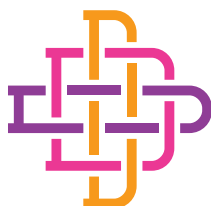# From Vulnerability to Leadership:
Lessons Learned from Collective and Collaborative Action for Rural Girls and Women in India

3D Program
FOR GIRLS & WOMEN

Document. Drive. Deliver.

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Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM) works with rural women in perennially drought-prone areas of Pune and Ahmednagar districts of Maharashtra state, and activities include women's right to health, confronting gender-based violence, building a progressive perspective among young people and enhancing women's rights in all areas of life.

Website: https://www.MASUM-India.org.in

Chaitanya is one of the pioneers of community-based microfinance institutions in Maharashtra. It facilitated the formation of the first Self-Help Group (SHG) federation in Maharashtra with the objective of supporting savings and credit for group members. Since its formation Chaitanya has played a catalytic role in spreading the SHG movement in and around Maharashtra. At present 40 federations promoted by Chaitanya are owned and governed by women members of more than 8,500 SHGs and work as strong, sustainable institutions that perform financial and other community development activities.

Website: https://www.ChaitanyaIndia.org

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) Asia's mission is to empower women, advance gender equality and fight poverty in the developing world. ICRW's Asia Regional Office in New Delhi collaborates closely with local, regional and international partners to undertake field research and program work and communicates findings and experience to policymakers through advocacy efforts that are grounded in sound evidence and data.

Website: https://www.ICRW.org/ICRW-Asia/

The **3D Program for Girls and Women** advances gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment by helping local governments work more efficiently across departments, and with civil society and the private sector, to increase economic opportunities for girls and women and address their health, education and safety needs.

Website: https://the3DProgram.org

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

From 2017 to 2021, the 3D Program for Girls and Women advanced gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment by helping local governments work with civil society and the private sector, while strengthening women's voices to hold government accountable. The Program demonstrated how convergent action or multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approaches can advance gender equality, with a focus on the economic empowerment, health, education and public safety of girls and women. With a small team hosted at the United Nations Foundation in Washington DC, USA, the 3D Program worked with government, civil society organizations and private sector partners to demonstrate convergent action in Pune District, Maharashtra State, India.

Maharashtra was the ideal choice because of its reliable government systems and the presence of both strong civil society and private sector actors who invest in rural development. Despite having the highest GDP of any state in India, Maharashtra continues to struggle with significant gender gaps and inequalities that disadvantage girls and women.[1] Within Maharashtra, we chose Pune District for both practical and strategic reasons. Pune is easily accessible and many on our team were fluent in Marathi, the state language. Pune District is also well known for its strong tradition of grassroots organizing and women's movements and is the historical center of the social reform movement of Maharashtra, gaining a reputation over the years for progressive social innovations.

This report provides a review of the 3D Program's rural program over the past four years, describing our efforts to establish a platform for collective action and a convergent and collaborative approach, across stakeholders and sectors, to advance the economic empowerment, health, education and safety of girls and women in select villages in two blocks or talukas of Pune District, Purandar and Khed. The report also describes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the course of the program and plans for the future scaling-up of the program based on the lessons learned and insights gained from this foundational phase.

The report draws on the wisdom and contributions of the authors and other members of the rural team, including Dr. Ramesh Awasthi of MASUM, Kalpana Pant of Chaitanya, and Dr. Ravi Verma, Pranita Achyut, Amajit Mukherjee, Shweta Bankar and Madhu Deshmukh of the International Center for Research on Women, (ICRW), Asia.

We are grateful to our rural partners MASUM, Chaitanya, and ICRW, Asia for their collaborative partnership and visionary work to organize and empower the rural girls and women of Purandar and Khed. In Purandar, we thank Jyoti Choundkar in Naigaon village and Bharti Gophane and Padma Dalvi in Bhivari village. We are also grateful to Sonali Sutar and Jyoti Condkar, and the entire MASUM team, who served as resource persons for training sessions that were conducted by the team. In Khed, we thank Najuka Gunjal of Kharoshi village; Hiratai Tambore of Mandoshi village; and Varsha Bhalerao and Sugandha Korade of Dehane Village.

We are grateful to Leadership for Equity for their partnership in developing our Quality of Service Index. We also worked closely with Sangini, a civil society organization based in Nashik, to conduct a project to improve menstrual care management. We thank them for their partnership. The Maharashtra Village Social Transformation Foundation (VSTF), a public-private entity that places trained fellows in villages across the state to facilitate sustainable economic and social development, provided us with important insights on scaling up our program. We are grateful to them for allowing us to learn from them and share our expertise and experience to strengthen their ability to address gender dynamics in the villages in which they work.

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[1] Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, 2019-20.

[2] Shweta Bankar is currently working with the Centre for Social and Behavior Change and Madhu Deshmukh is currently working at CARE, International.

Vanessa Coello, Senior Program Associate
Sia Nowrojee, Executive Director
Geeta Rao Gupta, Founder and Senior Advisor

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the 3D Program for Girls and Women was established in rural Pune District to advance gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment by helping local governments work more efficiently across departments, and with civil society and the private sector, while strengthening women's voices and platforms to hold government accountable. From 2017 to 2021, the program facilitated good governance through convergent action to increase economic opportunities for girls and women and address their health, education and safety needs.

Convergent action addresses the persistent shortcomings of development programs caused by working in sectoral siloes, with limited collaboration between government, private sector and civil society, and without the active engagement of the people they serve. We believe that girls and women are best served when traditional boundaries are crossed and the barriers of siloes are broken so that sectors and stakeholders – including girls and women themselves – can come together to get things done.

To demonstrate convergent action, we established a partnership with three civil society organizations, Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM), Chaitanya and ICRW, Asia to implement the program in two blocks or talukas of Pune District, Purandar and Khed. The two talukas were selected because they provided two distinct social and economic contexts for the implementation of the program.

Purandar is home to 108 villages and 3 towns and the main occupations are agriculture and animal husbandry. According to the 2011 census, the taluka has a population of approximately 235,000, most of whom are Hindus. The female literacy rate is 67.83 percent as compared to a male literacy rate of 79.51 percent and the sex ratio in the taluka is 965 women to every 1,000 men.[3] Since 1987, MASUM has worked in the drought-prone regions of Purandar taluka to mobilize rural communities to confront gender-based violence, increase women's economic self-reliance and improve their access to health care using a human rights-based approach, as well as strengthen girls and women's political participation and representation in local governance.

Khed taluka, where Chaitanya has worked since 1993, is larger than Purandar, with a population of approximately 450,000 but with a lower female literacy rate (63.77 percent) and a worse sex ratio (892 women to every 1,000 men).[4] Like Purandar,

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[3] Census of India (2011) https://www.censusindia2011.com/maharashtra/pune/purandhar-population. html#:~:text=As%20per%20the%20Census%20India,is%2010.62%25%20of%20total%20population.

[4] Census of India (2011) https://www.censusindia2011.com/maharashtra/pune/khed-population.html

Khed has a majority Hindu population but it has a larger tribal population. For over two decades, Chaitanya has promoted women's community-based microfinance institutions in Khed and has built a strong network of self-reliant and sustainable women's self-help groups and federations. Khed taluka also houses a large industrial park that provides employment to many in the taluka and corporate social responsibility resources to civil society organizations working in the area.

ICRW, Asia complemented the grassroots presence and capabilities of the other partners with its strong record of evidence-based program design, monitoring and evaluation research and gender training. Working across several states in India, ICRW, Asia has conducted pioneering research and led large-scale policy change to address the needs of girls and women. As a 3D Program partner, ICRW, Asia documented evidence and learning, coordinated the different streams of work in the rural program, and, with MASUM, designed and conducted gender training for local government officials and other partners.

The goal of the 3D Program for Girls and Women mirrored the overall objectives of our partners to empower girls and women. The partnership provided an opportunity to further strengthen the on-going work of each organization, while working together to find convergent, innovative and sustainable ways to institutionalize women's participation in local governance. We effectively leveraged existing governance and political mechanisms for girls and women to collaboratively work with government and elected officials, as well as other stakeholders to solve local problems.

We also established a Program Advisory Committee (PAC) to help us shape the program and make it effective in meeting its objectives. Consisting of representatives of government, civil society and the private sector in India, as well as experts on public policy, gender and development, the law, arts and culture, and philanthropy, the PAC met four times as a group and we consulted with individual members, as needed, over the course of the program. Annex A lists the members of the PAC and their institutional affiliations.

This report provides a description of the 3D Program's rural program of work over the past four years. It lists the program's objectives, the activities, progress achieved and challenges faced, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020-21, and finally, the lessons learned, insights gained and plans for scaling up and sustaining the work in the future.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the 3D Program in rural Pune were to:

1. **Document** the multisectoral needs and priorities of girls and women and the schemes and programs provided by government to meet those needs.

2. **Drive** stakeholders and sectors to collaborate at the district, block and village levels to demonstrate ways to more effectively meet girls and women's needs

3. **Deliver** convergent solutions to address girls and women's needs and priorities and fill gaps in the delivery and use of government programs and schemes.

The goal was to demonstrate a model for convergence to improve delivery of government programs and schemes for girls and women by helping government work across departments and stakeholders, while strengthening women's voices to provide feedback to and hold government accountable.

Program Implementation

To meet the three objectives, the program was implemented in Purandar and Khed talukas or blocks of rural Pune District. The activities were undertaken in close collaboration with key stakeholders across sectors, including rural girls and women, government officials from the district or the Zilla Parishad, block or taluka and village government, elected officials at the village level, civil society representatives, research organizations, a public-private initiative for rural development and corporate sector entities that invest in the empowerment of girls and women. Significant progress was made in achieving the objectives from 2017 to 2019, with some shifts in programming made from 2020 to 2021 to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

1. Documenting Needs of Girls and Women and Government Programs to Address Them

To inform the design and implementation of 3D Program activities, we first conducted a landscape analysis of the historical, demographic, social and economic context of Pune District and the administrative systems that operate within it; the status of girls and women in the district; and key education, health and safety initiatives implemented by the government, civil society and the private sector.[5] This was supplemented

[5] See *Empowerment of Girls and Women: A Landscape Analysis of Pune*, https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2019/07/Landscape-Analysis-Report-June-2018.pdf

with an analysis of global and Indian evidence on what works for the economic empowerment of low-income girls and women.[6] Finally, a review was conducted of the scope and impact of violence against girls and women in public spaces in India and the steps that have been taken to address these issues by different stakeholders, including law enforcement, civil society organizations and government agencies.[7]

To validate the information gathered through these reviews, the 3D Program team met with senior officials at the state, district and block levels and representatives from civil society and the private sector who were actively engaged in efforts to empower girls and women in rural Pune. These meetings were complemented with workshops and forums on select topics, including:

- A workshop on convergence as a strategy to empower girls and women, co-hosted jointly with Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA), the administrative training and research institute of the Government of Maharashtra;[8]

Participants at the workshop on convergence as a strategy to empower girls and women.
Photo by the 3D Program

[6] See *Economic Programs in India: What Works for the Empowerment of Girls and Women*, https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2018/10/3D-Economic-Empowerment-Report-August-2018.pdf

[7] See *Working Together for Girls' and Women's Safety in Public Spaces: Lessons from India*, https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2019/06/3D-Program-Public-Safety-report-June-2019.pdf

[8] See *Sangam: Convergence as a Strategy to Empower Girls and Women*, https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2017/12/3D-Program-Sangam-Workshop-report-2.pdf

- An expert consultation on the economic empowerment of urban and rural girls and women in India to test and validate the recommendations developed through the review of economic empowerment programs in India;[9]

- A roundtable discussion on data convergence with experts from the statistics departments of the Government of Maharashtra and the Pune district Zilla Parishad, as well as data experts from academic institutions and advocates from civil society organizations to explore the possibility for gaining efficiencies by converging data gathering, analysis and storage across departments rather than each department doing so separately;[10] and

- A workshop on public safety co-hosted with the Women's Studies Center at ILS Law College, Pune to validate a framework of key domains through which stakeholders across diverse movements and sectors can prevent and respond to incidents of violence,[11] which was developed based on the review of the scope and impact of violence against girls and women in public spaces.

