

**Kutch- The Safe district initiative -Learning Journey of KMVS
2015-2019
Written by Vandana Mahajan**

Flow of the Report

1. Scope and Purpose of documentation of the Kutch Safe District Initiative
2. Section I: Current realities in the context of Kutch with regard to safety concerns of women and girls
3. Section II: Reflections on overall impact and effectiveness of the Kutch Safe District Initiative by KMVS
4. Section III: Key insights for the future work of KMVS in addressing the safety of women and girls in Kutch
5. Annexure I: Key Questions for the review of the Safety work by KMVS (field visit 25-29 May 2019)

Nature and scope:

KMVS has been working on empowerment of women since past 30 years, and has strived to realign its strategies to match ever changing realities of the region. From 2015 onwards, KMVS and its CBOs strived to work on women's safety as their core agenda and devised strategies to realise vision of 'safe district'. The team and community leaders underwent capacity building and reflection at various times to understand women's safety issues. The process has been realised at various community, judiciary and other stakeholder's levels. It is apt that the strategies and realities of the region are studied in detail to bring the nuanced understanding on safety issues and how these initiatives can be shaped in future. Safe district initiative is a pilot for the region and one of its kind for the state, so such document will help on many levels and will serve as pointer for varied networks and organisations.

Methodology: the process involved review of existing reports, documents, interview with field team and interaction with community groups, leadership team in KMVS and other stakeholders (government, media, NGOs) from the region

Objectives of the documentation

- Examine realities of women safety in the current context of Kutch
- Capture the shifts in approaches and strategies in the span of last 3.5 years
- Narrate key insights and learnings from the organizational and community point of view
- Reflections on overall impact and effectiveness of the process and interventions, supported by some of the best practices and knowledge built
- Provide suggestions and recommendations for future directions

Section I

Current realities in the context of Kutch with regard to safety concerns of women and girls

Much has changed in today's context of Kutch- The first wave of irreversible changes happened post 2001, after the unmitigated devastation caused by the earth quake, the demographic and ecological, economical and socio- and cultural profile of Kutch as a region was permanently changed. The unprecedented changes had implicit and explicit repercussions on all sections of the diverse society that Kutch represents, including the position and condition of women and girls.

In the continuation of the wave of changes **in the landscape of Kutch, among the most impactful have been the opening of Kutch as a region to outsiders for commercial purposes and opening of the flood gates for tourist in flow.** The present state government of Gujarat which has now been power for more than 20 years has brought in hugely significant changes in the economic and social landscape in the Kutch region. There have been a slew of populist measures ostensibly to promote the development and empowerment of backward communities and sections of the society such as the girls and women and scheduled caste and

tribes and other backward communities. The development of the Kutch region has also been a highly decibel publicity programme by the Gujarat state government programme. The state government through its numerous policy initiatives has provided very lucrative options for the private entities to promote their businesses to extract the rich heritage, natural abundance of oil, mineral deposits and vast tracts of dessert land in the Kutch region. The district's population itself has grown from 15.83 lakhs to 20.93 lakhs. The region is now host to more than 600 industries, largely ports, thermal power plants and mining companies. **The unbridled access given to outsiders in the Kutch region for commercial and private gains has brought with it changes in the economic and socio- cultural landscape of the region, creating pressure and tension for the indigenous and settled communities to provide cheap labour with an extractive and exploitative nature of relations between the outsiders and the local communities.**

Over last 20 years, Kutch has been no exception to the incumbent political power in the state of Gujarat to strengthen its stronghold in all aspects of people's lives, more specifically through its arms of governance and executive functioning at different levels, starting from the village communities to the panchayati raj institutions and the municipality and district and state departments, there has been a very systematic process of politicisation of the functioning of the societal institutions both, in the formal and informal, customary institutions. There is very evidence of deep in roads made in the Panchayati raj institutions by the mainstream political parties and the controlling influence of the money and muscle power in the functioning of the third tier of governance. In the PRIs, despite 50% reservation for women and increased representation of women has not substantially resulted in their increased participation to change the predominantly patriarchal functioning of the PRIs as a male dominated space.

As a result of state's powerful influence and control, the unique social, ecological and economic profile of the large and diverse range of indigenous Kutchi communities who had been living in harmonious and interdependent existence for centuries, have come under tremendous pressure to break away and change from their strong traditions of networked and self reliant community based existence. These communities for long had been known to be living together as very good examples of peaceful and mutually learning and respecting societies, however, the Kutchi communities have become increasingly polarised. **The friction and exclusion has taken place along the lines of the religion, caste and class and location. Some times, there is a marriage of convenience taking place between unlikely partners being brought under a common religious denomination. It doesn't take long to discover that there are increased fissures in the communities living in Gujarat along the religious and caste and community lines.** They remain steadfast in upholding the caste and class based distinctions and holding on to a bitter rivalry of proving with their own cultural arithmetic calculation of caste based superiority when attempts to climb down these rigid walls are made by the young people in making marital choices. There are several examples of political convenience of bringing together the different and disparate sections of the Kutchi society such as the Maheshwari and Balmiki Samaj on certain platforms. Along side there is rivalry, suspicion and fear by creating the 'othering' phenomenon and treating those Kutchi communities as 'enemy' marked for practicing different religious beliefs.

Safety issues in the Kutch region: Old and the new issues

In the context of Kutch, there is need to be cognisant to distinguish between the long standing and structural issues concerning equality and autonomy of women and girls and those concerns which have manifested themselves in the past decades and their impact on women's empowerment for equality.

Safety concerns arising of entrenched harmful and discriminatory gender norms and customary practices: The region remains a strong bastion of all the structural and systemic barriers faced by women and girls due to gender inequality. Entrenched patriarchy has been and continues to be operative in the region in suppressing and denial of full spectrum of rights by the women from all the communities. **Whether it is restrictive mobility, or barriers of access to education and enjoying equal rights over material resources and lack of opportunities and**

say and visibility in decision making spaces in the family, community and in the functioning of the societal and state institutions, women and girls in Kutch continue to be marginalised and remain very vulnerable and unsafe , facing different forms of violence in private and public and other institutional spaces.

Rapid industrialization, urbanization, commercialisation and increasing fundamentalism taking place in the region, has brought in newer dimensions of exploitation and gender based violence for women and girls in their every day existence. **Women's lives have become societal mirror of the social, economic and cultural changes that are taking place in their families and communities and in the larger eco system of the state.**

Due to the presence of many outside industries and private companies, traditional occupations are going away as industrialisation has built a new class, people who were earlier working on their family land and farms or pursuing their traditional occupation are taking up unskilled jobs such as driving, blue collared jobs or lower spectrum semiskilled, clerical, manual or supervisory work, largely in the unregulated and unorganised sector. The families are breaking up. In most of the blocks of Kutch such as Mundhra, Mandavi, Kutch urban, and Nakhatrana, a large number of families have sold off the land as a result there is lot of pressure on the scarce agricultural land and many of those who have sold off their land , have not taken a long term view of wisely investing the cash that they had received by selling off their land asset. **They are now feeling the financial crunch of not having the availability of liquidity of resources nor have they sizeable and assets left with them, dragging their families in a cycle of debt and resulting depression leading to increased violence at the familial and community level and alcoholic abuse.**

In such situations, it has been found that girls are made the scapegoat to conserve on the scarce family resources and out of the patriarchal notions of keeping the family honour by forcing the girls to drop out after elementary school education to look after the younger siblings or contribute to the family burden of care and community work and also they are amongst the first ones to be traded off by the family in the name of marriage to escape from their responsibility of giving their daughters optimum conditions for her growth and development.

One of the issues which make the girls extremely vulnerable is the prevalence of early and forced marriage - "Bhuj has for long been in the red zone with regard to wide scale prevalence of child/ early marriages taking place in different caste based communities", told the district PCM officer , Mr. A.P Roharia during the interview held with him for the purpose of the review of safety initiative of the KMVS. He said that the challenges remain in enforcement of the law for prevention of child marriages as the hold of the caste based leaders over their communities is very strong. **The limitations of enforcement approach to a social legislation like PCM act are obvious by the low rate of the success of the prevention drive of the PCM law enforcement machinery.**

It has taken a lot of advocacy efforts by the civil society and women rights and child rights organisations for the local government to accept women's safety as an issue to be addressed. **Wherever it has been cognisant, the state has taken the more protectionist route in drafting its policy and programmatic directions and using the legal enforcement strategy under the POCSO act for curbing the freedom of adolescents to make their choices and using the law enforcement provisions under the prevention of child marriage act and PCPNDT act. Too much legal system in everyday conversation of consent exist, what is permissible or not permissible has permeated our conversation.** Hence conversation around consent remains around 'what is allowed' or 'is not allowed'. It's about time to discuss what kind of conversation we are having around Consent; are they liberating us or putting us up to new kinds of social bondage and restrictive cultural norms.

Issues of lack of choice and consent in when and whom to marry continue to put the young girls and boys in extremely hazardous situations ,facing threats and fear of isolation, social ostracisation and violence for women and girls from different communities of Kutch. Issues of sexual harassment, molestation, elopement, kidnapping and murder

and honour killings of women and girls from the region have been exacerbated in addition to the other endemic issues of gender discrimination and extreme nature of patriarchal controls and practices over the lives of women and girls in this region.

The newer issues-

The growing status of women in the district, and the transforming identities of women across class, caste, religion and geographies are at odds with the growing inequities, increasing sectarianism, aggressive culture of commerce and consumerism, and perverse forms of patriarchy - all of which are manifest in the increase in violence against women - within the home, and in the public domain.

