

Keeping children safe;

Educating Children on Child Protection through Muppet Shows at Salem and Dharmapuri districts

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The Introduction: Tamil Nadu has witnessed rapid economic and social progress in addressing the issues related to women and children's issues over the past decade. Many of the State's initiatives have been adopted as models for the rest of the country. However there are certain contradictions and disparities in the socio - economic and health care indicators across the districts of Tamil Nadu. For example, the districts of Salem and Dharmapuri are notable because of the growing trends of child labour, child marriage, feticide and infanticide.



The poverty levels across the most marginalized communities like the SC/ST (Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe) in Salem and Dharmapuri Districts are issues of concern. These communities have lesser access to education and children from these communities access education with great difficulty are further discouraged by the various

forms of discrimination at schools. In addition, SC/ST communities in two districts suffer from various stereotypes about their social roles and are discriminated in educational and occupational spheres.

Some of the glaring crimes against children in these two districts are as follows:

- Child labour practice is intense and 50% of the child laborers are girls.
- Exploiting poverty and luring adolescent girls into bonded labour.
- Increasing number of cases of child marriage and infanticides
- Girls are subjected to sexual harassment at work place
- The distance between residence and schools is often high.
- High rate of drop out due to the abject poverty conditions at the family level.

The State administration is aware of the fact that the social evils cannot be eradicated by rules and regulation alone and hence is resorting to various awareness programmes to educate the people on the rights of the children.

Myrtle-UNICEF Initiative: MYRTLE SOCIAL WELFARE NETWORK with the support of UNICEF had designed a unique programme to address the various social evils that curtail the right to protection of children in the districts of Salem and Dharmapuri. Myrtle had organized a combination of programmes from August 2010 to November 2010 to educate the people about child protection and to create awareness about the protection of children's rights. The programme used various forms of creating awareness which included Muppet shows (50 shows), Child Protection IEC (Information Education and Communication Materials) Exhibition (50 exhibitions at public places and schools), shows by cartoon characters (50 shows) and two Workshops on Puppetry for Salem and Dharmapuri Districts. The Muppet shows addressed the issue of Child Marriage, Child labour, female infanticide and feticide. The shows were designed to help the children and community to understand the rights of the children and the importance of Education. The Muppets were used as effective medium to enable the children to voice out their feelings and to restore their hopes against the anti-child practices of the community. This initiative was coordinated by the ICPP (Smile schools & NCLP) in Salem and Dharmapuri.



Objectives:

- To create awareness on Child Protection, child rights amongst the community at Salem & Dharmapuri districts
- To sensitize the target population on the various issues of child labour, female infanticide, child marriage and increase awareness about child protection measures
- Formation of Sustainable Task Force to create awareness on Child Protection through Muppet shows at Salem & Dharmapuri district
- To help communities to analyze and act collectively to improve the quality of their children lives

Myrtle-UNICEF reaches out too...

- Children / Women
- Child Labors / Bonded
- Drop Out Children
- SC/ST children
- Adolescent/Youth
- Men / Community Leaders
- Migrant / Tribal community





The process:

The process can be divided into the following phases:

- **Planning Phase:**

- One day discussion and planning meet with child protection specialist and other UNICEF officials of Chennai office regarding IEC of child protection – A3+ size 15 Posters, 4 page multi colour pamphlet 10000 nos, 5 Muppet show banners, 2 Roll-up banners, 2 Brochure stand and 2 canopy-exhibition stall - design, content approved by Chennai UNICEF officials.

- One day discussion and planning meet was organized to develop the work plan along with the coordination of the ICPP-NCLP Project directors and block development coordinators of salem & dharmapuri districts.



