



Report 2023

The Concerned For Working Children



THE CONCERNED FOR
Working Children

Programme Highlights

This report produced in 2023 presents the consolidated impact of CWC's work in the past five years.

The presence of COVID and its aftermath figure prominently through this period. While COVID brought in new challenges on an unprecedented scale, it also aggravated many of the pre-existing challenges – the existing fault-lines which are now chasms that continue to pose grave and long-lasting developmental problems.

CWC responded to COVID with direct intervention as well as policy advocacy to mitigate the crises. They have highlighted the severe deprivation and marginalisation of children and communities, demanded state response and have been partially successful on several counts. Children and adolescents have been supported to learn about their entitlements in campus and in the communities, access care and professional education, contact appropriate decision makers, assert their agency and demand their protection and provision entitlements from duty bearers. Simultaneously direct support such as nutrition, health, livelihood of children and adults and other wellbeing support were extended to communities, and they were facilitated to link up with relevant government schemes and aid to alleviate their immediate strife and to minimise factors likely to further aggravate their impoverishment.

CWC's COVID Response work is considered one of the outstanding examples nationally in the CSO fraternity¹ as it ranged from emergency medical assistance and provision of sustenance kits; facilitating children to map vulnerable communities needing immediate intervention, including families of the children themselves; provision of additional critical support such as counselling, educational assistance; residential care support; livelihood assistance to vulnerable and marginalised families in Vijayanagara and Udupi districts, many of which were undertaken in collaboration with children and their communities. Our projects also provided technical inputs and guidance to the State Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (RDPR) on a wide range of policy matters including on mid-day meal distribution, care for children in child care institution in the entire state, speedy response to needs of MGNREGA workers and the policy changes required at the both State and National Levels in relation to MGNREGA Act; salary for state health care works, growing of food crops under state schemes, medical management inputs to elected local self-governments, development of COVID care protocols for children, state-wide children's library programme, state health programme, development of an integrated information management system to document and follow-up on the needs of children in Karnataka, in the context of COVID etc.

In the course of our work during and post the COVID pandemic, the challenges to the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents have become starkly apparent. The consequences of the pandemic were felt across the board, with certain groups being more disproportionately impacted than others. Loss of employment and financial insecurity leading to poverty, social isolation, disruption of education, limited access to healthcare and food insecurity are some of the several social determinants which have placed children and adolescents, their families, and communities at an increased risk of vulnerability. Taking into consideration the existing care gap and the urgent need to respond to the mental health needs of children and adolescent, CWC collaborated with mental health experts to highlight and bring to the forefront the mental health and wellbeing needs of children and adolescents within policy and practice in Karnataka and in the larger ambit of child protection in India. A first step

¹ Excerpt from the Newsletter of VANI, a highly respected, autonomous national network of CSOs, India

in this regard was the Karnataka State-level Consultation on Mental Health and Well-being of Children and Adolescents. This was preceded by mapping of needs among children in our communities, review of secondary data and learning from existing good practices.

During the COVID pandemic, the State Resources Centre (SRC) emerged as a crucial support hub for children and their communities, offering essential psycho-social support amidst unprecedented challenges. Recognizing the heightened mental health needs during this crisis, the SRC established safe spaces where children could find refuge and begin their recovery. The center provided targeted mental health support, focusing on the emotional well-being of those most affected by the pandemic. By addressing both the immediate and long-term psychological impacts, the SRC played a vital role in helping children navigate the difficulties of the pandemic, fostering resilience and a sense of stability during a time of widespread uncertainty.

The State Resources Centre (SRC) has made a substantial impact on the lives of young people through its tailored approach to education and employment. By offering both professional and academic education, the SRC meets the varied demands and interests of youth, equipping them with essential skills for their future. The center's focus on creating employment opportunities, especially for adolescent girls, ensures that they gain practical experience alongside their learning, linking them to viable marketing outlets. At Namma Bhoomi, the SRC's initiatives have not only provided valuable resources but have also fostered personal growth and confidence among young individuals. As a vibrant hub for education and community engagement, the SRC continues to address diverse needs, empowering its residents and nurturing their development with a profound sense of purpose and support.

Recognising the immense power of the Udupi District Child Rights Protection Protocol, the DWCD-GOK² invited CWC to collaborate with the ICPS³, Child Rights Protection Protocol to all 30 districts of Karnataka. As the technical and training lead, CWC has included relevant issues such as Mental Health, response to disasters – including COVID like situations- into the capacity building and development design of Protocol process. In this period, CWC also helmed the consultative process to review and update the Karnataka Child Protection Policy.

Mobilisation of the members of Bhima Sangha (BS) and school children's sanghas and consistent advocacy to facilitate child rights friendly Makkala Gram Sabhas (MGS) across Karnataka, resulted in children's strong demand for spaces where they could gather, read, learn and assert their agency creatively and also enhanced the accountability of the local, block (taluk) and state level Governments. The issues raised by the BS included demand for water and sanitation works, infrastructure development, health vocational training and counselling for adolescents; which drew formally recorded assurances of accountability and action from the authorities. These have been raised from the panchayat to the state level, resulting in CWC being commissioned as Special Advisor to the RDPR⁴ government's ambitious Child Responsive Local Governance (CRLG) Project.

CWC mobilised grama sabha members to demand for elections to the local government and also advocated for it at the State level which resulted in ensuring elections were held for Grama Panchayats. This laid the foundation for bottom up planning and monitoring, effective conduction of grama sabhas,

² Department of Women and Child Development Empowerment of Differently Abled & Senior Citizens
<https://wcd.karnataka.gov.in/english>

³ Integrated Child Protection Scheme <https://icps.karnataka.gov.in/english>

⁴ Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department <https://rdpr.karnataka.gov.in/english>

MGNREGA grama sabhas, women's and children's grama sabhas – all of which we facilitated in the programme areas and effective fulfilment of the role of the local governments. This period also witnessed the Karnataka Legislative Assembly Elections in 2023, and CWC successfully launched and scaled the Honourable Voters' Campaign in Udupi, Vijayanagara and Bangalore, with the Mobile Facilitation Centre, as well as virtual perspective building facilitations extending our reach to many districts of Karnataka.

This period also witnessed the organisation's representation - as national anchor – of Young Voices National Movement's (YVNM) mandate to highlight agency and demands of young people regarding age of marriage and all issues surrounding it, including sexuality, consent etc. This was highlighted in important forums at the national, regional and global levels. Further YVNM's strong advocacy and response to the increasing of Age of Marriage Bill in the Indian Parliament's winter session contributed to the Bill being deferred to a Parliamentary Committee for review. The movement has also very strongly critiqued the National Youth Policy and the National Child Protection Policy Draft). The 'Children: Ambassadors of Change' (CAOC) national network – anchored by CWC - has brought together Unions of working children and adolescents from 8 states of the country, who have developed a working adolescents and children's petition which compels policy makers, enforcers and agencies at the national. As a founder member of the International Movement of Working Children, CAOC was also in the forefront providing a sound critique during the ILO's Global Child Labour Convention. The CAOC network has accordingly represented the rights, demands and aspirations of working adolescents and children in several national, regional and global forums and media.

CWC is a member of the Catalyst 2030 global as well as national network in collaboration with over 2000 multi-sectoral organisations working towards meaningful and synergetic pathways to meet the SDG goals.