Contrary to the common belief that Gujarat is safe for women, the Gujarat state agencies have been aggressively promoting for opening the state to the tourists with the gaiety and public participation of women especially during the Gujarat's signature festival of Navratri where there are cultural programmes taking place late in the night, it is also common knowledge that there has been increased reporting of cases of kidnapping, suicide by as young a girl as 14 year old and 20 year old boys.

In the last five years there has been shift in the nature of violence faced by the women and girls It is not restricted to intimate partner violence and domestic violence in interpersonal spaces. Now the violence is faced by girls and young women while going to schools, colleges and at the work place , due to which there are concerns of girls dropping out from higher education and women not able to work to their potential, other issues of IPV, elopement, girls exercising their choice, girls marrying below 18 years, cyber violence are becoming commonplace in the region.

Studies and documentation done by KMVS shows that not more than 25% cases of domestic violence are actually reported. For example, in the years 2011-13, the PWDVA have registered 406 cases while cases registered with KMVS and affiliated socio-legal centers for the same period alone was 1538. Cases of rape of the minor girls has shown manifold increase.

The extent of gender based violence and its reportage is particularly alarming, particularly in the blocks near and within the industrialized zones, (which is the south and south-east Kutch), peri urban and urban Kutch, rural areas of north and western Kutch which has seen a **sharp rise in muslim girls and women coming under pressure from conservative religious groups, and rampant alcoholism as well as trafficking of women and girls from east India**

The dramatic shift in the region's demographic, livelihood, and land use patterns has a direct and significant impact on the women's lives - be it their access to resources, their sense of safety, onset of new vulnerabilities at home and work, or **altered patterns of gender relationships in their homes and communities. For instance, with an increasing inflow of migrant labour population and emerging social dynamics between the local and migrant communities, there are newer forms of gender based exploitation and vulnerabilities faced by women. KMVS has found an increasing evidence of women in several of the blocks in Kutch taking up sex work to feed their families.**

Concerns of Safety among the younger generation: A paradoxical situation

Stemming from patriarchal value structure of the society, there is a visible paradox , on one hand, traditionally the youth faces social invisibility and lack of agency to make choice and and being heard and having space for having their say in matters pertaining to their life, and on the other hand, there is social anxiety among the older generations and guardians in the family and community set up of slipping of their control over the younger generation. It was an oft heard sentiment during my interactions for the review of the safety work of the KMVS, much like elsewhere, youth in Kutch region are also restless, want instant gratification and get distracted more easily. The common refrain heard during my discussions with the adults from different sections of the society was about comparing their youths with the

present one and feeling that this generation lacks the consistency and passion of yore, it was felt that this generation feeds on instant gratification. They don't respect the wisdom of the elders. They are ambitious at the cost of maintaining the 'decorum of family values'.

This paradox jeopardises the voices, aspirations and agency of the younger generation with which they can develop their capacities, navigate their life-choices, negotiate violence-free spaces and in reality, contribute to maintaining a healthy environment in their immediate communities.

Among the younger generation, due to intense and increased use of social media, there are increasing instances of cyber crimes including stalking, trolling and black mail tactics. Increased access through mobile telephony and social media has also given the young people wings to dream and make real their aspiration of entering into relationships of their choice, which has resulted in great deal of social tension and fictions coming to the fore due to the ageist and patriarchal hold that the adults wish to exercise on the lives and the choices made by the younger generation in their communities. The terror created by the notion of Love Jihad has also reached several of the Kutch households where the young people are being witch hunted for expressing their choice of whom to marry, where the political narrative is being promoted that the girls are being enticed by the men and boys from 'other' communities.

The concerns expressed by the society over the chastity and controlling the sexuality of young girls which in turn gets linked to the honour of the community continue to undermine the safety and well being of the young people. These social realities are also responsible for the poor performance of young girls on education and health indicators. The increased risks faced by young women have been confirmed by the safety audits and surveys carried by KMVS, wherein, young girls and women have articulated they feel unsafe in homes, transportation, public spaces, work places, schools and colleges, including the religious places.

Young girls from socially marginalised and economically deprived communities are especially disadvantaged, given their low enrolment rate and educational attainment levels. They typically lack access to financial capital and have limited opportunities to gain knowledge, and skills that can lead to economic advancement. In these circumstances, the young girls get emotionally and socially vulnerable. Sometimes they take the escape route to leaving home with the partner of their choice. These choices and agency of the young girls get criminalised through law and customary practices. In a recent research study done by ANANDI, a Gujarat based women's organisation, informs that the legal guardians of the young girls apply the sections dealing with Kidnapping and Abduction of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) along with Protection of Children Against Sexual Offence Act (POCSO), 2012 in the FIR instead of putting the complaints of the missing person. The reports of the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) reveal that the percentage of the child marriages booked under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 remains negligible but there has been a continuous rise in the number of abduction and kidnapping as well as sexual abuse incidences in this specific age cohort.

The above situation is confirmed by the KMVS's own studies and interventions with the young people and women in different blocks of Kutch. **Young girls in the age group of 15-19 tend to face enormous challenges of access to education, under-age marriages and restrictions on physical as well as social mobility. The child marriage with parental consent continues to prevail without being stringently prevented by the agencies dealing with law and order as well as child protection, but early marriage by young people's choice get criminalised.**

To sum up, it could be "safely" argued that in the urban, semi urban and rural landscape of Kutch, responsible actors and institutions have not been able provide necessary and sufficient conditions for ensuring safety to women and girls. The will and sensitivity is still lacking to put the systemic nuts and bolts in place to provide the safe, enabling and youth and gender sensitive environment to bring more women and girls into public spaces. This is a big drawback factor for the low rate of women's participation in workforce. Like any other urban and peri urban locations globally, the women and girls feel unsafe in Kutch. Targeted simply because they are women, they are exposed to daily harassment and sexual violence in private and public spaces. Despite the claims made by

the state agencies that every one is welcome to visit Kutch as it's publicised as a very safe and hospitable place, however the issues of women's safety continue to be the nagging worries of those who are working with these constituencies. The wide array of discussions held with different stakeholders during my recent visit for review of the safety work of the KMVS, it came across quite strongly that women in Kutch continue to face fear of violence in different spheres of their life. They are fearful of sexual harassment, of sexual assault. Women and girls said they try to avoid getting out at night. The moment it becomes dark, the place becomes more hostile for women. Lack of safe and well connected public transport system is also a red flag for women's safety. This clearly indicates that women are not equal citizens, they are not able to equally access what the villages and cities can offer to men and other influential sections of the society.

Section II

Reflections on overall impact and effectiveness of the Kutch Safe District Initiative by KMVS

Since 1989, when KMVS began working with the overarching mission of total empowerment of women in the Kutch region through their conscientization, organization, and mobilization into local collectives capable of independently addressing gender inequities in the development process, its journey over the past 30 years has been constantly evolving and responding to the changing context which is mostly inhospitable and inequitable for marginalised and vulnerable sections of the Kutch communities. As one of the founder members of KMVS put it during the FGD with the leadership team, that, " For the first two decades of its work , the work of KMVS was associated with promotion of women's livelihood and helping them to organise and collectively fight the issues of domestic violence and other forms of gender based violence in the domestic and public sphere. Another long time associate of KMVS affirmed that "Earlier the areas of emphasis included building women's economic and social security, now there is greater focus to work with the lens of women's safety . Safety in both the public and private spaces and not just security (i.e. Entitlements and benefits) has now become our priority, but the foundation for it was laid in the last 30 years of KMVS work of mobilisation of the rural poor women for their empowerment towards gender equality."

In 2015, KMVS expanded its organisational mandate to respond to the emerging challenges (referred to, as above, in the previous section of the report) that were posing newer and more complex kind of risks, threats and vulnerabilities to the women and girls in Kutch. KMVS took a leap of faith in consultation with its key constituents, viz, the women from the sangathans to work on issues of safety of and with the women and girls so as to fulfil their rights to dignity and equality to live without fear of violence and without discrimination, have freedom of mobility, and exercise agency to make their choices in pursuing education, marriage, livelihood and work. KMVS launched the 'Safe District initiative' as a pilot for the region and one of its kind for the state, which has been realised at various levels including different communities of the Kutch region, legal machinery, PRIs, and other governmental and non governmental stakeholders, networks and organisations.

While planning for a period of five years (2015-2020), KMVS has adopted the approach of gradual increase in outreach and a multi pronged approach for its safe district initiative (taking every year newer villages, newer panchayat areas and schools in different block of Kutch). The interventions in 2015 -16 were taken up in 56 villages of the blocks of Nakhtrana and Abdasa and Mandvi. In the first year, Bhuj urban and rural area were focused for interventions including training of the para legal cadre and initial work with the school based community(15 schools of Bhuj blocks urban pockets) of young boys and girls along with the teachers and with the block level panchayat representatives in Bhuj . In 2016-17 Nakhtrana block was chosen for focussed area work on women and girls safety with the total number of villages increased to 150 and to 35 panchayats in the blocks of Bhuj, Nakhtrana and Abdasa. In 2018-19, blocks of Anjar were identified as the focused area and focus area for the year 5 (2019-2020) will include Bachau block.

