make mistakes like what my mother and grandmother have done to my elder sisters and to me. I will enroll in a vocational training programme as I want to be self-independent and take care of my child."





COVID SUPPORT ENCOURAGES SHILPA

During the COVID 19 pandemic, every family experienced hurdles in feeding their children. When the government urged for a lockdown in the entire state, the situation became too bad and it was difficult for people from poor socio-economic backgrounds to survive.

Shilpa's family was one such which faced hardships during the lockdown. Married at a young age, today the 17 year old Shilpa lives with her baby and husband who has a physical disability. Her husband works in a small hotel.

Before the pandemic, he was able to provide for the family with his income. But as soon as the lockdown was imposed the family was struggling financially as there was no work and no income.

While providing relief to villages during lockdown, the IMAGE Team came across Shilpa's family situation and took action to support them immediately. At first, when the field facilitators approached her husband, he ran



away as he thought they would take him to hospital for a Corona check up.

After getting to know the truth, he understood and went to the district office to collect the ration kits. The ration kits provided them with food security for two months and they were able to manage the family's sustenance in the lockdown.

The team also registered them to receive the LPG under the Ujjwala scheme. Now, the family lives happily and Shipa has started to attend the IMAGE programme with her active participation.

The Field Associates says, "Earlier, Shilpa was not willing to participate in our programme. But after our intervention and support to her family during COVID-19, there is a positive change in her and now she is more enthusiastic."





COMING OUT OF DARKNESS

Kavya is a 17 year old who was forcefully married off to her maternal uncle when she was 14. She was also made to drop out from school in class eight. After marriage, she wasn't treated well. She was continuously harassed and sexually abused by her husband. When she shared this with her mother, he completely denied and instead blamed Kavya for everything.

The domestic violence and sexual abuse continued and her husband would not even let her step out of the house.

When she was identified under the Initiatives for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment project at Bagalkot in 2018, she saw a ray of hope. The IMAGE staff provided her with counselling sessions to understand her situation better and also enrolled her in the EMGs clubs which has given her a comfortable and friendly environment to mingle with others and space to overcome the experience of abuse and harassment.



Apart from the above, the IMAGE field staff enrolled her for the SSLC exam. But as soon as her relatives got to know this, they took her away.

Meanwhile, a complaint was filed about her child marriage by Women's Consolation Center. They rescued her from her abusive environment and shifted to a shelter home.

However, Kavya did not want to be in the shelter home and requested IMAGE to be brought back to her parent's house. The IMAGE team took the responsibility of getting her back to her parent's house, keeping the Child Welfare Committee informed about the same.

Her husband was hiding away when the police officials came to take him for investigation. Legal proceedings against him are still in process. Kavya is doing much better now as she is enrolled for the SSLC exam and receives counselling and awareness continuously from the IMAGE team.

She says to one of the field coordinators, "Akka (sister), now I am happy after meeting you and my anxiety has also reduced after sharing with others in this club. I desire to complete my school and pass in my SSLC exam and further complete my pre-university course too."





CREATING ART OUT OF ANXIETY

Anu is a 20 year old who comes from a village situated in Northern Karnataka. When Anu was 12 years old, her mother passed away due to an illness. After that at 13, she was married off to her maternal uncle by her father as the family was struggling financially and Anu was the eldest of the four siblings.

Soon after she entered her married life, she found herself being sad and anxious. Her childhood memories of the family's struggles kept haunting her and her anger towards her child marriage added fuel to the fire. She felt helpless and isolated.

She was identified by the IMAGE team at Bagalkot district and was enrolled in for counselling and support to fight off her anxiety and depression. She also underwent vocational training in tailoring and learnt the art of making woolen tassels and wall hangings. This creative work helps calm her anxiety and takes away her worries.



She has now become independent and is able to manage her problems.

She says, "Rekha's sister (one of the Field staff), approached and motivated me to stand on my own feet and to be emotionally strong. I am extremely grateful to the IMAGE project for this change in me."





