

GIRLS CAN!

YOUTH LEADERSHIP & SOCIAL CIRCUS
FOR ADIVASI GIRLS

ORISSA, INDIA 2005-06



GIRLS CAN WAS DESIGNED AND DELIVERED BY
Sasha Kiessling and Marta Kaszubska

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH Gram Vikas, India
WITH SUPPORT FROM Cirque du Soleil, Canada

The 'Girls Can' programme was designed by, and is the property of Sasha Kiessling and Marta Kaszubska. If you would like more information about this programme, please contact; sash_mike@yahoo.com or marta@ceo.org.pl.

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Cover photo: Curious onlookers, Vidya Vihar school Girls Can programme

GIRLS CAN: Youth Leadership and Social Circus for *Adivasi* Girls, 2005-06

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Girls Can is a youth leadership programme developed by Sasha Kiessling and Marta Kaszubska. This report outlines the delivery of the programme in the East Indian state of Orissa, between December 2005 – February 2006. The programme was delivered in partnership with the local grass non-government organization Gram Vikas, and with the support of Canada's Cirque du Soleil.

Girls Can uses social circus – and in particular juggling, as the means to achieving confidence, leadership, team work and public speaking skills in female *adivasi* (tribal) teenagers.

This report details the development of Girls Can in the context of the social environment and living condition of *adivasi* girls in rural Orissa, and the broader objectives of Gram Vikas' rural development work. The short and long term aims of the programme are outlined, along with the process followed in delivering the programme in three Gram Vikas run residential schools in the south and west of the state. The impacts are described along with challenges faced.

The report aims to provide an inclusive and frank document of the Girls Can programme in order to understand the processes and outcomes, methods used and significant lessons learnt.

Sasha Kiessling
August, 2006

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GIRLS CAN!

Girls Can is a social circus programme, implemented in India throughout 2005 – 2006. Girls Can is a unique and creative approach to youth leadership and female empowerment that has been developed in partnership with the local grassroots Non-Government Organisation (NGO) - Gram Vikas, and with support from Canada's Cirque du Soleil. Gram Vikas has been working for the last three decades with the poor and marginalised rural communities in the East Indian state of Orissa. Gram Vikas strives to empower communities with the capacity to take control of their own destinies, to stand up for their rights and demand a decent and dignified quality of life¹. Cirque du Soleil is a Quebec-based international organization devoted to the creation, production and performance of artistic works. A socially responsible corporation, Cirque du Soleil's social action and circus programme is one means by which they support at-risk youth around the world.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

The Girls Can programme was first developed and piloted in 2003 by long term volunteers to Gram Vikas - Sasha Kiessling (Australia) and Marta Kaszubska (Poland). The programme was developed in the context of the broader development objectives of Gram Vikas, and the environment in which it operates.

Orissa is one of the poorest states in India. The population lives predominantly in rural villages, depending largely on agriculture for survival. More than 40% of the population (around 17.5 million people) live below the poverty line, surviving on an income of less than a dollar a day. As a patriarchal society, women traditionally are assumed to have a subservient role, with little freedom or independence to travel outside of the home/village, engage in paid work, or exercise decision-making and leadership roles within the home or community. Along with women, the indigenous (tribal) communities – known as '*adivasis*', who constitute 22.5% of Orissa's population - form the most marginalized and disadvantaged brackets of the society, ranking lowest in all economic and human development indicators. Throughout history, *adivasi* people have faced prejudice and hardship, exploitation by the mainstream and displacement from their lands, forced deep into the remote mountainous interior of the state, away from state infrastructure such as roads, electricity, phones, and other basic goods and services such as education and health care. Orissa's *adivasis* depend on shifting 'slash-and-burn' cultivation and the gathering of forest products for their survival. Food insecurity, ongoing morbidity and mortality is high, options for productive livelihoods are few and it is typically women and their children who suffer the consequences the most.

¹ As of 2005-06 Gram Vikas actively worked with 26,000 households in 460 villages. Gram Vikas works with the most marginalised brackets of Orissa's society – especially women and indigenous or '*adivasi*' people.

These injustices are just some of the challenges that Gram Vikas works to address, through interventions in health, livelihoods, housing, infrastructure, water and sanitation and education.

In light of the significant absence of government education facilities in remote Orissa, and the subsequently meagre 10% literacy rate amongst all *adivasi* women², Gram Vikas supports more than 100 village-level primary schools and five centrally located boarding (residential) middle and high schools for *adivasi* children. More than 1000 students - all first generation learners, attend Gram Vikas' residential schools where they receive a rounded education in academic, vocational and life skills. It is through these residential schools that the Girls Can programme has been implemented.

Girls Can uses games, team initiative activities, group discussions and fun, creative, experiential learning techniques to teach girl students about empowerment and gender equality, self confidence, public speaking skills, leadership, teamwork, and how to realise their dreams. Juggling and social circus are the means through which the programmes objectives are achieved.

In 2003, 17 students participated in the pilot Girls Can programme. 2 years later, with funding secured from Cirque du Soleil, the programme was extended to 61 more students from 3 other schools in remote corners of the state. In addition, a one-day workshop based on the Girls Can activities was held for all 58 students (boys and girls) of the Gram Vikas' fifth and final residential school, thus all schools have been now covered by the programme. This report concentrates on the three Girls Can programmes delivered during November 2005 – January 2006, detailing in the following chapters the specific methods, impacts and learnings.



Participants of the Tumba Non Child Labour Project (NCLP) school

² Census of India, 2001

CHAPTER TWO: PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The eleven day Girls Can programme was designed and developed in view of the needs of *adivasi* girls in Orissa, India. However, Girls Can was also designed to be transferable and adaptable – over time, and in different communities. The aims of the Girls Can programme are therefore multi-dimensional, directly and indirectly seeking to address a broad range of short and long-term objectives.

Direct short-term goals of Girls Can

1. To develop self-confidence and public speaking skills

Typically shy, nervous and lacking in confidence, young *adivasi* girls in rural Orissa rarely speak in front of others or express their views. Prior to the Girls Can programme most participants were too shy to even stand up and give answers in class, speak to adults and many even had difficulty expressing their feelings amongst friends. The programme uses games and activities designed to build confidence in the girls, encouraging them to identify their strengths and skills, to step up and try new things, to express their views and to practice public speaking in a safe and encouraging environment.

2. Women's empowerment and gender awareness

Although the rights of women are today written into India's constitution, centuries of patriarchy has meant that women's right to all things - from food, education and healthcare, to employment, personal and house-hold decision making as well as basic justice is more often than not biased. Gram Vikas works to sensitise its staff, and the communities with whom they work about sexual discrimination, building greater parity between men and women, and their participation in civil society. The Girls Can programme gives the participants a greater sense of self worth, exploring the concept of equality and women's legal right to stand alongside men in all aspects of life. Activities look at the division of labour – i.e. men's work and women's work, traditions and culture versus equality and the law, and inter-generational differences between the lives of their grandmothers, mothers and themselves, as evidence of the capacity for change over time. The programme also generates a women's only space – created to give the girls a chance to feel liberated and free, encouraged and supported. Positive affirmation and the breaking down of inhibitions are important elements in creating this environment. The girls are given a chance to learn their own set of new and unique (circus) skills. This is intended as a reversal of reality whereby men (and cultural expectations) dominate most spaces and where men typically are the holders of all skilled trades and specialist knowledge. Circus and the space we inhabit through the programme however, is a 'girls-own' zone.

3. Goal setting and future planning; Teamwork and supporting each other

In conjunction with increasing confidence, speaking skills and an understanding of gender and equality, the Girls Can programme helps increase the participants' options in life by providing the life-skills required for working towards achieving their goals. Practical goal setting activities look at the new opportunities available to *adivasi* women in 'modern' or evolving societies, promoting the idea that there are more options in life other than just traditional home duties and family roles.

The girls are encouraged to identify their goals and develop their own step-by-step roadmaps towards getting there. Juggling is used as a powerful metaphor for proving that even the seemingly impossible can be achieved, with practice and determination. Practical games and activities also emphasize the value of teamwork in supporting each other, and the importance of strong support networks amongst women as they strive to define new roles and create change in their villages.