In this time period, a series of measures were put in place, both to provide gender sensitive support services to women and girls. A large number of women and girls in distress and facing

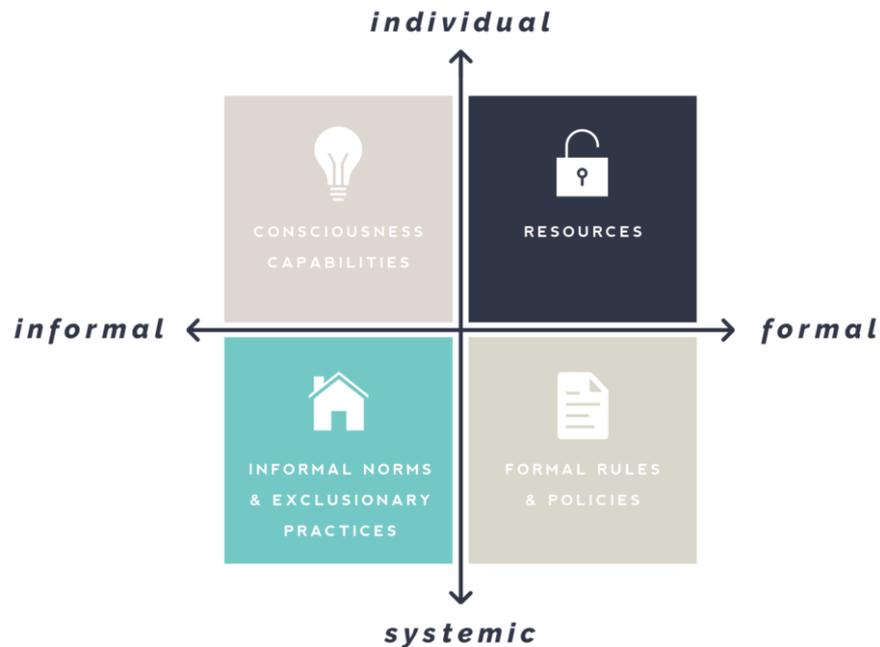
risks to their bodily and mental and emotional safety were provided with the support services of telephone help line (hello sakhi), police protection, safety centres, para legal counselling and district judicial and legal services.

Along side the efforts for providing gender sensitive support services to women and girls, the safety work in KMVS had given equal importance, if not more, in having a long term impact in making positive changes in perception and practice of gender norms and behaviors among individuals, families and communities and public institutions. In this regard, the safety work was taken up with with the caste based communities, youth, women's groups, media and civil society organisations and stakeholders from the panchayats, legal service, police department and in education and social welfare and women and child development departments of the Kutch district.

In the following section, I have attempted to understand and analyse how at the current juncture, the process has evolved at - KMVS, community and sectoral levels and what have the shifts in approaches in the Safe District initiative of KMVS. I have also featured here some of the good practices and the knowledge and tools that have emerged from the safety work in the past four years. To show case the relevance and effectiveness of work done in the last 3-4 years, the report highlights three key strategic areas of interventions for its innovation and synergistic approach to safety work with women, girls and vulnerable sections of the Kutch society.

1. The first area is the building of youth leadership and gender sensitisation work with the adolescents in the schools, colleges and in the communities. (to showcase the impact of building capacities and consciousness raising work with the youth and adolescents)
2. The second area of intervention by KMVS has been the work done with the para legals in the community and in providing gender sensitive legal support services through Hello Sakhi Helpline and Safety centres to the women and girls in rural and peri urban and urban parts of Kutch.(to showcase the impact of building a cadre of para legal service providers and sensitising the law enforcement and judicial system in addressing the issues of violence against women)
3. The third innovative area has been its unique work with the caste based societies of Kutch. (to showcase the impact of changing the deep structures of gender norms and beliefs prevailing in the communities)

Assessment of the safety work interventions of KMVS for the women and girls in Kutch has been done, using the framework of Four Domains of Change, to have an understanding of the relative impact and effectiveness of the Safety work of KMVS. The framework of change matrix was originally developed by Aruna Rao and David Kelleher at Gender at Work (2002) and adapted by Srilatha Batliwala(2008), the Change Matrix identifies four domains in which gender power structures operate. Based on the reflections from this section, the final section of the review provides the key learnings and take aways for all stakeholders for future interventions for the safety work with women and girls in Kutch.



In the above change matrix, the approach taken by KMVS for its Safe District initiative could be seen to influence the four domains of change positioned along the two axis. The vertical axis of the matrix indicates the continuum of changes to be brought at the individual, community and at the systemic level. On the horizontal axis of the matrix the strategies are aimed to influence the informal and formal spheres of the society. Desired outcomes from the first domain of change is for consciousness raising and capacity building for change in beliefs, values and attitudes of the individuals and communities, social institutions and organisations. The second domain looks at bringing improved access and control of resources and services and exercising power by those who have been traditionally denied such access and control and use of resources and power. Along the horizontal axis, in the third domain of the change matrix is for influencing the formal area of policies, laws and resource allocations and in the fourth domain, the change is sought to be made in the informal spheres that govern the harmful and discriminatory norms and practices in the society.

Based on an informed and consultative process of review of the strategies adopted by KMVS for its Safe District initiative, it could be said that the impact of interventions could be seen in all the four domains of the change matrix, albeit with a varying degree of intensity and success. While mapping the changes in each of the four domains, it could be seen that the changes have been brought in at the individual, community and institutional levels of the society. The impact of interventions was also assessed in the formal and informal domains of the society.

Given below is the broad clustering of the strategies deployed by KMVS in the four domains to impact the safety of women and girls and to bring more women and girls into the public spheres.

Awareness raising and capacity building

- Awareness and sensitising to address the issues of adolescents in school and with the school drop out girls on gender discrimination, psycho-social changes during adolescence; Holding awareness programmes through sports and art melas,
- Perspective building of college youth on gender and gendered violence
- Sensitising the teachers and block and district educational officers
- Sensitising the panchayats and deepening awareness and working with different committees, viz. SMCs, Nyaya samiti, mahila sabha, VHC, VCPC, EWRs, GP, block and Zilla panchayat members

- Conducting safety audit with the panchayat and schools to highlight issues of safety for women and girls in schools, colleges and in the village communities.
- Training the girls from urban poor settlements of Bhuj as auto drivers
- Capacity building and responding to victims of violence with a trained cadre of more than 300 para legal workers at community level to handle and refer GBV cases
- Training and sensitising the police and judiciary on gender responsiveness in cases of VAW
Training of the members of the ICC committees in colleges and industries to implement the provisions under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act
- Hosting of annual legal awareness and legal services fairs in collaboration with DALSA,
- Running awareness campaigns on prevention of early and child marriage with the government departments

A case study of Education Work with Adolescents and Youth -

When it started working on the safe district initiative in 2015, that was the first time that KMVS began its working with the education system and engaging with the issues of adolescent and young people. The stated objective was to nurture a gender sensitive and equity respecting community of boys and girls in the Kutch region. Work with the youth was undertaken with the focus to build their perspective on understanding the systemic causes of gender discrimination and develop capacities for their active engagement in prevention of gender based violence against women, girls and vulnerable communities. Inside the schools, the KMVS interventions focussed upon evolving a gender just pedagogy the school community of children, teachers and school administration and building a gender sensitive environment for the girls and vulnerable children to feel empowered to feel safe, confident and have greater self belief.

In these 4-5 years, much progress has been made through the education work and youth leadership and empowerment programmes. There is a vibrant and gender aware cadre of over 500 adolescent girls and boys and young people which has been built, who are challenging the gender norms and gender based barriers within their families and communities. They are actively participating in activities of the 14 safety centres which have been set up in different blocks of Kutch.

There were several examples focussed group discussion held during the review with adolescent girls and boys and young women of stories of change- of girls successfully challenging to stop the brewing and consumption of liquor in their own homes; of fighting and convincing the family members for postponement of the engagement and marriage of girls in their families; of winning the battle for increased freedom of mobility, taking admission in a school at a distance from their village, travelling independently and using public transport system, and joining the cricket and football team

A small fellowship programme for the youth had also encouraged leadership building in the youth from the urban slums to engage with the community members on issues of prevention of sexual harassment in public spaces, raising voice against gender discrimination practiced against their sisters, mothers and female members in the community, undertaking safety audit in their communities and identify points of vulnerability for safety of the girls and women. The Youth cadre has also been a very active part of the campaigns against female feticide and infanticide, early marriage in the last two years.

Exercises of school safety audit and Curriculum audit –from the perspective of gender and safety conducted by the trained youth have successfully established link between lack of safety in the school and college system for girls and their much higher drop out rates, especially at higher secondary level. These processes have definitely helped in engendering the school spaces and empowered the adolescents to articulate their concerns on safety.

The adolescents and young people have effectively been able to hold gender dialogue with teachers and communities on issues of safety, agency and educational equality of opportunities and on safe and responsible parenting.

In 2018, with the initiative of KMVS, a children's educational network has been built comprising of civil society organisations working in the area of education, child rights and child protection. There is a closer working relationship that KMVS has established with the district elementary education department. The POCSO booklet prepared by KMVS has been distributed by the elementary education department in all the schools.

A well trained cadre of youth mobilised by KMVS and its active engagement in the communities and in the schools and colleges for raising gender related issues in education and in addressing social issues of early marriage, violence against women has helped in getting the attention of the state actors to become more responsive to their issues.

In several areas of Kutch society, there is an emerging space opened up for the youth to voice their opinion on consent, choice and responding to gender based violence in private and public spaces. This has been possible due to mounting of a comprehensive range of strategic interventions by KMVS in consciousness raising of the youth to be more gender aware and responsive.