CWC has addressed the following SDG Goals: Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 3 (Good health and well beings), Goal 4 (Quality education), Goal 5 (Gender equality), Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation), Goal 8 (Decent work and Economic Growth) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality) Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), Goal 17 (Partnership for the Goals) to the extent possible – strategically building models within the children's rights framework, engaging with a wide spectrum of stakeholders and decision makers; mainstreaming initiatives through policy influence and collaborative networks; aiming at systemic changes in terms of policy, programmes and practices. These are taking place in a national environment that is growing increasingly centralised, inequitable, restrictive, industry-centric and polarised. In such an environment, projects such as ours are essential to mitigate and in the long term reverse the trend to respect and uphold rights of the most vulnerable citizens of the country.

Empowering Rural Children, Communities and Local Governments

Intended Outcome: Children and other members of the community, especially the vulnerable sections of the Gram Panchayats are realizing their unconditional rights to participation in governance and avail of infrastructure and all provision for their care and protection as enumerated in the CRC, National and State legislation. Local Governments act as autonomous units, uphold grassroots democracy and become self-reliant

The Concerned For Working Children (CWC) aimed to empower children and vulnerable community members, especially in rural areas, to recognize their rights and participate in decision-making processes concerning their care and protection. The COVID pandemic exacerbated the already challenging socio-political conditions, leading to severe economic difficulties and setbacks in education. CWC responded with innovative strategies to address these issues.

CWC emphasized strengthening Local Governments to act autonomously, as outlined in the Indian Constitution and state legislations, to uphold grassroots democracy. However, the pandemic gravely affected local governance, causing leadership vacuums due to postponed local body elections and a lack of technical and infrastructural capacities. CWC took significant steps to address these challenges.

CWC focused on enabling marginalized rural community members to claim their entitlements, sensitizing rural Local Governments for inclusive development, facilitating collective bargaining for children and adolescents, and providing vocational skills and rights-based education to enhance employability.

During this period, marginalized children actively participated in decision-making and held local governments accountable. They used research and advocacy tools, such as issue mapping and creative presentations, to engage in participatory platforms like Panchayat discussions and Makkala Grama Sabhas. These efforts demonstrated their collective bargaining power and gained them a role as agents of change.

Children and communities highlighted critical issues, including mental health and disabilities, prompting CWC to strategize responses at various levels. The adaptation of initiatives like Makkala Mitra and community-based support structures into state policy represents a significant achievement, providing pathways for children to raise concerns and receive support.

CWC also guided the State government in converting rural libraries into children's libraries during the pandemic, creating safe spaces for creativity and peer learning, which continue to be active.

CWC facilitated the effective use of key legislations, such as the Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj Act and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, empowering local governments to plan and manage programs autonomously. Despite the pandemic, Panchayat-level Task Forces were formed and played a crucial role in planning and implementing programs.

Over the past four years, CWC successfully helped children access education, vocational training, and skills in democratic practices, life skills, and gender sensitization. CWC also demonstrates a Green Campus and collaborates with institutions to provide eco-friendly technologies for the benefit of children, their communities, and local governments.

Children and adolescents, especially girls, access care and protection services with their active participation.

COVID hit hard immediately after a year of the commencement of CWC period. Given the reason of COVID and its impacts, Panchayat elections were postponed. Because of this, many forums and opportunities like Makkala Gram Sabhas, Children Task force Meetings were not held regularly which could be a statutory space for children to raise their concerns and issues, where children are being heard by the government. However, using all available opportunities, significant numbers of children, in particular marginalised children meaningfully participated in decision-making processes even though COVID has affected considerably during CWC period.

CWC mobilised, oriented and enhanced collective strength of the children to claim and access care and protection services in several instances⁵. As a result, members of Bhima Sangha⁶s and Makkala Sangha⁷s of rural project areas (Vijayanagar and Udupi District) demonstrated their agency and collectively advocated for their rights with their elected local governments, the Panchayat⁸s up to district level making effective use of different platforms. The issues raised by children for the attention and action of the local governments include health, loss of the primary earning members of the family due to COVID and non-COVID reasons, lack of food and nutrition, COVID impacts on their education leading to increase in out of school children, harsh hit of COVID on the family leading to child marriages and forcing children to opt the work against schooling, imposition of online education during COVID time and its continuation further in one or other means affecting their concentration, their memory, mental health and attracting them towards digital addiction, affect of communal polarisation on children, lack of toilets, lack of jobs for the family and for themselves which is leading towards their right to survival, need of work-related training for their livelihood; malnutrition and lack of safe places for care and protection. One of the important outcomes has been children and our advocacy related to adolescent working children and for designing tailor-made responses in their best interest. CWC also has facilitated counselling, health, food and emotional support to the children and their families who lost primary earning members during COVID period. Intensive discussions within the communities, Makkala Sanghas and Bhima Sabhas were carried out on the sensitivity of care and protection of children.

It is noteworthy that several elected members and officials of local governments up to district level were highly receptive to children and were frank and forthcoming in their responses. It's equally noteworthy that we were able to facilitate children to make use of digital platforms to raise their concerns and issues. Specific steps have been taken by the concerned authorities in relation to respond to the issues raised by children. Health Camps were conducted to respond to the health issues, child marriage awareness campaigns were held, intensive discussions with working children were carried out both in Vijayanagar and Udupi district. In collaboration with different institutions, foods have been supplied to families in need. The issues which are outside the remit of the Panchayat's up to district level mandate are being collectively taken up at the State and National level through different forums by the representatives of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Sangha. As a result, many issues were solved considering the care and

⁵Makkala Gram Sabha – Once in a year Task Force Meeting at GP – Once in 3 months. Children Meeting with GP – depends on the need and when the issues raised,

⁶Bhima Sangha is a union of, by, and for working children (aged 18 years and below), Sangha is the translation of the word organized group of people in Kannada.

⁷Makkala Sangha is Children Union, comprising any children from the community (below 18 years)

⁸ Panchayat: An administrative division consisting of a few villages. The Village/gram, Taluk and Zilla Panchayats are the 1st, 2nd and 3rd tiers of the Panchayati Raj System (Panchayati Raj system is the political system found mainly in India and other south Asian countries. The term Raj means 'rule' and panchayat means 'assembly') respectively. Village/gram Panchayat is the only grassroots-level of panchayat raj formalized local self-governance system in India at the village level

protection of the children with high priority. Considering the need of listening to children to address their concerns and issues, state government ordered to conduct ward level discussions with children even during peak COVID period. Understanding the need of safe space for children as children highlighted many such concerns, state government issued a circular to convert rural libraries as rural children's libraries which could be safe space for children to share their concerns, to exhibit their creativeness, and for peer learnings. State also adapted the initiative of Makkala Mitra, community-based support structures and Children Post Box giving high priority to the care and protection of children and their participation in decision making process.

Physical, emotional, Medical and physiological care has been provided to the children who were intensely affected due to the harrowing experiences they faced in their lives and had been referred to the State Resource Centre , Namma Bhoomi, our residential campus referred through State set up Child Welfare Committee⁹ of Udupi District during this period. Those children are provided with essential care and protection along with the appropriate education. Most of these children have a history of abuse, abandonment or severe pressure and our observation is that some of them have learning disabilities. Children with learning disabilities are given more attention, especially those who find difficulty to read and write- CWC supports them using methodology of oral learning, learning by doing, taking special attention that they won't get negative feedbacks. All children at our centre are facilitated with regular counselling and gender empowerment sessions and those children who need intensive socio-psychological support are provided the same under the guidance of psychiatrists and psychologist are required.