4. Leadership skills and opportunities

Through education, Gram Vikas seeks to raise the next generation of community leaders, with the relevant skills and knowledge to be able to return to their villages and to lead their communities forward. The Girls Can programme works towards this aim with practical exercises and leadership based activities. Local female leaders are invited as guest speakers to share their experiences, motivate the girls and act as valuable role models. Together, they look at existing and potential leadership opportunities within the schools and villages, and share civic information on local self-governance, people's organisations and the roles and responsibilities of government functionaries.

Indirect long-term goals of Girls Can

1. To demonstrate sustainable and replicable 'joyful' teaching methodologies for leadership development in Gram Vikas schools.

Gram Vikas actively promotes 'joyful' learning, as an alternative to the traditional rote learning style that dominates Indian mainstream classroom teaching. However to date, Gram Vikas teachers have been lacking ideas, innovation and/or experience to teach outside of the traditional rote style. In addition, Gram Vikas teachers had expressed difficulties in addressing leadership and personal development subjects in a creative non-confrontational way. The Girls Can programme aims to demonstrate new systems and practical methods for working with young people to address these subjects, using creative, joyful methodologies.

Games and practical activities, art exercises, team initiative tasks, small and large group discussions and circus skills are actively demonstrated, and significant time is given to training teachers and developing their facilitation skills. The Girls Can programme also draws heavily on the use of locally available, low cost teaching materials, which can be easily made and used by the students and teachers themselves. Girls Can offers a fresh approach, new ideas and importantly a replicable format that is easily adaptable to both the needs of students and skill-level of teachers.



Making Juggling balls, Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school

2. To promote education – especially girl-child education, amongst students, parents and the wider community.

As a result of entrenched cultural norms and the resulting expectations on young girls to contribute to household duties from a young age, the large majority of students in the lower economic bracket of society attending Indian schools are boys³.

For those girls that do attend school, the likelihood of irregular attendance and dropping out at an early age is far higher than amongst boys. The Girls Can programme seeks to recognise and celebrate those girls who have continued studying through to high school level, and provide some incentive to younger students to continue their studies. In addition, Girls Can actively seeks to promote the value of girl-child education to parents and the wider community. Local leaders are invited to participate as guest speakers, and parents, local leaders, government dignitaries as well as staff and students from both Gram Vikas and neighbouring government schools are invited to attend a performance at the end of the programme. This event serves as a showcase of the students' achievements, promoting the advantages of (girl child) education, joyful learning and the works of Gram Vikas amongst the wider community.



Abanti Jani with ribbon, Vidya Vihar school

³ In 2004-05 due to a new organisational policy of free education for all girl students adopted by Gram Vikas, enrolment of girl students reached the highest number to date. Despite this, girls were still only one third of the total number of students, and at high school level, the proportion was far less.

CHAPTER THREE:

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

In September 2003, Sasha Kiesslering and Marta Kaszubska drew together Gram Vikas' need for a student leadership programme, and the organisation's desire for greater emphasis on girl child education and gender empowerment in schools, by creating the Girls Can programme. The idea was first developed by Sasha and Marta, brainstorming a long list of issues that could be used as session topics, relevant to the needs of students and the objectives Gram Vikas schools. These were shared with Gram Vikas staff and management who then provided valuable inputs and feedback, helping to narrow the focus and identify priority areas for the programme. Girls from the senior classes, aged 10 – 13 years, were identified as the most suitable target audience. Drawing on our own personal experience and ideas, games, practical activities, group discussions and team initiative tasks were then designed around each of the themes and structured into ten classes of 1-2 hours each.

Juggling was selected as the centrepiece of the Girls Can programme and was used as the vehicle through which all learning occurred. In the process of learning to juggle, the participants learned about trying new things, visualising their goals, not giving up, learning from mistakes and believing in themselves (see box below). In this context, juggling became a powerful metaphor, as well as an excellent way of bringing a fun, active element into every session. It was progressively learnt - step-by-step - over the duration of the course, keeping the girl's attention and ongoing interest in the programme.

JUGGLING - A LESSON IN LIFE

1. Trying new things. Learning to juggle is about learning to have a go at things you have never done before! Just imagine if you never tried new things in your life... You would never learn, never grow, and never develop as a person. You would never get to do the things you are really interested in, and would never find out about the things you've never tried! Finding the courage to try new things will open up many doorways in your life and will teach you about taking opportunities.
2. Achieving goals – step by step. Learning to juggle is about setting a goal – even though it might seem impossible – and dedicating yourself to go for it! On the path to achieving your goals you might become frustrated, angry with yourself, annoyed, embarrassed or shy. You might even think about giving up. To become a juggler – like any goal in life - will take commitment, practice, and dedication. You will need to break down the goal into step-by-step parts. These are all essential life skills that you will need everywhere you go, to achieve anything that you do. If you can learn to juggle – you can learn to do ANYTHING.
3. Learn from mistakes: Sometimes we are scared to try new things in case we can't do it properly, or in case we make a mistake. Sometimes when you learn to juggle you might feel embarrassed when you drop the balls, or if you are unable to do it perfectly. That's OK. Learning to juggle teaches us that to achieve our goals we have to give it a go and be willing to learn from our errors. Think of mistakes as 'learning opportunities'. Make each mistake a lesson in life.

4. Recognizing skills, celebrating success: When trying new things it is essential to recognize your progress and measure every little step towards success. Learn to appreciate and acknowledge your skills, and those of the people around you, and begin to feel good about yourself. Celebrate your achievements! Juggling – like anything in life is easier if we support and encourage each other.



Rasmita Naik and Bhagyalata Jani impress with their juggling skills. Vidya Vihar school

Pilot Programme

The pilot Girls Can programme was delivered during 2003 at Gram Vikas' Konkia school, 6km from the organisation's head office near Mohuda village in Ganjam district, southern Orissa. The programme was supported and funded entirely by Gram Vikas - with no other outside funding. All 17 girl students enrolled in class 8 and 9 participated in the weekly classes. Each class was led by Sasha, Marta and a female teacher who had volunteered for the duration of the programme to provide essential translation and support. Partnering with a female teacher also ensured that there was a familiar contact person available to the participants. She provided encouragement and support, and helped monitor the impacts and progress of the girls between classes and after completion of the programme. She also was a valuable bridge to the rest of the teaching staff, sharing with them the details and progress of the programme at weekly staff meetings.

Upon completion of the pilot programme in December 2003, feedback was sought and documented from participants and teaching staff. All feedback was extremely positive and over the following two years, teachers at Konkia school took up many new initiatives that continued to promote student leadership and affirmative action for

girl students in their school. A bicycle was donated to the girl students by a retiring female teacher – a direct response to the idea that ‘girls can’, in a society where women’s freedom and mobility is limited partly by the fact that they traditionally do not ride bicycles. The impact of this, and other initiatives were reflected in the behaviour of girl students at Konkia school, young and old, who have become increasingly confident, outgoing and willing to speak and ask questions in class, speak to their teachers and other adults, try new things, lead students in school and extra-curricular activities etc.

An unexpected impact of the pilot Girls Can programme was the significant change in attitude in some of the teachers of Konkia school, who themselves – as products of a patriarchal society, held prejudices about the capabilities of girls. However, after the programme, having witnessed first hand the changes and achievements of the participants, many teachers internalised the idea that ‘girls can’ and were clearly more confident in the ability of girls, realising their capacity to perform as equals alongside boys.

Girls Can Programme: December 2005 – February 2006

Two years later, this time with financial support from Cirque du Soleil, the Girls Can programme was expanded to the senior female students of Gram Vikas’ three remaining residential schools. The programme was delivered over three successive months, at the rate of one school per month. Based on the experiences and learnings from the pilot programme, and incorporating specific inputs and suggestions from staff at the remaining schools, small modifications were made to the original content.

- Classes were held daily, instead of weekly, due to time restraints.
- The programme was extended into 11 consecutive classes of two – three hours each, giving much more time to cover each topic.
- New games and circus activities were introduced such as poi, ribbon, hula hoop, skipping, plate spinning and cycling.
- Cultural considerations were revised – especially in the selection of games that may not have translated well or that transgressed personal space boundaries.
- Session content was simplified and focussed to ensure maximum clarity and impact on the participants. This was important given the students’ (and teachers’) lack of exposure to many of the new and ‘foreign’ ideas introduced in the Girls Can programme. Sessions were distilled to just one simple message each day, with a metaphor prepared as the take home message from each class. This message was directly linked to the day’s games and circus activities, which were selected to be clear and simple, fast and relatively easy to learn, with minimal technical/equipment requirements. Even small things can, and do have large impacts in such remote areas, and it was therefore very important to show restraint and not overwhelm the girls, or their teachers, with complex sessions or impressive circus feats. The topics covered are listed in the table below.
- The most significant change made from the original pilot programme content was the addition of a public performance to celebrate completion of the programme, promoting the programme to a wider audience and ensuring a wider impact beyond just the girls involved.