However, it's a long journey to change the gender normative framework as expressed during the FGD with the girls in village Chandiya, where the young women complained, "*why don't we get to wear the western clothes? why we are not encouraged to study as much as we desire? We want the adults to understand what our aspirations are, If we want to study then we should be allowed. when girls and boys go out to work, then they come late then they are asked why are late child marriage is a common practice.*" *cycle bhai ko de dete or is sold off.*" "*why are girls are not allowed to play when we attain maturity, ...are not allowed to use mobile phones, are not allowed to drive different vehicles Humme kyon mariyada mein raho, maryada mein bolo, kapde se maryada ko dhako? Mein kya sirf smaaj ki maryada ke liye bani hoon? Mein apnei zindagi ein pehro ke bina kya nahi jee sakti?*"

Access to knowledge resources and services

- Providing legal aid and support to victims of gender based violence, through the para legal cadre, Hello Sakhi helpline and running of the safety centres at the block level covering all areas of Kutch district
- A drop in centre in Bhuj urban, providing training, IEC and health services to address issues of sex workers
- Active support and coordination for the two district helplines 1098 and 108 for women's health and prevention of violence
- Develop gender sensitive training modules for adolescent and college youth and dissemination of information on POCSO through the education and child development and child protection department of Kutch
- Producing and disseminating IEC materials on safety with a very effective larger outreach through different mediums (magazine, poster, radio, video, mobile technology) and holding 'Nari Kathas', generate new songs, using traditional fairs and festivals, skits, Dayra/ reyan (musical events).
- In 2016, the community media wing of KMVS ran a popular year long series on the community radio highlighting different issues of safety in the form of an edutainment show, titled Kala Dungar. KMVS has effectively used the community media programme to voice concerns from the ground level and ensure community articulation and participation on concerns of women's safety.

A Case study of gender responsive service model to support the survivors of VAW in Kutch

KMVS has developed a landmark gender responsive service delivery model in its safe district initiative. The service delivery model has strong elements of awareness raising, capacity building, legal counselling and psycho social support to women survivors of violence. The service also has a strong component of influencing the formal system to be held accountable and responsive to address VAW. The programme has the following unique features:

- **A trained cadre of more than 300 para legal workers** has been built, with a deeper engagement of skill building done with a core group of 30 para legal workers. There is a very intensive six phased training programme for building the capacities of the para legal workers. The modules cover a gamut of women's rights - customary, civil, political, constitutional guarantees, gender laws and international women's human rights provisions. The trained cadre has built a very good support network in the community for women who seek help in dealing with the violence and fear of violence they are facing. The support of the para legal cadre is provided to accompany them to the police station, help them seek their entitlements and services ex., getting caste certificates, scholarship for children and hospital care, to name a few. Amongst the cadre of the para legal workers, there are many stories of individual change and influencing others to change.
- **The Hello Sakhi helpline that has set a unique example of partnership between the state actors and women's organization** to curb violence against women in the Kutch.

In 2010, as a response to ever growing violence against women, KMVS took a unique initiative to launch a telephone based 'Hello Sakhi Help Line' in collaboration with DSP office in Bhuj. The helpline provides an immediate response to women seeking help/information/support. This is first of its kind in Gujarat state - the anonymity and privacy of the mobile has played a key role in breaking social silence around cases of violence against women and creating an environment for ending women's fear of being ostracised or oppressed. It has helped tremendously in leading to promote action and support for women who are victims of violence. (more on the initiative at <http://mobilesforgoodwinaward.manthanaward.org/project-visit/kmvs/http://www.indianexpress.com/news/friend-on-call/891717/> <http://defindia.net/files/2012/07/Phones-help-empower-women.pdf>)

Case data of 2017		case referred by	
Type of cases			
domestic violence	617	Awareness campain	318
compensation	4	Hello sakhi helpline	150
missing	4	Paraligal	120
rape	8	Police station	73
scheme	92	Social worker	55
other	58	Community leader	41
call by male	21	Publication	36
molestation	1	Previous beneficiary	23
cyber crime	9	EWR	12
kidnapping	5	Lawyer	8
property related	16	Mediation	1
suicide	1	Abhayam 181	1
marriage registration	1		
accident	1	total	838
			228
total	838		1066

Case data of 2018	
Type of cases	
Call by male	147
Child abuse	1
Cyber crime	10
Domestic violence	789
Sexual harassment at Workplace	5
Kidnapping	1
Unmarried mother	1
love marriage	3
Missing	9
Others	80
POCSO	8
Property related	23
Rape	12
Government scheme	97
Atrocity	1
Total	1187

In the past three years , the operation of Hello Sakhi helpline have been effectively streamlined to provide a quick turn around time in reaching to the women in distress.

- **6 Women's Safety centres at the block level covering all areas of Kutch district**
- **A Unique collaboration of the women's NGO with the local district administration, the police department, the DLSA, local lawyers and judiciary and health service providers**

Highlights of the KMVS legal aid programme

- The highlight of the model is the alignment of prevention aspects with access to speedy justice with the provision of support services to women in crisis situation, facing violence and/or threats of violence. KMVS has been able to build and deliver a very efficient, responsive and comprehensive support system to address the safety and security of women in their homes, families and in the public spaces.
- KMVS has been successful in enabling women from all sections, including the urban towns, slums, rural women, migrants, and women in gated spaces such as the special economic zones set up across Kutch District to access the services of the helpline, safety centre, and para legals cadre.
- Enabling police officials, para legals, local community groups, lawyers and counsellors to come on a single platform to respond to gender based violence faced by women and girls, covering all parts of Kutch. The approach has been effective in building the preventive aspects of GBV and to strengthen women's access to justice. This has been possible due to successful efforts of building and mobilizing a cadre of para legals at community level, close linkages with DLSA, and police staff, trainings of lawyers, legal work in the hospital settings, campaigning in villages on issues of women's safety and prevention of violence against women and training and advocacy efforts for setting up the POSH committees in the private and public sector companies.
- **A very rigourous system of creation of data base on crimes against women has been assiduously built and effectively used for advocacy by KMVS**

The creation of such an extensive data on crimes against women is an unprecedented effort in a place like Bhuj. The live tracking and updating and monitoring of the data base by the Help line team has made a big contribution huge in visibilising the women's safety issues and for holding the state legal and law enforcement machinery to higher levels of accotability in providing speedy response and support to the women in need.

As indicated in the data sets(comparative data for 2017 and 2018 is given in the tables above),this effort has been very successful in bringing out the issues of domestic violence in the public domain. This is backed by a strong evidence from the data base that has been very systematically built and reviewed by KMVS legal aid team. The availability of a scientifically built and analysed data on VAW has been also a critical factor in refuting the claims by the state law enforcement departments that the crime rates against women have decreased in the past few years.

As a para legal worker had commented during the FGD in the review, "earlier there was no response from the village, now there is much more receptivity from the village,from the women. There are many women who have benefited from the hello sakhi safety centre and interventions of the para legal workers in the community , from all part of the Kutch district. We are now getting more cases of kidnaping, bal lagan and elopement, seeking maintenance and property rights".

- From 2018, in its safety work, KMVS has reiterated the importance and adequacy of the mobile technology. Usage of mobile technology has been increased with the utilisation of voice message platform to generate legal literacy messages and public sensitisation on prevention of gender based violence and keeping home and public spares safe and free from the threat of violence , sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

- Cross programme collaboration between different cadres and programmes of KMVS- There is now a very vibrant relationship of drawing support across the different program cadres within KMVS and The Para-legal workers, counsellors, members of the urban women's network, the Sakhi- Sangini network and the block level women's sangathans. The combined women force of 300 para legal workers in 10 blocks and streamlined systems in partnership with the legal, law enforcement and justice departments in place, in the 6 safety centres, hell sakhi, both worked from one space.

Mehmoona represents the strength and success of cross programme partnership that KMVS has built in the safety programme. Mehmoona is a woman leader of the Nakhatrana sangathan which has a membership of 8000 women with a cadre of 350 women's group leaders, she has been working actively for mobilising and sensitising a large number of adolescent girls at the block level. She was also trained three years ago as a para legal worker. She spoke about her association with hello sakhi safety centre. She spoke about the regular interactions with the group leaders in the sangathan on issues of women and girls safety. The Nakhatrana sangathan also provides legal aid and gender sensitisation to the women from other three blocks of Abdasa, Gandhidham and Lakhpat. Mehmoona commented that they were recently successful in activating the Mahila Police in the local area, the government run short stay home has also been monitored by them for improving its facilities. She said that the para legal workers group has built a rapport with the local lawyers associated with the legal mediation centre (DLSA)

Policies and laws

- Support to law enforcement agencies for programmes on prevention of child marriage and prevention of domestic violence and addressing cases under POCSO, rape and sexual harassment
- Supporting to district judicial authorities in taking up cases of violence against women
- Activating the setting up of POSH and ICC committees in colleges and industries in Anjar, Bachaav and Mundra

In 2018, work was initiated for training of the members of the ICC committees in some of the colleges and industries to implement the provisions under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act in the industrial areas of Anjar, Bachav and Mundra.

In 2018, a network of civil society organizations working in Kutch, key influencers from media, community leaders, panchayat leaders and the government stakeholders was been initiated by KMVS for ensuring the safety of women and girls in the Kutch as a social and civic responsibility of one and all.