However, COVID and its aftermath exasperated an already critical situation with regards to mental health and wellbeing of communities, especially the children and young people. Interactions with the Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Sangha revealed numerous concerns regarding stressors and barriers to mental well-being. CWC is exploring different avenues of support to facilitate the mental health and well-being of its constituency. CWC initially focused on mental health and well-being in communities but later recognised the critical impact of disability on children. It conducted a situational analysis in panchayats of Udupi and Vijayanagara, revealing significant challenges, including its impact on mental wellbeing of the children and their families. Subsequently, it facilitated meetings between parents of children with disabilities and local governments to address issues at the panchayat level. Recognising the need for broader action, a consultation involving the MLA¹⁰ of Udupi, taluk level and district level officials and parents was held to address concerns at the taluk, district, and state levels.

Further, CWC implemented various innovative strategies to empower children and young people and address their challenges. One such initiative is the Bhima Bandi, the mobile facilitation center. CWC also worked towards prioritising health and nutrition, providing appropriate education, involving them in decision-making processes, ensuring their rights and provisions, and advocating for livelihood options. Recognising the fundamental right to survival, these efforts were aimed at empowering children and youth, enabling them to overcome obstacles and recognise and streamline their own optimum capabilities.

⁹ Child Welfare Committee is a legal authority of government at district level to dispose of cases for the care, protection, treatment, development and rehabilitation of children in need of care and protection, as well as to provide for their basic needs and protection.

¹⁰ Member of the Legislative Assembly, Government of Karnataka

Marginalised adolescents and youths, especially girls access safe, sustainable self/wage employment with right based orientation

Due to COVID, CWC period posed several challenges for the realisation of children's rights to life and development. This also created imbalances in the socio-economic stability in the economy at large which has a direct bearing on the kind of employment and business opportunities available for the young people who have gained vocational training from CWC. It also jeopardises the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 8: "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," and its target 8.5, which calls for the achievement, by 2030, of "full and productive employment and decent work for all."

The COVID – 19 pandemic over the two years and the resulting national lockdowns impacted upon our constituencies adversely in terms of loss of livelihoods, employment and lack of access to food security and quality healthcare. The impact has been largely disruptive in terms of economic activity as well as a loss of human lives. The country's GDP has also taken a major plunge and there are reports of large-scale unemployment and under-employment in the Indian economy. The job market, as a result has collapsed. Unemployment and underemployment are rampant. This is also reflected in our constituencies and corresponding geographical areas, wherein almost every sector is hard hit by lack of employment opportunities and diminished/non-existent wages. Many children, youth and women lost their primary earning members in the family due to COVID and their lives continue to be precarious.

CWC rose to the challenge to facilitate the constituencies to assist the realisation of their rights to protection and provision of basic facilities and entitlements announced by the Government. Issues of immediate concern have been taken up for advocacy at the local, district and state level to adequately support young people and their communities. After critical review, CWC also began to streamline in community vocational trainings in collaboration with local governments. Panchayats and local training institutions were facilitated to respond to the needs and concerns of the children, youth and women – all of whom were unable to move out of their villages as they had to care for the daily needs of the family. CWC aimed to create models of good practice, advocated for governments to replicate such models and to support the development of skills that foster individuals' resilience by meeting the emerging demands in the employment markets.

CWC has also taken concrete steps to advocate for the provision of adequate support to low-skilled and vulnerable workers through making MGNREGS¹¹ more effective and also in advocating effective re-training and up-skilling practices and programmes. This also enabled the vulnerable workers especially youth and women to become aware of their rights provided under MGNREGA¹².

CWC collaborated with different institutions with expertise in technical trainings for facilitating children, youth and women in skill upgradation. CWC also established links with potential employers to connect the trainees for employment opportunities. CWC also advocated with local to district

¹¹ The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme created as directed in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the means to implement the Act so that the guarantee comes into effect.

¹² The Government of India passed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 in September, 2005. The Act gives legal guarantee of a hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to adult members of a rural household who demand employment and are willing to do unskilled manual work.

administration to provide skill trainings to adolescents, youth and women from marginalised communities under NRLM¹³ programme enabling them to lead a reasonable quality of life. Adolescents and youth enrolled were made aware of their rights as per the provisions of the Labour Act and Apprenticeship Act. They were enabled to transform their lives by providing them with appropriate education and giving them the required skills and knowledge pertaining to democratic practices, life skills, gender sensitisation and access to safe and sustainable livelihood options. CWC facilitated those enrolled to upgrade their skills through appropriate short-term courses in collaboration with collaborating institutions to gain expertise in specific areas of their interest. They were also facilitated to obtain management, marketing & financial management skills.

As a result, despite the severe challenges posed by COVID, the children and their families in our project reach were able to survive, gain skills and maintain a certain quality of wellbeing as a result of our intervention.

Gram Sabha (Community) members are active partners of rural local governments in developing plans, programmes and its implementation

COVID had a significant impact on local governance systems. The state government postponed local body elections for a year under the pretext of the pandemic. Consequently, the Panchayat development plans, which were supposed to be created with community involvement in Gram Sabhas, remained under the control of officials, contrary to the principle of bottom-up planning. With no elected bodies at the Panchayat level and restrictions on gatherings, statutory meetings such as Gram Sabhas were not held. In response, Panchayat-level Task Forces were formed to manage the COVID situation in villages. Advocacy from our organization and other civil society groups led to the inclusion of representatives from local civil society organizations, women's self-help groups, youth groups, and community leaders in these Task Forces. Their roles and responsibilities were expanded to cover various community needs, including health, infrastructure management, livelihoods, and education. This involvement highlighted the importance of inclusive planning and influenced implementation at different government tiers.

Even after the new local bodies were established in 2021, Gram Sabhas were not conducted until mid-2022, with COVID cited as the reason. Large gatherings continued to be avoided, though religious and cultural events persisted, revealing a contradiction. Despite this, Task Forces became proactive in addressing community needs. With our facilitation, special Gram Sabhas were held to develop village plans focusing on livelihood options, health awareness, MGNREGA provisions, and addressing issues faced by workers. As a result, the government revised job creation policies under MGNREGA, addressing long-overdue payments and including new job types based on community demands.

Given the challenges posed by COVID and political hindrances in Karnataka, our organization focused on empowering Gram Sabha members to assert their rights and challenge governmental moves to limit their powers. We facilitated discussions with marginalized communities, emphasizing the importance of their participation in Gram Sabha meetings and their roles in local governance. Elected local government members were also trained in inclusive planning. Consequently, community members actively engaged in Gram Sabhas, raising concerns and demanding resolutions from local governments. Issues such as MGNREGA mismanagement and flood-related problems were addressed with authorities and legislators.

¹³ National Rural Livelihood Mission aims to reach out to all the rural poor families (BPL families) and link them to sustainable livelihoods opportunities. It will nurture them till they come out of poverty and enjoy a decent quality of life.

During the National Election period, we ran awareness campaigns promoting corruption-free elections, which were adopted by the Udupi Administration. Our campaign, part of the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation Programme (SVEEP), received recognition for its impact and reach through various media.

We coordinated with over 2,300 elected local government representatives across Karnataka during the COVID lockdown. Regular phone contact helped sensitize them to their disaster management responsibilities and ensure timely responses to community needs. We also provided information and support to local governments for migrant workers, addressing issues related to food, accommodation, and healthcare.

Our organization enabled community members, including children and women, to participate in the planning and implementation processes of their Panchayats. We have consistently worked with MGNREGA workers to raise awareness about their rights and advocate at various levels for better implementation of the Act. We challenged the misinterpretation of the Act's provision of employment days and addressed issues related to job opportunities and supervisory roles within the scheme.

Reduction in illegal sale of alcohol and alcohol abuse in the rural project areas.

Many women in the communities we serve are severely affected by alcohol-fueled domestic violence, with their husbands spending money on alcohol. Issues related to illegal alcohol sales, alcohol abuse, narcotic drugs, and youth addiction have been raised by our constituents.