Programme Summary

| Class | Take-home message and class topic | Circus activity or games covered |
|-------|--|---|
| 1 | <i>"Let's begin our Girls Can adventure"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal welcome and inauguration • Introductions, getting to know each other • Group agreement | Ice-breakers Name games |
| 2 | <i>"Girls Can! Everything is possible if you really try!"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to gender • The differences and similarities between girls and boys | Preparing juggling balls |
| 3 | <i>"See your skills, be confident, try new things, learn from your mistakes"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building confidence and self – esteem • Recognising your strengths | Hula hoops Learning to juggle one ball |
| 4 | <i>"Step by step, we can achieve our goals. Men and women can be equal."</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is equality? Are men and women equal? • Society and traditions can change. Who makes that change? We do! | Skipping Learning to juggle two balls |
| 5 | <i>"Step by step, we can achieve our goals."</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future planning • Public speaking | Poi's Learning to juggle three balls |
| 6 | <i>"The importance of teamwork in helping each other achieve our goals"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendship and Teamwork; supporting each other to achieve our goals. | Trust exercises Group initiatives Juggling in pairs 3 ball practice |
| 7 | <i>"Women are leaders. You can be a leader in your school and village!"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speaker – A local female leader • Leadership skills • Leadership opportunities in the school and village | Ribbons |
| 8 | Planning the final performance | Plate spinning, Flags Rotation circus skills |
| 9 | Preparation and rehearsal for final performance. | |
| 10 | Performance Certificates | |
| 11 | Evaluation of Girls Can programme Closing | |

Ladies' cycles were also purchased and donated – two per school, just prior to the start of each programme. Although these were not directly used in the course of the programme, they complimented the Girls Can objectives and students learnt to ride them between and after classes. The impact of this was significant. No students and few teachers had ever seen a ladies cycle before. None knew how to ride. The enthusiasm with which the cycles were received was an excellent precursor to the start of each programme, creating an air of excitement, courage and willingness to try new things.

Facilitation

A female teacher at each school was asked to volunteer as co-facilitator for the duration of the course. Ideally, this teacher was someone relatively confident and encouraging of the girls, who could act as a positive role model. In some cases two or three teachers volunteered for this position, and in other cases volunteer male teachers, who were extremely motivated and supportive of the programme, were also included.

During the course of the programme, daily meetings were held with the teachers to prepare for and reflect on each class. A detailed run-through of every activity was extremely important to ensure full comprehension, and that they were confident and capable of leading sessions and providing accurate translations. In this way, the teachers intimately learnt the methodology and rationale of each activity, and developed their facilitation skills.

Meetings after each class also allowed us to reflect on progress. In this way we were constantly updating the programme and adjusting the class content. Flexibility was extremely important, and the programme was ever evolving and adapted each time it was delivered.



Mohini Mandal cycles with the support of friends, Mahendra Tanaya Ashram School

CHAPTER FOUR: EVALUATION PROCESS AND TOOLS

Monitoring, evaluating and documenting of the Girls Can programme were essential and ongoing components, contributing to its success and sustainability, and essential in establishing the programme within Gram Vikas schools and in the minds of staff and teachers.

Following the pilot programme conducted in 2003, feedback collected in the final class from all participants was collated and analysed, along with observations collected throughout the course of the programme. This data, along with the processes followed and learnings made were then collated in a report and shared internally amongst Gram Vikas teachers, staff and management. As the programme was a new initiative, this report was an important document, recording the specific details of the programme methodology, content, impact and learnings. It was also a useful resource when later replicating the programme and extending it to other Gram Vikas residential schools across the state.

The approach just described – of monitoring, evaluation and documentation - is aligned with Gram Vikas' already well established internal systems and philosophy, measuring and incorporating past learning's into future programme planning. The specific methods used for monitoring, evaluation and documentation of Girls Can in its 2005-06 series, are detailed below.

Observation and monitoring throughout the programme

Observing and evaluating the progress of the Girls Can participants was the ongoing topic of the morning and evening meetings of the programme facilitators. Valuable feedback and inputs were shared amongst ourselves and the supporting co-facilitators – notice being made of the different perspectives and experiences of the local teachers and the foreign volunteers. Accordingly, activities were then prepared and tailored on a daily basis to best suit the progress and level of comprehension of the participants.

Evaluation session – final class

The final class of the Girls Can programme is entirely devoted to feedback, evaluation and follow-on. Participants give verbal feedback, presented in front of the group, as well as individual written feedback (confidentially, if they wish), giving them a chance to express themselves in two different ways.

Verbal feedback is collected creatively, using imagery and imagination as a way of helping them to open up and share their feelings honestly. Each girl is given a balloon and asked to think back over her best memories and experiences throughout the course of the Girls Can programme. She is then asked to 'blow' these memories into the balloon – capturing them inside. Each girl takes it in turn to share with the group what is 'inside her balloon' i.e. what are her best memories of the programme. This gives an impression of the lasting images and special moments that had stood out for each girl. The idea of storing memories and keeping hold of good experiences – as

real and tangible memento's was the key objective to designing this feedback session in this way⁴.

Following this, written feedback was also collected based on the following questions:

1. What did you like the most about Girls Can?
2. What activities were the best for you?
3. What did you learn?
4. What subject was the best? I.e.: leadership, confidence building, gender equality or teamwork?
5. What other things would like to learn more about, that were not covered in the programme?
6. What changes can you see in yourself after the training?

Although this captured a written statement from each girl regarding her views and major learnings from the programme, we found that the feedback received was fairly brief and general. Due to poor literacy skills, girls usually only wrote one to two sentences for each question, and were fairly weak in their ability to express their feelings in written form. In addition, as outlined in Chapter Six (see Challenges and Learnings of project implementation), the answers provided were sometimes relatively 'scripted' i.e.: the girls wrote what they felt were the expected answers, the 'correct' answers, rather than what they may have actually felt. However, collecting written feedback is still considered an important method for evaluating the programme, and represents an important opportunity for the participants to practice their writing and self-expression skills.

Post-programme evaluation and film documentation

Within three to four months of the project finishing, a follow-up visit was made to each school. Both formal and informal discussions were held with staff and students. Evidence of the changes observed in the participants was recorded. Formal interviews were held with teachers and students which were recorded on film. This footage, along with film footage recorded throughout the course of the programme has been used to create a small documentary film of the Girls Can programme. This film has been a significant tool for documenting the impacts of Girls Can, through visually demonstrating the changes in behaviour in the participants – before, and after. Extended interviews with students and staff are also a valuable record and testimony to the impacts of the programme. This film not only stands as a record of the proceedings and impacts of Girls Can, but is also a useful tool for promoting the programme, for training teachers in the methods and materials used, and for raising awareness amongst the wider community.

⁴ This was again the approach when the girls were gifted 'magic stones' at the end of the programme – which were an embodiment of the values and skills developed. Holding the magic stones in their hand, the girls could seek confidence, determination, or whatever she wished for.

CHAPTER FIVE: PROJECT RESULTS AND IMPACTS

Through social circus, the Girls Can programme sought to address a number of short and long term aims. Impacts have been felt not just by the participants, their teachers and the Gram Vikas schools directly involved, but through a ripple effect, impacts may also be observed within the wider organisation, and even amongst the families and rural *adivasi* communities with whom they work.

Impacts on participants

Based on the words and written feedback from the participants themselves, the degree to which the short-term aims of this programme have been met are detailed below. The long-term aims have not been directly assessed here, as it is too early to make a fair judgement. However the expected long term results have been alluded to where relevant, and extrapolated from the description of follow-on activities that have already occurred.