Social, gender norms and practices

- Engaging with the caste based societies and leaders in understanding safety concerns and providing a space for dialogue on the issue in their public discourse
- Building a youth cadre for being the change agents for transformation at individual and societal level

A case study of intervention by KMVS with the caste based societies of Kutch: influencing to change the prevailing harmful gender norms

In its safe district initiative, KMVS took up a unique initiative of engaging with the caste based societies in the Kutch region. This was a call made based on KMVS's extensive understanding gained from their long experience of working in Kutch, where there are several caste based communities which are very feudal in their outlook with deep rooted gender discrimination and prevalence of harmful gender norms against women and girls in their societies. KMVS took up the initiative to engage with the influential members of these caste based societies and sensitising them on gender issues concerning the safety and creating an environment for greater understanding in giving respect, dignity and equality for the girls and women in their communities.

Alongside there were systematic efforts to sensitise and mobilise the girls, young people and women from these communities. In a phased and systematic manner, interventions were planned with the Rebbari, Devi Poojak, Balmiki and Maheswari communities. All the strategies of dealing with issues of VAW, safety concerns of the young women were drawn in active association and with the support of the Caste based leaders. The women leaders from Bhuj based women's network, the Sakhi-Sangini network and the women's sangathans in other blocks of Kutch were the crucial allies in KMVS efforts to reach out to the caste based communities. Many of the women leaders who were influential members in their own communities provided leadership in supporting the young people from these caste based communities in taking up the gender safety audit and dialoguing with ward committees, municipalities, and discussing these issues with the caste leaders.

Changes that makes the efforts of engaging with caste based communities worth their while

-Engagement with the women, girls, youth and male leaders of these caste based societies has led to forming of informal support groups and networks of community, women, youth group in these communities. This has led to more gender sensitive handling of issues of young women and men. In one case of a run away marriage and later the young woman was dumped by the man after making her pregnant, the case was dealt by the male leaders in a manner that didn't stigmatise and punish the young woman. Through long processes of mediation with her family, the caste based panchayat leaders were able to rehabilitate the girl in her own natal family with dignity and respect.

-Extensive consultations to understand the needs of the young women to lead a self reliant life without fear of violence had led to identifying and training a group of 10 young women in the first batch in auto driving. Two of them are successfully running the auto rickshaw on the streets of Bhuj and another three are ready to launch their service soon.

-Through this approach, KMVS has made effective inroads for initiating changes in a deeply patriarchal mind set of these communities. On the basis of the discussions with the women and male members and youth from these communities, there seems to be more awareness on discrimination and violence against women in these marginalized communities. With sustained efforts, several women and girls in these communities have been able to exercise their choice, take independent decisions, and have been empowered to lead a more self self reliant life. Local influencers in the Devi Poojak community have taken measures such as community policing to address security concerns. As a result, the residents had reported improved safety in public areas.

In the words of one young woman from the community, *"I feel confident when I walk the streets. I know for sure that I have right to walk without feeling afraid and I appreciate myself more and can talk about issues on our safety in public meetings."*

"We have become more free to move around in our neighbourhoods, we are now asking to study further, we need to fulfill our dreams"

Earlier in public places, men were loitering, now we are standing, we go out, go to the shops, walk in small groups in the evening in our neighbourhood"

"earlier we didn't know about what is safe and unsafe, now we know and we go out with confidence."

With its intrinsic understanding of the pluralistic culture of the region and its ethos, KMVS has managed to sensitise and begin dialogue on safety with the caste based societies. The road to change in the gender norms of these communities has been effected with a sharper feminist gender analysis of VAW in placing the safety and well being of women and girls at its centre of all its efforts.

Overall impact analysis in the four domains of change:

Mapping of interventions in the above mentioned four domains of change illustrate that maximum inputs have gone into the awareness and agency building work of the young people and sensitising the key stakeholders. Interventions in the first domain were ably complemented with strategic interventions in the second domain of providing access to

resources, services, and support systems. This makes sense as the safety work of KMVS is in its first phase of implementation. Building an enabling and gender responsive eco system is key to impacting the systemic institutional spaces in the long term. Work done with the youth in building a well informed and gender sensitised youth cadre has been one of the highlights of interventions in the first domain of change. Awareness raising efforts done by KMVS of girls and women has empowered several girls in shining the torch of accountability on their family members and negotiate for exercising greater freedoms, individual liberties, and choices in their lives.

The work in third domain and fourth domains, viz. influencing laws and policies and change in the social norms and practices could be considered as work in progress. In the third domain to bring changes in the policies and laws to be gender responsive and enabling girls and women to enjoy the full spectrum of rights provided by the constitution, the interventions by KMVS were largely focussed to support the government agencies in enforcement of the laws for prevention of child marriage, supporting the child protection machinery in POCSO cases, in effective implementation of the provisions of the DV act, and Prevention of Sexual Harassment of women at work place Act. There are positive efforts that were taken up in the fourth domain providing space for dialogue with the caste based societies and their leaders and building a youth cadre for being the change agents for transformation at individual and societal level. It's still early stages of interventions, therefore it remains to be seen how deep and wide could be the shifts in normative practices have been made through the interventions so far!

A significant impact has been made in shifting the discourse from the paradigm of ensuring security to having safety for women and girls in an empowering and enabling paradigm. Another significant shift that was made was to bring the discus on safety, not to focus on ensuring safety in public spaces but to highlight the need for safety work in a continuum of private and public space, from the home to the work place, from the informal to the formal institutional spaces to enable women and vulnerable sections of the society to access these spaces with out the systematic barriers and gender based discrimination.

As one of the members of the leadership team of KMVS had put it , "Salamaati ka vishay samaj kaa hai(safety is a social issue), Safety is an experienced feeling. Safety is more of changing the norms of societal level." It's not so much about of the enforcement or protective measures provided by the state and other societal institutions." She elaborated upon it by giving example of constructing toilets under the 'Clean India' Campaign and " The Beti Bachao, Beti Padao" initiatives of the central and state governments which have not provided any impetus in changing the mind set of the people towards looking at issues of safety from enabling and empowering lens. The differentiation between others who are working on one's safety and what KMVS is doing is that KMVS focusses on district and rural spaces for ensuring women's safety , not only look at public spaces but look at private spaces, and that included looking at the structures in PRIs and creating support structures. We under stood that there are many circles of violence which are not restricted to Domestic violence, therefore our response need to be multi pronged, taking other actors along. Now we are looking at creating safe spaces such as the public toilets, at religious places, at the bus and railway station, in the school and hospital settings. We undertook the safety audits of these places. There was a lot of dialogue that took place with different stakeholders." Uniqueness of KMVS's work on women and girls safety lies in its highlighting the need to think beyond the paradigm of creating safety provisions in the public domain for women and young girls , instead it builds on the paradigm of addressing the systemic issues concerning the safety of women and young girls and address the discrimination and violence they face in their everyday lived realities. This is perhaps the first of its kind of initiative where collaboration with different district level authorities and departments such as the police, schools and universities, institutions of local self governance is being sought not only for immediate response/ corrective action but also for institutionalising the concept of 'women's safety' in their approach. Alongside, the programme also tries to engage with youth for understanding what is 'unsafe' and enable change within and at external levels.

Circles of influence and concerns of KMVS safety work with women and girls and vulnerable communities: KMVS in its safety work has been effective in influencing certain areas more than the others, where there has been relatively lesser impact.

The circles of influence include:

1. Effective Nature of Community Mobilisation KMVS seeks to work with different strata and segments of community. All the strategies are drawn towards their active association and seeking their voluntary engagement to mobilise support in triggering the desired change. Their participation can be seen through a very effectively employed strategy of mobilisation and cadre building that KMVS has developed in over thirty years of its work with women. KMVS has successfully been able to build a diverse community level cadre of para legal workers, youth and adolescent groups, a cadre of elected women's representatives (EWRs) and women's groups and organisations at the village and block level and mobilisation of caste based societies to address gender issues and the safety concerns of women and girls in Kutch. There are several instances to substantiate the effectiveness of the community engagement and mobilisation done by KMVS. There were instances where the caste based leaders had borne their travel and other expenses when they had mediated to provide support to women in some of the cases of violence. As a measure of engagement with community, some of the public events, as part of the safety campaign, were hosted by communities, including sharing their resources for organising of the event. The practice that none of the cadres are paid per diem/ honorarium for their engagement is a significant investment by the community.

2. Effectively taking up safety issues in urban areas of the marginalised communities of women As an innovative approach, KMVS has expanded its work on safety to include the rural, peri urban and urban spaces of Kutch. In the urban areas, KMVS with the support of AJWS took initiative of bringing in the voices of the marginalised communities of women such as of the sex workers, migrant workers in Anjar and Mundra blocks (from WB, Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar, MP, UP) and those who were working as sweepers in the municipal wards and private and public sector hospitals of the urban areas of Kutch. A network, called the Sakhi- Sangini network of the women's groups from these marginalised communities was formed in 2015 (not sure if this is correct). The network has played a very active role in addressing the urban safety issues of women.

3. Effective partnership and collaboration approach Sectoral interventions of KMVS and its engagements with many stakeholders seemed to be imbued with the vision to have the impact at individual and macro level with the wisdom that there isn't a fit-all-sizes kind of solution in addressing the complex issues for ensuring safety of women and girls. To increase its outreach as a district wide initiative and its area of influence, KMVS in its safety work has built effective partnerships with a wide spectrum of stakeholders. As one of the para legal worker explained that, "they understand that there are many circles of violence and these need to be entered through a multi pronged approach, and building of alliance with NGOs, private sector and public sector institutions, media, schooling system, judiciary, police, community leaders. EWRs Participation and engagement is sought on a continuous basis." The safety work by KMVS has been quite effective in mobilising support from local governance structures/ educational system/ other forums and enabling them to better understand the safety concerns of women and girls in Kutch.