Government policies that promote alcohol sales for revenue generation have often undermined our efforts. Although authorities occasionally address illegal alcohol sales when reported, their efforts have not been consistently successful due to pressures on the excise department to increase alcohol sales for revenue.

At the start of CWC, the Excise Minister of State proposed a plan for door-to-door alcohol delivery to boost state revenue. Women's groups, including those in our project areas, strongly opposed this plan, arguing that it would neglect the state's responsibility to protect women and children. We highlighted the high health, social, and economic costs associated with such a move, which would be socially and economically disastrous. Due to widespread protests and pressure from various stakeholders, the Excise Minister retracted the statement, clarifying that the government did not intend to implement the plan. However, the state's ongoing emphasis on alcohol revenue generation remains a significant obstacle to our progress.

According to Bhima Sangha members, easy access to alcohol in villages, through petty shops and grocery stores, contributes to addiction and increasing debt. Children have argued that shutting down illegal alcohol shops would significantly reduce consumption and domestic violence, as it would require consumers to travel longer distances to buy alcohol, which would lower their level of intoxication by the time they return home. Focus group discussions with women and children in areas affected by addiction have included preventive messages and information for those seeking help.

In Karnataka, alcohol sales generate substantial revenue. For the fiscal year 2020-2021, the excise department collected Rs 23,332 crore, surpassing its target by Rs 600 crore. By December 2021, it had collected Rs 19,306 crore, achieving 78% of its target. Excise duties account for 21% of the state's tax revenue and 12% of its total income, including central taxes. Revenue targets for recent years have consistently increased, with expectations of Rs 36,000 crore for 2023-24.

Allegations from community members suggest that many illegal alcohol outlets operate with the collusion of excise inspectors, who face pressure to meet sales targets. Licensed liquor shop owners are

also pressured to increase sales or risk losing their licenses. This focus on revenue has led to an increase in illegal alcohol outlets operating from petty shops, canteens, grocery stores, and even private homes, often linked to licensed outlets.

CWC has facilitated reporting of illegal sale locations and incidents of harassment and abuse to the district administration and police. While police raids have temporarily halted illegal sales, they often resume due to neglect or corruption.

Government support for licensed alcohol sales and negligence of illegal sales has frustrated children and young people, but they continue their efforts. Despite the challenges, discussions on alcohol abuse have influenced some young people to avoid alcohol.

Post-COVID, there has been a rise in cannabis and other psychotropic drug use among the youth, posing additional dangers to children. We need to strengthen our outreach, field responses, and policy work by collaborating with organizations specializing in substance abuse to address these emerging issues.

Education for Democracy: CWC's SRC as nucleus of learning and empowerment

Intended Outcome: Educational and employment opportunities are tailored to the needs and interests of young individuals, particularly adolescents and girls, which enhances their professional skills while ensuring their overall well-being and integration into their communities.

Educational and Vocational Training to strengthen learning and growth of young people.

CWC's State Resource Centre (SRC) at Namma Bhoomi has prioritized both professional and academic education, resulting in substantial positive outcomes. Most trainees have successfully secured employment, with adolescent girls gaining additional income through involvement with Namma Angadi, a marketing cooperative. This initiative links their learning with practical earning opportunities.

Special Focus Areas:

- **Adolescent Girls:** Special attention is given to adolescent girls, providing them with learning and earning opportunities. Their engagement with Nammangadi helps them gain market experience and financial independence.
- **Vulnerable Children:** The SRC supports children from marginalized backgrounds, including those from backward communities and orphans, ensuring their continued education. This support extends to the development of life skills and empowerment through both formal and informal educational processes.
- **Health and Well-being:** The SRC places a strong emphasis on the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of its residents. A full-time caretaker and an on-site clinic address health needs, while collaboration with Manipal Academy of Higher Education provides psychological counseling. During the COVID pandemic, the SRC established a quarantine center equipped with necessary medical supplies.

Democratic Engagement that promotes the citizenship and agency of the children

The SRC promotes democratic values through the Children's Panchayat, an elected body of representatives that facilitates self-governance among the children. This initiative helps children develop a strong understanding of democratic principles and collective leadership.

Outreach and Awareness:

To raise awareness about the SRC's programs, facilitators visited 69 Panchayats in Udupi and Vijayanagara Districts, engaging with over 3,300 community members and stakeholders. This outreach included interactions with Gramasabha members, local officials, and representatives from various institutions.

Training and Employment:

During the reporting period, 61 children enrolled in academic education, 130 in vocational training, and 32 in computer training. Vocational courses offered included electrical wiring, garment production, wood technology, and beautician training. The SRC successfully placed 55 young people in various occupations, with 8 becoming self-employed and 7 awaiting employment.

Cultural and Life Skills Development:

Children at the SRC are exposed to various cultural activities, including dance forms like Bharatanatyam and Yakshagana. They participate in artistic endeavors that blend traditional and modern themes, fostering a rich cultural environment. Additionally, they gain practical skills in agriculture, dairy management, and art and crafts, contributing to their holistic development.

Capacity Building and Outreach Programs:

The project has conducted 16 short-term outreach programs for women from vulnerable communities, including members of Bhima Sangha and Makkala Sangha in Udupi and Vijayanagara districts. These programs focus on capacity building and support for marginalized women.

The SRC's initiatives at Namma Bhoomi ha continued to empower young people, equipping them with the skills, education, and confidence needed for their personal and professional development. The center continues to be a dynamic space for learning, growth, and exploration, addressing the diverse needs of its residents and fostering a sense of community and empowerment.

Empowering the Children of Migrant Labourers Communities

Intended Outcome: The children of migrant labourers' community especially girls act as active agents of change to increasingly claim their rights to protection, provision, participation, and citizenship in Urban districts of Udupi and Bangalore. The local and district governments are more accountable, participatory and responsive to children of migrant labourers' community, recognize their rights and driven towards systemic change. The migrant labourers' community is more aware, organized and better equipped to reduce and prevent the alcohol abuse at community level; local and district governments are supportive and to systemic change.

CWC aimed to support children and adolescents, particularly girls, from migrant laborer communities, who are a significant part of the urban poor and face extreme vulnerability. These individuals are often deprived of basic entitlements and their rights to citizenship are frequently violated. Their marginalization is deeply rooted in both their places of origin and their new urban environments, resulting in dual vulnerability due to exclusion and deprivation.

CWC's initial focus was on empowering children to advocate for their rights, hold governments accountable, become aware of harmful social practices, and access their entitlements as citizens. However, the COVID pandemic drastically altered the situation for these migrant families, severely impacting CWC's original design. The pandemic led to massive job losses, quarantine measures, and a large-scale return of migrant workers to their places of origin. In Udupi District, families that had lived precariously in the city for over 20 years relocated back to their hometowns during the lockdown. This included children and working youth who had lost access to employment opportunities.

In response to the immediate needs during the pandemic, CWC provided survival kits, including medicines, food, and emergency services, deviating from the original plan. Post-COVID, families struggled to rebuild their lives in their hometowns due to a lack of livelihood opportunities, with daily wages dropping by 70% and increased expenses for family care, education, and debt repayment. Some individuals, especially youth and middle-aged adults, returned to Udupi for livelihood and educational opportunities, although these needs remain severely compromised.

CWC faced significant challenges in mobilizing working adolescents and other vulnerable children due to the constant relocation of the communities in search of work and basic facilities. This made it difficult to work consistently with a stable group of young people, and many were reluctant to engage in collective bargaining due to fear of economic, political, and social repercussions. Despite these challenges, CWC has provided crucial support to children in distress, including assistance with online education, food supplies, health, and other emergencies.

