

Girl students take the lead in plantation drive

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They choose the occasion to spread the message against child marriages. Hundreds of girl students of as many as 42 villages of Bangarupalem mandal, notorious for child marriages in Chittoor district, have joined the intensive tree plantation programme by the child rights activists. Several of the girls of the remote and forested villages have come out with a bold decision, taking a vow that they would oppose child marriages tooth and nail. The girl children say that planting a tree would remind them of their own future, and that they too could grow taller and fruitful like them.

Organisation for Poverty Eradication (ROPES) has undertaken the programme in coordination with the A.P. Forest Department, with the logistic support from the Christian Children's Fund of Canada (CCFC).

In full swing

When the plantation drive was in full swing on the very first day, a high school girl, Kavya, of a forested village Kanathala Cheruvu, after planting a sapling, took an oath that she would not marry till she would attain the age of 22. "This sapling (Alla Nerudu variety) should grow into a big tree and start bearing fruit. I consider this as a witness to my vow," says the girl. ROPES chairman K. Dhanasekharan has said that actually the plantation drive has been launched as part of joining the social forestry drive of the State government.

"The girl's random initiative has turned into a boost to the plantation drive, and in turn made a number of girls of various high schools in the mandal to follow suit. We are so happy that school girls are joining the plantation drive in large numbers. They begin to identify themselves with a sapling, they want it grow into a healthy fruit-

bearing and shade-providing trees. They are slowly gaining a clear perception that child marriages are a scourge that would scuttle their bright future.”

Apart from schools, the girl students of the forested villages of Bodabandla, Tekumanda, Mosalamadugu, Ragimanupenta and half a dozen others, who are also members of the Children’s Clubs formed by the ROPES, took the initiative by identifying the safe corners for the tree plantation, so as to prevent them from cattle and sheep.

The girls have also volunteered to plant the saplings at the backyard or cozy corners of their house compounds, besides high schools, anganwadi centres, bus stops and focal points in the villages. The drive also saw the participation of government staff at the field level, particularly teachers.

Boys too join it

The ZP High School at Ragimanupenta village, with students coming from a radius of 15 km covering a number of forested hamlets, is highlight of the tree plantation drive, with girls taking the lead in the drive. Interestingly, the boys say: “We could not sit idle, so we too have joined them to be friends of trees.” Headmaster P. Purushottam Reddy has said: “It is a welcome sign. The drive has galvanised the young minds, particularly the girls, to a new thinking that planting a tree is something special in their lives. It ushered in a living bond with them.

SOURCE:- <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/girl-students-take-the-lead-in-plantation-drive/article29818617.ece>