

**Constitutional Rights Education in Schools and Communities  
in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry**

**Brief Narrative Report for six months (from January to June 2021)**

The activities that were undertaken in the last six months include formation of committees, preparations of the Modules for schools and community engagement and receiving feedback from the experts, establishing contacts with TANCEAN (Tamil Nadu Bishop Council Forum for Education) and TNCRI (Tamil Nadu Conference of Religious Institutions), identifying the NGOs for community engagement, meeting the members of the State Human Rights Commission, the State Commission for Minorities and the State Commission for Protection of Rights of the Children(SCPCR), contacting teachers associations, preparing NGO facilitators for community engagement, consultations with child rights and social activists on the program, preparation of the byelaws for CRE clubs and facilitators guide and preparations for the official launch of CRE Program in 125 communities in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

It was a testing time for the project team during April to June 2021, due to the spike of covid 19 cases in Tamil Nadu, subsequent lockdowns imposed by the Government of Tamil Nadu and indefinite closure of schools. Some of the staff were very badly affected with corona virus during this period. The Project team was clueless, with the uncertainty of the situation and the fear that gripped many of the staff. Even the Government itself was in a fix as to how to proceed with the surge of cases day by day and increasing number of deaths. The program staff were asked to work from home due to the increase of cases and the restrictions imposed by the State Government. Vaan Muhil strictly followed the rules and regulations given by the State and gave priority to the safety of the staff, keeping in mind the surge of the cases with the spread of the ferocious second wave in Quarter 2.

As the team realized that the start of the CRE program in schools and hostels was a near impossibility in June, as scheduled, with the closure of schools in Tamil Nadu and due to the hesitation of the parents to send their children to schools, the team decided to start working among communities, involving NGOs and grassroots movements and started identifying villages in 16 districts and preparing the facilitators slowly for CRE program in communities.

Vaan Muhil appointed eight full time staff and five part time consultants in January 2021 at the start of the project. Conscious efforts were taken to appoint experienced program staff, who were earlier engaged in Human Rights Education projects in Tamil Nadu and have good rapport with human rights teachers across the state. The key staff and the consultants were given a one-day orientation on the key components and expected outcome out of this project. Their inputs and past experiences in organizing HRE program were useful to the project team in working out concrete strategies in the implementation of the CRE program.

### **1. Formation of Committees for CRE Program:**

The formation of two committees (State Advisory Committee and Curriculum Development Committee) took place in Quarter 1. The 15 member State Advisory Committee with vast experience and expertise in the fields of human rights education, social development and school education, is headed by Dr. V.Vasanthi Devi, a well-known educationist in Tamil Nadu, former Vice Chancellor of MS University, Tirunelveli and former Chair Person of the State Commission for Women. The diverse experience of the members in school and higher education for many years has been useful for the project.

The 10 Member Curriculum Development Committee is headed by Prof.I.Devasagayam, who was the former Director of Institute of Human Rights Education for 15 years. Many of the committee members were earlier involved in the development of human rights education modules for IHRE and conducted a series of human rights education programs for school and college students. There are also five experts to assist the committee by way of providing inputs and feedback on the lessons prepared. The Curriculum Development Committee had its meetings thrice in Quarter 1 (twice in Madurai and once in Trichy) to develop the first module for schools. Their rich experiences in the field were very useful in preparing the module for schools.

### **3. Series of consultations with TANCEAN and TNCRI in Quarter 1 :**

The Project team had a series of meetings with Rev. Fr. Don Bosco, Secretary, TANCEAN (Regional Education Commission of Tamil Nadu Catholic Bishop's Council), Chennai and Leaders of TNCRI, (President, Rev. Bro. Velankanni Ravi, General Superior of Brothers of Sacred Heart of Jesus, Palayamkottai) to explain to them about the components and the design of our Constitutional Rights Education program in schools, hostels and communities in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. The project team had an opportunity to make a presentation to TANCEAN members during their General Body Meeting on 20.03.2021 at Chennai and most of the members felt the need for such program in today's context and were convinced to take up the program in their schools from this academic year.

The team also had an opportunity to explain to the Provincial of the Chennai Jesuit Province, Rev. Dr. Jebamalai Raja on 24<sup>th</sup> March in Chennai about the proposed Constitutional Rights Education program in the state, involving various stakeholders across the state. He was very positive about the initiative and promised the team to extend his fullest cooperation to implement the program in their schools and their rural evening study centers located in vulnerable areas, largely of adivasis, dalit and children from fishing communities.