CWC has also focused on local interventions and pressured the Government of Karnataka to address these issues. This included providing direct relief to distressed groups, escalating complaints about inadequate state responses, contributing to policy documents and guidelines, and using social media to inform about entitlements and relief measures.

CWC succeeded in building the advocacy and participatory capacity of children from migrant laborer communities, enabling them to interact with local governance representatives to claim their entitlements. It emphasized the importance of awareness, information collection, and advocacy for their rights.

Following COVID, an exclusive survey was conducted of returning families living in Udupi town and surrounding areas. The findings were shared with key community members and presented to the Deputy Commissioner of Udupi District and the Deputy Secretary of the Karnataka Labor Department. This led to the District Administration planning to construct shelters for migrant labourer communities and

prioritizing them for housing allocations by the Urban Development Board in collaboration with the Town Municipality.

Children and adolescents, especially girls of Migrant Labourers Community, progressively realize their rights to protection

During this period, existing issues of patriarchy, gender discrimination, economic imbalance, marginalization, communal disharmony, and exploitation have intensified, further suppressing the rights of vulnerable and marginalized communities. State policies have deprioritized children's rights, evident in program designs and budget allocations.

Urban residents who benefit from migrant labour often undermine the rights and entitlements of these workers. Politicians who do not view migrant labourers as voters tend to ignore their needs. Migrant workers face the constant threat of eviction by private landowners who rent them housing. Any demand for rights or questioning of injustices typically results in immediate repercussions. Consequently, migrant communities are increasingly fearful and hesitant to advocate for their rights collectively.

Despite these challenges, it is commendable that children and families from migrant communities occasionally stand up for their rights and engage in empowerment processes. CWC has successfully facilitated platforms for members of Makkala Sanghas and adolescent sanghas, particularly girls from Migrant Laborer Communities (MLCs), to discuss their concerns and demands at local and district levels.

The COVID pandemic and resulting national lockdowns severely impacted these communities, causing loss of livelihoods, employment, and access to food and healthcare. Many who had lived in Udupi city for 10-20 years relocated to their native villages during the lockdown, driven by the fear of being unable to pay rent or afford living in urban areas. CWC worked to provide essential services such as water, food, and medical care during this period.

Post-pandemic, relocated families have struggled to live and care for their families in villages, which they had originally left due to a lack of livelihood opportunities. Moving forward, CWC needs to assess their current realities and focus on supporting those who have returned from their villages.

CWC identified 168 migrant communities living in temporary settlements for over 10-20 years with inadequate access to basic facilities, safety, protection, and amenities. To address these deficiencies, CWC has been working to help them demand their rights. However, the severe impact of COVID has hindered the achievement of set targets.

Mobilizing working adolescents and other vulnerable children from migrant labourer communities has become even more challenging. Despite this, CWC has reached out to several distressed children and adolescents, providing urgent responses and services. Support included assistance with health emergencies, nutritional needs, online education challenges, subsidized food, and other critical services. CWC has addressed key concerns such as health, nutrition, safety, and access to basic facilities.

Local governments and relevant authorities are expected to respond proactively to issues raised by children. However, during this period, most officials prioritized COVID responses, making it difficult for CWC to establish or sustain contact with them to support migrant community members and their children. This remains an ongoing challenge since late 2019.

Children and adolescents especially girls of Migrant Labourers Community collectively advocate for their rights at local and districts level

Due to the COVID lockdown and the resulting crisis for migrant communities, CWC has faced significant challenges in facilitating advocacy efforts for these communities and their children. Survival has understandably become the highest priority for families.

In this context, mobilizing working adolescents and other vulnerable children from migrant laborer communities has become increasingly difficult. CWC has had to rebuild rapport with children and adolescents from scratch due to extended periods of distancing and lockdowns.

Despite these challenges, CWC has carried out capacity-building exercises to enhance the participatory potential of children from migrant laborer communities. These children have been collectively empowered to raise their concerns and issues with urban local bodies and district administration officials. They were also given access to various platforms to demand accountability from the concerned authorities. Issue mapping initiatives were conducted to prepare children for meetings with the Chief Executive Officer of Udupi District Administration and the Chief Officer of the Town Municipality. These interactions highlighted their needs and concerns and familiarized them with the roles and responsibilities of decision-makers.

As a result of these meetings, several improvements were achieved, including the establishment of children's libraries in one locality, addressing delayed scholarships, providing solar lights for education, creating dedicated activity spaces for children, tackling corporal punishment, challenging school discrimination, and addressing the need for more toilets in relation to the population.

Children persistently raised the issue of online education, which was largely inaccessible to them due to lack of technology and connectivity. Many children had to drop out of school as they struggled with these barriers and were unable to clarify doubts or ask questions during online lessons. They have continually demanded that the state provide technology and internet access for those who cannot afford it. Given the poor quality of education they had already experienced, the attempt at online education has largely been ineffective for these children.

National Child Labour Day provided an opportunity for working adolescents, facilitated by CWC, to focus attention on their issues. The events included a consultation with the District Administrations of Udupi, reaffirming the need for accountability and demanding responses from decision-makers.

The objective was to enable working children to assert their agency directly and for officials to acknowledge their concerns and recommendations for change. This included making concrete commitments to address their issues, such as implementing schemes and programs for their welfare and developing tailored plans to address individual children's needs, considering their specific situations. Children consistently emphasized the need for opportunities that combine work and education and highlighted the challenging conditions in their families, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Children of migrant labourers' community and their community members access basic entitlements they are entitled to from the local authorities

Our organization has always embraced a facilitative and enabling role, empowering the constituency to assert their own protagonism in achieving their rights and entitlements. This ethos guided CWC as it continued to support both working and non-working children in the migrant communities of Udupi in accessing their entitlements and realizing their rights to protection, provision, and participation. Through both individual and collective meetings facilitated by CWC, the migrant labor communities identified and listed their collective issues. They raised these issues in meetings with officials and representatives, and submitted memorandums to seek solutions.

In 2019, the constituency's efforts began to yield results, with many of their demands being addressed or gaining traction with authorities. A notable achievement was the establishment of the Anganwadi Centre in Pragathinagar Udupi, specifically for the community's children. Additionally, after multiple submissions to the local gram panchayat and numerous meetings, garbage segregation was implemented in two areas.

During the COVID pandemic and subsequent lockdown, our project facilitated the distribution of cooked food, rations, lodging, health services, and other essentials to these communities in Udupi district, particularly in the peripheral areas around Kundapur and Byndoor taluks. We coordinated with gram panchayats, district administration, civil society organizations, local and state governments, and private donors to ensure that urban poor, elderly, disabled individuals, and migrants received necessary support.

Post-COVID, CWC shifted focus to advocating for children's rights. We engaged in repeated dialogues with children to emphasize the need for advocacy and to sensitize local authorities about their responsibilities to provide basic facilities and entitlements for migrant communities, who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

On National Child Labour Day, working children had the opportunity to interact with officials, which fostered empathy and a deeper understanding of their challenges.

After the pandemic, CWC conducted a survey of families living in tents around Udupi. We facilitated the presentation of survey findings and recommendations, emphasizing the right to citizenship and protection, to the Deputy Commissioner of Udupi district and the Deputy Secretary of the Labour Department of Karnataka. As a result, the District Administration is now planning to construct shelters for migrant labor communities and has assured that these communities will be prioritized in housing allocations by the Urban Development Board in collaboration with the Town Municipality.