3D Program workshop on public safety of girls and women. *Photo by the 3D Program*

[9] See *What Works for the Economic Empowerment of Girls and Women*, https://the3dprogram.org/document/what-works-for-womens-and-girls-economic-empowerment/
[10] See *Data Convergence to Empower Girls and Women*, https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2018/02/3D-Program-Data-Con-workshop-report-1.19.18.pdf
Program for Girls and Women, 2018
[11] See Working Together to Keep Girls and Women Safe in Public Spaces, https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2019/08/3D-Program-Public-Safety-Report-Launch-Proceedings-June-2019.pdf

To add to this rich background information, the 3D Program team also conducted eight focus group discussions with girls and women in Purandar and six in Khed to learn about their priority needs, their knowledge of existing government schemes and programs and their experience in using them.

The following overarching take-aways from these activities informed the 3D Program's activities:

- Social indicators for girls and women, such as the literacy rate, sex ratio and age of marriage, continue to lag behind state and national averages, despite Pune district being more economically and socially advanced compared to other districts in Maharashtra and in India.

- There is broad acknowledgement that multi-sectoral approaches could serve girls and women better, and the term 'convergence' is readily used in discussions and even in government scheme guidelines. Yet, past efforts to achieve convergence across departments in government have been deemed unsuccessful because of a lack of appropriate incentives or mechanisms.

"Too often we are not seeing the big picture, busy with the day-to-day work of government. The result is that we work in silos and see limited impact and limited satisfaction. To truly serve girls and women effectively, we need to coordinate multiple inputs and provide them simultaneously. By talking to each other within the Zilla Parishad and sharing data, we will be able to jointly plan and implement programs more effectively. By working with partners in civil society and the corporate sector, who can provide technical and other inputs, we can fill gaps and benefit from new methodologies and additional resources."

- **Suraj Mandhare**,
Indian Administrative Service Officer and former CEO of the Zilla Parishad (District Council), Pune, Maharashtra State.

- Government officials are well-intentioned and want to work differently to better serve girls and women, but often do not have the bandwidth or the continuity of service to do so.[12]
- There are numerous government programs meant to meet the needs of girls and women in poor communities but many are under-utilized and allocated budgets often go unspent.
- There are significant overlaps between schemes, resulting in a lack of clarity which remains a key barrier to girls and women benefitting from them.
- Some government programs, such as the Maharashtra Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) and other reproductive health schemes under the National Health Mission, hold promise but implementation challenges have undermined their potential and the quality of their services.
- There are significant inefficiencies in the collection, analysis and use of data at the state and district levels. Each department has its own system, with a lack of clarity on the use of data for the design, planning, implementation and monitoring of schemes, and little effort is made to share data across departments, even when they all serve the same population.
- Private sector actors invest in rural development through their corporate social responsibility programs that sometimes work with civil society organizations. However, for the most part they work in silos and do not collaborate with each other or with government and often do not base their programming on a gender analysis.
- Civil society organizations contribute significantly to rural development, filling gaps in services to meet demand or expanding the reach of government programs. However, they are often seen as having limited reach and sometimes are viewed as adversaries rather than collaborators by state or district government.
- Civil society organizations often create parallel systems of service delivery because of a deficit of trust in government.
- There is no mechanism or platform for adolescent girls to participate in local governance bodies and contribute to community decision-making.

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[12] For example, over the course of the 4-years, due to transfers for various reasons, the 3D Program worked with four different CEOs at the Zilla Parishad office at the district level!

- Girls and women are often unaware of government schemes and programs that are intended for them.
- The digitization of government programs to increase efficiencies has the perverse effect of creating challenges for rural women to enroll because of their limited knowledge of and access to smartphones, computers and the Internet.
- Women reported that Mahila Gram Sabhas (MGSs) or women's general body meetings, which are mandated by the Panchyati Raj system to be held regularly, are rarely convened, and as a result women's concerns and needs are rarely reflected in Gram Sabha (GS) or general body meeting discussions or village Panchayat agendas.
- There is no mechanism for girls and women to provide feedback to the government or hold local officials accountable.

In sum, there was a gap between intention and implementation, as well as between investment and outcome. While the private sector and civil society organizations often fill gaps in government programming, they do not always succeed in working in sustained partnership with government. And finally, there were few functioning platforms for girls and women to participate in local governance.

2. Driving Convergence Between Sectors and Stakeholders

To demonstrate the value of convergence to address some of the issues that emerged from the documentation exercise, the 3D Program established multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms. Each of these is described below.

a. Driving collaboration across government departments and with rural women at the district, block and village levels

To facilitate sharing of data and the development of multisectoral solutions to meet girls and women's needs, the 3D Program established Convergence Planning Committees at the district, block and village levels. The membership of the District Convergence Planning Committee (DCPC) and the each of the Block Convergence Planning Committees (BCPCs), one in Purandar and one in Khed, included heads of the various sectoral departments and the civil society organization representatives

of the 3D Program team, with private sector or academic representatives invited to attend, as needed. The membership of the Village Convergence Planning Committees (VCPCs), included girls and women from each of two villages in Purandar (Naigaon and Bhivari) and three villages in Khed (Mandoshi, Kharoshi and Dehane), in addition to local village administrative and elected officials, such as the Sarpanch or head of the village Panchayat, the Talathi or the Revenue Officer, the local police constable and the principal of the local elementary school.

This three-tier structure – DCPC, BCPC and VCPC – was designed by the 3D Program to enable a free flow of information to and from the village to the block and onward to the district, enabling girls' and women's needs and perspectives, as well as feedback from them and local government functionaries and elected officials to inform decisions made by block and district level officials. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for all three committees are provided in Annex B.

A DCPC meeting in progress at the Zilla Parishad, Pune. *Photo by the 3D Program*

Typically, any committee or mechanism in government to address girls and women's needs is by default chaired by the head of the Women and Child Welfare Department (WCD). However, a committee that is chaired by the head of one department is unlikely to have the power to demand action and accountability from other heads of department who are peers. For this reason, at the district or Zilla Parishad level, we sought and received an endorsement from the District Collector for the formation of the committees and convinced the CEO, the senior-most official in the Zilla Parishad

office, to chair the District Convergence Planning Committee (DCPC). This was the best way to provide the DCPC with the stature to draw heads of other departments to meetings and to give the committee the authority to set agendas of work. WCD was designated by the CEO to serve as the secretariat for the DCPC and in this capacity was responsible for scheduling meetings, setting agendas in collaboration with the 3D Program team and arranging the necessary logistics.[13] A similar model was followed at the block or taluka level, with the Block Development Officer (BDO) chairing the Block Convergence Planning Committees (BCPC) and the WCD serving as the secretariat.

After organizing just two DCPC and BCPC meetings, it became evident that senior district and block officials did not value meeting as a group to resolve issues that were identified by the VCPCs. Given the hierarchical culture of government, we realized that the same outcome could be achieved more efficiently by sharing the feedback and issues of concern raised at the VCPC meetings with the CEO at the Zilla Parishad and with the BDO at the block level, discuss potential solutions with them and have

A BCPC meeting in progress in Purandar. *Photo by the 3D Program.*

[13] Two years later the Department for Rural Development was assigned the role of the secretariat.

them issue instructions or orders to the respective department heads to implement the necessary actions. As a result, after the first two meetings, we stopped holding DCPC and BCPC meetings.

The VCPC platform, in contrast, proved to be well-attended and in high demand by girls and women, as well as by local front-line government workers and elected officials. There was no equivalent forum for girls and women to share their views and solve problems collaboratively with each other, as well as with those in positions of power at the village level. The self-help group (SHG) model for women as a way for rural women to gain power through numbers to negotiate for their needs is popular, well organized and supported across Pune district by civil society organizations and the government. However, that model grew out of the microfinance movement and while SHGs have empowered rural women, they do not provide them with a direct way to influence local governance or political processes.

The only other forum for women to influence local governance is the Mahila Gram Sabha (MGS) or the women's general body meeting at the village level. India's Panchayati Raj or local governance system includes within it a provision for MGSs to be held regularly, prior to the Gram Sabha or village general body meeting, to enable women to identify priorities and prepare for participation in the Gram Sabha. However, MGSs are rarely held in Pune district and it is unclear why or who is accountable to hold them. The government and local elected officials complain that even when they are held, women do not participate, and the women insist that they would attend if they were held regularly. The VCPCs filled the void left by the restricted mandate of the SHGs and the absence of MGSs. Finally, there is no mechanism for adolescent girls in rural areas to have their voices heard and the VCPCs provided them that venue. VCPCs were successful not just in serving as an effective platform to converge the perspectives and resources of women with those of government and elected officials, but were also effective in addressing priority issues and solving local problems (see Section III 3a for VCPC outcomes and results).

b. Driving collaboration between public and private stakeholders to demonstrate ways to meet girls' and women's needs

The 3D Program also established innovative partnerships between government, the private sector and civil society to demonstrate and test solutions to problems raised by girls and women in VCPC meetings. These are documented in detail in the 3D Program Case Studies in Convergence Series.[14] This section summarizes three such collaborations to:

- Increase economic opportunities for young rural women by making job skills training programs more accessible to them;
- Increase the safety of girls in public transportation to enable them to more freely pursue educational, job and other opportunities; and
- Provide girls and women with options for menstrual hygiene management.

(i) Collaborating to provide job skills training for rural women: The difficulty rural women faced in getting jobs in the formal labor market, such as in administration or accounting, was repeatedly mentioned by younger women and adolescent girls, as well as their mothers. Many young women and girls had completed high school and even college, but still found themselves lacking the skills required to get, what they called, "office jobs", such as computer skills, English-language skills, and the confidence to interact and negotiate with peers and supervisors. They saw office jobs as a way to earn a better salary and not be limited to agricultural work or running small enterprises, such as pickle making or sewing, that are usually associated with rural women,

Although there are several skill-building programs run by the government, NGOs and corporate initiatives in India, they are mostly located in cities, typically recruit young men and women from low-income urban communities and are offered in the evenings. Private courses are too expensive for young women from low-income families and do not provide the necessary networks and support to help them find jobs. Government courses, some of which are available in rural locations, are often of poor quality, do not link to market realities, and do not provide support with job placement. For

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[14] https://the3dprogram.org/documents/

rural women, cost, distance and timings present challenges that prevent them from participating in those training programs.