The circle of concerns viz. safety of women and girls and vulnerable communities:

1. Despite a good and mutually responsive working partnership between the government agencies and the civil society organisations, where KMVS is seen as a key ally by the government authorities from the departments of Panchayati Raj, Child development and child protection and education, the success and effectiveness of interventions for prevention of early/ child marriage in the Kutch has remained doubtful. Young people in their teens continue to be married off by the parents without their consent and with no say in making of such life changing decisions. As more and more adolescents and young girls are becoming aware of the gender and

social inequities, the credit of which goes to a significant extent to the interventions of KMVS in the schools, colleges and in the community, there are voices of resistance, anger and helplessness of the young girls against such practices. The concern arises from the strong backlash that the young people are facing from their families, and communities with additional patronage of the political leadership promoting sexist, protectionist and harmful practices such as conducting mass marriages in the poor communities, providing incentives in the name of arranging dowry for the girls from the poor families and being hand in glove to hoodwink the legal provisions as deterrents for prevention of early marriage. The mix of rage and vulnerability and bravado felt by the young people in such situation has led many of them to take huge risks (educational disruption, running away with no security, being dumped after being made pregnant) and in several instances, to take the extreme step of taking their life or being killed in the name of protection of family honour.

2. There was a related concern related to the lack of dialogic space available to address the increasing intergenerational gap in the present set of approaches under the safe district initiative. The nature of engagement and interventions with different age groups were largely designed in a mutually exclusive manner. This has caused to a certain extent a loss of space for empathetic hearing from each other. There was a concern that there are very sharp differences of understanding between the younger generation, their aspiration, expectations, and their articulation and that of their parents and older generation of adult community around them. Traditional communication approaches don't provide the tools for treating the youth as an equal and responsible adult constituency. Therefore there is an urgent need to build a repertoire of communication tools and approaches for speaking with the young people and for them to be heard in a mutually responsive, open, non judgemental manner.

3. Another concern that was reflected in the review process is the inadequacy of addressing and preparation of the young people in dealing with the onslaught of digital and social media in their lives. The current set of strategies in the area of sensitising, perspective, capacity and knowledge building is lacking in equipping and enabling the youth to be more aware of responsible handling of these mediums and understand it from the point of ensuring safety of using and being in the cyber space. Here it would be prudent to take in the concerns of addressing issues of masculinities, privileges and entitlements of the manhood being exercised in the digital and social media world as well. Finding ways of working with men and boys in rural and urban context on issues of safety also remains a relevant area of concern to be addressed.

4. Finally as one of the leadership team members of KMVS raised her concern, that, *“for the success of making Kutch as a safe district, how do we ensure stronger accountability of all the important stakeholders, as it cannot be of KMVS alone.” How do we bring the discourse of safety in the district development framework and bring it in the shape of the movement.*”

The work on safety started in 2015 by KMVS is extremely relevant and it is making a difference in the larger eco system of the KUTCH region. Halfway through the five-year plan for a safe district initiative, KMVS has taken significant strides in shaping the safety discourse from a progressively stronger gender and rights based lens. The safe district initiative of KMVS is very timely in such times where traditional safety networks created by the families, communities and the societal institutions are weakening in the face of the strains and pressures of the neo-economic, privatisation and globalisation agenda being aggressively promoted by the state. As one of the members of the KMVS leadership team had expressed, “Now, we are beginning to understand for ourselves the how and what and why of working on the safety issues, we would like to know more about how the other stakeholders are thinking with regards to the safety concerns and how do we work with them to sustain and scale up the work on safety? We want to work at the district level to address issues of gender based sexual harassment at the work place, make homes and public places, free of fear of violence, to create network of other NGOs, work with the ICC committees and bring in other stakeholders.”

This is perhaps the first of its kind of safety work initiative in the state of Gujarat where collaboration with district police, colleges, Panchayati Raj institutions, local schools was sought not only for an immediate response/ corrective action but also for institutionalising the concept of

'women's safety' in their approach, with active engagement of youth for understanding what is 'unsafe' and lead the transformation both within and at external levels. Through this initiative KMVS has pushed the envelope in creating a positive societal environment with regard to the safety of women and girls in Kutch. It becomes critical to see that the safe district initiative to remain relevant in the coming years.

Section III

Key insights for the future work of KMVS in addressing the safety of women and girls in Kutch

Based on the wide ranging interactions with all concerned actors from the organisation, community and the public domain during my four day visit to KMVS to understand the journey of Kutch- Safe District initiative, I would like to put forward the following areas for consideration while planning for interventions in the future.

For the next 3-4 years, KMVS could plan for two fold strategic directions- Deepening the knowledge and perspective building work and strengthening the institutional capacities to address safety from a rights base, gender responsive and enabling manner. It would mean continuity of KMVS approach of building alliances and partnership with institutions from different sectors of society- the formal , state and civil society and traditional, social and community based institutions.

I have made two sets of suggestions, A. the first set pertaining to the thematic direction for future interventions and B, the second set pertains to suggestions for the programmatic areas under the Safe District Initiative.

A. Thematic Directions: Deepening the understanding with regard to women's safety in the public and private spheres

A1. Address Salaamati- Sahmati-Swayatata in a contiguous process, i.e building the connection between Safety, Consent and Autonomy of women and girls and young people an individual

The approach to safety of women and girls and young people in Kutch needs to realign with the influences, aspirations and challenges faced by the young people who are caught in the whirlpool of pressures of a consumerist, conformist , discriminatory and isolationist ways of life. Today's lives of the young men and women is dictated by the stress of performing, achieving and showing off, to be part of the digital culture, be in sync with the fast moving trends on the social media. These new age challenges faced by the young people intersect closely with the traditional gender discriminatory and harmful norms of feminine and masculine behaviour prescribed for men, women, children, adolescents and young adults from different caste based communities in Kutch.

The echo of what the young people communicated during my recent visit and interactions with them to understand the learning of the last 3-4 years of KMVS work on Safety Initiative is ringing in a strong and clear message to refresh the discourse of safety. They are saying, " Hum safe tab hai jab hum bina rok tok ke , bina darr ke, apni marzi se apni kaam kar sake, ghoom- phir sake, pad - likh sake, apni marzi ka khana khain, bol paein , kapde pehen paye." Another recurrent and powerfully emotive questions that was asked by young people was , " Agar maa- baap meri shaadi much se bina pooche mera rishta tai karte hein, toh mein iss situation mein kaise safe reh sakti hoon?"

There is a clear articulation of the need to work on three areas of sahmati-salaamati- swayatata in a contiguous whole, i.e building the connections between consent, safety and autonomy. This will

enable the strategising of work around safety in building a culture of consent and enabling young people to be empowered with autonomy and self efficacy as an individual. It will ensure that interventions for safety of women and girls are not focussed with the intention to protect them and take control of their decision making and agency by the family and community nor is the legal enforcement taken as the preferred route for ensuring safety. Going with the rights perspective will open the pathways of enabling them as individuals to lead a life without fear, with dignity and enjoyment of full spectrum of her constitutional rights as a citizen.

A1.1

In the efforts for prevention of early marriage, bring in the shift in perspective address issue of forced marriage in Kutch: There is need for shifting the focus away from talking and taking action from the stand point of not only prevention of early marriage but to focus on the forced nature in which the young people are not given choice and nor their consent is taken for the marital contract that their parents and families forces upon them.

The challenge of early marriage is one of the biggest contributing factors in making the lives of the young people in Kutch as unsafe. Its manifestation can be seen through the rising graph of incidents of kidnapping, elopement, honour killing and suicides by the young people from several parts of Kutch. They are facing much more increased pressure and surveillance of the families and communities. This has led to the young people prone to taking huge risks to their lives. The criminalisation of consent, choice and agency of the young people under the legal provisions of POCSO act have put a large number of young people in a very vulnerable position viz viz the powers of the state and psycho-social pressures placed on them by their families and communities. Though the marital rape has yet to come under the purview of law, IPC sections 366 (kidnapping and abduction for compelling a girl to marry) and POCSO criminalise the possibility of sexual exploitation in the (assumed) kidnapping for marriage. The POCSO, 2012, a law framed for protection from sexual abuse and violence of the minors, does not take into account consensual sexual relations among adolescents and youth. Instead, it criminalises them. The judiciary has used statutory rape and kidnapping and abduction while undermining the agency of the young girls and boys. However, dealing with these issues of agency, choice and consent of the young people has been a tough call for organisations working with children and young people with a gender and human rights lens. The feminist principles are always put to the test while addressing the question of ethical practices, dilemmas of maintaining confidentiality in the purview of laws which have made reporting mandatory.

A1.2

Enabling and promoting the culture of consent

There is a missing link in the work on safety in Indian context, that the culture of consent is not there. Do you recall, how many of us were told to sing or dance, hug or allow somebody to pull our cheeks even when we were uncomfortable. It is seen rude and disrespectful to assert one's comfort and say "No" when uncomfortable. This behaviour we have carried with us while growing as an adult. Most people don't know enough of consent or what it means to begin with, this goes to showing that India as a nation still struggles to ensure a violence free space. Which explains why people continue to get exploited in workspace, remain in abusive relationship or experience being bullied in school. People feel free to whistle, grope, abuse or ridicule, click or share photos. According to UN Women, 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and /or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives.