Reduction in the prevalence of alcohol abuse in the migrant labourers' communities

Alcohol consumption and abuse is rampant in the migrant labour communities. Alcohol related harm has been highlighted by the migrant labour communities (MLCs) in several problem identification & priority ranking exercises. In the face of the struggle of the community to respond to socio-economic-political situations on the communities, level of pressure to take care families, past debts and increased debt burden due to COVID and aftermath, as well as increase in alcohol consumption by men in the families. These have cumulatively adversely influenced all of our awareness initiatives and attempts to encourage women and children to raise their voice against alcohol abuse and violence. It is regrettable that as of now, no concrete actions have been taken by the government to support the community members to recover from their mental stress – hence our work and interventions are critical and significant.

When children raised their concerns about social negative practices in the community, instead of getting support, they had to face counter allegations that their communities were violent, unhygienic and a nuisance in the locality. Such a response would silence children and affect their agency at times.

Our interventions at the local level have not witnessed long term sustainability because of the apathy and the indifference of the state policy. There have been extremely adverse steps taken by the government to push for increased consumption of alcohol which calls for a larger and comprehensive strategy to be developed. As the state has a high dependence on revenue generated from the sale of alcohol, CWC has been unable to influence the district and/or the state to restrict the supply of alcohol despite presenting all its affects on wellbeing of women and children. It is disgraceful that the annual financial target on excise of the state increased when the budget allocation for the protection of children and women has decreased steeply.

The challenges to reduce prevalence of alcohol abuse in the migrant labourers communities remain for CWC. In addition, post COVID we note there is increased use of alcohol in the community which the youth are turning to in noticeable numbers. These also prove a grave danger for children and adolescents. We will need to equip ourselves and/or have collaborations with organisations working with prevention of alcohol abuse to build in information about abuse of drugs along with alcohol in our awareness outreach, field responses and policy work.

State and National Policy and Advocacy Impact

Intended Outcome: Working children & adolescents, girl children, children and adults from migrant and vulnerable rural and urban communities, inform and influence the government policies at the state and national level, to enable a policy environment and a systemic change conducive to realizing their rights to protection, provision and participation, with a focus on child rights , citizenship and governance, and prevention of alcohol abuse.

In line with the theory of change, during the past five years, CWC has accentuated its strategic focus on child rights and children's agency, citizenship and governance, and continued its efforts to highlight and initiate collective dialogue on all issues upholding or violating the rights of its constituencies, including alcohol related harm, governance and decentralisation.

The thrust of CWC has been on strengthening the grassroots interventions to garner solidarity among CWC's constituency members, but also across other movements, networks and federations to highlight the constituencies' issues and concerns, and to demand for their rights to protection, provision and participation, at all levels.

In its efforts, CWC has actively developed, collaborated and at times also anchored collective state level and national level processes that have partnered with the appropriate constituency members. These boundary partners include working children & adolescents especially girl children, their community members, adults from vulnerable rural communities and CSOs working with similar issues. As a result, the constituency members have been able to map/consolidate their issues, access appropriate information for their informed participation, vocalise/present their demands in a proactive manner, use online and social media for effective/fast communication, harness their collective bargaining power – all of these to inform, influence and engage with decision makers at the local, district, state, national and international levels.

CWC's strategies have included supporting grassroots mobilisation with data and information curating, capacity building for information management and advocacy, being alert to policies that violate the rights of the constituencies, quickly sensing policy-opportunities, proactively initiating programme led policy, issue based networking, empowerment of constituencies, alliance building of CSOs/CBOs, state, national and international level federations social monitoring and active media engagement.

CWC had to acquire the knowledge and build alliances to address unexpected floods in some parts of the state. These were followed by COVID – 19 with its unprecedented impact on all aspects of development. CWC also had to navigate a very challenging socio-political and economic terrain where people and children were struggling for their very survival – and had no mental band-width for empowerment/advocacy. So, CWC had to urgently address policy lapses/lacunae and advocate for their speedy resolutions. Even in the mid and long term, on account of the wide spread effect of COVID on various socio-economic and geographical factors, CWC had to strategically focus on a host of issues – including some (like health, nutrition etc) in which it had to acquire knowledge and competence, on the job. Many of CWC's efforts and success were also due to the support of empathetic senior and mid-level bureaucrats and committed CSOs it partnered with.

In effect, the cumulative strategic efforts of CWC, supplemented by independent initiatives have actualised into systemic policy changes, thematic federations, inter-sectoral dialogues and demonstration of bottom up and scalable practices/models/approaches. This has been accentuated by the formation of partnerships with issue-based alliances - in solidarity with its constituencies and partner organisations - to work towards strengthening environments that uphold the rights of the constituencies. A few significant examples, which will be detailed in the course of the report are development of the Udupi District Child Rights Protection Protocol and scaling it to other districts in the state, the Children Ambassadors of Change Network and its role in highlighting the rights and agency of working children

and adolescents, the Young Voices National Movement, active involvement of CWC in the development of a State's MIS system on COVID impacted children; being part of a rapid-action state response team with state level officials and active CSOs, co-designing and being a member of the Special Advisory team for the Child Responsive Local Governance project, Government of Karnataka, to amplifying the views of children and community members at the international level such as the UN agencies at the regional and global forums on issues such as child labour, children's citizenship, child protection, digital safety, children's sexuality and reproductive rights. early and child marriages, after-care of children in care institutions, democratic education and impact of alcohol and substance abuse on children, with the Child Friendly Governance Project (CFGFP) – from facilitating children's agency and participation in the Global Call to Action for an International Day of Play. being a member of the Global Working Committee guiding the implementation of the entire project and to also be a member of the Executive Board of the CFGFP.

CWC is a member of the Catalyst 2030 global as well as national network in collaboration with over 2000 multi-sectoral organisations working towards meaningful and synergetic pathways to meet the SDG goals.

State & National policies and programmes promote the Protection, Provision and Participation Rights of the constituency namely working children & adolescents, girl children, children and adults from migrant and vulnerable rural and urban communities

CWC period has seen a significant decline in the quality of the policy climate, increasingly narrowing its focus on child rights and development. In response, CWC has partnered with its constituency to create tangible opportunities for their concerns and demands to be addressed at district, state, national, and international levels. Notable efforts include:

- Providing a detailed critique and recommendations on the National Child Protection Policy Draft (2018-2019).
- Contributing to Bhima Sangha's Manifesto development in 2019.
- Creating platforms for flood-affected victims in North Karnataka (2019-20) to liaise with authorities and access entitlements.
- Facilitating the agency and citizenship of children, particularly working children, adolescents, and other vulnerable groups across 2021 and 2022.
- Anchoring the Young Voices National Movement's critique of the government's move to raise the age of marriage, rather than addressing systemic factors contributing to child and early marriage.
- Leading the Children as Ambassadors Of Change's (CAOC) Working Adolescents' National Petition.
- Coordinating CAOC's endorsement of the Joint International Declaration of International Working Children's Movements.

These initiatives reflect CWC's commitment to advocacy at various levels, serving as platforms for constituencies to engage with governments and global policy think tanks. They address issues of rights violations and entitlements while emphasizing the agency and meaningful participation of children.

The COVID pandemic exacerbated existing challenges, leading to severe crises for children and communities. CWC responded with a multi-pronged strategy to address immediate, short-term, and long-term impacts, including:

- Facilitating engagements with decision-making bodies at state, national, and international levels for emergency response.
- Prioritizing food and nutrition, stable livelihoods, health care, uninterrupted quality education, and protection from abuse and exploitation.
- Successfully advocating for children's right to nutritious meals with the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD).
- Securing access to menstrual sanitation and other health needs for adolescent girls.