To address these gaps, the 3D Program facilitated a multisectoral partnership to implement an innovative residential job skills and placement program in Pune City for young rural women from Purandar block. The program partners were: a) a corporate entity, Tech Mahindra Foundation, which had received recognition for its success in running job skills training programs in Pune City and elsewhere across the country; b) their academic partner, SNDT Women's University, where Tech Mahindra's course was offered; and c) MASUM, a 3D Program partner, with a long history of working with girls and young women in Purandar. Together, these partners implemented the training program as a way to demonstrate that it is possible to increase job skills training and placement opportunities for young women from rural areas.[15]

SNDT Women's University and the Tech Mahindra Foundation provided the infrastructure and the trained personnel from their existing job skills training program, but the program was modified to meet rural women's needs in the following ways:

- Instead of it being a part-time course that ran for four months, it was offered as a full-time residential course over the two months of the summer holidays, when the University's dormitories and dining facilities were available, allowing the young rural women to stay on campus.
- The teaching hours per day were increased to allow for the shorter duration of the program, though the syllabus remained the same as the regular part-time program.
- The 3D Program covered the costs of lodging and food for the students for a daily cost of INR 217 (under USD 3) per student, while the tuition costs were covered by Tech Mahindra, as they do for their part-time program.

Each partner leveraged their particular skills to implement the program in a way that met the unique needs and constraints of young rural women. Two courses were offered: Office Administration and Goods and Services Tax and Accounting (GST Accounting). Tech Mahindra Foundation also offered workplace readiness sessions and organized exposure visits to companies and potential employers. SNDT Women's

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[15] "Dreaming the Impossible: Insights from an Innovative Job Skills Program for Rural Young Women in Maharashtra, India." Case Studies in Convergence Series, no. 1, Washington, DC: 3D Program for Girls and Women, 2020.

University provided instruction in spoken English, information technology and computers, typing and office etiquette. MASUM complemented that training with sessions on gender-related issues, such as gender-based violence, menstrual hygiene and sexual harassment in the workplace; a field trip to expose students to city life outside the campus; and weekly visits to resolve any interpersonal or personal issues that the young women were facing. MASUM was also responsible for encouraging parents to allow their daughters to participate in the program, mobilizing community support, orientating the new recruits, organizing logistics and hiring a placement officer to place graduates from the course in jobs in rural towns in Purandar, which Tech Mahindra did not have the networks to provide.

As a result of the complementary expertise and role of each partner, the partnership as a whole proved to be greater than the sum of its parts. It successfully demonstrated a new model to meet the demand for job skills training among young rural women. However, the partnership also posed challenges and resulted in some tensions because MASUM and Tech Mahindra Foundation had different definitions of success for the project. The results of this innovative partnership and the challenges are discussed in detail in Section 3b(i).

Graduates of the job skilling program at their graduation ceremony. *Photo by the 3D Program*

(ii) Collaborating to increase the safety of girls in public transportation: The analysis done by the 3D Program on girls and women's safety in public spaces[16], together with reports from girls and women in VCPCs that they felt unsafe in almost every public space in the rural areas in which they lived, led to a recommendation to strengthen the capacity of public services to prevent and address violence against women and girls (VAWG) and increase accountability within and across public spaces.

The 3D Program team identified three priority sets of public servants: the police, education officials, and public transportation staff. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the availability of participants from all these sectors. The police were busy with managing lockdowns and emergency responses, and colleges and high schools were closed. Public transportation was also curtailed, but the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) staff in Purandar block were available and were identified as the first cohort for training.

Public transport is a critical element of public spaces, linking citizens to resources, new experiences, and life changing opportunities. For rural girls and women, public buses are the most vital mode of public transport for routine travel. These buses connect the remotest of villages with educational institutions, government offices, courts, police, health care, commercial centers, marketplaces and recreational centers. MSRTC officials plan the everyday functioning of public buses and regulate passenger movement and safety. Their capacities, approaches and responses determine the kinds of experiences girls and women encounter while using public bus transport and the redressal mechanisms available when physical and sexual violence occurs.

To design and implement the training program, the 3D Program brought together three stakeholders: the state government entity, the Maharashtra State Road Transport Company (MSRTC) and 3D Program partners with training and gender expertise, MASUM and ICRW, Asia.

The MSRTC was interested in implementing measures to increase girls and women's safety on their buses and in their depots and had already taken measures to address gender inequalities and public safety in Pune District. This included the 2019 decision

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[16] https://the3dprogram.org/document/safe-travels-increasing-girls-and-womens-safety-on-public-transport/

to hire over 160 women bus drivers. MSRTC guidelines traditionally required a minimum of three years of experience driving heavy motor vehicles and a minimum height requirement of five feet two inches. These guidelines were changed to make it easier for women to qualify. Women with one year of experience driving a light motor vehicle were selected for training, and the height requirement was dropped to five feet. These changes created new economic and professional opportunities for women drivers and potentially improved the safety of female passengers. Additionally, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in response to a request and analysis done by the 3D Program, MSRTC had agreed to review its bus schedules to synchronize them with the school and college schedules of girls and young women, to enable them to attend more classes and waste less time waiting at bus stops, exposing them to an increased risk of sexual harassment.

The training program was designed to increase understanding of the relevance of addressing violence against women and identify ways to improve public transport services. Additionally, it covered the law and policy framework on violence against girls and women in India; analyzed the role that gender norms play in responses to violence; explored difficult situations and identified solutions; and allowed participants to understand their role in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls across a range of public spaces. The majority of participants were bus drivers and conductors, but Purandar bus depot officials also participated.

"We do notice and intervene when girls and women face harassment and violence. But we had never comprehended the magnitude of adversities and hardships that befall them due to such incidents."

- **MSRTC Training Participant**

The partnership between MASUM, ICRW, Asia and the MSRTC was collaborative and effective because the senior officials in the MSRTC appreciated the need for such a program and were willing partners. They made the necessary arrangements for over 200 staff members to participate in the program and provided all the necessary support for the program to be conducted during COVID-19, with appropriate safety measures. The details of the outcomes from the training program are documented in the 3D Program Case Studies in Convergence No. 3 report[17] and a summary of the outcomes achieved are provided in Section 3b(ii).

(iii) Collaborating to provide girls and women with options for menstrual hygiene management: Healthy menstrual hygiene management (MHM) contributes to women's reproductive and sexual health. Rural women in India typically use some combination of disposable sanitary napkins and pads made with rags for MHM. Disposable sanitary napkins are available commercially and are distributed at a subsidized rate by the government, through the ASHA or community health workers. In VCPCs, girls and women complained that the pads provided by the government were of poor quality and during the COVID-19 crisis, they were not available through the ASHA workers. Commercial sanitary pads are readily available but are expensive, costing approximately INR 75 (1 USD) for a menstrual period that lasts an average of three days. To save money, many girls and women use sanitary napkins only when their menstrual flow is heavy or when they have to leave their home and go to school. At home, they tend to use rags, which may or may not be sanitized. Rural women also face the added challenge of discreetly disposing of used pads in the absence of a formal garbage disposal system. Moreover, disposable sanitary pads are not an environmentally sustainable option, given how long they take to decompose and the high amounts of fossil fuel generated energy required to process the plastic back-strip used to make them leakproof.

To address these challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 3D Program partnered with Essity, a global health and hygiene private sector company, which provided funding, and with the social enterprise, Allforasmile Foundation in Pune, to procure and distribute innovatively designed, reusable, absorbent cloth pads, to test the acceptability of more environmentally-friendly, and in the long-term, less expensive reusable cloth pads.

[17] See "Safe Travels: Increasing Girls' and Women's Safety on Public Transport." Case Studies in Convergence Series, no. 3, Washington, DC: 3D Program for Girls and Women, 2021.
https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2021/01/3D-Program-case-study-no.-3-MSRTC-Gender-training-January-2021.pdf

The study was designed to make recommendations to the government and other stakeholders on the acceptability, cost and distribution of reusable pads by conducting interviews with women to understand:

- women's menstrual journeys;
- their experience of using reusable cloth pads, as compared to disposable pads;
- their willingness to continue to use the cloth pads for multiple menstrual cycles, in combination with disposable pads or exclusively;
- the mechanism best suited to supply reusable pads to rural women; and
- the amount that women are willing to pay for a reusable cloth pad, which requires a higher outlay of cash initially but is cheaper over the long-term.

The study was jointly conducted through a collaboration between ICRW, Asia, MASUM and Chaitanya, together with a civil society organization, Sangini, based in Nashik, a town in Nashik District, Maharashtra, who collected similar data from an urban sample of girls and women to provide the basis for a comparison between rural and urban settings.

This partnership between private sector companies (global and local), a research organization and three civil society organizations, like other 3D Program partnerships, effectively leveraged the expertise and skills of each partner to conduct this pilot study and generate useful data to share with the government on the potential for the provision of more than one menstrual hygiene option for girls and women. The details and results of the study are summarized in Section 3b(iii).

3. Delivering Convergent Solutions to Address Needs and Priorities and Fill Gaps in Programs

Each of the collaborations described in the section above were established to demonstrate potential solutions to needs and priorities identified by girls and women that affect their families and communities. This section describes what the 3D Program was able to deliver from each of these partnerships.

a. Delivering outcomes through VCPCs

Over the course of the 3D Program, a total of 19 VCPC meetings were held in Purandar taluka and 32 meetings in Khed. A common format for documentation was used across all VCPCs to record attendance, minutes from each meeting, issues raised, actions proposed and solutions achieved. This helped the 3D Program team to follow-up, track and report back on steps taken to address each proposed action.

Girls and women identified multiple issues that were of concern to them. Some were very local, such as a missing gate in a school compound that made it unsafe for children to play or a water pump that was not working. Others were more systemic issues, such as the lack of accessible maternity care services, challenges in enrolling in certain government schemes or ensuring that women could register property in their names. With the help of the 3D Program, VCPC members were able to bring each issue to the attention of the relevant local or block level official for resolution. Examples of outcomes achieved include the following:

- 26 women's self-help groups (SHGs) were formed and registered in Purandar with the Panchayat Samiti under Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM) enabling the women members to become eligible for benefits and loans. In Bhivari village, for example, 19 SHGs received a loan of INR 100,000 (approximately USD 1,350) each under MSRLM during COVID, which helped them support their family's needs during the pandemic. A village federation of SHGs, known as a Gram Sangh, was also formed through the MSRLM in Bhivari.
- VCPC members worked with the Gram Sevak, the village development officer, in Bhivari, to ensure that a water-line connection to a health sub-center was completed.
- In Naigaon village, Purandar, VCPC members identified and registered 30 vulnerable single and separated women who were eligible for pensions under the government scheme, Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana.
- VCPC members in Khed identified and ensured over 200 households in three villages received water wheels[18] through a Habitat from Humanity program.
- VCPC members organized their first MGS in Bhivari village.

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[18] Water drums with wheels to make it more convenient to transport water over long distances.

- In Naigaon, where MASUM had already established regular MGS meetings, VCPC members used those meetings to identify priorities and orient village women about government schemes.

Additional examples of issues identified and actions taken in VCPC meetings are provided in Annex C.

During the COVID pandemic, VCPCs played an important role in facilitating COVID relief, disseminating prevention information, identifying vulnerable families and individuals and distributing vital emergency supplies, such as food rations (see Box 1).

Box 1. VCPC Food Distribution Activities During COVID-19

VCPC members leveraged resources from government and the private sector to:
- Identify and distribute ration kits to 60 vulnerable families in Naigaon, Purandar;
- Distribute dry rations to migrants who were in Khed and unable to return home;
- Help start a kitchen to feed migrant workers in Rajgurunagar, Khed;
- Distribute food to 300 people twice a day in Khed, with support from various donors and the Revenue Department;
- Identify vulnerable families and enroll 54 families in Sharad Bhojan scheme in Khed;
- Distribute groceries to 13 needy families in Dehane, Khed through the Jan Arogya Abhiyan or People's Health Movement of Maharashtra;
- Distribute seeds and train 90 girls and women to create kitchen gardens in Khed to ensure a healthy food supply and generate income.