Before looking at the degree to which the specific aims of Girls Can have been met, it is first noteworthy to mention feedback from the participants that acknowledges the processes and means through which these goals were reached. Girls Can uses circus skills, games, creative expression and group initiative tasks as metaphors or vehicles, rather than as the main objectives of the programme. In other words, circus was used as a means for achieving broader goals of cultural and personal change, rather than as an outcome in itself. Based on the participants' feedback, it is positive to see that all had a very clear understanding that this was the overall purpose of the programme; they could recognise the circus activities – juggling in particular - as a metaphor, connecting and applying what they were learning to their own lives.



Namita Pradhan juggles for the crowd, Vidya Vihar school

“I liked the juggling game very much because my mind became steady by playing juggling. It enhanced my knowledge of courage. The fear in my mind was removed.”

Nilendri Nayak. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“I liked juggling very much because it is a difficult game. Due to playing that game, fear and shyness vanished in me and my self confidence increased.”

Saudamini Majhi. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“Life is full of mistakes... Out of those mistakes we can learn new things. When they practiced juggling, they dropped the balls. Then they collected them again and started juggling... So this way they came to know they can learn something out of mistakes, and not to give up.”

Sujata Pradhan. Teacher, Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur

Girls Can, Aim Number 1: To develop self-confidence and public speaking skills

All girls participating in the Girls Can programme noted a considerable increase in their self-confidence. This was one of the biggest impacts of the programme, with positive results and changes clearly observable in all the girls' behaviour. The body language and demeanour with which they now present themselves is a good sign of improvement. Their willingness to try new things and participate in extra-curricular activities is also a good sign. Eye contact, laughter and physical contact, which were rarely seen before, are now common amongst the girls. Students have also shown much more confidence and self-assurance in coming forward to speak with guests and visitors to the school. Evidence suggests significant improvements in the girls' participation in class and interactions with their teachers, with them asking more questions and speaking in front of groups. This is likely to have direct a result on their academic performance, improve their results and quality of education. Sujata Pradhan, a teacher and Girls Can facilitator from Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur confirms this change -

“Girls Can programme is a nice programme and the children have confidence and teamwork in what they are doing. They cooperate with each other... Before they were hanging their heads down, but now they lift their heads up high. They pay more attention to their teacher. Now they interact with their teachers more freely, but previously they were not so free. This Girls Can programme makes them more able to talk with their teachers. The teachers are also very happy. Somehow the Girls Can programme has made our children so developed.”

Following are quotes from some of the participants noting the benefits they experienced from the programme:

“Girls were shy before. I was very shy and afraid when I saw boys. With shame and fear I would hide myself. But after Girls Can programme I do not fear anybody and I even speak to my teachers with courage! And I am going to go many places by entering in (interschool) competitions. Now I have no shyness, fear has disappeared and my courage and strength has developed.”

Saubhagini Majhi, Siskshya Niketanschool, Thaumul Rampur



Shanti Sabar practices public speaking Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school

“My courage has increased after the training; timidity has gone. Earlier I feared to talk, but now I am able to speak loudly and I want to participate in all activities.”

Baidehi Majhi, Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“I was feeling shy earlier; I was timid. I was not able to make friendship with others. These habits have changed now.” Anonymous. Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar

“I liked learning self confidence, because my shyness and fear were removed. Before, I was not able to speak with my head up in front of anyone. Now I am able to speak before everyone with a smiling face.”

Anonymous. Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar

“After Girls Can programme I dared to speak in big gatherings and meetings. I can also communicate my views with elders without fear. That I could not do before.”

Minati Naik. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

Girls Can Aim Number 2: Women’s empowerment and gender awareness

The Girls Can programme has been effective in addressing women’s empowerment and gender equality in a number of ways. Quite simply, the programme has proven to the participants their strengths and abilities. Learning to cycle, mastering circus feats, standing up and speaking before a crowd, becoming a community leader – these were all things that inherently girls though they were incapable of doing, or should not attempt to try before. Believing in themselves, experiencing their own potential and witnessing first hand the abilities and potential other of women has been a direct result.

Girls Can has had many direct impacts on the participation of girls within the classroom and schoolyard. One example is the significant increase in female participation in games and sports. Where before there were few girl’s sports, or



Sakuntala Gamanga,
Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school

opportunities for them to be active, now there are many. Skipping, plate spinning, ribbons, hula hoops, cycling and poi’s have been a big success and all of these new games (except cycling) are viewed as ‘girls only’ activities. It is the first time that girls have been able to develop their own unique and exclusive set of skills, not shared by the boys! For this, they feel proud. Likewise, throughout the programme a physical space in the schoolyard was created exclusively for girls to play in - for the first time. This has continued as a permanent feature in at least one school. Creating this space has helped and encouraged girls in being active, free of inhibitions and confident to be themselves and try new things. Both the immediate and long-term implications of this, although difficult to measure, cannot be underestimated.

On another level, a significant outcome has been the appearance of new words into the girls vocabulary's, providing them with the language of power and equality. The words 'Girls Can' make a clear and powerful statement and have become a mantra amongst girl students in Gram Vikas schools; a slogan which has given them strength and determination. The programme has helped provide them not just the confidence, but with a whole new vocabulary with which to stand up and defend themselves. The language of Girls Can has also left a lasting impression on younger girl students, boys and teachers. The words 'girls can' are now regularly heard in the playground of Gram Vikas schools – as a question, as defiance, as encouragement. This change in the collective view of the status of women within their schools and communities has been critical in increasing girls individual confidence and self esteem.

This feedback comes directly from the participants –who share their views below:

“This programme is about how girls are backward in all fields. We discussed how girls will advance in all fields, how girls can do the work of boys, and how girls will go to higher levels. We will not feel shy, we will speak out clearly, we will work jointly in a team... Actually, with effort and hard work it can be done easily. If we will not make an effort, then no work can be done... with effort we will move forward... Earlier we were feeling shy and thought that we cannot do any work. Boys were also saying girls are unable to do anything. But after this programme we have improved to some extent.”

Shanti Sabar. Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur

“From this we learnt that girls can do any work; girls can become leaders. Boys or girls – it makes no difference. In gender they are different, but in work boys and girls are equal.”

Luli Gaudo. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“We have changed considerably after the training. We have been able to demonstrate that what we earlier thought we could not do, we can do it! The timidity that we had in our mind is gone.”

Anjali Majhi. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“This programme has taught us many things: how girls can do every thing, how they will advance, how girls can do work like boys. It has taught us to speak loudly, to be happy, help and cooperation, self confidence, punctuality, making fun, unity. We are now able to discuss problems faced by women, to think about our future plans, to each be a leader.”

Padmini Sabar. Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur

Girls Can Aim Number 3: Goal setting and future planning

Tuni Malika of Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar quite simply says -
“I liked it that you asked me the aims of my life.”

In a society where the thoughts and ideas of girls are rarely heard, and where opportunities in life are heavily restricted by culture and circumstance, Girls Can gave the participants' permission – often for the first time - to voice their ideas and dreams. The Girls Can programme made a point of hearing and valuing each girl's goals, opinions, aspirations and ideas. This simple gesture opened up a world of possibility.

Participants also learnt the skills to realise these dreams breaking them down step-by-step into achievable goals. Kamala Jena, teacher and Girls Can co-facilitator from Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar confirms –

“They have some desire in their hearts, and we have to ask them about what are their goals. Amongst them, some have high targets to become such-and-such. And if it is so, they should get some encouragement and the self-confidence should build up in their mind and hearts. I think this Girls Can programme is very much necessary for these children, because in future they should not feel weak inside themselves; they should believe they can do everything, equally to their male partners.”

As a result of goal setting exercises, many students now have greater self-determination and sense of purpose. Increases in their awareness of life opportunities and livelihood prospects have direct and immediate implications to their commitment to study, and their academic progress. The participants now see a range of possibilities and realise their potential for contributing positively to their communities. In the long term, it will be important to monitor if this corresponds to an increase in the numbers and standard of educated girls in the region, and/or women in leadership positions in the region.

In the following quotes, some participants talk about their goals.

“My aim in life is grow up and study hard and then become a doctor. I like to serve the people, so I want to become a doctor. People are suffering from fever and diseases, so I want to cure them as a doctor. I will be a doctor and I will go to the villages and cure the people of superstitions and ignorance and encourage them to speak the truth and I will help to establish equality. I will ask them to study and try to make them good people. I will be very happy if I achieve my goal.”