Interface with PD & BDCs of Salem ICPP

- **Implementation Phase:** This includes the pre-performance visit to the schools, villages, bus stands and public places where the performance is to be held. This is to identity the key issues persisting in the areas and also to establish rapport with the community. It is only after the preliminary visits that shows are performed in the areas. This enables the performers to also engage in participatory interactions with the participants during the performance
- **Follow up and Feedback:** The performers ensured the feedback from the participants so as to further improvise the programmes. The feedback and suggestions of the children were given priority. The feedback session were conducted to measure the impact of the programme.
- **Ensuring Sustainability:** One of the main objectives of the project is to create a sustainable community cadre to carry forward the child protection initiatives in the community for which Myrtle coordinated along with the UNICEF district block development coordinators to identify the potential children giving special importance to the children from Smile school and NCLP of Salem and Dharmapuri districts. The cadre also identified the drop out children and enrolled them in the regular schools. Awareness generation is the first level of initiative in these areas. It was also understood that there is rampant prevalence of child labour in these areas. Children are employed in hazardous industries and this issue remains un-addressed. There needs to be intervention beyond awareness generation as these practices deeply rooted in poverty and patriarchy.



Performance process flow

- the primary exhibition cum counseling centre was set up to identify the needs
- child protection IEC Exhibition is set up in the main places like Bus terminus, Market places and in schools
- Ice breaking games conducted in schools for students and teachers
- Announcement was made along with folk songs and Mickey Mouse, Donald duck procession for community mobilization
- Fun filling ice breaking activity and games conducted for children this process also help to mobilize the community and build rapport
- Program started with village panchayat presidents/counselors in villages and in schools started with school Head masters
- Folk songs by professional singers addressed on child rights, child labour, importance of education and social evils with the traditional music
- Mickey Mouse and Donald duck performed a welcome laugh show and addressed on child rights
- The Navigator and the Rosy Navigator the Muppet will interact with the public in a friendly manner with fun loving stories
- The Myrtle team will gather necessary information about the children in the community. This helps Rosy to involve in humorous interaction with the young and the old alike in the community. This friendly conversations help in facilitating participatory approach and also assist in the building of effective, long standing rapport with the children and the other members of the community.



Community ice break games



Mickey & Donald performance



The issues addressed by the Muppet shows:

- Child Rights
- Importance of educating the girl child
Basic education promotes the well-being of girls. More educated women enjoy better opportunities for employment, and seek out modern health care and also in decision making, higher self esteem and treated equally
- The legislation that safeguards the rights of the children from child labour
- The child Marriage Act 2006
- Corporal punishment in schools
- Health & Hygiene
 - o Environmental Health
 - o Personal Hygiene
 - o Sanitation
- An awareness song was played for which the puppet dolls danced. This helped the community to understand the concept of social values, specially child labour, and education. The song was in a form of a dialogue between a child labour, his mother and that of his father. At the end, the song will end with a vow taken by the parents that they will educate the children at any cost.
- Special counselling for drop outs and their parents by professionals
- Drop outs and children who are in need referred to respective district ICPP Block development coordinator & Community Volunteers



The lyrics of the whole show were in the vernacular language and the people were able to relate to the Muppets. The Muppets captured the hearts of the young and the old.

The Muppets in Action: The Muppet shows were conducted in 5 blocks in Salem Districts and 4 blocks in Dharmapuri districts.

The backbone of the Muppet shows is the Myrtle team, UNICEF's Child protection specialist and the Project directors of ICPP, ICPP Block development coordinators, the local Panchayat leaders, BDOs, School management, and the social welfare officers of the Residential schools extended their support for every Muppet shows.





The Propaganda Unit is used to announce the commencement of the Muppet shows with the help of Mickey Mouse, Donald duck and folk songs with their mobile caravan propaganda unit. They make announcements regarding the venue and distribute pamphlets.

Rosy the Muppet navigator steals the show...She adds spice to the lives of the children. Rosy is known for her laughter. The show usually starts with Rosy's remarks on UNICEF. She points out that this organization is established exclusively to "protect the children". These words of reassurance are a soothing balm for the children who face the brunt. The child replies to each of Rosy's queries with great enthusiasm. Their face light up with joy and laughter at the very sight of Rosy and her team.