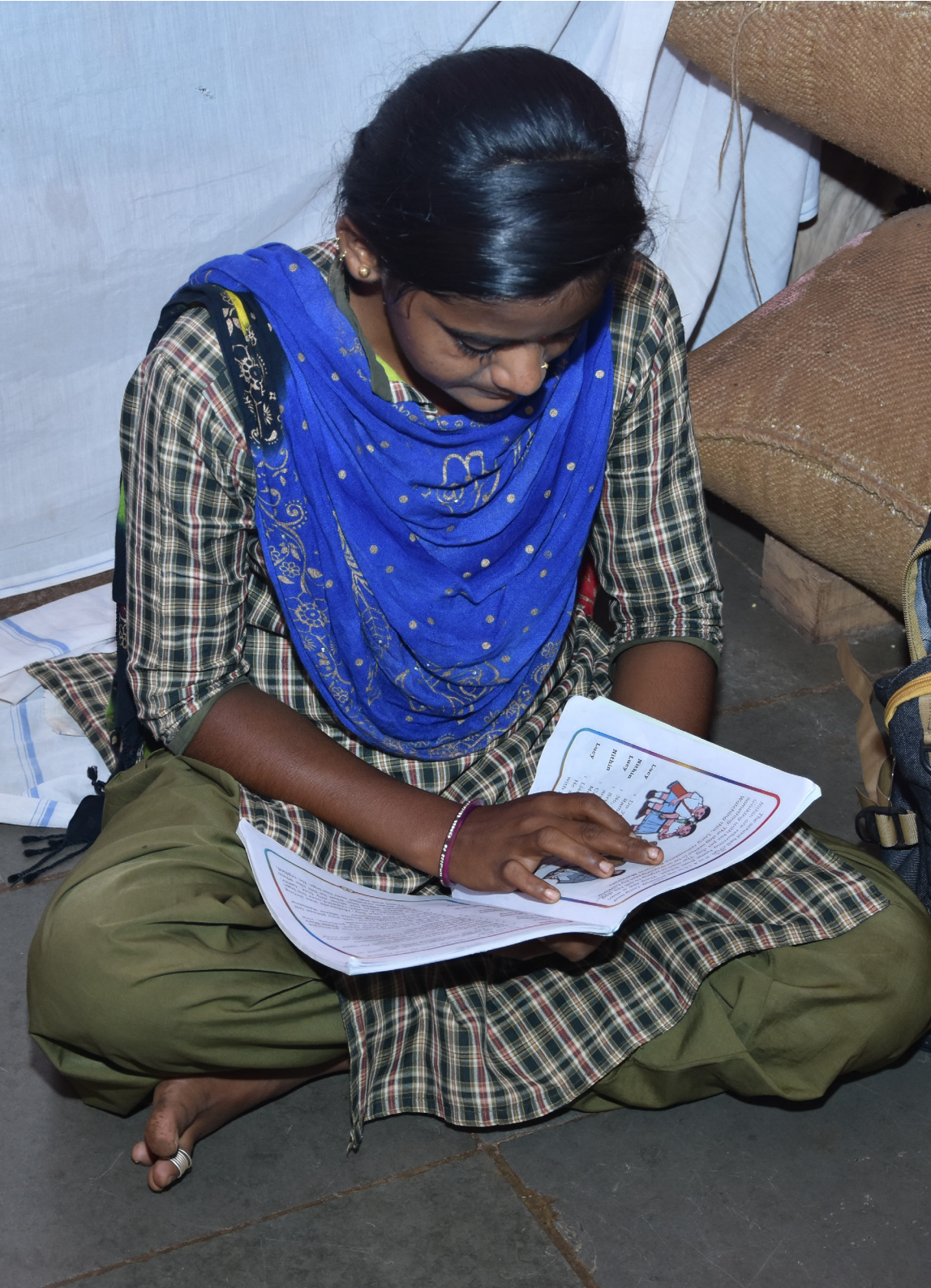
LIVING THE CHILDHOOD

Meghana is a 15 year old early married girl. She got married at the age of 11 when she was studying in class five. Because she had not attained puberty, she was living in her parent's house as the traditional people of her community practice so.

Soon after when she attained puberty, the parents pressurised her to send her to the husband's place even though she didn't want to.

During this time, she was identified by IMAGE programme during the awareness workshop on Child marriage held in her school. She was registered as an Early Married Girl.

After understanding her concerns, the IMAGE Team visited her home and convinced the parents to drop the idea of sending Meghana to the husband's house at such an early age. After much explanation and counselling, they agreed and understood the problems that can arise due to Child Marriage.



Now, Meghana is continuing her studies and her parents also are convinced that she should be attending school now.

She says, "Because of IMAGE Team's regular visits, counselling, my parents have agreed to send me to school rather than the husband's house. It's all because of them that I'll be able to live my childhood and study well"



NO MORE WEAKNESS

Roopa is an eighteen-year-old young widow from Chamrajnagar, South Karnataka who was married off at the age of 11 by her parents when she had attained puberty. All the three daughters of her parents were married off right after hitting puberty as they feared the taboo attached with unmarried young girls of their community.