Bhagyalata Jani. Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar

“Learning about our goals for the future was good, because in future one can be a great person. For that, some money has to be saved. I now have some ideas as to what I could be in future.” Bijay Laxmi Dalai. Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur

“My aim is to become a teacher. A good teacher. I like to study and I would like to teach the children very much. During class time, I listen attentively and again in the hostel I revise and try to understand the lesson. We face difficulties in our studies, but we will try to overcome them step-by-step. Though we face difficulties, still we study attentively and we will try and improve ourselves.”

Mamata Pradhan. Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar

Girls Can Aim Number 3: Teamwork and supporting each other

Teamwork, and learning to work together to support each other was another favourite topic covered in the programme. Community and family life is very close-knit in rural Orissa, and the unity, strength and camaraderie of women's alliances is highly valued. Group initiative tasks were extremely popular, and the girls enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with each other to achieve various goals. This is reflected in their comments below:

“Group work is helping each other, working together with friendly feelings; it improves our self confidence if we work in groups. If we all try together, we can do any work.”
Gitanjali Jani. Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar

“The other girls helped me at the time of learning bicycle riding...In whatever work we did, friends helped. In case of any difficulty, friends can help. So I liked this group work.”
Sagarika Karjee. Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur

“In the Girls Can programme, I liked the activity ‘teamwork’ very much. The reason is that working with team spirit makes everything easy. The work is finished quickly. Teamwork means cooperation. By cooperating we can do everything properly. So I liked teamwork very much.” Luli Gaudo. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“I like very much team work, because we can do any big work in a team. For example, if one of us has to lift a big boulder, she can't. But if we do that in a group, we can do it easily. We can do more work in less time by working in a group. What is impossible for us can be possible by thinking in a group.”

Rashmita Nayak. Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur



Team Games: Siskshya Niketan school



Team Games: Vidya Vihar school

Girls Can Aim Number 4: Leadership skills and opportunities

As the girls' aspirations for the future have opened up, so too has their realisation of the potential to be active and valued members of their communities, and the possible leadership positions available to them. The participation of female leaders as guest speakers was a valuable and important element of the Girls Can programme. They explained the range of possibilities to the girls, the various committees, women's groups and community organisations that operated in each area, and provided living proof that women's leadership was an achievable reality. This opportunity was also a chance for local leaders to be acknowledged and appreciated – giving them a rare sense of pride in their achievements. Within the schools, girls are now taking up more and more leadership positions, speaking at school functions and representing their schools at inter-school competitions.

“The Sarpanch⁵ came and spoke about how she became Sarpanch. I liked that because girls were not becoming Sarpanch's or Chairmen⁶ before. Now girls are. The Sarpanch encouraged us and advised each of us to become a good person.”

Rashmita Gahir. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“After this training I can be a leader. I can take part in all work, and I can do all the work that boys are doing. After this training my courage and strength have increased, and shyness is gone”

Minati Naik. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

“I no longer feel shy. Before I didn't mix with others, but now I am able to make friends. I want to be a leader in future. I will be able to unite people and make them my friends. I will tell them to have self confidence.”

Anonymous. Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar

Impacts on Gram Vikas

- For teachers and schools

Girls Can was received with an enormous amount of enthusiasm and openness by the teachers and school staff of Gram Vikas' residential schools. Eager to learn new ideas for 'joyful learning' materials, games and teaching methodologies, they have embraced those demonstrated in Girls Can with gusto. Immediately after the programme, at least one school has already made more poi - from low cost, locally available materials - made and used by girl students - young and old. Other schools have expressed interest in securing more materials in future. Materials, games and activities used in Girls Can have been incorporated into the regular sports sessions of all schools and girls are now seen practicing cycle-riding, juggling, skipping etc, during sport classes and their free time.

⁵ A *Sarpanch* is a 'local mayor' or elected representative of a '*Panchayat*'. Built into the Indian democratic system is the *Panchayati Raj* system of local self-governance. A '*Panchayat*' is the lowest elected tier of government, and comprises an area covering, on average, 10 small villages. The *Sarpanch* is the elected representative.

⁶ The *Chairman* is an elected representative above that of *Sarpanch*. The *Chairman* represents a 'block' or conglomerate of a number of '*Panchayats*'.

These skills have also been incorporated into the school 'cultural programmes' whereby students perform, accompanied often by singing and dancing, for visitors and at school events and inter-school competitions/functions.

Although little formal evaluation has been made in this area, it is hoped that the teaching methodologies promoted as an alternative to rote learning i.e. group discussions and debate, team initiative tasks and experiential learning, will have a lasting impression on Gram Vikas teachers. What has been noted already is a more confident, relaxed and free attitude amongst the participating teachers. They appear to be more optimistic and have a greater belief in the abilities and potential of their students. Female teachers who worked as facilitators throughout the course of Girls Can were also avid students of the programme, opening up their own minds to new ideas, and learning alongside the girl students. Having seen first hand what the girls achieved, against all expectations, has convinced staff that 'girls can'. They have internalised the ideas and values promoted in the programme and this has effected not only their views and expectations of *adivasi* students, but their own self perceptions and levels of empowerment. They have clearly benefited from applying gender equality, goal setting, self confidence and team work skills to their own professional lives, and have become increasingly active and innovative teachers, taking on more responsibilities and participating as leaders within the teaching staff. This has overflowed to the personal lives of some, who have even gone on to share the messages of Girls Can with their own families and friends.

"I understood from this programme that I can certainly work like a man, which before I was thinking cannot be done. In my mind, I had a feeling of gender inequality in work. But I feel now – No! It can be possible by me also."

Ashalata Samal. Teacher, Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

"After the training I feel that we shall take an active part in all work. We shall not back out from any work. As the men can do, so can we."

Pravatini Dash. Teacher, Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur

"In this society the girls have the same rights as boys. They are the two arms of society. If the males advance and the women go backwards, society cannot develop. I now think that women have the same right as men. Boys and girls together can do the same work. The Girls Can programme has played an important role by creating this thing in our minds."

Kamala Jena. Teacher, Vidya Vihar school, Rudhapadar

There is clear evidence of a different relationship developing between students and their teachers as a result of this programme. With formal barriers broken down, those teachers who were involved in the programme have formed warmer and closer bonds with the girls, demonstrating greater trust and openness and behaving now more as friends and mentors, rather than simply as authority figures. This closeness can be expected to have positive implications on the quality of education and school experience for other students.

One other benefit is that staff of Gram Vikas schools have an increased commitment to creating leadership opportunities for girls. Affirmative action is on the agenda, and teachers are more attentive to creating spaces and opportunities for the participation of girl students, whereby they are able to stand as equals alongside boys in all aspects of school life.

Girls Can has also provided them with a format or template with which they can work, adapt and alter, to formally teach leadership and life skills to their students. Each school's commitment to follow up this programme is sincere, and plans for replicating it, and/or creating other opportunities for girl-student development in successive years are already in place.

- For other students

Girls Can had a wide appeal with its message reaching out to all the students in Gram Vikas' schools. The interest level of non-participating students remained extremely high for the duration of the programme, with crowds of peering faces gathering every day to listen and watch the classes through windows and door cracks. Younger girls would enthusiastically join the activities after hours – led by the older girls who demonstrated and encouraged them to try juggling, cycling, poi, skipping etc. Posters and key messages prepared during the programme were displayed openly on the school walls throughout the course for all students to view. In at least one school, these posters have been kept and are displayed on the walls of the girls hostel and in the school hall as a constant reminder. This, and the influence of senior girls – acting with confidence and courage, role modelling equality and participation in front of their junior peers has been extremely influential. Younger girls are now seen behaving more confidently, participating in sports and games, speaking up and showing (if not believing) the principles promoted throughout the programme.



Girls Can classes draw a crowd. Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school

Boys also have been influenced by the message of girls can, and although challenged at times by the principles promoted in the programme, and were somewhat jealous from being excluded from all the fun and games, overall they seemed enthusiastic and encouraging. In future, boys would perhaps benefit from a similar style leadership course of their own.

“After this programme boys are also saying that they want to do this programme. They want to know how we did this programme, and how they can also improve.” says Padmini Sabar of Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur.