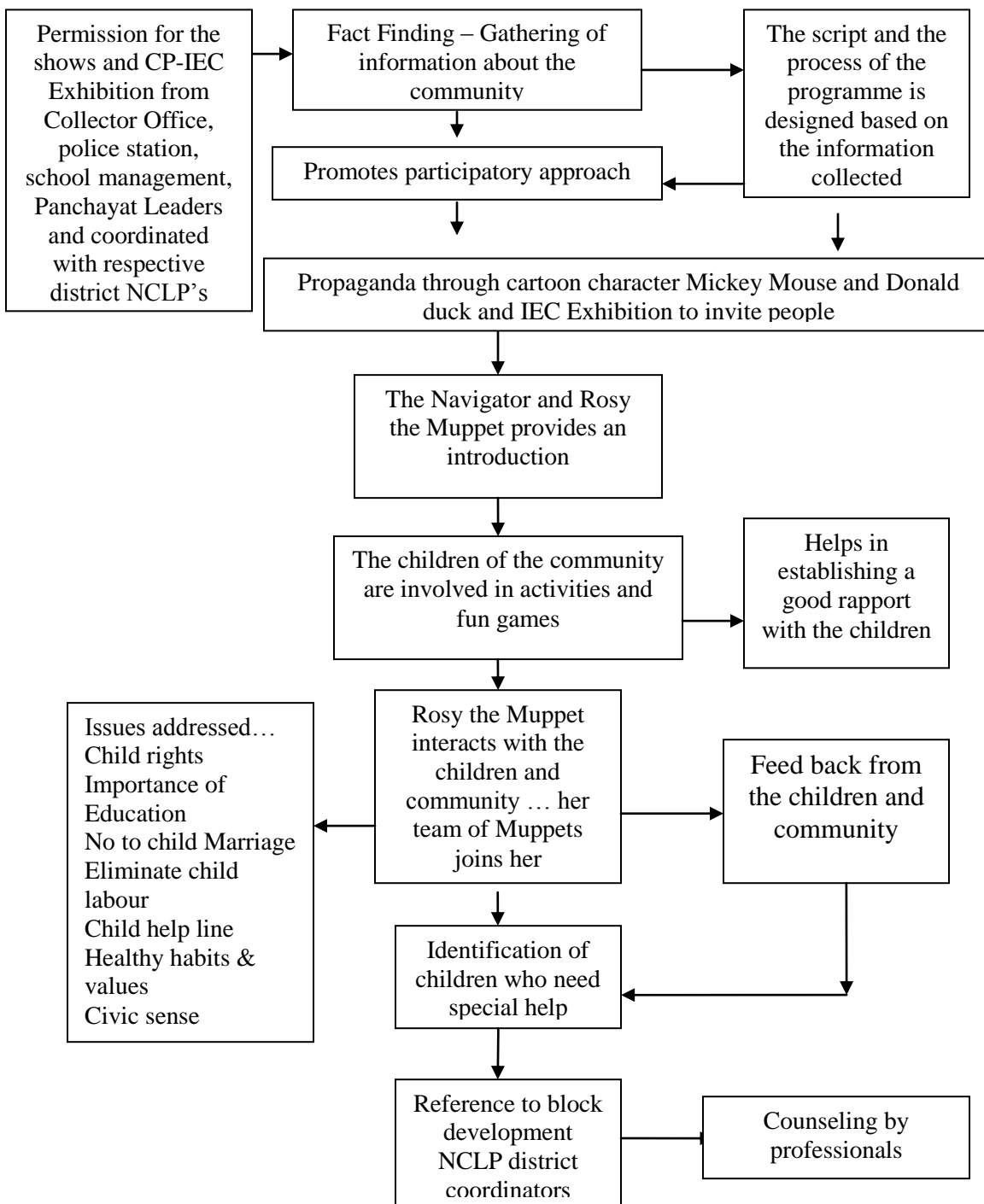
Shows were performed in

- Schools and villages WHICH INCLUDES VILLAGES IN Tribal AREAS of Salem & Dharmapuri Districts
- SC/ST/BC Hostels in Salem and Dharmapuri Districts
- Market (Santhai) places in Salem and Dharmapuri districts
- Bus Terminus & Bus stands in Salem and Dharmapuri districts