- Advocating for hostel facilities and educational aid for students impacted by COVID.
- Conducting a state-level consultation on children's mental health and wellbeing, and incorporating disaster mitigation and social support into policy updates.

Despite pandemic restrictions, CWC maintained contact with constituencies through digital and telephonic means. This virtual engagement has facilitated broader participation and representation, overcoming financial and logistical barriers. Examples include:

- AIWGRC's virtual platform for children across India to share issues and solutions.
- A nationwide process for young people to submit recommendations for the National Youth Policy 2021, with over 400 participants from 14 states.
- In 2023, CWC, through YVNM, critiqued the National Child Protection Policy Draft, with consultations in Karnataka and endorsements from various organizations.

CWC also collaborated with the National Children's Forum (NCF) to design and organize large events for approximately 90 young people from nine states, energizing participants and fostering discussions on various issues. Following the event, participants continued to engage through social media and local initiatives.

Additionally, 200 young people from the Association of People With Disabilities were trained on Children's Rights as part of the 'inclusion in education' program.

CWC has represented these processes at international forums, often in the absence of boundary partners, including:

- YVNM's National Report on age of marriage being considered by the Maharashtra State Task Force and various international organizations.
- The International Movement of Working Children and Adolescents' submission receiving international attention from CSOs, the ILO, CLARISSA, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

CWC is a partner organization in the Child Friendly Governance Project, Geneva, and has contributed to the call for an International Day of Play (IDOP) through collaborations with UNGA, Plan International, and the International Association for Play.

Components of District Child Rights Friendly, community based approaches are developed by the state as scalable.

Throughout this project period, national and state governments have consistently shown resistance to expressions of dissent and increasingly restricted access to consultative spaces for communities to voice their concerns. This limits constituencies from exercising their fundamental rights and entitlements. Efforts by these constituencies to critique government policies or engage in non-violent protests are often labelled as unpatriotic or disruptive rather than being seen as democratic means of upholding the country's constitutional commitments.

Despite these challenges, CWC has seized several opportunities for constructive critique and dialogue to assist communities in accessing their entitlements and exercising their rights. Examples of successful advocacy and strategic networking include:

- Leading the critique of the transfer of Childline Services from the Ministry of Women and Child Development to the Ministry of Home Affairs (2021-2022).
- Supporting secular voices of children in Udupi district to resist religious and regional disharmony caused by the 2021 Hijab ban in educational institutions.

- Successfully convincing the state to repeal its order closing Child Care Institutions during the second wave of COVID.

CWC has also highlighted the severe impact of COVID on children's rights and entitlements, including their right to education and socio-economic well-being. It collaborated with key civil society organizations (CSOs) to assess the 'COVID education emergency' and provided in-depth recommendations to relevant departments within a child rights framework. CWC effectively mobilized officials into action, such as the reactivation of consultative processes for developing District Child Rights Protection Protocols in eight districts, in coordination with the Directorate of Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS).

These advocacy efforts have led to the exploration of replicating components of the UDCPP at various state levels. Notably, CWC contributed to the formation of the first-ever Taluk (Block) Level Child Rights Task Force in North Karnataka, encompassing children, community representatives, and local and block government representatives in Huvinahadagali taluk, Bellary district.

CWC also responded to several policy interventions that undermine constitutional rights for children. For instance, it led a successful collective advocacy effort that resulted in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) retracting its directive mandating affiliated colleges to monitor and censor students' social media accounts in 2019.

Additionally, the Government of Karnataka launched a progressive program under the Center for Child Responsive Governance (CRLG), piloted in 100 Panchayats across Karnataka in 2023. CWC was commissioned to design the adolescent work module and the adolescent club model, which was adopted into the program's design. CWC contributed to all Train-the-Trainer (TOT) materials, provided capacity building for 100 Master Trainers, and offered IEC inputs. The CWC is also a member of the Center's Special Advisory Committee.

State alcohol policies and programs better regulate the sale of alcohol and there is a reduction in alcohol-related harm.

In Karnataka, children and women, who are the primary beneficiaries of CWC, have been steadfast advocates against alcohol abuse and its illegal sale. This issue has led to alcohol being readily accessible to both adults and children, violating statutory restrictions including minimum age limits. Over the years, these advocates have researched the physical, mental, economic, and social costs of alcohol and have persistently confronted officials with evidence demanding action. They have also protested despite facing severe repercussions.

At the beginning of 2019, CWC conducted a scoping study that highlighted the State Government's role in the failure to address illegal alcohol sales, largely due to the state's Excise Policy. Since 2019, alcohol consumption in Karnataka has increased by 77%, with excise revenue soaring by 273%. In 2018 alone, excise revenue jumped from ₹17,000 crores to ₹19,750 crores. This surge in revenue targets has pressured officials at every level to increase alcohol sales, even though the requirement for a minimum procurement of Indian Made Foreign Liquor to retain a license was removed and largely concealed.

The Excise Department's aggressive expansion into rural markets was justified as a measure to regulate spurious liquor and prevent drug use. In response, CWC conducted a Situational Analysis Study in Kundapur Taluka, Udupi district in 2019, documenting the community's concerns and frustrations. This led to five panchayats passing resolutions against the Excise Minister's proposal for door-to-door alcohol supply. The communities, driven by women and children, successfully pressured local governments to oppose this plan and demand its withdrawal. They also sought assurances from the Chief Minister that such plans would be halted.

Women's groups across the state, including those within CWC's constituencies, voiced strong opposition. A press release condemned the government's move as a failure to protect children and

women. The arguments presented highlighted the severe health, social, and economic costs of such policies. Due to intense pressure, the Chief Minister intervened, leading to the Excise Minister retracting the proposal and issuing a clarification that such plans would not be pursued. However, the state's focus on revenue generation from alcohol continues to hinder progress.

CWC has also facilitated judicial recourse, such as the Writ Petition by Beedi Panchayat in Belagavi district, challenging the Excise Department's violations of their decision to ban alcohol sales. Despite these efforts, the government's revenue-driven focus undermines progress. Illegal alcohol sales persist due to the pressure on excise officials to meet revenue targets, with outlets often resuming operations shortly after raids.

Karnataka ranks among the top states in alcohol revenue collection. In 2020-2021, the excise department collected ₹23,332 crore, exceeding its target by ₹600 crore. Excise duties contribute 21% of the state's tax revenue and 12% of its overall income. Revenue targets have seen annual increases of ₹1,000 to ₹1,500 crore.

Engagements with constituencies, particularly women and children, reveal that illegal alcohol sales are often in collusion with excise inspectors pressured to meet targets. Licensed shop owners face threats of license cancellation if sales do not meet expectations, reflecting the state's prioritization of alcohol sales.

This situation has left children and young people frustrated but undeterred. CWC continues to advocate for systemic changes, incorporating alcohol and substance abuse as violations of children's rights in policy instruments such as the Karnataka State Child Protection Policy and the Udupi Child Rights Protection Protocol.

Internationally, CWC has successfully advocated for children's rights and participation in addressing substance abuse, with recognition from organizations like the World Federation Against Drugs and European Cities Against Drugs. Despite these advancements, the challenge remains to elicit a state response. Post-COVID, there is a rise in cannabis and other psychotropic drug use among youth, necessitating collaboration with substance abuse organizations to address these issues in outreach, field responses, and policy work.

The State fulfils its constitutional and legislative commitments of devolution of power to rural and urban self-governments to make it more participatory, transparent and accountable

During CWC period, there were significant developments in governance and democratic decentralization.