- For other Gram Vikas staff (i.e. village level workers and managers)

The ripple effect of Girls Can has spread its language and messages beyond just Gram Vikas schools. Regional staff and management have shown a high level of support for the programme’s objectives. They too have adopted the language of Girls Can, and have been motivated by the efforts of the participating girls. Some staff have commented on the surprise and amazement they felt at the achievements of the girls. This has motivated them in their work, and encouraged them to promote the message of gender equality, empowerment and leadership in the villages and surrounding communities in which they work.

The final performance held to celebrate the closing of the programme at each school was also an opportunity for Gram Vikas to promote education amongst the wider community. Each performance involved Gram Vikas staff and management helping to coordinate the invitations, guest speakers, logistics and programme of activities, thus ensuring their participation and commitment, however marginal, to the programme. The event provided an opportunity to engage with parents, community members, local and regional leaders, to garner their support for education and to promote the specific message of the importance of girl child education and women’s equality in their own communities’ development.

These events also promoted the innovative and creative methods used within Gram Vikas schools. As a part of a wide reaching promotional strategy by Gram Vikas, this is aimed at encouraging parents to send their children to school more frequently (i.e. more regularly, and for longer periods), especially parents of girl children. Indirectly this encourages communities to be more responsible for tackling related issues – such as child labour - in their villages.

The celebration event was also effective in creating a more positive working relationship between Gram Vikas and the government dignitaries who attended, and who may be in a position to support the organisations work in future.

Finally, the effort of the programme facilitators – Sasha and Marta, appears to have left a lasting impression on staff and others. Many have commented that they are gratified by the efforts and motivation of foreign volunteers, whose faith in and dedication to the young *adivasi* girls they worked with has inspired them in their own work.

Impacts on Community

It is difficult to directly gauge the impacts of the Girls Can programme on parents and surrounding communities – immediately, or in the long term, as it is unlikely that any single programme can be held responsible for any cultural or behavioural changes that may be seen, however, a few significant events can be noted here, whereby the Girls Can programme has directly engaged with the surrounding community members, and perhaps prompted in them some kind of response.

An important factor in this is that students themselves have played a key role in taking the messages of Girls Can outside of Gram Vikas and their schools, and back to their families and villages. Participants were encouraged to tell their families about Girls Can during their summer holiday break, and perhaps even to teach them some circus skills.

The Girls Can final celebration and performance at each school was attended by guests including parents and community members, local government-school students and teachers, local and regional government dignitaries and Gram Vikas staff and management. Many of these people were invited to speak, espousing their views on why education for girl children is important, and motivating the audience to support education and women rights. Not only did this give a clear message to the audience, but in some cases (if not many), it forced the speaker to consider such topics and articulate his views on such matters, something he may, or may not have done so before; thus becoming allies in Gram Vikas' fight to realise its vision. The Member of the Legislative Assembly (M.L.A.) Parlekhamundi, who attended the Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school closing ceremony at Koinpur was still talking about the impact that the programme had on him long afterwards and has been heard promoting the Girls Can programme and its messages at state and district-level events many months later! He was clearly moved by his participation, and it is hoped he will continue to be an advocate and supporter of such work for some time to come.



Dignitaries speak at the Girls Can celebration Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school

Likewise, other elected government dignitaries, visitors and guests who visit Gram Vikas' residential schools are now proudly shown the Girls Can photo-album and documentary film – as an example of one of the many interesting activities carried out within the school. These resources are valuable tools in promoting the programme and sustaining the messages in the long term. The impression that this leaves on guests can only be expected to be positive, and will hopefully make a lasting impact.

At the annual parent–teacher meeting of Siskshya Niketan school in remote Thaumul Rampur, a slide show presentation was made to the parents of images from the Girls Can programme. The documentary film has been distributed to all schools, and Gram Vikas staff have been encouraged to show it - within the school, and also in villages, public functions and community events. It is hoped that this will also be a powerful and lasting tool in demonstrating that ‘girls can’, and the messages of girl child education, equality and women’s leadership.

Aurobindo Swain, Headmaster of Siskshya Niketan is an enthusiastic supporter of Girls Can and understands the potential it has for affecting the wider community. He surmises: *“When this programme will continue on a long term basis it will definitely influence parents. Now parents have some ignorance. They do not know. They do not send their children to school – they think when their children grow up they should not go to school. But when this programme concludes it will influence the parents and their children. These problems will not be there in the future, and they will send their children to school of their own accord. They will send their children to take part in all kinds of work and the backwardness will disappear. It will definitely influence them.”*

CHAPTER SIX: CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Whilst acknowledging the significant impacts and achievements of the Girls Can programme, it is also important to note a number of challenges and learnings that have occurred along the way. It is my belief that the issues listed below are specific, (although not exclusive to) the culture and conditions in *adivasi* communities of remote rural Orissa. Thus, these issues must be seen as largely unavoidable, inherent to the nature of the programme, the communities and cultures with whom we were working. Such challenges and compromises are part and parcel of the project. This is why the programme is necessarily flexible, and demands that the facilitators be intuitive to minimising, tolerating, adapting and adjusting to these obstacles.

'Perfection' pressure: Cultural constrains and behavioural norms

In rural Orissa, young girls (in particular) are reserved and shy. As mentioned previously, strict moral codes guide the expected behaviour of women – young and old, and society as a whole rarely displays or expresses emotions – regarding it as a sign of weakness. A significant challenge faced throughout the course of the programme was the inability of students to identify with their emotions, honestly share their thoughts, or open up and express themselves. This was compounded by the pressure from teachers, (and society as a whole), to not shame themselves or their school (especially in front of foreign guests), by ensuring they always give correct answers and perfect performances. Thus, if the girls spoke, they often gave quite scripted statements, saying what they were 'expected' to say, giving the 'correct' responses, rather than what may have actually been the truth, or what they really felt or believed. Although this lessened over time as the girls relaxed and became more comfortable with us, many of the initial discussion, debriefs and even written activities fell short, being quite shallow, or feeling somewhat false.

Another example of this was when written feedback was collected from students at completion of the programme. Typically this feedback well scripted, espousing the Girls Can programme as being perfect in every possible way. Giving criticism or making honest suggestions about improvements to the programme would perhaps have been considered disrespectful or impolite.

Training of trainers: Limited skills and experience of teachers

Due to the limited skills and experiences of teachers with whom we worked, a key aim of Girls Can was to present new ways of teaching. Traditionally, teachers in Orissa hold a position of power and authority. Traditionally, teachers expect uniformity and conformity, silence and discipline in the classroom. Students are more often punished for mistakes than rewarded for success. Rote learning is the predominant approach, teaching students the answers, instead of teaching them to think for themselves. Questioning, debate, enquiry and saying 'I don't know' is not appreciated.

For these reasons, considerable time has been invested in teacher training by Gram Vikas, and during the course of the Girls Can programme. We trained teachers in giving encouragement, positive reinforcement and praise to students. We encouraged freedom, noise, self-expression and even chaos in the classroom. We emphasised over and over again the importance of role modelling a positive attitude, of participation, tolerance, enthusiasm, optimism, friendship and fun. We aimed to convince teachers that the process was more important than the outcome. We explained the value of appreciative enquiry, asking questions of students, encouraging them to think of their answers and the importance of giving students a sense of ownership over their ideas and outcomes in life. We sought to portray ourselves, and the teachers as mentors and friends, rather than superiors and authorities.

Meanwhile the teachers were also learning about equality, teamwork, goal setting etc, at the same rate as the girls. All of these were new, and at times challenging concepts.

Language barriers; translation or interpretation

Language barriers were an obvious and expected challenge. Although we had a reasonable comprehension of the local language – Oriya - and most teachers with whom we worked had a moderate understanding of English, the level of understanding between ourselves, the teachers and the students was not always 100%. At times we depended on a translator, especially to help explain the details of complex session objectives, new and unfamiliar content and the reasoning for our teaching methodologies. During classes, sessions were held in a mix of English and Oriya, with translations throughout, which was at times challenging and time consuming. We also came to realise the vast difference between translation and interpretation. Often teacher's 'interpretation' of our messages was skewed or even incorrect. At other times, when a direct word-for-word translation was required – i.e.: to ask a leading question or raise a specific point in a discussion/debrief, the teachers would elaborate, expand, go off on a tangent or give the answers away, without giving the students a chance to think and answer for themselves.

In addition, Oriya was not the first language for many of the students, who primarily spoke their *adivasi* languages at home and in their communities. Therefore, their comprehension and articulation of the participants in Oriya was at times limited.