Salem district Name of the Blocks	No of Programmes Planned	No of Programmes Performed
1. Salem Rural	5	3
2. Pethanaickan palayam	5	9
3. Thalaivasal	5	5
4. Gangavalli	5	8
5. Yercaud	5	8
Total	25	33
Dharmapuri District		
1. Harur	6	12
2. Pappireddipatti	6	8
3. Pennagaram	7	8
4. Palacode	6	12
Total	25	40



Overall Process Flow Chart





IEC Exhibition on Child Protection: Child protection exhibition was conducted in all the schools where the Muppet show was planned. The bus terminals and the market places were also included as it attracted the moving crowd. Pamphlets on child protection information was printed and distributed during the exhibition and community awareness programmes. The printed information contained the details like;

- Who are children?
- What are the rights of children?
- Why do children need protection?
- What is the legislation that safeguards the rights of the children?
- Child Marriage Act 2006
- Child Labour Act 1986



A3+ size child protection IEC Multi colour Posters introduced in the local language.

The volunteer, BDCs and the professional counsellors also helped the people who came for any help regarding the services of the government; provide assistance in identifying the referral and resources available in the area of child protection and legal measures.



The impact of IEC Exhibition and Caravan - Children and community are keen on knowing the Child Marriage Act 2006 and other child protection message Child labour Act 1986 to read in the Caravan. When the caravan stopped all kind of age groups had shown the interest to study the child protection messages in the caravan. The caravan is used to mobilize the crowd and give announcement about the programme venue.





Highlights of the show

At Schools

- children took oath to study at least up to college
- children took oath to marry after 21 years, if the family compel they go as children group and fight for the vulnerable one in the respective family
- in boys schools boys took oath they will marry after 21 years and they ensure the girl is above 18 years and will not take dowry

At villages

- drop out children come forward to join back in regular schools and child labour schools
- community people understand the risk of child marriage
- community understand the importance of education
- gender issues talked about and addressed

Impact of Muppet show: In schools during school hours IEC exhibition, folk songs, cartoon character show, Muppet show and distributed pamphlets.

- In schools through folk songs on child labour, child marriage, rights of the children was highlighted
- New song developed by Myrtle has added value to the performance on child labour in cotton farm
- Muppet show addressed on child labour, child marriage, importance of education, female infanticide, health & hygiene
- Through Muppet show and also promoted child labour specials schools for drop out children
- End up with child right song and a case history on importance of education and setting up a goal in life in education
- Feed back and counselling and referral services linked to the local block development coordinators of ICPP

The show impact on drop out children:

Myrtle's performance has resulted in many drop out children accepting to study again.

On 1.11.10 at B.Thuringipatti Boyar colony (stone breaking community) 9 children came forward then these children have been referred to 2 community volunteers and Mr. Murugan the Pappirettipatti block coordinator of NCLP, dharmapuri district, and next day myrtle team went to see the response, 2 of the children Govindan* 7 years old joined 3rd std and Muthukumar* 14 years joined 7th std, again after 3 months and 5 months respectively at Govt. Hr. Sec. School, Thuringipatti.





The List of drop outs who came forward to join the school

S.No	NAME	STD	AGE	FATHER	MOTHER
B.Thuringipatti Boyar colony - Pappirettipatti Block					
1	Prakash	7	15	Thangaraj	chitra
2	Muthukumar*	7	14	Jayavel	indirani
3	Govindan*(parents are at coimbatore now, living with grandmother)	3	8	Murugan	Kamala
4	Kathirvel	6	13	panneer	Sudha
5	Velmurugan	8	14	Pushparaj	devika
6	Vignesh	8	14	Poobal	sarasu
7	Arunkumar and sathyamurthy are brothers	4 & 6	10 & 13	Chinnaraj	latha
8	Thirumurthy	8	14	Muthusamy	sumathy
9	Manigantan	7	14	Vijayan	suryagandhi
Pennagaram Block, dharmapuri district Performed programme on 9.11.10 at Pennagaram Santhai(Market) after seeing the show Ramya wanted to study again, so she took us to her mother who living in the roadside then gave counseling and referred to the BDC of dharmapuri district of all the other 3 siblings and her 2 cousins (who have not joined yet in schools).					
1	Boopathi - male		6	Kuppan	ganga
2	Pratap - male		7	"	"
3	Ramya-studied in hostel at pennagaram after the girl sister born mother ask her to take care of sister	6	11	Allimuthu	murugammal
4	Kumaran		7	"	"
5	Ranjith		5	"	"
	Name yet to keep for girl child		3 months	"	"