During COVID, some VCPC members were able to meet in person or over the phone and these meetings proved to be effective platforms through which girls and women were able to collect and share data with government officials on the impact that COVID-19 had on the lives of girls and women (see Box 2).

Box 2. VCPC Data Collection

VCPC members collected data on:

- Cases of early marriage due to interrupted education and lower wedding costs during COVID and shared that data with the BDO and WCD officer;
- The number of girls in Class 10 who did not have smart phones or Internet connectivity and therefore could not participate in online classes and shared that information with the CEO at the Zilla Parishad;
- The need for the Zilla Parishad to increase women's access to the government-sponsored Employment Guarantee Scheme during COVID because of the limited market for agricultural products and reduced demand for agricultural labor, and to help women enroll in the newly initiated pilot programme, the Vishesh Rojgar Hami Abhiyan, to provide agricultural laborers with alternate wage earning opportunities.
- Cases of domestic violence that increased during the COVID lockdown period and the need to provide affected women with counselling services, legal guidance and better protection through the local Police Patil; and
- The lack of sanitary napkins provided by ASHA workers who were diverted to address COVID needs, forcing women to buy menstrual hygiene products from local medical shops at a high price.

VCPC Meeting in Naigaon village. *Photo by MASUM*

Overall, VCPCs have been credited by girls and women, as well as block, district and state officials for:

- increasing women's participation in local governance and decision-making;
- raising awareness of government officials of girls' and women's realities and priorities;
- creating a bond between local officials and the communities they serve; and
- strengthening local governance and women-led accountability of government actions.

In 2020, after three years of implementing the VCPC platform in Purandar and Khed, the 3D Program looked for opportunities to replicate and scale up the model across Maharashtra.

The most suitable initiative for scaling the VCPC model was the Maharashtra Village Social Transformation Foundation (VSTF)[19], a public-private entity that promotes a self-sustaining model of rural growth and development through a rural fellowship program that deploys trained fellows to work with Gram Panchayats to facilitate community engagement for local planning and development efforts. With funding support and the endorsement from the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and several corporate partners, VSTF currently covers villages across 93 blocks. In each village, the trained fellows focus on multiple development goals, including digital connectivity, improving learning outcomes, building pucca houses, water security, improving sanitation, environmental protection and increasing agricultural productivity.

A partnership with VSTF was established through a MoU with them and the State government to train VSTF fellows to establish and conduct VCPC meetings. Online training was organized for 110 VSTF fellows by 3D Program partners and was livestreamed, recorded and posted on different platforms, including YouTube and Google Drive. The training included an overview of Terms of Reference, membership requirements and other functional parameters, as well as testimonials from VCPC members from Purandar and Khed. The trainers shared and reviewed forms used to track issues raised and actions taken, as well as indicators to measure the impact of the VCPCs in resolving local issues and in assessing the impact on the confidence level and participation in local governance of the girls and women who participate in the VCPCs.

3D Program partners also organized gender training sessions for the fellows, so that they had the knowledge and tools to enable them to be aware of and responsive to the gender dynamics operating in communities and the role of VCPCs in promoting gender equality and girls' and women's participation in local governance. The training exposed the fellows to an understanding of gender norms and how they affect individual lives as well as local governance structures and processes. Many participants felt that the training was useful in revealing how much their own work was shaped by prevailing gender norms and stereotypes. There was consensus among the fellows that convening VCPCs was a good way to build a gendered perspective in the work they do at the village level. They also expressed the need for continued training on gender dynamics to make their work more effective.

[19] See https://www.mvstf.org/en

The partnership with VSTF expanded the reach of the 3D Program and laid the foundation for scaling up the 3D Program model for convergence across Maharashtra (see the final section). It also enabled the 3D Program's model to become an integral part of the State government's response to rural development and expanded the possibility for support from a broad range of influential private sector partners across the State.

> "To date, we have understood gender equality as implementing schemes for women and girls. We have not thought about the barriers that women and girls face in accessing government schemes and platforms. We look at them as numbers, I think we need to talk to women and girls and hear about their experiences and challenges. As rural development fellows, we must really think about this."
>
> - **VSTF Fellow**

b. Delivering outcomes through collaborations between public and private stakeholders

Each of the four examples of collaborations described in Section III 2b delivered results for girls and women that are summarized below and described in greater detail in the 3D Program's Case Studies in Convergence Series.

(i) Demonstrating a job skills training program for rural women: The job skills training program enrolled 45 young women, aged 16-26, from 22 villages in Purandar block in two courses: 36 chose Office Administration and nine chose Goods and Services Tax (GST) Accounting. All the young women completed the training program successfully. Of these, 21 women were placed in jobs after the course, although five dropped out, leaving 16 who are currently employed, nine of them with jobs in Pune city. The five who dropped out decided to continue their education, while also continuing to look for another job. The remaining 22 young women all chose to go back to school or college to complete their higher education rather than finding a job. Four of them chose to continue their education in Pune city, of which three enrolled in a course on

interior design and one was admitted to SNDT Women's University. It is interesting to note that despite the initial apprehension of living in the city, a large proportion of the young women chose to stay on in the city to either study or work.

The responsibility for job placement in Pune City was shouldered by Tech Mahindra, while MASUM hired a placement officer to identify jobs for the young women in semi-rural towns in Purandar. MASUM was careful to find out the young women's preferences with regard to type of job, location and salary expectations and with that information, as well as information on safety of each workplace, their placement officer was able to place 11 women in jobs. MASUM continues to help the women who are currently unemployed find suitable jobs. To date, the job placement rate is 35 percent, considerably lower than what Tech Mahindra Foundation and SNDT Women's University have achieved with urban women in the past, which was in the range of 70-75 percent. However, it is important to note that an additional 60 percent of women chose to pursue higher education after completing the course, which is a significant outcome for rural women. For Tech Mahindra, the pressure to place the women in jobs, resulted in them encouraging the students to take jobs even if they were only part-way through the training program. In contrast, for MASUM it was important for the young women to complete the course and feel empowered enough to decide how best to use that training, whether by seeking employment or pursuing further education. Another indicator of success used by Tech Mahindra Foundation is the monthly salary of students who are placed in jobs. For their traditional courses for urban youth, that target is set at INR 10,000 (USD 132). However, the average salary the young rural women received was significantly lower, at INR 7,000 per month (USD 92). From the perspective of Tech Mahindra, the job skills training program for young rural women did not meet their standards for success.

Moreover, for TechMahindra the additional support that the rural young women and their families needed from MASUM and the 3D Program to participate and complete the course showed that investing in them was an expensive proposition with a low return. For MASUM the expense was necessary and low compared to the return it generated in giving rural women a chance to visualize a future different from that of their parents.

Additionally, from MASUM's perspective, the number of early marriages prevented, were proof of the success of the program. Of the 45 young women, only one reported that getting her married was still a priority for her family; the others confirmed that any discussion of marriage was now delayed. The increase in the young women's level of self-confidence as exemplified in a poem written by one of the graduates (Annex D) was also a strong indicator of the success of the program. In addition, MASUM noted a shift in aspirations of the young women's parents, who now want their daughters to work and be financially independent.

> "Earlier I was hesitant to send my daughter far away, but this course has changed my view. Now I am confident that my daughter can live in a city and can take care of herself well. We talk to each other through video calls everyday so there is no anxiety of not seeing her."
>
> - **Mother of a course participant**

These differences in indicators of success between the two key partnerships led to them each arriving at very difference conclusions, with Tech Mahindra considering the program to be challenging and expensive, and MASUM considering the demonstration project to be a resounding success that needed to be scaled up and replicated by other private sector entities.

From the perspective of the 3D Program, this pilot program demonstrates that job training for rural young women needs greater investment but when those investments are made, the returns in terms of maximizing untapped human capital are immeasurable. Creating such programs in the future will require the convergence of the resources and strengths of different sectors:

- The government can provide the infrastructure and networks to reach young women at scale.
- Corporate programs can begin to invest in rural youth.
- Universities can play an important role by opening up their campuses and providing non-technical courses, such as life skills and other 'soft' skills courses, and by exposing young rural women to what it might be like to attend and live on a university campus.

- NGOs provide critical relationships within communities and can serve as advocates for young rural women to help them succeed at understanding and acting on their aspirations.

With these kinds of investments and partnerships, we anticipate that stakeholders will overcome the implementation challenges of providing job skills training programs for young rural women.

(ii) Training public transportation officials to increase girls' and women's safety: The training program on VAGW in public transportation was attended by 200 MSRTC bus drivers, conductors and other bus depot staff, in compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols. The participants included 189 men and 19 women, some of whom were seasoned MSRTC staff and others who were relatively new recruits.

The training was the first of its kind for all the participants and it resulted in an increase in their knowledge and awareness of VAWG and related issues. Initially, many participants described incidents in which they witnessed VAWG and intervened by directly taking action or encouraging girls and women to stand up to their harassers, placing an undue burden on girls and women to challenge their harassers, without understanding the fear of further violence that this elicited or restrictions on the mobility of girls and women that would invariably result from such confrontations. A couple of participants suggested that girls and women should not board crowded buses since there was unavoidable pushing and men were not wholly to blame. Some participants suggested that VAWG was knowingly or unknowingly provoked by girls who were socializing with boys or that it was an expected fallout of past, consensual relationships with a perpetrator. A few participants did not understand the difference between consensual physical contact and abuse.

These attitudes and beliefs were challenged during the training. The training also highlighted the impact of VAWG beyond particular incidents of harassment and assault. One case study described a girl who was no longer permitted to attend college by her parents after experiencing repeated sexual harassment at the bus stop. Participants were asked whether they agreed with the parents and why. Following the training, participants expressed more support for the girl, using arguments based on the right to education.

Overall, the post-training evaluation survey revealed a significant increase in scores of all participants, indicating a uniformly positive impact of the training. Participants understood that the stakes are high and so is the possibility for action.

"I previously thought there were only biological and no other differences between men and women. Had it not been for this training, I would not have gained this crucial perspective."

- **Training Participant**

Participants also unanimously agreed that there should be a strong response to VAWG and acknowledged the roles, responsibilities and accountability they had as MSRTC officials to prevent and act against incidents of VAWG occurring at public transport facilities, including buses, bus stops and the depot. They felt that the training provided a platform to discuss these kinds of experiences, understand deeper reasons for VAWG, and to think about their role and accountability mechanisms.

While one training session is not enough, the MSRTC training program demonstrated how a group that typically does not receive training on issues such as gender norms and women's rights can benefit from such an intervention. A fundamental shift that began during the training was changing participants' views of girls and women as vulnerable victims needing protection to recognizing girls and women as individuals with the right to bodily integrity and the right to mobility. This is an important shift, regardless of sector. The opportunities to build on these results and the demand that was generated are encouraging, both within the transportation sector and across other sectors.

(iii) Providing girls and women with options for menstrual hygiene management:
The study to determine the acceptability of reusable cloth pads was conducted on a sample of 150 women and girls aged 18-35 years from five villages each in Purandar and Khed blocks, as well as an urban slum in the city of Nashik. Through the study each participant was given a set of four reusable cloth pads for use, procured by the 3D Program from Allforasmile Foundation. Participants were interviewed thrice over a period of six months, from November 2020 to April 2021—at the beginning, during the third month and at the end.