Limited time

The time required to cover the course content covered in the Girls Can programme was 11 days. However, feedback from the participants suggests they would have liked the programme to have run for longer.

Minati Naik of Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur says -

“To us Girls Can would have been better if it had been a few more days. We could have learnt more”.

More specifically, students felt there was limited time for them to perfect the circus skills to which they were exposed. Many new circus skills were presented, with the aim of demonstrating a range of materials and activities to teachers and students, providing a 'taste test' and encouraging them to try many new things.

Afterwards, all materials were given to the schools, such that they could practice and develop their skills further. However, for some, this left them feeling disappointed and dissatisfied, having not had more time to achieve proficiency in the skills within the course. Conversely, as observed in the following feedback from participants, their favourite circus skills were those that they were able to conquer within the timeframe.

"I could not play the plate-spinning game well. I could not do much practice. However much I practiced, I could not understand it. So I didn't like this game."

Sagarika Karjee. Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur school.

"I had a great desire to learn juggling but not enough time was given. I have learnt juggling a little. I am practicing",

Rashmita Gahir. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur.

"I liked poi game very much because I could play the game immediately after seeing it, and I was the leader. So I like very much."

Baidehi Majhi. Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur.

Future programmes could therefore consider limiting the number of activities presented, or ensure sufficient time for the maximum number of girls to perfect the skills, ensuring the maximum sense of achievement and self-satisfaction from the programme.

Need for follow up and sustained integrated programmes.

For the Girls Can programme to have a real and sustained impact on the lives of the young participants, considerable follow-up is required. Only through a long range, sustained approach of integrated activities and programmes, such that Gram Vikas has been implementing over the past three decades, can significant cultural and social change be expected to occur. Education, women's rights, community leadership and livelihood development are considerably new and somewhat foreign ideas in *adivasi* villages of rural Orissa. The Girls Can programme is just one weapon in an ongoing fight to realise these ambitious objectives.

For this reason, the Girls Can programme can only hope to be effective if its objectives if there is a network of complimentary activities and support structures in place, to maintain the momentum developed, carry forward the ideas and ensure follow-on. Girls Can has been successful in planting a seed in the hearts and minds of almost 80 young girls. However, for that seed to grow, they must be able to move forward into a fertile and nurturing environment. The conditions must be right for the seed to sprout, and for the ideas and values to live on. Mohini Mandal, a participant of Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur, understands this well -

"Yes, now I think I am equal with boys. But in the future boys and girls will be more and more equal".

To achieve this takes a commitment from Gram Vikas and community leaders, and it is for this reason that it is essential for Girls Can to be embedded within the organisations integrated long term approach. This can be a difficult and complex task. For example, for girl children to easily attend school, mechanisms must be in place to substitute the important role that girls play in home duties – such as child minding, cattle tending, water and firewood collection. Ideas of leadership and gender equality in empowered young girls may be difficult to sustain unless community organisations’ democratic systems are in place and the current male leaders are willing to give women a chance to prove themselves as worthy successors. Likewise, for students to realistically achieve their dreams and find meaningful, secure work in the future requires the existence of training and education opportunities, entrepreneurial support structures and access to savings and bank credit. In other words, a new attitude of empowerment and equality, although a great achievement, is not necessarily enough to create change, unless there are corresponding changes to community infrastructure, social structures and access to basic goods and services. This is the challenge of community development.

The sustainability of Girls Can is important to its success. To achieve the programmes goals, on a deeper, long-term basis, the programme and its values must be embraced by Gram Vikas, and the communities with whom they work, embedded within their existing activities and integrated into their broader goals. As well as girls, boys, parents and community leaders must be targeted in future strategies and given the opportunity to develop important leadership and life skills, internalising values of gender equality and self-determination.



Learning to work together. Skipping at Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The Girls Can programme has been a joyful, colourful and uplifting experience for all involved. In the remote and isolated *adivasi* communities, where even small things can make a big difference, the impact has been significant. It is apparent that the direct, short-term goals of the programme have been adequately met. The challenge now is to ensure follow-on and continuity to address the programme's indirect long-term objectives. When asked if she would like the programme to continue in her school, Padmini Sabar of Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school, Koinpur replied, *"Yes I do, because we are improving much."*

All schools have made a commitment to continue the programme in some way. For 2006-07, the Siskshya Niketan school in Thaumul Rampur has made innovative plans, re-interpreting Girls Can, taking the message and applying it to their own skills and contexts. For this year, the school will be implementing the Girls Can programme by forming a girls cricket team to play and compete in the traditionally male dominated school and interschool cricket competitions. They have also taken a traditional *adivasi* dance performed by boys, and taught it to girls under the banner of 'Girls Can', competing at interschool dance competitions – much to the shock and surprise of the audience and other (male) competitors!

To me, this is a positive sign of Gram Vikas' commitment to continuing the ideology of Girls Can. Although originally designed and delivered as a social circus programme, it is important to remember that circus was not the ultimate objective of Girls Can. Circus was used as a means to an end. Circus skills were the vehicle for which we hoped to achieve goals related to personal and community development. Therefore, for the sustainability and continuation of this programme into the future, it must be acknowledged that any such vehicle can be used. Teachers must be able to adapt the concept and take the principles to suit their own skills, ideas and needs. It is a flexible programme, where the vehicle may be changed, i.e.: from circus to cricket, in order to reach the same destination. Girls Can is a flexible programme that can be taken to different communities and easily adapted to address different needs.

Aurobindo Swain, headmaster of Siskshya Niketan school, Thaumul Rampur believes that this experience has been a 'historical step' whereby this structure and style of working bears no comparison to the way they were working before.

"The Girls Can programme is a fruitful programme and if the programme is successful, the children's success will come automatically. The children will study, their knowledge will improve and they will do a lot for the development of society."

APPENDIX ONE:
GIRLS CAN PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

| School | Dates | Participants | Support staff |
|---|------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Mahendra Tanaya Ashram school. Koinpur, Gajapati district | 15 – 27 November, 2005 | 22 girls | Sujata Ku. Pradhan Mineketan Mohanty |
| Siskshya Niketan school. Thaumul Rampur. Kalahandi district | 15 – 24 December, 2005 | 17 girls | Ashalata Samal Pravatini Dash Sujata Jenna |
| Vidya Vihar school. Rudhapadar, Ganjam district | 10 – 20 January, 2006 | 22 girls | Kamala Jena Rashmi Ramjan Atta |

* Also note: A one day workshop was held on 9 January, 2006, for 58 boys and girls of Tumba Non Child Labour Project (NCLP) school, Tumba, Ganjam district.

APPENDIX TWO:
GIRLS CAN PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS

**Mahendra Tanaya
Ashram school**

Padmini Sabar
Lilabati Sabar
Santoshi Karjee
Ambica Bhuyan
Sagarika Karjee
Mohini Mandal
Sujata Sabar
Saudamini Bhuyan
Tanuja Mandal
Bharati Sabar
Arati Sabar
Anupama Bhuyan
Shanti Sabar
Sarojini Sabar
Rajani Kanti Sabar
Sukumari Sabar
Ketaki Khandapatra
Bijayalaxmi Dalai
Puspalata Gamanga
Pritina Bhuyan
Jekalya Bhuyan
Sakuntala Gamanga

Siskshya Niketan school

Sunanda Majhi
Sulagna Majhi
Sasha Majhi
Saubhagini Majhi
Diptimayee Majhi
Sanjukta Majhi
Anjali Majhi
Baidehi Majhi
Sabita Majhi
Basanti Majhi
Kausalya Naik
Nilendri Naik
Minati Naik
Sumitra Naik
Sairendri Naik
Rashmيرانjita Gahir
Luli Gauda

Vidya Vihar school

Abanti Jani
Ambika Jani
Anita Jani
Bhagyalata Jani
Bhagyalata Dalabehera
Gitanjali Jani
Laxmi Nayak
Ranjulata Malik
Rosalin Sahu
Puspanjali Jani
Pratima Jani
Sanjukta Jani
Satyabhama Jani
Puspalata Jani
Asha Bisoi
Brishnu Pria Malik
Laxmi Jani
Mamata Pradhan
Namita Pradhan
Rasmita Naik
Susama Pradhan
Tuni Malik

APPENDIX THREE: **GIRLS CAN PROGRAMME CONTENT**

Please note: The schedule listed below is a generic outline of the Girls Can programme. This sequencing and timing of many of these activities was altered at each location. Additional energiser games were also randomly added, and some discussions and activities extended or shortened depending on students interest.