Her husband was a construction worker and soon after marriage Roopa got pregnant. When Roopa's child was 9 months old, her husband died in a road accident. This had a huge impact on Roopa as she lost all hope because of her husband's demise and was further under the pressure of raising her child as a single mother.

In 2018, she was identified and registered under the IMAGE Programme in Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka state. The IMAGE staff frequently visited her home and provided counselling and support to her.



The fear of life and anxiety kept affecting her which had an adverse effect on her physical health too. During one of the awareness sessions, the IMAGE staff observed Roopa's weakness and immediately took her for a blood test. In her blood report, the blood count came out to be very low and her HB level was extremely low too (7).

The physician informed that she needed a blood infusion at the earliest. The IMAGE staff immediately made arrangements for her treatment and mobilised 3 bottles of blood to Roopa. They also ensured all the medicines and tonics prescribed by the doctor to improve Roopa's health.

Now, Roopa lives happily with her daughter as her health has also improved (HB level has reached 12).

Roopa is earning independently from her saree designing which she learnt through IMAGE. She is confident that she can provide the best to her daughter.

She says, "I am fortunate that I came to the IMAGE awareness programme session for Early Married Girls. Their timely support helped me a lot and now I want to lead a good life and raise my child well".





COMING OUT OF HER CAGE

Sushmita is a nineteen-year-old mother of two children from a small village in South Karnataka. When she was 13 years old and studying in 9th standard, she fell in love with Pradeep who was a tailor from the same village. When her parents got to know about this, they arranged her marriage immediately with Pradeep as a means to protect the honour of the family.

After she got married, reality hit her hard as she had to drop out of her school and was confined to the four walls of her spouse's home. She realised that her freedom and childhood were fading away and she felt trapped. At 16, she gave birth to a child and her life became even worse because of the added responsibility of household work and a child to look after.

In 2018, she was identified and registered as an Early Married Girl (EMG) under the IMAGE project in the Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka state. She was given awareness on Sexual Reproductive Health Rights, Food and Nutrition and was also enrolled for Vocational



Training courses. After learning tailoring skills, she purchased a sewing machine from her savings and the funds she received from IMAGE. This enabled her to earn Rs. 150- 200 per day.

During COVID -19, Sushmita's family faced a lot of challenges to manage their daily needs. The IMAGE team extended their support by providing her with raw materials needed for sewing masks. With the skills developed in the IMAGE tailoring lessons, she sewed masks for an honorarium of Rs.1500. This helped her generate the much needed income to her family during the economic crisis and distress of COVID-19.

She says, "I got married at an early age and dropped my education due to my immature decisions. The IMAGE project helped me reshape my life. The Vocational training course was very helpful and it helped me during the COVID-19 economic distress too. I was able to earn by stitching masks. Earlier I was trapped, now I am free!"





CHILDREN'S CLUB HELPS SHRUTHI

Shruthi* is a fifteen-year-old early married girl who lives in a small village in the Bagalkot district of Karnataka state. She was married off to her maternal uncle when she was just a nine months old baby. This kind of marriage is common among her community and is often referred to as "thottilu maduve" (cradle marriage).

In the year 2018, she was identified by the IMAGE team in Bagalkot district. She was registered as an Early Married Girl. She attended the awareness programmes about the ill effects of child marriage.

In 2019, she joined the Spoorthi Children's Club and became one of the active participants in the children club. She has developed her knowledge about child marriage, Child Helpline 1098 and has also learnt about the health and hygienic practices for adolescent girls.

As soon as she reached puberty, her in laws pressured her family members to send her to the in laws house.



She took the support of one the children club members and informed the IMAGE team and ChildHelpline 1098. The IMAGE team members and the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) counselled her parents to not send her to the inlaws' house before she turns 18. The parents understood and agreed to continue her school education also.

Shruthi says, "I will not go to my husband's house before 18 age and I will continue my studies by staying at my parents home. The Children club was an eye-opener for me and helped me act wisely by contacting and sharing with the IMAGE team and ChildHelpline. Thanks to the IMAGE team and TdH-NL. Our Children Club members and neighbours are also very happy and praise me for my courageous work and remarkable changes in my life."





