



Women's Empowerment

India is a deeply patriarchal society where women face constant discrimination and in many cases harassment. Although women are legally entitled to equal rights in all areas of society, most women are severely disadvantaged.

The Vicente Ferrer Foundation works to achieve gender equality between women and men in India. We stand up against violence and discrimination against women and strive to improve the social and economic situation of women and their families. By enabling women to reach their full potential and equipping them to be part of the decision-making process, we can attain sustainable development. Sanghams (support groups for women) serve as a key resource to help women network and find support; to address and solve problems in the family and community; and to gain access to loans or microcredits to develop their own businesses. As such, sanghams provide women with the opportunity to develop their own potential and make self-determined decisions about their lives. Our Foundation supports Indian women and helps their voices to be heard.

1. Self-help groups

By forming and strengthening *sanghams* (support groups) in villages, we promote the collective autonomy and the rights of women at the grassroots level.

- The purpose of *sanghams* is to provide a space where women can talk about their problems and concerns and to promote **networks of mutual solidarity and support**.
- Women discuss education, health, and various socio-economic issues concerning their development. They also learn about available resources, such as how to obtain house sites or loans from the government.

2. Economic development

Financial independence is essential in achieving the empowerment of women. To improve women's access to finance, self-help groups promote the creation of savings and loan mechanisms.

- Through the *sanghams*, **women successfully manage mini-banks** in which they pool their monthly savings and then grant loans amongst themselves on a rotating basis.
- Members of the *sangham* are encouraged to access the **Women Development Fund**, a revolving fund that provides capital to women to undertake income-generating activities or small businesses.
- Self-help groups help women access **institutionalized loans** from the government.
- Venturing into an economic sphere through the sangham has not only **improved leadership and managerial skills** amongst rural women but also made them more self-confident.



3. Reducing gender-based violence

Girls and women are constantly under the threat of harassment and violence from their families and in the society at large. Tackling such situations is only possible through the combined efforts of both men and women. The Foundation addresses this through:

- **Awareness workshops with adolescents** to discuss various issues they face and to instill gender sensitivity.
- **Gender sensitization workshops with men** to engage them as partners in the fight for equality.
- **Discussions about gender violence** in village meetings and through cultural activities on women's rights, on how to avail legal aid and medical assistance, where to report a crime, or on the functioning of family courts.

4. Social Action Teams

Generally comprising two men and two women, these teams are trained to identify and tackle gender-based violence in the society.

- Training is imparted to these members on **observation and communications skills** as well as first response.
- They spread awareness in the villages about importance of education in girls and adolescents, the difficulties involved in early marriages, alcoholism, migration, trafficking, etc.
- They have been instrumental in identifying and stopping cases of **child marriage and domestic violence** in the villages.

5. Counseling centers and shelter homes

We provide rehabilitative support to victims of harassment and violence to help them recover from the trauma they have undergone and provide a safe space to them.

- We run **counseling centers** especially in the Kadiri region where incidence of trafficking are especially high. These sessions are led by our staff and a female doctor, who also checks on their health.
- We also run a **shelter home in Bathalapalli for women in distress**. These women and their family members are provided with counseling to help them recover from their trauma. They also have a chance here to participate in vocational training.

6. Support for Widows

Widows and destitute women are in a vulnerable situation in rural India. We work to improve their status facilitating the process of their inclusion, integration, and empowerment. We provide access to adequate nutrition, health care, counseling, awareness, capacity building and children's education to widows so they can overcome social barriers, meet their basic needs and lead a life of dignity.