Class ONE: “Let’s begin our Girls Can adventure”

- Formal welcome and inauguration
- Introduction, getting to know each other
- Group agreement

1. *Inauguration: Formal welcome by headmaster and facilitators. Traditional lighting of lantern.*
2. *Introductions: brief description of yourself*
3. *GAME: Name games, and getting to know each other games.*
4. *Name tags. Each girl creates her own nametag to wear throughout the programme. Pen and notebooks given to each girl.*
5. *POSTER: Presenting the aims of Girls Can:*
 - *To build confidence in myself!*
 - *To discuss issues facing women*
 - *To think about our future plans*
 - *To become a leader in my community*
 - *To have fun and be friends*
 - *To learn new games and juggling*
6. *Group agreement: Brainstorm session, creating a large poster of values and rules that are important to our group. A ribbon is then passed around the circle, linking all girls in the group. The ribbon is cut and tied to our wrist as our commitment to uphold the group agreement and as a symbol of our participation in Girls Can.*

Class TWO: “Girls Can! Everything is possible if you really try!”

- Introduction to gender; the differences between girls and boys
- Preparing juggling balls

1. **ENERGISER GAME**
2. *Gender activity: Under 3 columns – ‘Males’, ‘Females’ and ‘Both’ brainstorm the different roles and activities performed by men/boys and women/girls, including:*
3. *Go through each activity in the ‘Males’ column and ask – “Can girls do....?”, and vice versa for the activities listed in the ‘Females’ column. Ask why/why not? Discuss, emphasising the point that physically, both boys and girls are capable of the same things.*
4. *METAPHOR POSTER: Introduce and explain message of the day. Demonstration of juggling...Juggling, like all goals in life – seems impossible at first.... Discuss*
5. *Juggling balls preparation. Demonstration of ball making with sand and cloth. Every girl then stitches her own 3 juggling balls.*

Class THREE:**“See your skills, be confident, try new things, learn from your mistakes”**

- Hula hoops
- Building confidence and self – esteem; recognising your strengths
- Learning to juggle one ball

1. *ENERGIZER: Introducing Hula Hoops.*
2. *My personal qualities and skills. A drawing activity where each girl draws a portrait of herself and writes (around the page) her good qualities.*
3. *Finding each other’s qualities. Each girl finds a partner and swaps portraits, adding the good qualities you admire in her onto her page.*
4. *Portrait exhibition. In turn, each girl presents her portrait and reads 4 or 5 of her best qualities in front of the whole group. The rest of the group supports and encourages by clapping and cheering.*
5. *METAPHOR POSTER: Introduce and explain message of the day. Explain that the first step to successfully learning to juggle is to believe yourself. Discuss.*
6. *First juggling class: Demonstration and practice of one ball juggling.*

Class FOUR:**“Step by step, we can achieve our goals. Men and women can be equal.”**

- Skipping
- What is equality? Are men and women equal?
- Society and traditions can change; Who makes that change? We do!
- Learning to juggle two balls

1. *ENERGIZER GAME: Introducing skipping.*
2. *How to juggle two balls. Demonstration and practice of two ball juggling.*
3. *Shadow theatre – an activity about equality. A short shadow drama is performed by the facilitators – setting a scenario about equality.*
4. *Group discussion – Group discussion about the shadow drama and equality. Emphasize that it is due to tradition and society that has made women and men unequal.*
5. *METAPHOR POSTER: Introduce and explain message of the day. Ask the girls -
Who makes tradition and society? We do!
Can society and traditions change? Yes
Who makes that change? We do!*
6. *Shadow theatre – the next chapter. In small groups, students are given time to prepare and rehearse a closing scene to the shadow drama.*
7. *Role-plays: Step-by step – society can change. Forming 3 groups, each prepares and role plays -
a. Different between yours and your grand mothers life?
b. Different between yours and your mother life?
c. Differences there will be between yours and your daughter’s life?*

Class FIVE: “Step by step, we can achieve our goals.”

- Poi’s
- Future planning
- Public speaking
- Learning to juggle three balls

1. *ENERGISER GAME: Introducing poi.*
2. *How to juggle three balls Demonstration and practice of three ball juggling.*
3. *Future planning activity. Think about a future goal, breaking it down into 4 – 5 smaller steps required to get there. Each then writes 1 – 2 pages detailing the steps.*
4. *Preparation for public speaking. With a partner, speak for one minute your goal and the steps to getting there. Facilitators give tips, and students repeat again and again until confident to face the whole group.*
5. *Public speaking. Each girl stands in front of a whole group and presents her goal, and the steps to getting there. Each girl speaks for one minute. The rest of the group supports by active listening, and encourages by clapping and cheering.*

Class SIX:**“The importance of teamwork in helping each other achieve our goals”**

- Friendship and Teamwork; supporting each other to achieve our goals.
- Trust exercises and group initiative games
- Juggling in pairs or continuing 3 ball practice

1. *Juggling practice. Practice and tuition of three ball juggling. Demonstration and practice of two-person juggling for advanced learners.*
2. *Introduction – friendship. In small groups, girls briefly take it in turns to talk about “Why are friends important?” Share in the big group a little of what was discussed.*
3. *Team building game - Acid river. The group is given 3 –4 newspaper squares, on which they must get across the acid river - from A to B (i.e.: the length of the room), standing only on the newspaper squares.*
4. *Group discussion – Debrief after the game. Discuss learnings, applications to real life and qualities of teamwork. ,*
5. *METAPHOR POSTER: Introduce and explain message of the day. Brainstorm with the group the important qualities and skills of effective teamwork.*
6. *Trust and teamwork games - Bell, Body Lift, Water Balloon etc, as per time*

Class SEVEN:**“Women are leaders. You can be a leader in your school and village!”**

- Ribbons
- Guest speaker – A local female leader
- Leadership skills
- Leadership opportunities in the school and village

1. *ENERGISER GAME: Introducing ribbons.*
2. *Guest speaker – Introducing a local female leader.*
3. *Leadership skills – group discussion. What is leadership – i.e.: where do you find leaders? Can women be leaders? What are the names of woman leaders you know? What are the skills of a good leader? etc*
4. *METAPHOR POSTER: Introduce and explain message of the day. Brainstorm the qualities of a good leader.*
5. *Leadership in my school and village – group discussion. Brainstorms leadership opportunities in school and village. For each discuss - What do they do? What is their role and responsibilities? What skills are needed for this position? etc*
6. *Juggling practice. Practice and tuition of three ball juggling. Demonstration and practice of two-person juggling and tricks for advanced learners.*

Class EIGHT:

- Plate spinning and flags
- Rotation of all circus skills
- Planning the final performance

1. *ENERGISER GAME: Introducing plate-spinning and flags.*
2. *Circus skills - Rotation. Stations are set up - one each for juggling, poi, ribbons, plates, flags, hoops, skipping, and shadow theatre, with small groups given 20 minutes at each station, Participants are encouraged to think about which is their favourite circus skills, and ideas for how they could make a performance with it.*
3. *Performance planning. Each girl nominates two circus skills she would like to show in the performance and a leader is elected in each group.*
4. *Students are given the rest of the class to develop and practice a short 5 minute demonstration of their circus skill.*

Class NINE:

- Preparation and rehearsal for final performance.

Rehearsal for each group –finalising demonstrations of each circus skills.

Finalize costumes.

Run through of entire performance.

Class TEN:

- Performance
- Certificates

Girls Can closing ceremony

- *including speeches from guests and dignitaries,*
- *speeches from facilitators*
- *speeches and songs from participants,*
- *demonstration of each circus skills*
- *presentation of certificates to each student*
- *closing and thanks to one and all.*

Class ELEVEN:

- Evaluation of Girls Can programme
- Closing

1. Feedback session – Capturing the memories. Each girl shares her favorite memories from the past 10 days.

2. Written feedback – Collecting written feedback from each girl on set questions.

3. Brief discussion – follow on. Ideas for how can we continue the learning from the Girls Can programme - in our lives, in our school, in our villages? How can our teachers support us? How can we involve other students in Girls Can?"

4. Closure and Goodbye - Each girl is presented with a 'magic stone' gift.