RADHIKA BECOMES INDEPENDENT

Radhika* is a nineteen-year-old early married girl and a mother of two children living in Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka. She got married at the age of fourteen when she was studying in 8th standard. Her parents are daily wage labourers and they faced a lot of challenges to fulfil the basic needs of family with three children. Therefore, they decided to marry her off to reduce the financial burden. Radhika protested and expressed to continue her studies. But, she was helpless.

The marriage life only caused more troubles as her in laws did not allow her to talk with neighbours or friends.. She was trapped in the four walls of her house.

When the IMAGE programme was initiated in Chamarajanagar district in 2018, she was identified and registered during the survey. She attended the awareness and training programmes on child marriage and its consequences, mother and child health, gender discrimination, domestic and gender-based violence and vocational training.



In 2019, she enrolled for saree designing classes under the IMAGE programme. She learnt enthusiastically and is now able to earn Rs. 500 - Rs. 750 by saree designing. She also received the revolving fund from TdH-NL and purchased a sewing machine. She earns from both sewing clothes and sarees designing, which is contributing as a supplementary income to the family. The Spouse forum and family forum meetings also impacted Radhika's life as they were counselled too. Now, her husband takes care of the children and supports her.

Radhika says, "I was shy and afraid to share my opinions but now I have become a bold person, I mingle with all and also travel myself to Kollegal (block) to purchase the material for sewing. I have now gained confidence and courage. Now, my family treats me well and respects the work I do."





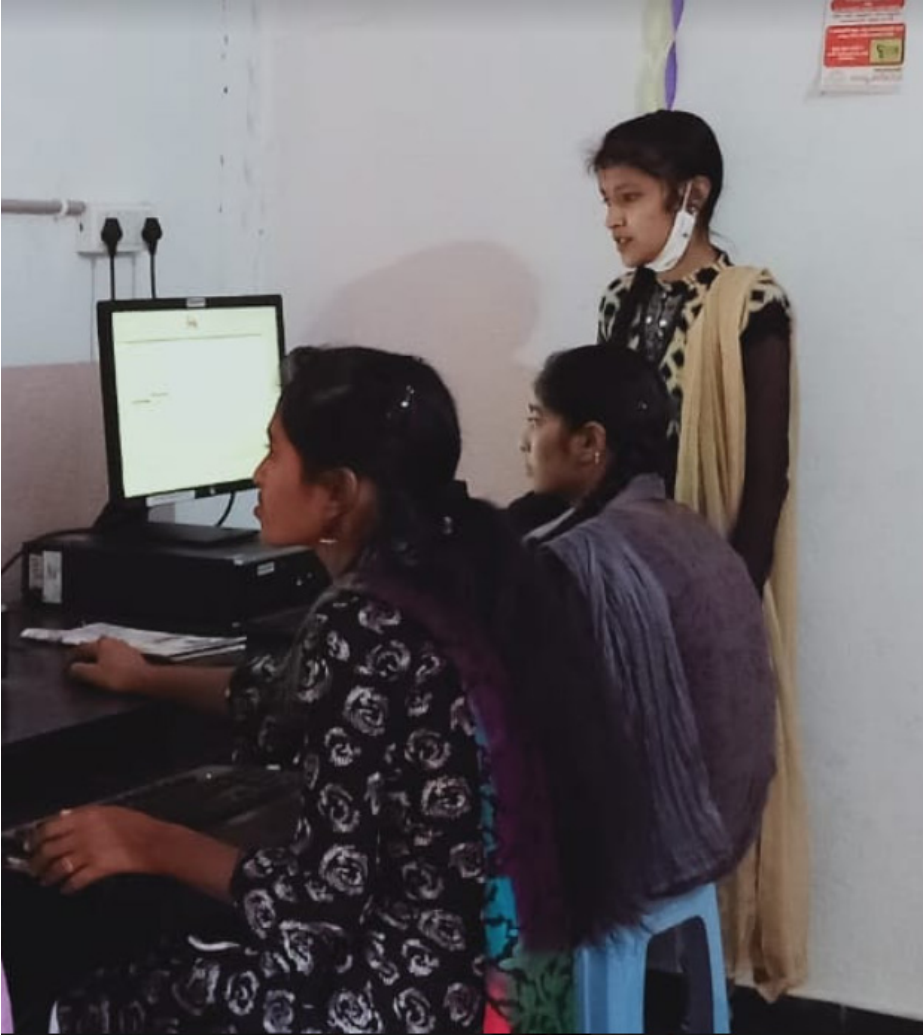
CELEBRATING EMPOWERMENT

Sindhu is a twenty-year-old girl who lives in a small village in Bidar district of North Karnataka. Her parents are agricultural labourers. After completing her 10th standard, she was married off due to poverty. Sindhu's father decided to marry her off to his sister's son as he believed she will be forever happy with him.