Pennagaram block - Ootamalai community

on 10.11.10 at mariamman temple end of the show the following children came forward to join the school again, the responsibility have been handed over to the community volunteer Mr. Manikandan(MBA) and also refereed to the Pennagaram BDC. After the intervention there wish is to become..



Pennagaram block - Ootamalai community

1	Muthulakshmi (wish to become police)	7 th	12	chinnasami	devayani
2.	Ramesh (social worker)	6	11	Madaiyan	Rani
3.	Arul (Doctor)	4	8	Mariappan	Arulammal

They said it:

Wherever Myrtle performed shows people appreciated specially in all the schools for an example

- on 15-11-10 Myrtle performed Muppet show at Marandhaalli Govt. Girls Higher Secondary school, timings between 2pm to 3pm. After seeing the impact of the programme the school head master Mr. M.Varadarajan B.Sc.,M.A.,M.Ed., spoke to the Marandhaalli Govt. Boys Higher Secondary school Headmaster Mr.R.Chandran M.A.,M.Ed., and said about the impact of the programme and he asked the MYRTLE team to perform one more show in the boy's school in the same day. Normally the school ends at 4.15pm but both the school HM they made the 1450 students and 50 teachers to stay till 4.45pm to stay in the school, end of the program the teachers and some of the student came and said programme is very excellent and useful. This school is not planned in the schedule.
- Eriyur Government Hr. Sec. School, Tamil teacher Mr. Mahendran and who also a secretary in a NGO working for education and HIV/AIDS at Dharmapuri district who said "the programme is Innovative best communicative medium this will reach the hearts and minds of uneducated and educated of all age groups".
- "Rosy has not only touched the lives of the children by her songs but also our hearts. We forgot our sufferings like children we laughed and enjoyed" P. Venkatesan, Chairman, Thadavur, Gangavalli block, Salem dt.



- “My daughter’s kalpana(6th std) and kamala(8th std) went on stage and declared that one day they would become doctor and collector. When I heard that my children my eyes were flooded with tears. I never knew what my daughters wanted. I never imagined that my children cherished such dreams. Thanks to this puppet show, I now know what my children aspire to become...I will somehow provide my daughters with good education. I will help them make their dreams a reality” Mr. K. S. Raju, (Ex-Panchayat President) Perumpalai, Pennagaram block, Dharmapuri district.



Workshop towards Sustainability: Three days non residential workshop on puppetry was planned to be organized by MYRTLE funded by UNICEF. In the workshop conducted at Salem the children were selected from the Smile school and Adults were referred from the BDCs of Salem. In Dharmapuri 10 children were selected from NCLP School and 10 adults from Dharmapuri CPP cultural team.



CP-Posters released by DRO, Sweden & Chennai UNICEF officials



Dharmapuri Puppet workshop participants

The identified cadre was imparted inputs on the basics on child protection, the importance of puppetry, the performance skill, production of dolls etc. the main issue for the puppet show was selected by the cadre and story and script writing was done by them and the fine tuning was done by Myrtle. This trained group will be a lasting resource in the community.