At best, consent, in our country is limited to whether 16 or 18 years should be the legal "Age of Consent", and where marriage is seen as a sanction or certificate for forced physical conduct. The idea or rather the concept of consent is highly dependent on the agency one holds in the society. The lack of social agency for women affects not only the choices they make but also affects the agency of being sought or give permission to. Therefore, it is rather important to talk about consent, draw a parallel between social consent and sexual consent in a patriarchal society. It

definitely has an impact on the choices, men and women are able to make in their lives in terms of their mobility, education, work, marriage, health etc.

Promoting a consent culture: Few suggestions

Given the momentum built and with an impressive outreach in the past five years, KMVS is poised at an opportune moment for supporting and promoting of a culture of consent, free from coercion, fear, violence in the Kutch district. Such a shift will further enhance the effectiveness of KMVS approach to safety in equipping the women, young girls and boys with the understanding of safety as a psycho- social and emotional state of well being at an individual and societal level. In this scenario, the individual has the agency to make their living conditions safe.

A 2. Drawing up a Revised and Updated Communication Strategy, Training approaches, and Knowledge management is suggested for its safety work for the next 5 years. The revised strategy could be developed by KMVS for realignment of its approach to safety with the added dimensions of sahmati and swayatata i.e. safety built with individual's right to consent, choice and autonomy.

A2.1

“Let's talk about consent and building a consent culture” could be one of the thematic focus area of the communication strategy of KMVS.

Campaigns, sustained programmatic interventions and innovative advocacy and networking strategies could be planned with the multi stakeholder outreach.

A2.2

In the on going school and college based life skills programmes with adolescents and young people KMVS communication team could bring in smarter and more effective use of social and digital media and provide support to the new means of communication with its KMVS niche and expertise of using IEC mediums of posters, education and conscience raising programmes, street plays, role plays, puppets, radio, and other audio- visual means.

A2.3

For KMVS in its future road map of safety work, **providing responsive communication and engagement platforms for the gate keepers, key influencers from the community and the concerned actors from the state and civil society agencies and young people** could be the a crucial building block in creating a consent culture and empowering them to develop safe, respectful and equality based relationships.

A2.4

KMVS can reflectively and creatively find ways to open up the channels of intergenerational and gender responsive communication in its work at the community level with the caste based institutions. It would require **creating safe spaces for diverse opinions to be heard with mutual respect and responsibility in all the engagements and interventions of KMVS.** Women and young men and women could use such safe spaces in their families, communities for starting the conversations and sharing their understanding around seeking and giving consent and experiences around it and in the process learn the life skills of being tolerant and accepting towards diverse opinions. In the process it is hoped that the gap of understanding between the two generations could be bridged with the gate keepers and key influencers from the community to appreciate the concerns, aspirations and challenges faced by the younger generation.

A2.5

The pedagogy and tools of the safety audit conducted in the PRIs and in the schools could be reviewed as to why, how, where and what to bring in the deepening of the understanding of the safety from a structural analysis of the causes of violence and fear and vulnerability faced by women and girls both in the private and public spheres. **In the next phase of designing the tools and use of the Safety audit as an approach could focus on enabling instead of the**

protective, coercive, (surveillance) framework. This would ensure the PRIs and other duty bearers along with the key influencers in the community are not only providing manual and material solutions of installing CCTVs or increased police patrolling but to think of more humane, dialogic and empathetic ways of responding to multiple risks of violence and feeling unsafe faced by women and young people in the private and public spheres. The design and Use of safety audit method could be enhanced with an understanding of providing enabling conditions for the panchayats and schools to function as gender equitable and responsive institutions .

A3. Focus on “Enabling Rights” rather than “Protective Rights”

As soon as we look at consent under the law, it becomes framed in protective terms; in other words as a question of who cannot consent and who must be protected. Under the umbrella of the ‘Protective rights’, the age of consent is legally enforced, punitive measures under the anti-trafficking laws are sanctioned , and addressal against Domestic violence and sexual harassment at the work place gets covered under the social legislation. The enforcement of social legislation and legal measures for prevention of harmful and discriminatory customary practices such as early marriage , female foeticide and sex selection don’t have the backing of the strong political and societal will, as a consequence, these are treated with kids gloves fearing societal backlash if the enforcement of these legal provisions is done in true letter and spirit.

A3.1

Future areas of building space for enabling rights-

In the next phase of interventions for the safe district programme **KMVS could bring simple communication, advocacy materials to facilitate understanding of Enabling Rights and building understanding of consent and autonomy for achieving the goal of safety in the private and public spheres; Part of the revised communication strategy could be highlighting the harmful impact and limitations of working with the approach of Protective Rights from a gender lens.**

A3.2

The revised communication strategy could bring out the evidence based negative impact of mis use of legal measures such as under the POCSO **on the criminalisation of consent, choice and agency of young girls and boys in the context of early marriage. This will bring the onus and responsibility of the gate keepers and influencers from the families and communities** of the young people to provide space to hear them, and seek their consent before taking the life changing decisions for them.

For drawing up its programme, communication and advocacy strategy in the next phase, KMVS can very effectively draw upon the evidence and experience based body of knowledge gained from the ground in the last four- five years.

A3.3

One of its best practices that have emerged from the safety work which is a very good example of the enabling and empowering notion of safety is the training of the young women for auto driving as a public transport. In the next phase, KMVS could expand on its initiative of training the girls from urban poor settlements of Bhuj for auto drivers of the public transport system. This will provide great impetus in building a positive and favourable impression of Kutch being a safe area for women in public places.

A4. Concept of safety to address issues of wellness and good emotional and mental health

There was a repeated reference and bringing up of the need for looking at the cost of violence on the wellness and emotional health of the survivors and those providing counselling and legal support services to the survivors of violence. Women from both side of the table had put out a very strong need in my interactions during the review of the safety work for developing appropriate responses to address the issue of fatigue, dealing with mental trauma and depressions and low self esteem faced by the survivors of violence.

A5. Emerging areas for further exploration and building evidence

A5.1

The safety work team at KMVS could benefit if an exploratory study on criminalisation of consent and harm done for exercising choice by young girls and boys could be planned in the context of specific customary practices and legal provisions. The study can be planned with the young women and men themselves taking the lead on what the young women have to say if their agency, choice and consent is to be given primacy in overcoming the barriers of gender discriminatory norms, law and customary practices.

A5.2

Another area of building evidence of the reasons for ineffective implementation and poor legal enforcement of prevention of child marriage could be to take up as a social research inquiry. Such an effort could be very useful **to unravel the politics and economics of the thriving practice of child marriage in Kutch.** It will also help to build a sound and informed critique of efforts to address issue of child / early marriage, including government initiatives in promoting mass marriages or promoting populist schemes such as Kanya daan yojana where on attaining the age of 18 years, the young woman is provided cash and incentives in kind to support her family in procuring the dowry for her marriage. It would help in understanding, whose interests, such entrenched social practices are serving and what is the impact on those who are being pushed into being the recipients of such practices!

A5.3

It is an opportune time **for KMVS to initiate a larger debate with the civil society organisations, government and private sector and community stakeholders, PRIs and urban local bodies to address the safety concerns for women and girls into the current context of commercialisation and urbanisation impacting all aspects of life, people and culture of Kutch.** It is also an opportune time to initiate the dialogue of how to build safety networks with expansion of cities and in- migration where in more people are coming from the rural areas to come and do different things and they are dealing with the conflict of rural- urban dualism. It would also help in deepening the understanding of the impact of expansion of cities and in- migration on women and young girls and how are they dealing with it and what are their concerns? It is expected to provide concrete suggestions for furthering and expanding the work with un-organised, migrant women workers and home based workers.

A5.4

Another area of exploration for developing the next level of safety interventions, that merits closer observation and deeper gender analysis of how the Gender-Geography - location axis operates and strengthens the oppressive binary of distribution of gender roles in the public and private spheres.

Looking into these aspects would help in fine tuning of the strategies of increased engagement of young women engagement in public spaces, to have a greater voice and agency for raising their concerns against early and forced marriage, for being given uninterrupted 12 years of schooling and pursuing higher educational goals, opportunities for work in safe and conditions of dignity, for leading violence free life in all spheres of their life

B. Key Programmatic and Stakeholders Engagement in the next five years of the Safe Kutch initiative:

B1

Youth are one of the key stakeholders for KMVS safety work. The work with young people and adolescents is a relatively newer area of intervention in KMVS. In the near future, KMVS needs to broaden, expand and deepen the rights based, feminist and youth centred approach to Safe District Initiative in Kutch. This would ensure gender and socially responsive participation by young men and women with a legitimate stake and say in the decisions being taken for their safety. It would mean creating more enabling spaces for youth leadership to drive

the safety initiative in Kutch at the family and community level and in public engagement based on the principles of gender equality, respect and enjoyment of fundamental rights by all without discrimination.

B1.1

Key strategies for building a youth led safety initiative would include **building young women's leadership and mobilise and collectivise the young people** across the wide cross-section of marginalised and vulnerable communities in Kutch for championing their rights to education, freedom of expression, equality, mobility and work.

B2.

Continuity of intervening with the caste based societies, with emphasising of intergenerational dialogue space to be created, for the voice of the young people to be heard, for building a culture of consent and respecting autonomy of the young people in their communities.

B3.