She agreed to the marriage because of her parents' challenges. She went to her husband's house with high hopes but within two months she became a victim of domestic violence from her in-laws and husband.

Her in law's and her husband start to harass her every day because Sindhu's parents couldn;t meet their dowry needs. Her husband used to get drunk and assaulted her physically. She came back to her parents' house but was pressured and blackmailed by the in-laws and husband everyday.

In 2018, when the IMAGE programme was initiated in Bidar District, she was identified in the survey and was



registered as an early married girl. The IMAGE team got to know about the reasons that caused depression and stress in her. The team members made frequent visits and ensured her participation in all awareness and training programmes. Gradually, she opened up with the staff members. The team provided her with moral support and boosted her confidence.

In 2019, she undertook the computer vocational course and her life took turns when a computer course centre was inaugurated under the IMAGE project. She got an opportunity to become the course teacher for the students who were coming to the centre for learning. She continues to handle three batches with 5 -6 students in each batch.

Sindhu says, "I was depressed after the bitter experience in my married life. The IMAGE team and their programmes have encouraged me to take the next step in life. They gave me new confidence and courage. Because of them, I am happy that I get to teach computers to students."



STOPPING CHILD MARRIAGE

A lot of communities faced real challenges to sustain themselves during the Covid-19 lockdown. The school and colleges were also shut down due to it. This caused even more trouble in the lives of rural poor children as their means of getting education literally stopped.

Sneha*, a sixteen-year-old girl from Bagalkot district, who was studying in Morarji Desai school at Moodbidri returned to her home town due to COVID-19 and was staying with her parents. During this time, her parents decided to marry her off on 29/11/2020 at a temple by 4 am as the bridegroom's brother's marriage was also arranged on the same date. Both parents had thought about doing the two marriages at the same time as it would reduce their social obligation and marriage expenses.

On 28th November 2020, Childhelpline 1098 received a call regarding these child marriage arrangements. After confirming with the caller, the team reached the place immediately.



The Child Welfare Department, Village Extension Officer, Police officials, REACH/TdH-NL staff and field facilitator reached the place and enquired with her parents. Her parents were not ready to cooperate and were lying about their daughter not being present there as they hid her in a room.

The team was able to judge the situation and rescued her. They warned her parents about an attempt of child marriage and the penalty amount of Rs. 1 lakh and prison for 1-2 years. They also provided them with the knowledge of the POCSO Act.

Her parents were made to sign on the document which stated they would not marry off their daughter until she is 18 and has completed her education.

The rescue team also reached out to the boy's (Basappa) family and educated them about child marriage and its consequences. The Team took a disclosure letter from Basappa's parents.

The marriage was about to happen at 4 am and our team succeeded to stop the child marriage by 2.30 am. The timely action measures Sneha from becoming a victim of Child Marriage.





E-TAB HELPS DHANAMMA

Dhanamma* is an eighteen-year-old girl who lives in Chikkaballapura district of Karnataka. Her parents are daily wage labourers. Due to financial constraint, when she was studying 9th standard, her parents arranged her marriage with her nephew forcefully. At the age of 14, she became a victim for the child marriage. With it, her dream of getting educated started fading away.

Being married didn't bring any happiness in her life as her husband didn't treat her well and harassed her every day. One day he eloped with his ex-lover and started to live with her. This caused a lot of anxiety in Dhanamma's life. Many times she decided to end her life. She became weak and was not able to eat well too.

Her life took a turn when she was identified and registered under the IMAGE project in Chikkaballapura district in the year 2018. She participated in the awareness programme on child marriage and later also undertook vocational training. Now, she earns up to Rs. 3000 per month by sewing clothes.



IMAGE Staff also counselled her to complete her studies. She realised the importance of education and was happy to pursue her dream of getting educated. She got herself enrolled for the SSLC exam and started preparing for the same.

When the government imposed nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19, she started to worry about the SSLC exam preparation as the schools were shut and she didn't have access to the study material.

During this time, IMAGE came out with the solution of distributing E-Tablets for exam preparation. Dhanamma is one of the students who received the E-tab.

