

HITESH MAKWANA,
Mahisagar District



“I have changed a lot after joining the group. Now I wish for a good job so I can progress in life.”

A regular at all the meetings and sessions conducted by SAHAJ, Hitesh Makwana, 17 years old, has transformed from a shy boy to a confident peer leader who conducts training, files applications and approaches government officials. Apart from applying to Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan for sports equipment and facilitating life skills training for the boys in his community, Hitesh also ensures that all adolescent girls get the Take Home Ration and Iron tablets distributed by the government.

SHABANA ASMALBHAI,
Surendranagar District



“While doing all this I realised education is extremely important. I have decided to return to school.”

As the oldest of three sisters, Shabana Asmalbhai, 19 years old, shoulders a lot of the household responsibilities. When she heard about the vocational courses offered under the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan programme, Shabana took the onus of starting a sewing class for the girls in her community. Staunch opposition from local political leaders created a hurdle, but Shabana succeeded in reopening the classes and ensuring their smooth operation. This incident has encouraged her to complete her own education in order to empower more girls.

A PROJECT OVERVIEW (2013 to date)

groups YUVA Manch (Youth Platform) at block and district level has contributed to the Peer Leaders' feeling of empowerment - the solidarity of belonging to a larger collective has expanded their sense of self.

A midterm Evaluation of the project, commissioned in 2016, shows that the project is extremely relevant for building citizenship and rights awareness among the adolescents. The stories reflect a marked increase in awareness among the adolescents about their entitlements. The adolescents also reported that the skills imparted during the project period equipped them to claim these entitlements. The Jan Samwads (public hearings) were helpful in establishing accountability of the program managers for adolescent related schemes and have led to increased self-expression amongst the adolescent girls and boys.

The Outcomes of this project exemplify what is required to channel the latent power of young people and how to increase their voice and participation.

Sahaj

**towards alternatives in
health and development**

1 Shri Hari Apartment, 13 Anandnagar Society,
Behind Express Hotel, Alkapuri,
Vadodara 390 007, Gujarat, India
Ph. : 0265 2342539, 2358307
E-mail : sahaj_sm2006@yahoo.co.in
sahaj.sm@gmail.com
Website : www.sahaj.org.in

Social Accountability for Adolescents' Rights Voices of Peer Leaders

Sahaj SARTHI



SWATI JADHAV,
Vadodara City



"I felt so proud the day the anganwadi was inaugurated. The girls now have a place to sit and study."

When Swati Jadhav, 18 years old, saw young girls falling ill because of spending so much time in the sun, she requested authorities to reopen the locked-up anganwadi at Shanti Nagar. Along with other girls from her community, she wrote and submitted an application to the Integrated Child Development Services officer. Regular follow-ups and the persistence of the girls from Shanti Nagar ensured the inauguration of the anganwadi in February 2017.

SAGAR BHIL,
Vadodara City



"It is the responsibility of the peer leader to spread the knowledge and learning that we receive from SAHAJ."

Sagar Bhil, 18 years old, lives in Subhash Nagar, and a large part of his colony has been demolished to make way for a flyover. When the lack of drinking water began disrupting their lives, Sagar and other peer leaders filled up forms under the guidance of SAHAJ's field officers and put in a request for tankers at the local ward office. Within weeks, Subhash Nagar had access to drinking water, and Sagar received a boost to take up social causes for his community.

SAROJ VASAVA,
Vadodara City



"I'm glad that more children are going to the school because of our efforts. My brothers and sister also study there now."

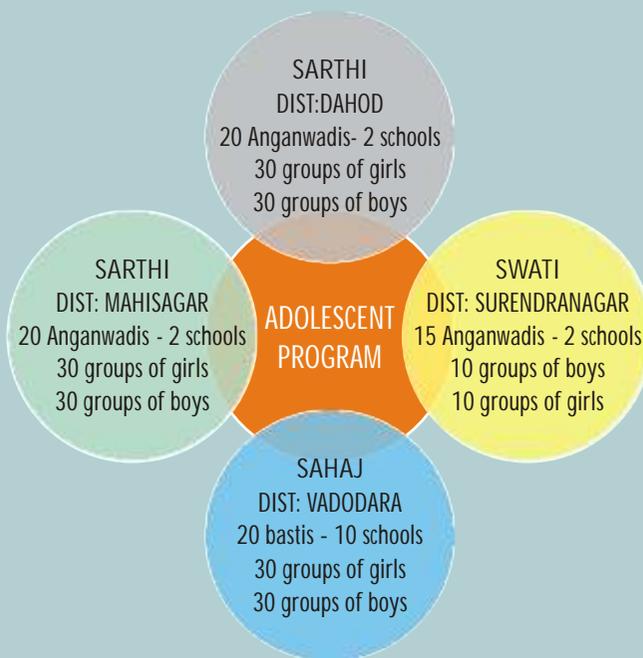
Unsanitary conditions and common bathrooms for boys and girls deterred many young girls from attending the government school at Gayatriपुरa. Saroj Vasava, 19 years old, gathered the girls of her community to file an application for a bigger and better school, with separate rooms for different classes and hygienic bathrooms for boys and girls. After many requests, multiple rounds of meetings and repeated follow ups, the new school building was finally inaugurated in April 2016.

A PROJECT OVERVIEW (2013 to date)

The stories illustrate the challenges that young people have to encounter in their struggle for rights realisation and citizenship. They come from extremely challenging contexts. They represent socially excluded groups like the urban poor migrants and 'squatters' (Vadodara City), tribal population (Mahisagar and Dahod) and muslims and dalits (Surendranagar), where terms like 'gender justice', 'rights' and 'citizenship' take on new meanings.

These young people are participants in a project 'Adolescents as Citizens and Change Agents for Social Accountability', supported by the Ford Foundation. It is being implemented by SAHAJ (Urban Vadodara) in partnership with SARTHI (Mahisagar and Dahod) and SWATI (Surendranagar).

Coverage of the project through SAHAJ, SWATI and SARTHI is highlighted in the diagram.



The Goal of the project is to create a model of leadership / citizenship amongst adolescent girls and boys (11 to 18 years) from a gender and rights perspective. Important Activities of the project are to increase awareness about gender, sexuality, rights, and entitlements related to three government programmes (SABLA, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathans and Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram) and to promote collective action by local groups of girls and boys.

In addition to empowering the adolescent boys and girls, the Strategy to involve parents of adolescents and other stakeholders such as Anganwadi Workers (AWW), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNC) or Mahila Aarogya Samitis (MAS) from the villages/ bastis is creating an informed support system for the adolescents at the level of community / village / basti. The federation of the adolescent