#### **4. Meeting with Church of South India's synod officials :**

The Project Team took special efforts to meet the CSI Synod and CSI Chennai Bishop in their respective offices in Chennai, seeking their support and cooperation for taking up Constitutional Rights Education program in schools and hostels, run by CSI Dioceses in Tamil Nadu. The series of meetings with Mr.Fernandes Rathina Raja, General Secretary, CSI Synod, Chennai and Rev.Dr.Benjamin Inbaraj, Director of SEVA of the CSI Synod Chennai and Rev.Dr.Jeyaharan, Director of Social Justice Commission, CSI diocese, Chennai and Rev.Paul Williams, Vice President, CSI Bishop office, Chennai were fruitful and they assured the team that they would explore the possibilities of joining this collective effort from this academic year. The follow up meetings with these leaders could not be held during the second quarter, due to lockdowns.

#### **4. Preliminary discussions with Hostel Wardens:**

An online meeting was organized for selected hostel wardens on 29.03.2021 to discuss strategies on introducing CRE program in hostels from this academic year. There were 19 hostel wardens representing different sections, boys and girls- run by catholic Sisters, Fathers, Adi Dravidar Welfare Hostels and Backward Community Hostels. Their experiential sharing was very useful to organize CRE program for hostel students and strategies to be worked out, keeping in mind the interests, likes and dislikes of the inmates and the hostel atmosphere. The identification of hostels by the staff team could not be done, due to the pandemic situation in Quarter 2. The follow up will be done in Quarter 4, once the schools are reopened.

#### **5. Experiential sharing by HRE teachers and contact with Teachers' Unions:**

Seven experienced HRE teachers from different parts of Tamil Nadu were invited for a one-day meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2021 in Trichy. Particularly, their inputs on the syllabus for CRE program for schools and practical tips as to how to handle these sessions in classrooms were useful to the curriculum development committee to fine tune the CRE module. These teachers have promised to extend their support to carry out CRE program in schools in an effective manner. In addition to this batch of HRE teachers, the project team has identified a few retired teachers, who are exploring different models of taking up human rights education in informal setting (Street Class Room models).

The project team has been in touch with these teachers and is seriously exploring the possibility of taking our project to another level in future, with the support of these teachers who work in informal settings. The Project team is also in touch with two teachers' unions and associations (Tamil Nadu Science Forum and Pallikalvi Pathukappu Iyakkam) so that these associations could be involved in supporting CRE program in both schools and communities in an effective way in future.

## **6. Support extended from the Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission and other statutory bodies :**

Vaan Muhil approached the Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) for its support to our CRE program in schools and communities and the initial discussions with the Commission was extremely positive and the Commission assured CRE of its possible support to our program in schools, hostels and communities. The project team invited the members from the State Human Rights Commission and the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR), besides the Chairperson of the State Minorities Commission for the official launch of the CRE program for community engagement.

## **7. Preparation of Modules for CRE program in Schools and communities:**

The Curriculum Development Committee prepared Module 1 for school program in Quarter 2. It contains eight lessons, each lesson with specific objectives and an introduction to the lesson. The module contains a lot of case studies and real stories, besides quotes and facts related to the topics. At the end of each lesson, there are group exercises for children to understand their grasp and comprehension of the topic. The lessons prepared are aimed at ensuring child participation in the classrooms and developing rights perspective among the young minds.

The pre final draft was sent to a couple of experts for their comments and feedback and after incorporating their feedback and comments on the lessons, the book is ready for printing and will go for digital format. The Curriculum Development Committee could not physically meet during Quarter 2, due to the pandemic situation and restrictions of mobility and therefore most of the conversations and corrections had to take place online.

The Module for community engagement has been prepared by the Curriculum Development Committee and there are 11 lessons in the Module, which is mostly activity based for the children in communities. Comments and feedbacks were received for this Module from the experts and two activists working for child protection. Lot of case studies, real stories, group exercises and facts relevant to the lessons are incorporated in the Module. Some of the activities and exercises for children in the Module are aimed at highlighting relevant SDGs and the corresponding targets.

## **8. Preparations for Digitalization of Modules for Schools and community engagement and developing Activity App for CRE children clubs:**

The Project Team had discussions with three digital experts on digitalization process of modules and developing Activity APP for CRE children's clubs. The content will be given to the experts team for digitalization of the school module, after the training program for teachers. The process will also involve the members of curriculum development committee and their inputs will be incorporated in the design of the digital format of the modules.

The project team has also approached St. Joseph's College, Trichy to support the process of digitalization and developing of activity APP for CRE children clubs. A team from Visual Communication Department in the College is willing to support our effort and will provide technical input in this process. Communications have been sent to the Principal of the College and the MoU will be signed with the College in Quarter 3, after having detailed discussions with the staff team in the department of the college. This will be an added value for our project in terms of outreach and visibility for the project.