In 2019, a key strategic achievement was the facilitation of the Gram Panchayat Hakkottaaya Andolana (GPHA) to successfully advocate with the State Government. This resulted in an Order for Karnataka Development Programme (KDP) meetings to be held at the Gram Panchayat level instead of the district level. This change reinforced the bottom-up approach to development, supported the devolution of powers to Gram Panchayats, and empowered them to demand accountability from district and state officials.

CWC also engaged in the Honourable Voters' Campaign in response to the polarizing National General Elections of 2019. The campaign aimed to ensure the integrity of citizenship and voting. The campaign's message, "MY VOTE IS NOT FOR SALE," was promoted through various media channels and adopted by the Election Commission of Karnataka as a call for honorable voting. The campaign, which began as a grassroots effort in 2010, has been embraced by numerous civil society organizations and institutions. The Udupi District Administration's SVEEP Programme also supported the campaign by funding the publication of key materials.

In relation to the Karnataka Gram Swaraj Act, the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (RDPR) department's statement about developing new Responsibility Maps was challenged by GPHA. They pointed out that a detailed Responsibility Map already existed, developed through consultations with local governance representatives and referenced in the Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayati Raj Act (GS Act 2015). Despite GPHA's advocacy, the Responsibility Map was not incorporated into the Gazette Notification, leading to ongoing efforts to ensure its inclusion.

During the COVID pandemic, CWC advocated for Grama Panchayats to operate effectively as local self-governments. This advocacy led to orders for Grama Panchayats to form task forces, including representatives from various sectors to manage the crisis. CWC also focused on addressing the needs of working children and adolescents, ensuring local governments responded to their concerns.

Several advocacy initiatives aimed at long-term stability included securing a circular from the MGNREGA Commissionerate to include water management, agriculture, and asset creation works. This was achieved through extensive advocacy with the Commissionerate and other partners.

CWC also addressed the state government's delays in conducting gram panchayat elections, despite permitting other activities. Advocacy with the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary included an online petition and print media campaigns, which contributed to successful pressure on the government to conduct the elections.

CWC facilitated strategic collaborations between gram panchayats and gram sabhas across 31 districts in Karnataka. This included advocacy on MGNREGA issues, leading to consultations with worker collectives and inclusion in a core team focused on improving MGNREGA implementation and local governance.

During the pandemic, CWC helped panchayats identify children in distress and provided support, including counselling and access to schemes. CWC also supported the liaison of gram panchayats with child protection structures to ensure children's rights and effective local governance.

The Honourable Voter's Campaign also involved statewide perspective-building and highlighting the Children's Manifesto, developed by Bhima Sangha and Makkala Sanghas, in the Civil Society Manifesto deliberations.

Overall, CWC has played a crucial role in advancing local governance and democratic processes both at the state and national levels.

An Example of our Impact ... Story of Change

Young Voices National Movement

Why?:

On June 23rd, 2020, it was learnt that the Ministry of Women and Child Development of Government of India had set up a Task Force to examine matters pertaining to the age of motherhood, particularly maternal mortality rate (MMR) and nutritional levels, with a mandate to provide recommendations for legislative response by July 31, 2020. Within the three weeks, 'Young Voices' was able to involve around 2500 children, adolescents and youth in rural, peri-urban and urban areas, predominantly from marginalised communities across 15 States, facilitated by 96 Civil Society Organisations.

What?

On July 17th, 2020, 4 representatives of the 'Young Voices' process spoke to the Task Force in a webinar. Each one of them fulfilled the criteria of being from marginalised communities, with a history of activism and engagement with social movements. The young persons were extremely vocal, articulate and made their points related to all causal issues forcefully. They pointed out how poverty, lack of options, agency, educational opportunities and employment opportunities affects them most. They spoke of girls being seen as a liability and how that affects their lives. They referred to criminalisation of consensual sexual relationships of young people, the impact COVID is having on their lives - and what needs to be done to support them at these times was also shared. The negative experience from Karnataka where Child Marriage has been made void and how it has led to more harm than good was also shared. They covered a host of issues to explain how increasing the age of marriage will either harm; or have no impact by itself unless the root causes of women's disempowerment are addressed. YVNM's National Report on the age of marriage and all its attendant issues were considered by the Maharashtra State Task Force on Age of Marriage by the Adolescent Development and Adolescent Participation (ADAP) Unit of the UNICEF Regional Office of South Asia (ROSA), UNEFCEM, OCHR's EFCM unit to address early, forced and child marriages, the UN - Committee on the Rights of Child, as a core reference document on this matter internationally and regionally. Since its inception in 2020, the Young Voices National Movement (YVNM) has evolved into a platform to promote and hold the agency of young people in matters that concern them and their communities. Thus YVNM has subsequently developed exhaustive and nationally acknowledged critiques to the National Youth Policy draft, National Child Protection Policy draft, all the while ensuring that the agency and recommendations of the children and young people at the forefront. YVNM is also evolving to become a resource space for cross learnings, ideations and solidarity.

CWC's learnings:

This submission is an amalgamation of the views of around 2500 young people. They laid out, with the clarity of their lived realities, all the issues the Task Force must take into serious consideration - the causal and systemic issues surrounding early marriages of girls, maternal and infant malnutrition. Anything short of these, they strongly argue, will not make any dent on the issue at best and at worst, gravely harm and criminalise them, whom the state is supposed to protect. Core issues discussed by the young people examine the status of girls and women - as individuals, as members of communities and citizens of India. They delve into the matters of their identity, their opportunities, their agency and their entitlements. The issue of the age of marriage clearly emerges only as a subset of this larger canvas as young people clearly do not think that the 'quality of life' is limited to marriage and parenting.

This journey and its learnings have informed and influenced several other processes and informed dialogue beyond age of marriage.

YVNM considers itself as a contributor to stalling the process of the passing of this bill, by directing strategic public focus and dialogue on the matter through the last few years.

How?

The young persons were facilitated to share their views through interviews, focus group discussions, google surveys, life stories and spoken messages. State-level webinars were hosted where young people spoke with and listened to each other across districts.

With Whom?

CWC partnered with 96 organisations at the national level. These were facilitated by a National Working Group consisting of 17 organisations anchored by CWC. The Young Voices – National Working Group, has been successful in mobilising 96 civil society organisations ruling the process and also subsequently to uphold rights of young people.

Way Ahead... Opportunities and Challenges

This period posed several challenges for the realisation of children's rights, grassroots democracy and decentralisation, enabling livelihood options at the local, state and national levels. The COVID – 19 pandemic and its aftermath impacted our constituencies adversely in terms of loss of lives, loss of livelihoods, employment and lack of access to food security and quality healthcare. CWC rose to the challenge to facilitate the constituencies to raise issues of immediate concern at the local, district and state levels. Despite the challenges posed with the onset of the pandemic and the resultant national lockdown, most of our contact with the constituencies was through online and telephonic means. At the panchayat and district levels, CWC has facilitated various initiatives to ensure child rights friendly system of response to issues faced by marginalised children.

The approach of CWC in all its projects is to develop good practices on the ground and to influence policy for systemic changes. After the focused implementation of CWC – its principles and framework are gradually scaled up both geographically and in policy (keeping in mind required variations and flexibilities) in order to bring in systemic changes. The Child Rights Task Forces, the Children's Grama Sabhas, the Village Library Programme, District Child Protection Protocol – are some of the examples of how models have made their way into state policy – which also augers well for their sustainability and stability. The challenge is, that the external environment is at present not favourable to rights-based work and is de-prioritising the needs of the vulnerable. However at CWC, albeit the obstacles, we will continue to strive to sustain, and thus evolve in our narrative and action, in partnership with children, young people and their communities!

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