Similar interventions could be made **for the women's sangathans to be further inclusive in their engagement and provide space in a more institutionalised manner to the voices of the young women and efforts to engage with men. The sangathans leadership can be** strengthened with the pro active stance of encouraging younger generation of women to take active interest in the functioning and agenda setting of the sangathans. Sangathans could then be encouraged to build a stronger intergenerational perspective in addressing the issues faced by adolescents and younger women viz. a. viz. their decision regarding whom to marry, pursuing education, and making decisions regarding their sexuality forming relationships and Within impressive range of work that has been taken up by KMVS team and women's sangathan over the past 30 years in different blocks of Kutch to address issues of Gender based violence. The women's organisations which are associated with KMVS at the block level have also done significant work in empowering the EWRs to make the PRIs more gender sensitive in its functioning and with the caste/ traditional community panchayats.

B4.

With the PRIs- Continue to advocate with the PRIs, elected representatives including the EWRs to be support a gender sensitive and socially inclusive functioning of the panchayati raj institutions. Greater advocacy efforts could be made for proposing outlays for sectoral allocation in the municipal and gram sabha plans, keeping the geographical peculiarities of the region; Work for effective utilisation of the budget allocated for the *nyaya committees* (in the PRI budget for supporting the services and entitlements to the village members, there is 30% allocation for the activities by the *Nyaya samitis*; there were suggestion given by the EWRs and women sarpanch for forming of the sexual harassment committee at the village level

With the support of trained and experienced **EWRs, PRI representatives** and young people from the community who have participated in the safety audits facilitated by KMVS, **they could be further trained to become safety champions to engage with governments and other organizations in developing inclusive, gender responsive and youth sensitive interventions and services in their respective Wards and Panchayats.** In the forthcoming phase, the work on safety with the PRIs and EWRs could have a sharper and stronger youth and social inclusion perspective.

B5.

Continuing to expand and strengthen the cadre of para legal workers, based on the principles of 'enabling rights' and not 'protective rights'. Currently there are more than 400 women who have been trained as para legal workers with basic legal information on the gender progressive was and their implementation. In the next phase, the pool of para legal workers can be expanded to cover all the villages and blocks where the KMVS is working. The visibility and effectiveness of having a large pool of para legal workers could be further strengthened by show casing the legal knowledge that the para legal workers have been equipped with in a gender just

and feminist framework. Support to the para legal workers to respond timely and quickly and at the door step of the victims could be negotiated with the block and district judicial authorities and police and child protection agencies. If a better coordinated and collaborative response mechanism between the concerned agencies and the local level cadre of the para legal workers, it will go a long way in providing speedy relief to victims of violence and gender related crimes.

The Advocacy work by the para legal cadre, women's sangathans and the trained young leaders at the KMVS supported block level youth centres could be further strengthened for facilitating the access and use of state program/ services such as Childline, Women's helpline and Sabla in addressing needs of girls and young women for protection against violence and sexual harassment. The para legal cadre could play a influencing role for increased effectiveness and coordination of services provided by the police, WCD and health and social justice departments. There is a scope for improved coordination between different help lines, e.g., between 1098 and 108 and the Hello sakhi helpline.

B6.

Efforts can also be stepped up to bridge the work of the para legal workers with the interventions of the women sangathans (that were founded by the support of KMVS) which have been functioning in 5-6 blocks of Kutch on various issues of women's empowerment, especially in areas of women's health, education and livelihood, GBV and good governance. The para legal cadre could be trained by the Sangathan leaders for movement building and effective strategies of organising and mobilising women and girls.

B7.

To advocate at the district level for forming and training of the ICC committees for addressing sexual harassment at the work place; to create network of other NGOs, strengthen and improve the work with the ICC committees formed by the companies and corporations in different blocks of Kutch.

B8.

It's strongly suggested **for continuation of capacity and skill building interventions in the school based programmes for addressing gender discrimination.** The next phase of work within the school system could focus on the following - strong advocacy efforts for pushing the importance of uninterrupted 12 years of schooling for all children as the gateway to upliftment of children from poverty, abuse and social ills such as the early and forced marriage and other harmful influences; the training curriculum developed by KMVS could be enriched by including understanding what is consent, importance of consent, managing relationships, dealing with differences and rejection, learning skills of assertiveness and making responsible and informed choices and empower and legitimise youth and adolescent leadership building, developing self efficacy and autonomy of the young people.

B9.

When the **review of the existing training modules and communication materials with regard to safety work** is undertaken by KMVS, it is suggested **to take into cognisance in the revised modules, the needs of the young people for stigma free, and rights affirming information on issues of health, sexuality and human rights. The designing the training curriculum can address the bias of ageism and taking in the needs of the unmarried, single, sexually active generation of the young people.**

The revision also is a good opportunity to bring in safe and responsible handling of social media influences. The curriculum review could also benefit by being more inclusive and responsive to the peculiarities of young people living in a rapidly urbanising and commercialised Kutch and its implication on the social, economic aspirations of the young women and men. For instance, **the modules could address the gender impact of changed nature of families in Kutch on women and children and young people.**

C. Building for greater public engagement and ownership of the Kutch Safe District Initiative

In the coming years, to support the Safe Kutch district initiative, **KMVS needs to take its advocacy and networking and alliance building to the next level wherein ownership of the agenda is taken by the state and the key influencers from all levels of Kutch society. It is a crucial stage in the programming cycle of the safe district initiative to build a more systemic, sustained and long term response** since KMVS, working as a NGO can only have a limited sphere of influence with its restricted human and material resources and outreach.

KMVS has worked very strategically in close cooperation with offices and departments of the police, judiciary, legal and social welfare and justice, education, women and child development and PRI. In the process, KMVS has earned the respect and credibility for addressing safety issues in Kutch. KMVS has also built strong bridges of partnering and networking for advocacy with the civil society organisations and the local media. KMVS would need to devote substantive time in the next few years for strengthening the networking and alliance building work for the Kutch Safe District Initiative. **KMVS would need to systematically work for building alliances with the civil, state and traditional and customary institutions of the Kutch society for greater public engagement and ownership of the Kutch Safe District Initiative.**

With in a time line agreed upon by consensus, a broad based multi stakeholder Kutch Safe District Network could be aimed to be set up and functioning in a more organised and self sustaining manner.

C1.

To begin with, within an agreed upon time frame, **KMVS could start the process of creating an internal organisational platform for better convergence and greater collaboration between all the major stakeholders whose capacities it has nurtured and built in the Safe District initiative.** This would mean bringing together on an internal organisational platform the cadre of para legals trained by them, the youth leaders and adolescent groups, caste based community leaders, Sangathan women and leaders from six blocks of Kutch.

C2.

One of the strategies could be for KMVS to take the lead for bringing together the stakeholders in developing of the Safe Kutch District Plan in creating gender-inclusive and zero tolerance to violence rural and urban spaces. Developing a safe Kutch district plan would need to be mainstreamed in the rural and urban planning processes of the district involving the urban local bodies, and Zilla Panchayati Raj and other relevant state departments at the district level. It would require putting a strategy plan to influence the government agencies, to ensure that adequate resources are earmarked towards the implementation of the safety plan by the government and other stakeholders. The scope of the plan would be inclusive of getting the urban local bodies, PRIs, the public transport department, the police and legal enforcement machinery and other civic authorities to implement the safety plan. These departments could also be encouraged to draw up training and orientation programmes for its staff on their role in maintaining law and order and enabling a safe environment and building their understanding of using the protectionist and enable legal approach for ensuring safety for women and girls. Women and girls safety, is an urgent and emotive issue. If this plan goes through, it could fundamentally transform the way our perception of women's safety is viewed and acted upon.

C3.

As a goal for the next five years five year goal, launch of a Kutch Safe District Network KMVS could also benefit in the next phase of advocacy **to build alliance with national and international networks and organisations working on women and safety programmes.** Collaboration could be sought with Women in Cities International (WICI), United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women which has partnered with WICI in doing groundbreaking work that promotes women's safety in some of the world's major cities. Partners of the Gender Inclusive Cities Programme (GICP), an innovative program designed to engage women and girls in

creating safer cities could also be reached out by KMVS. The partner organizations are Jagori in New Delhi, India; the International Centre and Network for Information on Crime — Tanzania, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; CISCSA (Centro de Intercambio y Servicios Cono Sur Argentina) — the Women and Habitat Network in Rosario, Argentina; and the Information Centre of the Independent Women's Forum in Petrozavodsk, Russia.

Conclusion

The KMVS vision to make Kutch safe for women has challenges of implementation- especially where it looks at safety and security of women in the private spaces of marriage, families and inter personal relationships, where the harmful and discriminatory gender norms are deeply entrenched, dictating the position of women and men in an unequal manner. There needs to be a fundamental shift in how the Kutch society views its women within the private and public spheres, their access and use of public spaces, their participation in public life. It could mean liberation in many ways – freedom to travel, to encourage higher use of public transport, and create a more equitable sharing of public resources, pursuing higher education, to work and become financially self-sufficient, are the required steps in the right direction. For such a plan to ensure women's safety would require better street planning and lighting, and last-mile connectivity which would mean safety in public spaces.

KMVS work on women's safety has highlighted that women's safety is to be seen in a continuum of their experiences in the private and public realm. **For the girls and women to feel safe at home, the state, the civil society and the community need to have quick response mechanisms and supportive services for prevention of crimes against women and enabling interpretation of rights for enforcement of legal provisions under the DV act, POCSO, PCM act and Prevention and Addressal of Sexual Harassment (PASH at the work place act.** This would go a long way in making the safety concerns of women and girls visible to policymakers.

Kutch, as the safe district initiative would need to constantly evolve, broaden and deepen its scope of engagement as there is no perfect plan, ever. But we must begin somewhere. Is Kutch prepared for getting its own version of enabling women and girls safety?