## **9. Discussions with NGOs to start CRE program in Communities**

Ten civil society organizations working on child protection and human rights issues at the grassroots level in different parts of the state have been approached to take up CRE program through their child activity centers or community resource centers and adolescent girls' groups in their communities. These CSOs have identified ten communities each, to take up CRE program from June onwards and to form CRE clubs among the children, after the training programs for the facilitators (Local Community based Trainers). Each of these CSOs has provided two or three Community based Trainers to work in the communities together with their ongoing programs.

Series of online meetings (May 04<sup>th</sup>, May 12<sup>th</sup>, May 20<sup>th</sup> and May 28<sup>th</sup>) in Quarter 2 with the NGO partners were held by way of preparing themselves and to give them a comprehensive picture on the CRE project in communities. Their inputs were also received for effective implementation of the CRE program in communities and their practical suggestions were helpful to the project team in designing the training programs for the community based trainers (facilitators) and designing module for community engagement. All the ten NGOs show keen interest in carrying out the CRE program in their communities and provide maximum support to the project team.

## **10. Preparing Community based Trainers (Facilitators) for CRE program in their communities :**

With the list of community based trainers from each of the ten NGOs, the project team organized series of online meetings (2<sup>nd</sup> June, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 18<sup>th</sup> June and 25<sup>th</sup> June) for them in Quarter 2. One contact person from each NGO also joined the meetings to support the programs in the districts by way of coordinating the activities and facilitation with the project team. These online meetings were useful for all facilitators and contact persons to understand the objectives and the components of the project and to understand the pedagogy to be adopted, while taking up CRE sessions for children in communities.

The facilitators (community based trainers) were properly oriented with the objectives and the expected outcomes of the project and their roles and responsibilities were also clearly mentioned through a series of weekly meetings. The facilitators were involved in rapport building with the communities and particularly with the children by way of preparing for the launch of the CRE programs. There were also inputs for the facilitators on the impact of the pandemic on the rural communities and the necessary precautions to be taken, besides the rules to be followed up as per the instructions of the government. It was accepted by the facilitators to attend weekly briefings through virtual mode and these weekly online meetings are very useful to get an update from them about the activities that are being carried out in their communities in the week and to plan a few things in the next week with regard to CRE project. The NGO Directors are properly informed by the project team about the decision taken in the facilitators weekly meetings and to get their consent for the same.

## **11. Collection of Children Profiles of the CRE Clubs in the Communities**

All the Ten NGOs (*IPRO, Thoondil Students Movement, TRRM, Child Voice, Sudar, Power Trust, Real Foundation, Indo Trust, HOPE, Thozhamai and Vaan Muhil*) started preparing the details of the children in their communities and these details were compiled by the project team before the start of the program. A total of 2500 children's profiles in 125 communities in 16 districts has been collated by the project team in Quarter 2. A Google Sheet was prepared by the project team and sent to all the facilitators to collect the details of all children in 125 CRE clubs. The socio economic backgrounds of the children are diverse, as there are children from Adivasis, Arunthathiyars, dalits, Muslim and religious minorities, fisher folks, de-notified and backward sections, besides the urban poor. Their experiences will definitely be rich and the cross learning among the children will be great.

## **12. Preparations of villages profiles and socio economic conditions of the communities :**

Village profiles for all 125 communities have been prepared by the community based trainers (facilitators) by way of preparing the CRE project in an effect way in their communities. A structured format was given to the community based trainers (facilitators) to collect basic details about the villages and the socio economic conditions of the people so that the project team better understands the ground realities in the villages where CRE project is being carried out. As the children and communities are diverse, these background details will be of great help for the project team in future in designing the Module and some of the specific programs for the CRE clubs in future depending upon the composition of the people and their socio economic conditions.

## **13. Preparations for the official launch of the CRE Program in communities:**

All the ten NGOs were involved in the preparations for the official launch of the CRE program from June onwards. The project team started the preparations for the official launch of the CRE program in communities. A promo video was prepared by the team to reach out common people about the CRE project in Tamil Nadu and the visuals made a huge impact on the children in our CRE clubs. Visibility materials were also prepared with attractive E-posters and widely circulated through social media and reached most of the Civil Society Groups in Tamil Nadu. The project team took extra efforts to invite the School Education Minister and the Minister for Information Technology for the official launch. Since the project team had a good rapport with the statutory bodies (the State Human Rights Commission, the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, The State Women Commission and The State Minorities Commission), it was easy for them to invite the members or the Chairperson for the inauguration of the CRE programs in the communities.