Features of the workshop

- 3 days non residential workshop for the children in the community
- The workshop organized on weekends so that the children will not miss school



- Children and adults are trained together, so that the adults would understand the issues and difficulties of the children. Children had space to express their concerns and the activity based exercises made adult to understand the talents of children and also their participatory rights got ensured.
- The cadre will be split into 2 groups; each of the groups will be trained in script writing and performance. For every training 2 skits portraying social issues will be produced
- The cadre identified the social issues that they want to sensitize the community. They have a brainstorming process on the social issues, followed by script writing process.
- Some of the social issues made into skits by the children are: child marriage, child labour, and child labour special school for drop outs
- The cadre were given a lot of training to fine tune performance before the final performance in the community
- Each of the training will be followed by performance in the community
- There will be a follow up of the training where by the resource team conducted in the schools/community and conduct an informal evaluation of the following performances of the cadre
- The children/team were given inputs on personal hygiene, soaps were provided for them to wash their hands before and after food, the children followed these meticulously

The highlights of the workshop:

The workshop proved to be very useful for the children/adult because the children were able to develop in a holistic manner



Dharmapuri collector Mr. Anandkumar IAS enjoyed the Muppet show, performed by NCLP Puppet cadre children

- The children/cadre were able to display their creativity especially in the designing of glove puppets
- The children with all their enthusiasm both girls and boys and adults, (children are equally competing adults) sat to stitch the puppets. It made them realize that stitching is certainly not a woman's thing.....



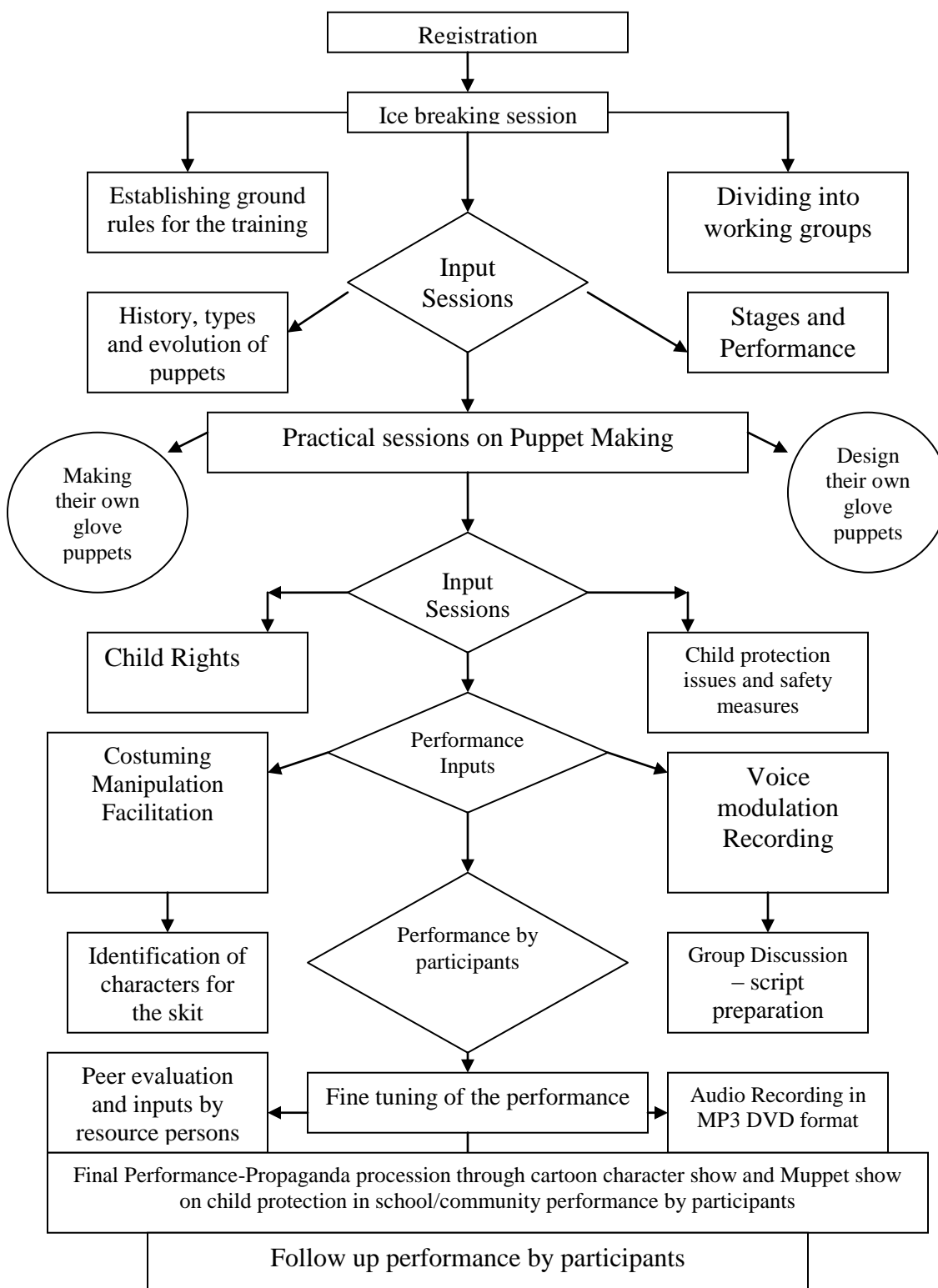
- The workshop promoted in the children a sense of critical thinking, they were effective peer evaluators when they were asked to critically analyze the performance of their counterparts in the training process
- The children/adult learnt to work together as a team. The team building exercises encouraged them to do so
- The children learnt to take up responsibility. They were able to execute the responsibilities entrusted on them. In every workshop the children were divided into cartoon character committee, announcement committee, games committee and skit and song performance committee
- The cadre promised to be role models for the other children in the community and vouched to adopt the walk-talk policy
- The cadre in the valedictory session took vows to be role models in the community
- The follow up provided by the resource team proved the fact that the workshop a sustainable intervention. The children-team were a catalyst of change in their community