Once the pads were procured, the research teams at MASUM, Chaitanya and Sangini were trained by ICRW, Asia on the use of the pads, research ethics, conducting qualitative research, data recording and data management. The trained staff began recruitment of women for the study. A key aspect of the study was that female staff working at the local level in MASUM, Chaitanya and Sangini, were trained as researchers. Most of the staff belonged to the villages, where the study participants lived. The study design received ethical approval from ICRW's Institutional Review Board. Under the study, 30 girls ranging in age from 18-22 years were also given menstrual diaries to share their thoughts around menstruation and express them in a creative manner.

Due to COVID, all study related training sessions and interviews were held and conducted telephonically. The participants included married and single women between the ages of 18-35 years, with the following characteristics: not-pregnant, not breast-feeding currently, no planned pregnancy for six months, no history of a hysterectomy and with regular menstrual cycles and a history of using a mix of menstrual products (cloth and disposable pads). The sample also included local health workers, such as ASHA and Aganwadi workers. Given the restrictions imposed by COVID, the team could not follow up regularly with the participants about the menstrual diaries, thus only 15 participants filled the diaries.

The key findings from the study interviews and diaries are:

• **Source of Information:** Mothers, sisters and sister-in-laws are the first source of information about menstruation and menstrual products for girls. In most cases information is limited to how to use cloth for protection (and in a few cases, pads) and how to dispose or where to wash the cloth, once girls got their first period. None of the participants in the study were told about the importance of how to maintain proper menstrual hygiene. A few girls reported that they had health sessions in school where they were told about menstruation, about menstrual products like pads and how to wash and dry menstrual cloth. This was more common in the urban slum of Nashik, where participants also shared that their friends were a key source of information

- **Use of menstrual products:** Women and girls used home-made cloth pads during their first period since their mothers also used cloth, with a few using disposable sanitary napkins like Whisper and Stayfree. Cloth was also used because of its easy availability at home and because it was free of cost. Participants shared that accessing sanitary napkins was difficult, because they were not available in markets near their homes. During their menstrual journeys, almost 50 percent of participants used cloth, the remaining 50 percent alternated between cloth and sanitary napkins, depending upon availability. Young women especially those below 25 years preferred sanitary pads because they feared cloth would leak and stain their clothes. They shared that sanitary napkins gave them confidence that the product will stay in place and adequately absorb menstrual blood, enabling them to conduct daily activities with far less stress and worry. This was particularly true in Nashik, where young girls whose families had migrated from rural areas, had made a shift to using disposable sanitary napkins and preferred these to reusable cloth pads.

> "A menstrual product should be cheap. Quality should be good. The new product should soak more and should be reusable."
>
> - **19-year old participant from Padali Village, Khed Block**

- **Health issues a concern:** Although comfort (in terms of disposal, washing and drying), access and affordability were the main reasons for using a particular menstrual product, there are instances where health issues played a dominant role in choice of menstrual product. Rubbing against the thighs, dampness and irritation were cited by many girls and women for shifting to disposable sanitary napkins in the absence of other suitable options/choice. Some participants also cited these very reasons for shifting from pads to cloth. In terms of expectations from a menstrual product, participants preferred an affordable product that would last for a longer period without posing any health issues.

- **Experience with reusable cloth pads:** Most participants used the reusable cloth pads given by the study at least for three cycles. They used these pads in combination with products that they were already using. They were confident in using the cloth pads during the day and when they were at home, at night but while going out they preferred using disposable sanitary napkins due to a fear of getting their clothes stained. It is interesting to note that in terms of the comfort and convenience of using the reusable cloth pads, there is a clear difference between the study's rural and urban sites. In Purandar and Khed blocks, participants shared that they found this reusable cloth pad very comfortable and convenient to use.

"While using this [resuable] pad I felt very comfortable. The blood doesn't leak and this is an important aspect as then I don't have to be afraid that my clothes would get stained. It is very comfortable to use. I find this very good, convenient and comfortable. If I go out I am confident that there would be no stains, there is no fear. Also, there is no problem while drying, it can be easily dried in the sun. Even if I don't use a brush, stains go away easily and it remains soft. This is very comfortable. I can sit anywhere without any fear. The pads from the shop are not so comfortable, it sometimes goes to one side and clothes get stained."

- **19 year old, single woman from Malshiras Village, Purandar Block.**

They found the material soft and absorbent. It resolved their problem of disposing and burning the used cloth. They also did not experience any embarrassment in drying these reusable pads because when they were unfolded they looked like a handkerchief. Majority of the participants in Purandar and Khed, found the reusable cloth pads better in terms of absorption compared to the cloth pads they were using earlier. Most said that they needed to change the reusable pad less often than other menstrual products that they had used so far. Many also liked the fact that by reusing these pads they were saving money every month.

In the urban slum of Nashik, the study participants' experiences were different. They found the use of cloth pads inconvenient. Most participants had transitioned to using disposable sanitary napkins and hence did not find cloth pads comfortable. Participants from Nashik shared that they did not like the feeling of wearing these pads, they found them heavy and wet, did not want to wash the pads, and did not have the time to do so. They constantly worried that the reusable cloth pads may stain their clothes.

- **Future use of reusable cloth pads:** In Purandar and Khed, most participants shared that they would be willing to continue to use the reusable cloth pads and would recommend them to others. Some participants did share that the quality of the fabric could be improved further, because after a few washes the cloth started feeling stiff. In Nashik, 35 out of 50 participants shared that they would be open to using the reusable pads, but in combination with other menstrual products. They preferred disposable pads while traveling and working. The remaining 15 participants from Nashik shared that they would not continue to use the reusable pads because they did not find them convenient.

- **Cost and availability of pads:** Most participants suggested that the reusable pad should be available at a lower price, although there were some participants who thought Rs 400 for 4 pads was appropriate. Participants were concerned about spending Rs 400 at one go; however, they did feel in the long term, these pads are more affordable. Participants suggested that the reusable pads should be available in the village, either through SHGs or in local shops and during weekly markets.

Overall, the study revealed that families, health workers, and schools do not adequately prepare young girls attaining menarche to deal with the physiological and psychological changes that occur. This forces girls to enter puberty with knowledge gaps or misinformation about menstruation and unprepared to cope with it. Further, the study emphasizes that social taboos around menstruation influence how women use and experience menstrual products. They prefer discreet products, such as a cloth pad that looks like a handkerchief. The study also shows that experiences of women and girls with menstrual products varies with their age and location and are influenced by the availability and cost of products.

An artistic representation by a 22-year-old participant from Malshiras village, Purandar block of how women feel during their periods.

The study highlighted that women and girls' needs and desires about menstrual products are not uniform and hence providing them with choices of menstrual products is important. Further, awareness about menstruation and menstrual products needs to be a part of health programs run by the government, civil society and the private sector. Finally, menstrual products should be easily accessible in places where women and girls are more likely to have access. The availability and distribution of menstrual products must keep in mind the constraints that women and girls face in terms of mobility and availability of financial resources.

REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS

Throughout the implementation of the 3D Program in rural Pune, we adopted a learning, iterative approach, evolving the content of the program based on the context, advice from our implementing partners and other stakeholders, as well as what we were hearing from girls and women. We regularly sought and responded to inputs and feedback from officials at the different levels of government, representatives of the private sector and various leaders of civil society organizations who provided valuable insights on the local context and the best way to navigate a complex environment to meet the needs of rural girls and women. This section captures many of the insights we gained and lessons we learned.

1. Girls' and Women's Priorities

When the 3D Program began, we identified four key priority areas of importance for girls and women: economic opportunity, health, education, and public safety. In conversations with adolescent girls and women in rural Pune, we found that these were, broadly speaking, the issues that they also prioritize. We also learned how interlinked these issues were as they played out in the daily lives of girls and women, which underscored the importance of multisectoral solutions or a convergent approach to programming. For example, threats to their safety in public spaces affects girls and women's mobility, which in turn affects their ability to participate in public life, access health services, and take advantage of education and employment opportunities. Similarly, the inability to pursue education opportunities affects their employment and income earning opportunities. Within each of the substantive areas of focus, girls and women shared with us the specific concerns they have and the gaps that exist in the provision of services or the implementation of government schemes and programs.

a. Economic opportunity

Although the government prioritizes financial inclusion for the poor and women as a key target through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and programs such as the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM) and the Maharashtra Rural Employment Guarantee (MREG) Scheme, each of these well-intentioned programs fall short in implementation. While many women participate in these programs, they consistently reported that limited access to markets and the inability to negotiate a fair price hindered their ability to increase their income. Despite the offer of guaranteed employment through MREG, the daily wage work available often requires hard physical labor which limits women's use of those opportunities. Moreover, worksite facilities promised to women, such as

creches, did not materialize and payments made into women's bank accounts meant that women could not readily access the money they earned because of the distance and cost of travel to banks.

Among younger women, there was an aspiration to get jobs in the service sector, yet most of the job skills training programs provided by the government emphasized agricultural jobs or trades stereotypically suited for young men, such as plumbing or vehicle repair. Job skills training programs run by the private sector offered more options but presented both financial and distance barriers for rural women's participation. As our demonstration of a job skills program for rural young women showed, meeting young rural women's aspiration for administrative jobs will require new types of partnerships, some innovative thinking and additional investment to provide these women with the technical and language skills, but more importantly the softer skills required to succeed in the formal work world.

b. Health

Basic primary health care issues were consistently raised, such as the inability to get quality sexual and reproductive health services from the local primary health care sub-center because of the absence of health care providers, the lack of medical supplies, and run-down infrastructure. Adolescent girls and young women identified menstrual hygiene management as a priority, including the lack of availability of menstrual products, the expense they incurred using commercial sanitary napkins, the stigma associated with menstruation, and the poor quality of products provided by the government. Adolescent girls were also concerned about early marriage, which parents rely on when times were hard or when education did not result in jobs or when jobs were not an option because of fears of safety, distance to be traveled or cost.

c. Education

Mothers raised concerns about the poor quality of schooling for children, the dilapidated state of school buildings that posed a physical risk to their children, teachers who did not show up on time or were too drunk to teach, and other issues. They also complained that local officials could not attend to these shortcomings because of a lack of funds and other mechanisms for recourse. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues because the lack of digital connectivity in rural areas made distant learning for children impossible, resulting in the loss of a year of education for many of them.

d. Public Safety

Most public sector officials we met with asserted that public safety was not a problem in Maharashtra compared to the northern states of India, but the girls and women of Pune district we met with vociferously disagreed. A public safety mapping exercise organized by the 3D Program, together with other civil society organizations, revealed that girls and women viewed almost all the spaces they travel through as risky. Additionally, multiple authorities were identified as being accountable for ensuring safety in each of those spots, making it challenging to hold any one authority responsible. Three priority sets of officials were identified -- the police, management of educational institutions and public transportation workers. The 3D Program organized training for some public transportation workers but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the training of the other officials. This should be a priority in Pune district for girls and women to feel safe in public spaces and not have the threat of harassment or violence stop them from participating in public life or taking advantage of educational or economic opportunities.

Overall, we learned that girls and women are never asked about their priority needs and issues because others presume to know what they need or assume that girls and women would be reticent to talk about what they want. We found quite the opposite – if given the opportunity, girls and women not only voice their concerns and needs, they often propose solutions on how to address them.