## **14. Creating a website for CRE Program and subscription to Zoom:**

The process of website creation for Constitutional Rights Education program has been initiated. The content for website has been finalized and the official launch for the website will be in Quarter 3. The project team has been organizing number of programs through online mode, considering the pandemic situation and practical difficulties in organizing physical meetings during this period. The team is making maximum use of online mode for its meetings.

## **15. Opening of FCRA Account in New Delhi SBI main branch**

A new FCRA Account to Vaan Muhil Trust has been opened in State Bank of India main branch in New Delhi in Quarter 1, as per the regulations of the Ministry of the Home Affairs, following the rules of FCRA Amendment Act. The Managing Trustee cum Executive Director took pains to complete the process of opening the new FCRA account as per the instructions of the Home Ministry by the end of February. The MHA also approved the new FCRA account number to Vaan Muhil Trust and we have started using this new FCRA account for our transactions.

## **16. Renewal of 12AA and 80G certificates for Vaan Muhil Trust**

The Managing Trustee made all efforts to renew 12AA and 80G certificates for Vaan Muhil Trust and got both of them renewed before the deadline given by the Income Tax department. The management is taking utmost care in complying the legal requirements, as per the amendments made by the Government of India.

## **17. Renewal of FCRA for Vaan Muhil Trust is in the process**

Vaan Muhil submitted the application for the renewal of FCRA registration in the month of April 2021, well before the deadline given by the FCRA division, the Ministry Home Affairs. Extra care was taken to follow the instructions given in the renewal form and the management is regularly following up in this regard. Recently the MHA has announced the extension of FCRA validity period upto 31 December 2021. Vaan Muhil has been waiting for the FCRA renewal.

## **18. Challenges faced by the Project Team during the half yearly:**

1. With surge of COVID 19 cases in the wake of second wave spread, the Project Team could not effectively carry out a number of planned activities from mid March to the end of June and this hampered the progress of the project in this academic year and many of the scheduled activities in Quarter 2 had to be postponed. Three of the staff were severely affected with Corono virus and they could not do any activity nearly for one and half months. Therefore most of the programs had to be temporarily suspended, while some of them had to be turned into virtual mode.
2. The Government of Tamil Nadu imposed a lot of restrictions during the pandemic situation and the subsequent lockdowns were a challenge to team in organizing the physical meetings in Quarter 2 (meetings with school principals, hostel wardens, teachers, curriculum development committee members and teachers unions, besides meeting with government



officials particularly with Education Department scheduled for Quarter 2). The orientation programs for teachers, hostel wardens and community based trainers could not be held in quarter 2 as per our original schedule. Therefore most of the activities had to be shifted to Quarter 3 and Quarter 4.

3. The Assembly Election for Tamil Nadu was announced by the end of February and the code of conduct was in force and therefore a couple of program that were planned in March could not be conducted, due to monitoring of the State Election Commission, which put forth several conditions for organizing program in common places. The state election was held on 6<sup>th</sup> April and the results will be announced on 2<sup>nd</sup> May.
4. With the new restrictions and regulations on the NGOs by the Ministry of Home Affairs to open new FCRA Account and to renew FRCA, 12AA certifications, the NGOs find difficult to follow the process with the tight time schedule. However Vaan Muhil Trust took maximum efforts to follow these processes and to complete the same in the time schedule stipulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

## 19. Plan for next Half Yearly:

We have planned detailed activities for next half yearly and specific responsibilities have been assigned to the staff team. These activities include:

- ❖ Digitalization of the Module -1 and printing of Module -1 (for schools and communities)
- ❖ Organizing two day orientation program for teachers
- ❖ Identifying and finalizing the hostels for CRE program
- ❖ Finalizing the list of schools (TANCEAN, CRI, CSI Synod and private schools)
- ❖ Organizing program for NGO volunteers and hostel wardens
- ❖ Follow up meetings with authorities of the school education department and Members of the Legislative Assembly in Tamil Nadu
- ❖ Follow up with Chair Persons and members of various State Human Rights Institutions (SHRC, SCW, SCM, SCPCR and the Tamil Nadu State Legal Services Authority)
- ❖ Three day residential training program for the facilitators
- ❖ District level launching of CRE program (in 16 districts)
- ❖ Unit level launching of CRE program (in all 125 units)
- ❖ Regular weekly and monthly online meetings for all facilitators
- ❖ Observance of important days by CRE clubs
- ❖ Preparatory work in Karnataka and Odissa

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