



VicenteFerrer

Empowering rural communities



Fighting Women's Discrimination by Supporting Vulnerable Single Mothers in Rural Communities

Project Rationale

India is a deeply patriarchal society where women face constant discrimination, especially in rural areas. Although women are legally entitled to equal rights in all areas of society, many women are still severely disadvantaged. VFF USA supports Rural Development Trust (RDT), our local partner in India that works to achieve gender equality, stands up against violence and discrimination against women and strives to improve the social and economic situation of women and their families.

There has been a significant increase in the number of widows in India, due to early marriages and the age gap between males and females at the time of marriage. Today, there are around 50 million widows in India. In fact, India's southern states have a significant percentage of their respective populations widowed. In Andhra Pradesh 6% of the population are widows. Anantapur, one of the poorest areas in this state, is one of the most chronic drought-prone regions in India. Due to these harsh climate conditions which result in a lack of income, the suicide rates among local farmers continue to grow. In Anantapur district alone, 532 farmers ended their lives reportedly due to crop failure and existing agrarian crisis between June 2014 to December 2018, according to [The Hindu Newspaper](#).

Widows' Plight in Rural India

In rural India, widows are rejected by society due to various local superstitions. They are often perceived as inauspicious and are subjected to gender-based and culture-based discrimination. Many of them suffer abuse and exploitation by family members and are often subjected to discrimination in inheritance rights. Widows typically have no support from their parents or in-laws, and they are not invited to be part of weddings or celebrations. In addition, remarriage is more unusual among widowers, and often "forbidden" by local communities and prevalent cultural norms.

The inferior social status assigned to widows and the difficulties in accessing livelihood opportunities result in an enormous difficulty for widows to feed their families and to continue

their children's education. On top of this, many widows are illiterate which further aggravates their situation.

- Widows are considered extremely inauspicious and suffer ostracism.
- They are supposed to wear white saris without any color marking the borders.
- They are not considered for wage labor during the first 12 months of widowhood.
- With no property and job opportunities, most of them live alone and suffer from severe poverty.
- In widowed families, most of the children drop out of school and have to take care of their siblings or work to supplement the family's income.

Project Goal

The aim of this project is to improve the status of vulnerable single mothers both in the community and society and facilitate the process of their inclusion, integration, and empowerment.

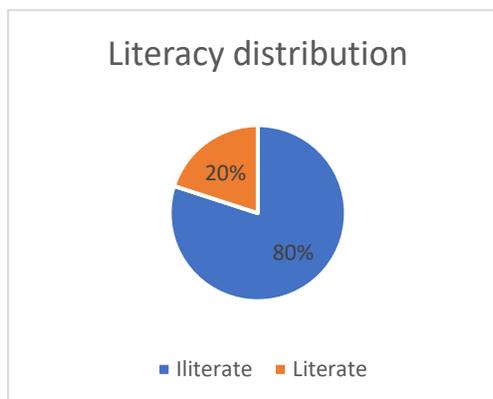
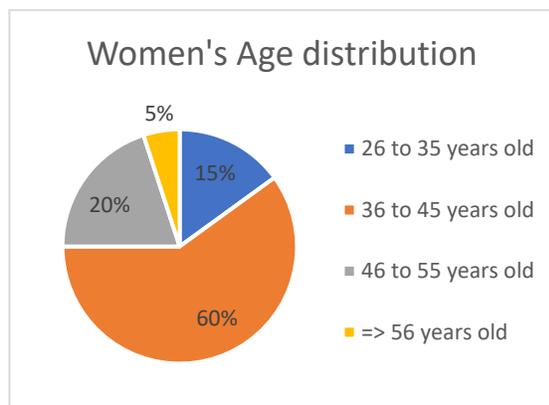
There are many vulnerable single mothers in rural India, either because they have been widowed or because they have been deserted by their husbands. Most of these women and their children face various economic challenges.

Project Description

To address this problem, Vicente Ferrer Foundation USA (VFF USA) provides access to adequate nutrition, health care, counseling, awareness, capacity building, and children's education to vulnerable single mothers, so they can overcome social barriers, and meet their basic needs and lead a life of dignity. In addition, some of the mothers receive funding support for income generation activities so they can become financially independent and self-sufficient.

The beneficiaries of this project are 40 vulnerable single mothers, comprised of 38 widows and 2 deserted women located in 23 villages spread across the Bathalapalli Region, in the Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh. The beneficiaries have been selected by the RDT Women's Sector leaders according to the following criteria:

- Widows or deserted women without any assured sources of income or livelihood.
- Each woman has two or more children, which must be enrolled at school if they are of school age.



There are 87 additional beneficiaries, the children who are depending upon these marginalized women.

The project provides the following resources:

- **Nutrition:** Twelve kilograms of rice, two liters of oil, four kilograms of red lentils, four kilograms of wheat, and four kilograms of ragi, six times per year. Food is distributed once every 2 months after the completion of awareness workshops.
- **Healthcare:** check-ups and medical consultations. Treatment and follow-up of women suffering from chronic health issues like anemia or other diseases.
- **Awareness and capacity building:** Organization of awareness sessions every 2 months focusing on gender, education, health, self-esteem, legal rights, government resource mobilization, and livelihood opportunities.
- **Counselling** for women in need
- **Economic support** for children continuing their **education**.
- A **saree** to break the traditional barrier of not providing any sarees to widows.
- **Income generation activities funding** for 10 women. The type of activities funded is Buffalo (1), Cow (1), Sheep (3), Goats (1), Flour mill (1), Fast Food Center (1), and Vegetable Business (2). The goal is to achieve women's financial autonomy through self-employment. RDT provides the resources for the activity and women are responsible for starting the business with support from RDT.
- Workshops on promoting **entrepreneurial skills**, focusing on the basics of purchasing, quality control, negotiation, marketing, and accounting for profit and loss assessment.

Impact

This program has a very positive impact on improving vulnerable single mothers' socio-economic situation. This is very important, especially for their children, who have, thanks to the program, an opportunity to continue their higher education. Continuity of education is very valuable for girls, as it helps to prevent early marriages and break the cycle of poverty.

To date, RDT has provided support to a total of 5,000 marginalized women. They have many testimonials on how this program has changed their lives.

“Leading life in the absence of husband is difficult. But providing good education to my girls with the support of RDT is my first priority. I am getting nutritional support from RDT and it should be continued till my children grow and earn something on their own. We are glad that RDT knocked our door to find out about our situation. It really boosted our spirits and enabled us to look for a hopeful future” Says Padmini, widow and mother of seven daughters.

Would you like to help? You can support our project directly on the web www.vffusa.org or contact us for more information at: info@vffusa.org or at (202) 798-5269.

Thank you for your generosity and kindness!



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