2. Lessons from Convergence

As Audre Lorde, the well-known feminist author and activist, said: "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives." We started the work of the 3D Program guided by this truth and believing that girls and women have multiple, intersecting needs that are best served when traditional boundaries are crossed and the barriers of siloes are broken so that stakeholders, including girls and women themselves, can come together to get things done.

In reviewing different approaches to working across sectors and stakeholders, we were drawn to the model of Collective Impact. It offered an approach to creating lasting solutions to social problems on a large-scale through cross-sectoral, structured collaborations between different organizations working toward a clearly defined goal.[20]

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[20] John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011). Collective Impact. Stanford Innovation Review, Winter Issue.

The collective impact approach required a community-based organization to serve as the backbone or secretariat to the coalition of organizations that come together to solve a social problem. For the Indian context, we believed that such an approach would only work at scale if it was adapted to have government in the lead and with the 3D Program serving as the bridge to facilitate partnerships across diverse sectors.

We used the term convergence to describe this adapted model and many of the partners we chose to work with in India believed, like we did, that a multisectoral, convergent approach would be the most effective to meet girls and women's needs. We learned that the concept of convergence was not new to India. It had been incorporated in many government schemes and programs as an underlying principle or pillar for action. The 3D Program's landscape analysis also revealed several examples of convergent action implemented in Maharashtra and other states in India by government and civil society actors, many of which worked in concept but seemed to fall short in sustained impact.[21]

Drawing on the lessons of those past efforts and our own experience in implementing convergence across sectors and stakeholders to meet girls and women's needs, we learned the following lessons:

a. Convergence cannot work unless there is a demand for it

Incentive structures, budgets and other systems within government are designed to reinforce working in sectoral silos, which poses a challenge for effectively addressing a cross-sectoral issue like gender equality. We learned that the best way to get government departments to work with each other is to have girls and women demand solutions that require multisectoral action. For example, when girls and young women complained that the timings of public buses did not match school and college timings, the local school administrative officials worked with the local state transportation depot officers to change the bus schedules to make them more convenient for students. We also found that women's platforms, such as VCPCs, serve as an effective accountability mechanism, especially when the feedback provided consists of the identification of a problem together with a proposed solution.

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[21] Summarized in Box 1 on page 70 of the 3D Program publication, Empowerment of Girls and Women: A Landscape Analysis of Pune (https://the3dprogram.org/content/uploads/2019/07/Landscape-Analysis-Report-June-2018.pdf)

b. Leveraging the hierarchical culture of government can shift old ways of doing business

We learned that the best way to implement convergent, cross-sectoral action within government is to leverage the power and authority of the person in charge. In the case of the district office, this is the CEO of the Pune Zilla Parishad and at the block level, it is the Block Development Officer. Such an approach aligns with the hierarchical culture of government organizations and is more likely to result in quick action.

We found, however, that such an approach requires an investment of time in building a relationship of trust with senior officials and convincing them of the value of the work that we were doing with girls and women. This proved challenging due to the frequent transfer of government officials and the need to re-establish the trust and support of the next officer. This caused some delays and frustrations but during those periods of transition, having internal champions for our work at different levels of the bureaucracy helped to provide the continuity. Overall, we were struck by the openness among the bureaucrats at all levels to listen and support our efforts.

c. Convergence across stakeholders requires trust, a shared commitment and a common definition of success

Our job skills training program taught us that convergence across stakeholders requires an investment in building trust and compromising to create a shared definition and indicators of success. The collaborations across stakeholders that worked best, such as the partnership with the MSRTC, were built on a shared understanding of and commitment to the goal of the project. MSRTC senior officials felt as strongly as we did for the need for such a program and believed that the training would benefit the public transportation system.

d. The presence of an external facilitator helps to forge common ground

As an external partner based at an international organization, the U.S.-based 3D Program team played an important facilitative role in linking stakeholders across sectors, providing opportunities to amplify the voices of rural women and their advocates, and identifying and securing the support and resources necessary to make those collaborations work. As outsiders with no prior history with the actors in the district, we were able start with a clean slate and help stakeholders who previously may not have chosen to work together to find common ground. We understood that the technical

expertise, in-depth knowledge of the local context, and prioritization of activities lay with the local partners and rural communities, and that each partner had their own unique strength and capability. Following their lead, the 3D Program was uniquely positioned to leverage their work and capacity to maximize impact by catalyzing or reinvigorating partnerships, resources and opportunities and providing an additional global platform through which to share their work with a broader audience.

3. VCPCs: Women's Collectives with a Difference

Girls and women should be at the center of decisions that impact them. Currently, they have no say in the design of programs meant to serve them, face significant barriers in accessing those programs, and are excluded from local governance to hold government systems accountable. Rural governance systems lack well-functioning, women-led platforms that hold government accountable, allow for local problem-solving, shape block-level decision-making and district-wide planning, and address barriers to accessing services.   Rural girls and women are therefore not able to effectively participate in the governance processes that affect them. Many are unaware of government programs designed to address their needs and when they are, they face significant enrollment barriers. Additionally, since programs are developed without inputs from girls and women, they are often of poor quality, resulting in low utilization and wasted resources that imperil future budgetary allocations.

India's Panchayati Raj Act mandated MGSs as the pathway for participation by rural women to discuss issues that could be fed into Gram Sabhas (GSs) and block and district processes. However, we learned from women that MGSs are rarely convened. Even when they are, men dominate the political economy of villages and control which priorities advance for further action. While other women's platforms like self-help groups (SHGs) amplify women's voices, they often do not link to local governance processes. Additionally, there are few platforms that allow adolescent girls to participate.

The most ubiquitous form of women's collectives across India and in Maharashtra are SHGs, which help women in poor communities save money and access credit. Reserve Bank of India regulations mandate that banks offer financial services, including collateral-free loans to these groups, at very low interest rates. The SHG movement is thriving in Maharashtra and with full support from the state and local governments, as well as civil

society organizations, such as 3D Program partner, Chaitanya. Village SHGs are now organized into federations across blocks and districts, promoting community-based microfinance services, facilitating women's economic empowerment and providing them with social security.

The VCPCs complement the SHG structures by including members from the local federations and groups, as well as local government and elected officials. In this way, VCPCs are women's collectives with a difference; they are led by girls and women and provide a platform for them to work with local officials to find solutions to problems that affect their daily lives. As designed by the 3D Program, VCPCs:

- **Adopted a collaborative rather than the adversarial approach** that is more typically adopted by community-based women's groups. They are facilitated to create a shared sense of responsibility and accountability for the solution of local problems through a much-needed, two-way conversation between women and their government and elected officials that is solution oriented, with both sides taking ownership to address local problems.

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"We did not even know that there are officials above the village officials, due to the VCPC, we were able understand that there are officials at the block level and we were able to meet them in their big offices and put our viewpoint forward."

- **Youth Representative of the VCPC in Dehane Village, Khed Block, Pune**

- **Provided an important feedback mechanism,** a way for government and elected officials at the village, block and district levels to hear girls' and women's perspectives about the way in which government programs and services are working. Interestingly, we noted that it also allowed frontline government workers an opportunity that the administrative system does not currently provide – a way for them to give their supervisors at the block and district levels important feedback on the realities of working on the frontlines, trying to meet the needs of local communities.

- **Served as an important governance mechanism**, filling a gap that currently exists in the administrative and governance system, while empowering girls and women to play a leadership role in identifying and solving local problems. In fact, several girls and women in Khed shared that prior to participating in VCPC meetings they had no idea how local government was structured or that their village officials had bosses who could hold them accountable.

For all these reasons, we concluded that the VCPC model deserves to be sustained and replicated across the state. As described in greater detail in the next section, there is a possibility to sustain 3D Program's VCPCs through an existing public-private entity, such as VSTF or through a rural fellowship program that trains local women leaders (such as those who run local SHG federations) to convene and facilitate VCPCs. Over time VCPCs could then become the engines that ensure that MGSs are regularly held and that girls' and women's issues are represented on the agendas of GS and local Panchayat meetings, giving girls and women's voices a chance to be heard.

4. Partners and Partnerships

In 2017, when the 3D Program launched our website, we proudly included "Partnerships lie at the heart of 3D" on our "Who We Are" page. From the beginning, our partnerships were rooted in deep respect and growing trust, as well as genuine friendship. Through those partnerships we learned some important lessons and gained valuable insights about working with and across sectors.

a. Working with government

To achieve change at scale in India, we knew that government had to be a central partner of the 3D Program. Our goal was to work with government and facilitate partnerships between government and civil society organizations and the private sector. We were cautioned this was overly ambitious because working with government would be challenging, particularly since we were outsiders from an international organization, and that the bureaucratic processes would slow down the pace of the program.

We found quite the opposite. From the very beginning, we were warmly received by government representatives at the state, district and block levels, who were open to

partnering to address what many felt was a priority issue – gender equality. We found the bureaucrats at each level of government to be skilled, committed and thoughtful, asking the right questions, providing useful advice, and pushing us to think through the best ways to add value to the many diverse initiatives that were already underway. Communicating directly with government officials at all levels was greatly facilitated by the use of the messaging platform, WhatsApp.

Although the stereotype of bureaucratic processes being slow and cumbersome was sometimes borne out, we were struck by the many officials who were willing to cut through the red tape to assist us to get the job done. It was helpful to establish contacts at the state and district levels to move things along at the local level. The time it took to keep officials at the three levels continuously informed of our progress was well worth it because it helped to increase the transparency of our work and build the trust of government.

Government officials at every level were also open to working with civil society organizations and private sector entities. Although CSR funds were sometimes mentioned as the reason for working with the corporate sector, more often than not officials would state that they valued technical inputs and support rather than funding. With regard to civil society organizations, government officials expressed a need for transparency and regular reporting, as well as support for government schemes and programs rather than the setting up of parallel systems and services by civil society organizations.

The main challenge we faced in working with government was the frequency of transfers of key government personnel. Over the four years, for example, we worked with four different CEOs at the Zilla Parishad and two different District Collectors. The time required to establish rapport and trust with each new official slowed the progress of the program considerably, a fact that we had not taken into consideration in developing our work-plans and timelines.

Despite this, our decision to work with the bureaucracy rather than the political system was the right one. It allowed for greater continuity and protected us from having to deal with the greater challenges that come with the transfer of power from one political party to another. Navigating that complexity would have undoubtedly been much more time consuming.

b. Working with civil society partners

Civil society organizations and leaders from Pune were an integral part of the 3D Program team. As a team we also interacted with many other CSOs, learning from the work they were doing in Pune and other districts.

The CSOs we worked with kept us rooted in the realities on the ground and constantly held us accountable to meeting the needs of rural communities and keeping their perspectives at the center of our programming. They taught us about the political nuances of village dynamics and advised us how to navigate those effectively. It was the CSO partners who provided continuity in the face of government transfers and changes in the political or policy environment.

We noted that each of our CSO partners used different approaches in their work with communities. While Chaitanaya leveraged and extended the reach and impact of existing government schemes and programs for financial inclusion for rural women, MASUM organized women to meet their health and economic needs and mobilized them to hold government and local elected officials accountable for the services provided. ICRW, Asia worked regionally and nationally, in partnership with other CSOs, the government and private sector actors to integrate gender considerations into policies and programs, design evidence-based programs and use research tools to evaluate their impact on girls and women in communities.