She says, "I was worried about my exam and I didn't know how to prepare for the exam when the school got shut due to the pandemic. When I received the E-Tab, I felt very happy and all my worries flew away. I got confident too in appearing for the exam as I used to spend 2 hours a day preparing via the E - Tab."



A note from the IMAGE Team

Dear reader,

We are extremely glad to showcase the success of our IMAGE project in India through these stories. It is inspiring and motivating for us to see our girls transform and grow in their journey with IMAGE.

Young girls who are victims of child marriage had to drop out of school, face severe health issues and in some cases are subjected to abuse. The unfortunate fact is that as child marriages are illegal (although still prevalent) in India, these girls have minimal or no access to their basic rights or any social welfare schemes.

It was this extreme vulnerability that drove us to empower Early Married Girls, or EMGs as we call them. Selecting Karnataka as our location (23% of India's child marriages), we began IMAGE by identifying girls, counselling them and providing them with support services in health, education, social protection, skill development and protection from gender-based violence.

Girls who were confined at home and hesitant to speak up for themselves, now move about confidently in pursuit of their goals. Many girls have written public exams as private candidates, some have enrolled in school, many have developed vocational skills and have started earning through them. Most of the girls are now economically independent and are able to provide for their children. Access to government schemes has given them the social security they are entitled to.

Apart from legal support, sensitisation programmes with families and spouses have all resulted in the reduction in cases of gender-based violence against the girls. Cases of child marriages in the project areas have also been reduced.

As we gear up our Phase 2 of the project, we look forward to building a movement of these EMGs so that they are able to collectively ascertain their rights. The leaders identified will direct their peers and motivate them to fight against child marriage along with advocating with officials to ensure that their demands are met.

We are confident that with support from IMAGE, our early married girls will soldier on to achieve victory in addressing child marriages and other related issues in their communities.

Yours sincerely,
The IMAGE India team
Terre des Hommes Netherlands

Country Manager
IMAGE Project Officer
IMAGE Project Coordinator
IMAGE Communication Officer
IMAGE Communication Associate
with administrative support from

Thangaperumal Ponpandi
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Way Forward

Apart from providing socio-economic empowerment to the early married girls (EMGs), IMAGE is working towards building a movement to enable 15,000 EMGs facilitate change on their own.

As part of the movement, EMGs are trained on child rights and child protection, with a specific focus on acts pertaining to child marriage to enable their effective advocacy. The girls are also trained on developing their life skills, especially on confidence building, decision making and leadership to nurture their skills in order to represent and voice out their demands on various platforms to ascertain their rights and opportunities.

Among this group of girls, those with extreme confidence,

enthusiasm and an interest have been identified as leaders to lead the movement towards its vision.

The future of IMAGE gives these girls a plethora of opportunities to build themselves and empower other girls too in the process. The issue of prevailing child marriages will be brought to light, and policy makers and decision takers will be encouraged to make changes in favour of the married adolescent girl.

The IMAGE team is excited for what lies ahead; most importantly for the early married girls who will change from being victims to being victorious.

Our Partners



Children of India, a non profit organisation registered in Coimbatore engages in work related to education, health, livelihoods and emergency.



PMSR aims towards bringing transformation in the lives of children living in exploitative and difficult situations by providing them access to education.



Rural Environmental Awareness Community Help (REACH) has been involved in the process of empowering the rural poor children.



Child Rights Trust (CRT) is a public charitable organisation which works for and with children.



Arpanam Trust works for the empowerment of children in difficult situations in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, focusing on child protection and child rights.



Vidyanikethan improves the lives and livelihoods of individuals and families, especially children and women, from low income groups.



SEVAK works with communities to form and strengthen community based organisations in Karnataka. It promotes livelihood opportunities.



Comic Relief is a major UK charity with a vision of a just world, free from poverty.

An Empowered Girl creates an Empowered World is the second volume of a documentation series on the success of the IMAGE (Initiative for Married Adolescent Girl Empowerment) programme. IMAGE is an initiative of Terre des Hommes Netherlands, an international humanitarian organisation working towards a world free of child exploitation.

In India, the programme is implemented in five districts through five partner organisations, viz., Vidyanikethan (lead partner) in Bidar district, REACH in Bagalkote district, Arpanam Trust in Chikkaballapur district, SEVAK in Belagavi district and PMSR in Chamarajanagar district, with technical partner, Children of India Foundation (CIF) and capacity enhancement partner, Child Rights Trust (CRT).



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