



# Women Empowerment

In India, a deeply patriarchal society, women are subjected to constant discrimination and in many cases, harassment. They are legally entitled to equal rights in all spheres of society, yet most women are at great disadvantage.

The Rural Development Trust (RDT) works with men and women to achieve gender equality by fighting against gender-based violence and discrimination and striving to improve the social and economic situation of women. By enabling women to reach their full potential and equipping them to be a part of the decision-making processes, we can attain sustainable development.

The Women Empowerment sector focuses on these areas of work to attain its goal:

## 1. Self-help groups

By forming and strengthening these sanghams in the villages, RDT promotes the collective autonomy and the rights of women at the grassroots level.

- The purpose of sanghams is to provide a space where women can talk about their problems and concerns and to **promote networks of mutual solidarity** and support.
- **Women discuss** about education, health, various socio-economic issues concerning their development and also resource mobilisation such as obtaining house sites or loans from the government.
- **Network groups** are an intersection between all self-help groups. They have an expanded view of the work in other self-help groups and receive regular training on different economic and social issues.

## 2. Economic development

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

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



### 3. Reducing gender-based violence

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

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

### 4. Social Action Teams

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

- Training is imparted to these members on **observation and communications skills** as well as first response.
- They spread awareness in the villages about importance of education in girls and adolescents, the difficulties involved in early marriages, alcoholism, migration, trafficking, etc.
- They have been instrumental in identifying and stopping cases of **child marriage and domestic violence** in the villages.
- RDTs sister organisations manage **Childline 1908** the Government's helpline for children, in the Anantapur district.

### 5. Counselling centers and shelter home

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

- We run **counselling centers** especially in the Kadiri region where incidence of trafficking are especially high. These sessions are led by RDT staff and a female doctor, who also checks on their health.
- To extend rehabilitative support RDT runs **a shelter home in Bathalapalli for women in distress**. These women and their family members are provided with counselling to help them recover from their trauma. They are also imparted with vocational training.

### 6. Widow's support

Widows and destitute women who are in vulnerable situations are provided with nutritional support so that they can maintain their health and don't fall prey to illnesses.