Overall, we came away from the experience with the conviction that CSOs are Maharashtra's wealth. Through their dedication and work and their long history of mobilizing and empowering rural communities, they have complemented the efforts of government to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities. The 3D Program benefitted from their wisdom and experience by establishing transparent, respectful relationships that led to productive partnerships.

c. Working with the private sector

With the Government of India's mandated requirement for large private sector companies to spend a minimum of two percent of their profits on corporate social responsibility programs, the private sector in India has the potential to be a significant player in the country's social and economic development. In keeping with that mandate, several Pune-based companies, such as Forbes Marshall, have made investments in rural Pune district, motivated by a commitment to make an impact. However, these efforts are typically run through partnerships with civil society organizations, who they rely on for expertise, but with little collaboration across other companies or with government. This is beginning to change, particularly in response to the COVID-19, with many corporate entities collaborating to provide basic supplies and food rations to vulnerable communities.

One notable effort of corporate-civil society-government collaboration is Pune City Connect, an effort motivated by a need to have large scale impact in education, life and job skills training and digital connectivity for low-income communities. However, most of those efforts are targeted to low-income communities in the city rather than in rural Pune.

The CSR departments of private sector companies in Pune vary greatly in size and composition. Some consist of a large staff trained in social work and economic development, such as Yardi Software, Forbes Marshall and Bharat Forge, while others, such as Mastercard, use their corporate personnel to take on CSR efforts as a part of their jobs. Typically, CSR investments are narrowly focused on politically "safe" issues such as education, job skills training and health programs, rather than human rights issues, such as violence against women, reproductive rights, or community organizing. Investments are usually short-term and are limited to geographies where the companies draw their customers or labor force.

Overall, of all the stakeholders, the 3D Program faced the greatest challenge in convincing the private sector to converge their efforts by collaborating with each other and the government to enable large-scale change or to expand the scope of their investments from a needs-based focus to a rights-based focus.

TRANSITION TO THE NEXT PHASE[22]

When we established the 3D Program, the intention was to continue to work together as a team, with some of us based in the U.S. and others in India, to scale up the effort after the first four years of experimentation and demonstration. In 2020, the U.S. team decided to transfer ownership of the program to our partners in India to take on the scaling up of the 3D Program model across Maharashtra. We made this decision against the backdrop of two significant global events:

• **The COVID pandemic:** COVID has endangered hard-won gains in the fight for gender equality[23]. It has put the spotlight on rigid gender-based norms and barriers, and critical weaknesses in public systems[24]. 3D Program implementation sites in Pune District have been at the epicenter of the pandemic in India since the beginning and continue to be heavily impacted by COVID. The women's collectives we supported, the VCPCs, were designed to address disparities, inequalities and barriers to accessing services before COVID. During the pandemic, they have been stress-tested and have shown their value, proving vital in facilitating multi-sectoral partnerships to deliver COVID relief, information and responses. This has validated and motivated us further to scale up the VCPC model across Maharashtra.

Like other international programs and partnerships, COVID also impacted the ways in which we operated as an international team. Following travel restrictions, the 3D Program team effectively adjusted to online platforms and our partners in Pune took a more strategic lead in shaping our programs, which continues to adapt based on emerging needs. The pandemic also resulted in the erosion and reallocation of donor funds, with a focus on COVID responses and localization. This pushed us to assess the advantages of taking the U.S.-based team members off the budget.

• **The global reckoning on international development:** The 2020 wave of social justice movements across the world put the spotlight on structural racism and power imbalances, leading to a global reckoning on international development.

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[22] Information in this section was previously published in Sia Nowrojee, Responsible Transitions to Local Ownership: Reflections from the 3D Program for Girls and Women in From Where I Stand: Unpacking "local" in Aid, A CDA Virtual Learning Forum, https://www.cdacollaborative.org/blog/responsible-transitions-to-local-ownership-reflections-from-the-3d-program-for-girls-and-women/

[23] https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/taking-stock-2020-glaring-inequality-girls-womens-rights-pivotal-year-ahead/

[24] https://the3dprogram.org/breaking-down-silos-for-gender-equality-in-covid-19-responses/

[25] https://www.cdacollaborative.org/blog/what-weve-heard/

As a result, traditional development models are now being examined[25] in mainstream discussions about international development. Questions that have long been asked by grassroots activists are now being asked at organizational board meetings and are reshaping donors' criteria and decisions. Who leads programs? Where does decision-making power lie? How do you measure impact? Who has access to and controls resources? Over the past year, these questions have led many international NGOs to contend with issues related to equity and inclusion. The 3D Program team realized that it was the right time for us to intentionally examine and transform the structure of our program to hand over leadership of the next phase of the program to the Indian team members.

The Transition

Against this backdrop, the 3D Program team designed a three-phase transition process to transfer ownership of the program to our partners in India. The process was implemented over a nine-month period of September 2020 to May 2021.

Buy-in and strategy

The first phase focused on buy-in and strategy. We began with conversations with each implementing partner to assess their commitment to taking ownership of the program, identify the programmatic elements they preferred to advance, and the ways to do so. We then facilitated a series of partner retreats to enable transparent discussions, reflections and a shared understanding of the best ways to scale up the VCPC model through our partners. Our conversations with partners helped clarify our strategy to do so and revealed some surprises. For example, we had been proud of how we had convened a remarkable mix of partners who worked together well and contributed rich, complementary expertise to the program. However, we found that each of our partners working in rural Pune wanted to proceed on their own or with a different partner and focus on their respective geographic areas. They were each committed to scaling up the VCPC model but wanted to do so through different partnerships and mechanisms. Once we had established a process for moving forward, we developed plans to wind down our programs and operations in the U.S.

Planning and action

The second phase in our transition process focused on planning and action. We worked with each implementing partner to develop strategic plans for scaling up their particular component of our model in their particular geographies. We reallocated resources to our partners to support their planning and transition process and developed a fundraising plan to support our partners to raise the necessary resources to implement their plans.

ICRW, Asia established a formal partnership with VSTF to expand the gender and VCPC training for all new VSTF fellows and to integrate the establishment of VCPCs in 8,000 villages across 24 districts of Maharashtra over the next three years. MASUM decided to leverage its long history of mobilizing women in communities across Purandar block, to expand the implementation of the VCPCs across 25 villages. They plan to increase the sustainability of the VCPC model by training local women to be facilitators, through a two-tiered women's rural development fellowship program over the next three years, with one fellow at the block level and another at the village level. Similarly, Chaitanya will leverage its expertise in community mobilization, as well as its vast network of self-help group (SHG) networks and federations, to scale up the VCPC model across 16 federations in 150 villages in eight districts across Maharashtra and the state of Madhya Pradesh, where they also have a track record of establishing SHGs.

Completion and reflection

The final phase of our transition process included both completing the transition and the ongoing process of reflection and learning. Logistically, it included the final steps of officially transferring ownership of the program to each partner, communicating the transition to our broader network, and working in partnership with the organization that housed us, the UN Foundation, to close down our operations. Notably, once the decision to transfer ownership was made, the balance shifted and changes in roles happened quickly, with partners playing a leadership role and the DC team providing support.

While the continued disruptions of COVID will define the work of our partners for a long time to come, we are confident that they will continue to strengthen and scale up

the 3D Program model. Looking back over the four years, 3D Program partnerships paved the way for multisectoral collaborations that engage the government and enable girls and women to hold government accountable. Through the program activities and partnerships, the foundation was laid for systemic change that will move girls and women from a place of vulnerability to secure their place as leaders and experts, as well as active participants in local governance.

The 3D Program Rural team. *Photo from 3D Program*

ANNEX A. List of Program Advisory Group Members

Mohan Agashe
Mental Health Advocate, Theatre and Film Actor
Pune

Anand Bang
Health Advisor, Tata Trusts
Mumbai

Madhukar Banuri
Founder & CEO, Leadership For Equity
Pune

Leena Deshpande
Associate VP, Human Resources, and Head,
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Bharat Forge
Pune

Suneeta Dhar
Senior Advisor, JAGORI –
Women's Training & Resource Centre
Delhi

Rati Forbes
Director, Forbes Marshall
Pune

Ratnakar Gaikwad
Managing Director, Maharashtra Village Social
Transformation Foundation
Pune

Nitin Kareer
Additional Chief Secretary, Revenue and Forest
Department, Government of Maharashtra
Mumbai

Govind Kelkar
Senior Advisor, Landesa
Delhi

A.K. Shiva Kumar
Global Co-Chair, Know Violence
Delhi

Anu Madgavkar
Partner, McKinsey Global Institute
Mumbai

P.M. Nair
Indian Police Service (retired)
Chair Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Chennai

Anupama Pandey
Specialist, Documentation and Communication
Formerly of Mission Convergence, City of Delhi
Delhi

Jaya Sagade
Director, Centre for Women's Studies
India Law Society Law College
Pune

Kalpana Sharma
Independent journalist
Mumbai

Vijay Wavare
Consultant, Corporate Social Responsibility
(CSR) Cell, Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal
Corporation
Pune

ANNEX B. Terms of Reference for Village Convergence Planning Committees, Block Convergence Planning Committees and District Convergence Planning Committees

1. Village Convergence Planning Committee (VCPC)

GOAL:
To identify convergent solutions to address issues and problems faced by girls and women in accessing health and education services and economic opportunities, as well as guaranteeing their safety.

OBJECTIVES:
1. Identify and communicate issues and problems facing girls and women through community dialogue and monitoring of services and programs
2. Develop multi-sectoral convergent solutions and recommendations to address the issues and problems faced by girls and women
3. Link to the processes of the Block Convergence Planning Committee (BCPC) and District Convergence Planning Committee (DCPC)

MEMBERSHIP:
1. Gram Panchayat Mahila Member
2. Sarpanch/Deputy Sarpanch (as and when required)
3. Primary-Secondary Principal/Senior teacher (one from each level for a total of 02)
4. Anganwadi worker/ Anganwadi helper
5. ANM
6. ASHA
7. Gram Suraksha committee member (village Dakshata Committee)
8. Police Patil
9. Youth representatives (2)
10. Women representatives (2 from local groups, with at least 1 Dalit/Muslim woman representative)
11. Civil society member

Total: 14 members

Rationale for Core Membership:

The core members mainly represent different departments and have the responsibility of providing information on the schemes/programs at the village level. These members can take issues at the grassroot level to their departments/program committees (VHSNC, Village Vigilance Committee, Parent Teachers Association, SMCs, other committees at the Gram Panchayat) to seek solutions and support for convergent action. This core group ensures the participation in planning and decision-making of a broader representation of youth, women and marginalized communities and gives its members a platform to discuss and influence the budget at the village level (gram panchayat, untied funds at the health sub-centers, funds under 14th financial commission, etc.) for the empowerment of girls and women.

Additional members to be invited (as and when necessary):

Invited members will represent different departments from the block level and guide the VCPC towards drawing sustainable solutions. They will serve as the link between the Village Convergence Planning Committee and the departments at the block level. The discussions and convergent solutions and recommendations to address the issues and problems faced by girls and women at the village level will be taken to the Block Convergence Planning Committee. The invited members will provide information on schemes/program to the VCPC and develop strategies in discussion with the VCPC members to reach the beneficiaries.

Invited Member Pool:
1. Gram Sevak
2. Block level Dakshata Committee member
3. Nirbhaya squad member
4. Beat Marshal
5. Senior Police inspector
6. State Transportation representative
7. Block level Depot Manager, State Transportation
8. School Management Committee representative
9. Representation from the ITI (Industrial Training Institutes)
10. RKSK representative

11. Medical Officer - Primary Health Centre
12. Public Works Department Engineer
13. Block Agricultural Officer
14. Circle Office- Block Revenue Department
15. Talathi

Chair of the VCPC: Gram Panchayat Mahila Member

Convener of the VCPC meetings: ASHA worker

Role of Convenor:
1. Call and conduct meetings
2. Maintain the meeting minutes and committee records
3. Co-ordinate the interactions of the Village Level Convergence Committee with Gram Sabha and block officials
4. Report to the Block Level Convergence Committee

Quorum will be reached with one-third of members present.