Some children emerged as strong, challenging, motivated child leaders. Many children were able to shed their inhibitions, -- a 12 year old Manimegalai from NCLP school was able to host a whole cultural performance of children's day celebration at Gandhi mandapam, chennai on 16-11-2010 as that was appreciated by the Tamilnadu labour department officials, participants, other cultural groups and UNICEF child protection specialist Mr.Vidyasagar.





Workshop Flow chart





The sustainable impact

The Vidayal Kalai cultural team of dharmapuri district who performs Regular Street plays with the support of NCLP - dharmapuri collectorate for more than 5 years. This cultural team also identified for training on puppetry with MYRTLE – UNICEF intervention. After the puppet workshop the team started performing Muppet shows on child protection in schools, colleges and communities.

The puppet cadre leader Mr. Mariappan said “we have performed more than 15 programmes reached 4500 people so far, we are getting overwhelming response from the community and schools. The medium of puppetry is Very effective in the field of creating awareness on child development.



Overall performance:

• Total no of Workshop on puppetry conducted	2
• Total no of Follow-up Workshop on puppetry conducted	2
• Total no of Child protection IEC Exhibition conducted:	53
• Total no of Muppet shows conducted	73
• Total no of cartoon character show conducted	73
- Total no of people visited Child protection IEC exhibition	13306
- Total no of participants in Muppet show	30389
- Total no of people visited CP-IEC caravan	11887
- Total no of workshop participants	50
- Total no of workshop performance in the field	4
- Total no of people participated in sustainable cadre Muppet show performance	2760

Conclusion: The programme has been successful in initiating a thought process amongst the community especially the children about the need for understanding child rights and protection. The children have understood the implications of the various social evils on their lives and have learnt about the various legal measures that can protect them.

The first process of awareness generation has been successful as the elders as well as the children were able to think about child rights and protection without any inhibitions as Muppets were used as a medium. The IEC materials used were useful to understand the various legislations that protected the rights of the children. One of the key impacts of the programme is the enrollment of children back in school.

Moreover the teachers have also understood the concept of child rights and protection and there have been instances where corporal punishments have been addressed. On the whole the project has resulted in generating mass awareness about child protection in Salem and Dharmapuri districts that is known for its various crimes against children.

Our plans for the future

- To increase awareness generation on child protection to all the other blocks of Salem & Dharmapuri districts.
- Creating a sustainable task force in every block of these districts
- To facilitate the children to reach out to other affected children by means of puppetry
- To inculcate in the children certain values that they lack

Our Journey...

Our first phase intervention is but a drop in the ocean. We have to walk a mile to bring about a smile...We have just started our journey and we shall not give up till we achieve our goals.