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS: The Executive Committee will meet once a month and the Advisory Members will join for one meeting every quarter. Members of the General Body will be called to attend select meetings of the executive committee based on the issues on the agenda.

ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS: To be effective, the Village Level Convergence Committee should be approved and supported by the CEO and other officials of the Pune Zilla Parishad, Block elected and administrative functionaries, and village level elected and administrative functionaries.

2. Block Convergence Planning Committee (BCPC)

GOAL:
To facilitate convergent solutions to address issues and problems faced by girls and women in accessing health and education services and economic opportunities, as well as guaranteeing their safety.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Create Create a block level platform to facilitate regular discussion/dialogue among different stakeholders to identify issues and problems faced girls and women and support solutions and materialize the recommendations by VCPC to address them
2. Facilitate decentralized planning by serving as a bridge between the Village Convergence Planning Committee (VCPC) and decisions of the District Convergence Planning Committee (DCPC)

STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP:

Rationale:

The membership for the BCPC represents different stakeholders from government departments, local bodies, issue-based organizations and institutions. These representatives are in a position to influence the planning and execution of support for solutions and recommendations from the VCPC and the DCPC.

Chair of the BCPC: Block Development Officer (BDO)
Membership: Heads of the different departments.

ROLE AND FUNCTIONS:

1. Link the VCPC to the DCPC and convey the recommendations from the VCPC and BCPC to the DCPC to inform the discussions, planning and fund allocation.
2. Discuss issue-based recommendations with the concerned block level officials and engage them in convergent action to address the issue.
3. Convey the decisions from the DCPC to the VCPC and support the VCPC in monitoring the implementation of the decision by the responsible authority.
4. Support to the Village Convergence Committees.

3. District Convergence Planning Committee (DCPC)

The committee will be comprised of key district government departments and representatives of NGOs and the private sector, chaired by the CEO, Zilla Parishad, and endorsed by the District Collector.

OBJECTIVES:
The DCPC will inform district planning and resource allocations processes and strength district-wide services for girls and women in rural Pune district by:
1. Shaping Shaping district-level planning processes to impact girls' and women's status through ongoing analysis of data, gender analysis and convergent planning
2. Facilitating convergence among Zilla Parishad departments and district-level partners to ensure coordinated services for girls and women
3. Identifying, monitoring and improving key indicators of girls' and women's status

PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE:

- Identify jointly agreed upon priorities to improve girls and women's status in Pune rural district
- Set goals and targets to be achieved over a three-year period for each priority
- Identify the schemes/programs that address those priorities and the departments responsible for each
- Select priority talukas for implementation and how schemes/programs can converge
- Identify gaps in funding, technical capacity or human resources and the NGO or private sector partners who can fill the gaps
- Select indicators to measure progress and decide on the best way to gather that information and share it across departments
- Develop an implementation plan, with roles and responsibilities for each department
- Integrate implementation plan into deliberations of District Planning and Coordination Committee (DPCC), the decision-making body to agree on schemes and resource allocation for Pune District.
- Set a timeline for implementation and six-monthly monitoring meetings

- Hold members accountable for agreed outcomes under the developed joint vision for girls and women in Pune Rural District by supporting required follow-up on agreed action points and conducting review meetings
- Convene quarterly meetings of the committee
- Support and provide inputs for the monitoring and evaluation of the DCPC process

MEMBERSHIP:

Chair: CEO, Zilla Parishad

Special official attendee: District Collector, Pune

Members:
- Department heads of Rural Development, Health, Education and WCD at the district level, and any others, as required
- District planning officer
- 3D Program representatives

As needed:
- District statistical officer
- Additional ZP departments and district agencies
- CSO representatives
- CSR representatives

MEETING SCHEDULE:

Quarterly until March 2020

ANNEX C. Examples of Actions taken by VCPCs in Naigaon and Bhivari villages of Purandar

S.No.	Issue	Action Taken	Result
Issue Addressed			
1.	Missing gate to government primary school compound causing stray pigs to enter, creating unhygienic conditions.	Issue was raised with the Gram Sevak and speaker of Panchayat Samiti and with BDO.	Gate installed.
2.	Unavailability of potable and safe water in remote communities.	Issue was raised with the Gram Sevak and the vice president of the Panchayat Samiti.	Water tankers were sent to meet the needs of remote communities as a temporary solution. The construction of a dam is planned which will solve the problem permanently.
3.	Poor road conditions and lack of lighting affects girls' and women's safety and a leakage from a sewage pipe on to the road is cause of unhygienic conditions.	VCPC members submitted an application to the Gram Panchayat to repair the road and sewage pipe and install lights, which was forwarded to the local MLA.	Street lights have been installed and the sewage line has been repaired. Gram Panchayat did not have funds to construct a new road, so they used local materials to temporarily make the road usable.

S.No.	Issue	Action Taken	Result
Issue Addressed			
4.	Inadequate number of classrooms in the high school building resulting in children dropping out of school.	Discussed with the Block level Education officer but because it is a private school the government cannot address the issue. Later the Gram Panchayat brought the matter to the attention of the Managing Board of the private school but they said they did not have money to expand the school.	The newly elected Gram Panchayat decided to spend INR 220,000 for the constructing an expansion of the school, with money from a local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).
5.	Lack of availability of sanitary napkins for college-going girls.	VCPC members discussed the issue with the ASHA worker who is responsible for distributing sanitary napkins and explained the need for her to specifically reach out to girls and young women.	The issue has now been resolved – the ASHA worker agreed to distribute sanitary napkins to girls, as well as women.

S.No.	Issue	Action Taken	Result
In Progress			
6.	Deteriorating condition of the Anganwadi Center (day care and pre-school), with no space for a classroom for the children.	VCPC raised the issue with the BDO and discussed it at the Gram Panchayat meeting. The delay in construction and repair was because of the lack of coordination between WCD, the education department and the gram panchayat.	The Panchayat Samiti approved the funds for the construction and the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sevak submitted a letter requesting a no-objection certificate from the education department in the ZP.
7.	Lack of access to primary health care center (PHC) for residents of Bhivari because it is located 31 kms away from the village.	VCPC members asked the Gram Panchayat to build a new PHC and were willing to provide two acres of land in Bhivari for it.	The Gram Sevak was not able to take this recommendation forward because of impending elections.
8.	Vacancies in the posts of Multi-purpose Workers (MPW) and Auxillary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) in the village hampering the health care services that can be provided.	Letter sent by the VCPC to the District Health Officer and the Gram Panchayat and to be presented at the next Gram Sabha meeting.	Action postponed because of elections for the Gram Panchayat.

S.No.	Issue	Action Taken	Result
Alternate Solution Sought			
9.	Low enrollment in the Sanjay Gandhi Pension and Housing Scheme by single and abandoned women.	VCPC members identified 30 needy women and shared it with the Talathi or revenue officer.	Most of the single and abandoned women did not fit the government criteria for the scheme because they owned a piece of land or had a son above the age of 18, both of which were interpreted to mean that the woman has a source of income. Other women did not have the documents require to enroll. Since the land most of these women owned is barren and their sons do not provide them economic support, the women advocated for the Talathi to ask the government to change the criteria for enrollment.
10.	Need for vocational training to help women find employment during the months when the demand for agricultural labor is low.	3D Program organized to have program coordinators for the Maharashtra Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM) and other government schemes to provide an orientation for the women on the training opportunities that are available. Women showed interest in classes for driving, honey production, goat farming, tailoring, and jewelry making.	None of the schemes and training programs available met the needs of women: some training programs are provided during time slots when women were busy or through residential courses which presents a challenge for women who need to be at home for household duties or are in the city making it difficult for young women to access. To respond to these challenges, the 3D Program decided to pilot an innovative solution through a collaboration described in Section III of the report.

Annex D. Poem written by a graduate of the job skills training program

Your Joy Would Lie in our Becoming Self-Reliant

Selflessly you gave us so much, that
None can henceforth call these daughters of yours helpless.
We've realized that your joy would lie in our becoming self-reliant!

Our parents must be grappling with predicaments:
"Can we hinder our girls now, after having traversed so far?"

We will not burn out like lamps, merely as extensions of anyone's family line
But we'll cherish the flame that enlightens our own being.
Thus empowered, we will respond to our parents' dilemma.
We've realized that your joy would lie in our becoming self-reliant!

We'll continue teaching ourselves abundantly
Now that MASUM is our companion.
Never ever will we belittle ourselves because
We've realized that your joy would lie in our becoming self-reliant!

Never was I aware of the self-interests of this world and its designs,
Nor mindful of the extent to which MASUM was a blessing for Purandar taluka.
Society has no agenda except to put women down!
However, we're becoming conscious of MASUM's existence for women's rights.
We've realized that your joy would lie in our becoming self-reliant!

Our yearning and determination to study are now known to one and all,
And so, we'll never give anyone the power to demean women anymore.
We've realized that your joy would lie in our becoming self-reliant!

Not only have you shown everyone the path ahead;
You've placed us one step above, closer to success.
From now on, we'll prove our self-determination to ourselves!
We've realized that your joy would lie in our becoming self-reliant!

By Reshma Khaladkar, a 20-year old graduate of the program. Reshma is currently studying at Waghire College in Purandar.
Translated from Marathi by Dr. Manisha Gupte, MASUM

IN MEMORIAM

Anita Pagare
(November 24, 1971 - March 28, 2021)

Anita Pagare, a well-known and well-loved social activist from Nashik in Maharashtra state, passed away at the age of 50 due to COVID-19. In spite of losing her younger sister and two cousins to COVID last year, she continued to support communities to ensure that they had what they needed, including organizing state transport buses free of cost for migrant workers and farmers during the pandemic.
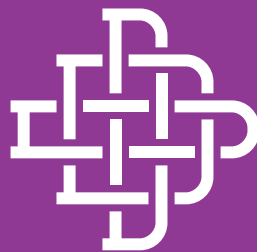
Anita was raised in a working-class community or *basti* by Dalit parents who were committed to educating their children, as advocated for by the national leader, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who exhorted Dalits to study. She acquired a higher education, with a Master's in Social Work (Family and Child Welfare) and a Master's in Business Administration (Corporate Financial Marketing). She was closely associated with numerous progressive organisations such as Samata Andolan, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), Chhatra Bharati, Rashtra Sewa Dal, Mahila Hakk Sanrakshan Samiti, Kisan Jan Andolan Samiti, Dakshinayan, Sanvidhan Pracharak, Maharashtra Forum and youth groups who apply Buddhist principles for social change. She was the state convenor of the Maharashtra state unit of National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM). Her book "Vastivarchi Pora" (the young people from *bastis*) is popular in Maharashtra. Along with her family and friends living in the *basti*, she co-founded the organization Sangini, to educate single women from urban poor settlements and adolescent girls from *bastis*, schools and colleges on menstrual hygiene.

Zindabad to you, Saathi Anita. The 3D Program honors your life and work. Your legacy will be an inspiration for young people everywhere.

Partnerships lie at the heart of the 3D Program.
We are grateful for the support we receive from
our partners to help us advance our work.

3D Program

FOR GIRLS & WOMEN