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PAVING THE WAY

An Ethnography of Local NGO Employees Combating Child Labor and Improving School Retention in Rural Indian Villages

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ABSTRACT

Lea Absetz: Paving the Way: An Ethnography of Local NGO Employees Combating Child Labor and Improving School Retention in Rural Indian Villages
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This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of the Save the Children project *Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19*, which took place in 30 rural villages in the south of India in 2021-2022. The thesis focuses on the role of field-level project employees, referred to within the project as "volunteers", in promoting education in their local schools and communities. It explores why the work of the volunteers was so important to their local schools and communities and what gaps in the official school systems the volunteers were able to fill, how the volunteers fought child labor and improved school retention in their local villages, and how they used their local knowledge and contacts to help their work in the project.

The findings of this thesis are based on six weeks of ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out in the project during July and August of 2022. This fieldwork included visits to all 30 of the project schools, where I observed lessons of both the Save the Children volunteers and local teachers, as well as five Children's Group meetings conducted by the volunteers. I also attended local Parents' Monitoring Committee meetings, a Child Protection Committee meeting and other events organized by the project. In addition to my fieldnotes, I conducted three group interviews in English with some of the volunteers. This data is analyzed against previous research and theory on child labor and school retention in India, the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the Indian education sector, and community participation in schools and non-governmental organizations.

The thesis demonstrates that volunteers were able to fill gaps within the official school system, improve community members' access to social protection schemes and avenues of participation, and decrease child labor in their local villages. The volunteers also used their local knowledge in many ways to aid their work in the project and served as mediators between their local schools, community members and the organization. The thesis argues that enhancing community participation in the work of non-governmental organizations is beneficial to both organizations and local communities, and it should be encouraged and further implemented in the planning and practice of future projects both in the fields of education and other sectors of development work.

Keywords: Non-governmental organizations, Education, School retention, Child labor, Community participation, Local knowledge

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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1. Introduction

> Child labor is likely to increase due to the lockdown and the closure of schools. With schools closed, children are deprived of education and, in certain cases, subject to violence, including being forced to work, to contract early marriages and to be involved in unethical practices, such as drug peddling. As parents lose their employment and schools are shut, it is reported that children are being compelled to join the workforce. (Venkateswarlu 2021, 6)

In the citation above, Venkateswarlu (2021,6) describes some of the challenges faced by children in India as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic hit India especially hard, resulting in widespread news coverage and the country's accepting international aid for the first time in 16 years. The pandemic had devastating effects on children specifically, due to schools being closed for up to two academic years in many cases. These school closures, in conjunction with a lack of opportunities for distance-learning and confinement measures, were predicted to increase child labor in India and globally (ILO 2020, 4).

The International Labor Organization (2020, 4) additionally predicted that due to job loss and health shocks in the family, children may be pushed into child labor by their families, especially if they cannot or do not attend school. The ILO also expects that due to the pandemic the root causes of child labor are likely to be exacerbated. These root causes include: "poverty, limited access to decent work opportunities for those of legal working age, social marginalization, discrimination, the lack of universal quality education, the prevalence of the informal economy and weak social dialogue" (ILO 2020, 4). Kaur and Byard (2021, 212) also point out that the pandemic (and resulting lockdown) has "exposed gaps in India's child protection services and has demonstrated an urgent need for a collaborative, proactive approach". These gaps have been and are currently being addressed by both the Indian government, local administration, and national and international non-governmental organizations, such as Save the Children, whose project I analyze in this study.

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of the Save the Children project *Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19*, which was funded by the Paulig group. Based on six weeks of fieldwork carried out in the project during July and August of 2022, the thesis focuses on the role of field-level project employees in promoting education in their local schools and communities. These local employees are referred to as "Academic Support Fellows" in project documentation, but in the field they were known as

"volunteers", despite being paid a small salary for their work in the project. Following this field-level terminology, I also refer to these local employees as volunteers throughout. My thesis aims to answer the following questions:

1) Why was the work of the volunteers of the Save the Children & Paulig Group project so important to their local schools and communities and what gaps in the official school systems were the volunteers able to fill?
2) How were the volunteers fighting child labor and improving school retention in their local villages?
3) How were the volunteers using their local knowledge and contacts to help their work in the project?

This ethnographic analysis is grounded in previous research on child labor and school retention in India, and on the role of (international) non-governmental organizations in the field of education. I also examine the roles and autonomy of project volunteers through the lens of community participation. This theoretical background will be presented more fully in Chapter 2, but before that I present the project in more detail.

1.1. Introducing the Project: "Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19"

Save the Children India, also known as Bal Raksha Bharat, has worked to support children's education through various state-level programs and advocating for changes to national policies. Save the Children also works with Anganwadi Centers (government preschools) and government schools. The organization provides these schools with basic infrastructure, learning materials, and teacher training, and teaches children about safer hygiene practices and their basic rights. The organization also supports the education of girls, encourages dropouts to re-enroll in schools, and works with local parents, community members and committees to improve children's access to education. In 2022, Save the Children India had programs and interventions in fifteen states. (Save the Children India 2023.)

The Save the Children project *Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19*, supported by the Paulig group, was one such project which aimed to support children across 30 rural villages to leave chili farming and continue their education

despite the many challenges brought on by the pandemic. It was designed to last for one year and be a continuation of a three-year project that took place in the same 30 villages before the beginning of the pandemic. After being closed for two academic years, schools reopened on August 16, 2021, and the project kicked off just a few days later. The project ended up getting a one-month extension and lasted from August 2021 until the end of September 2022. The team at Save the Children India firmly believes that this continuation project has been vital in combating the negative effects of the pandemic and making sure that the positive contributions of the previous project have not been lost.

In the initial Concept Note of the project, Save the Children India outlined three key aspects of their approach in the project as: "supporting children during school closure; promoting a safe return to school; and improving farming practices amongst farmers, thereby increasing family income and creating better opportunities for children". The project also included the following three Special Objectives, also quoted here from the original Concept Note:

1) To ensure that all children (girls and boys) between 6-14 years old affected by COVID-19 induced school closures in the target regions continue to learn.
2) To ensure an effective, inclusive and safe return to learning for children and teachers when schools re-open.
3) Strengthen the supplier engagement model from the previous phase to build farmers' (including both women and men) capacity in adopting improved cropping and harvesting practices.

A defining feature of the project were the thirty local volunteers who had been recruited from the villages at the beginning of the project in order to encourage local participation and benefit from the volunteers' motivation, local knowledge and contacts. The volunteers received a salary of 7500 rupees per month (around 84€ as per the exchange rate in April 2023) as "consultants", which they considered to be reasonable but not enough to put much into savings. The volunteers received a short virtual training from Save the Children at the beginning of the project, though a few of the volunteers were unable to attend the training due to bad internet reception in their villages. The training focused on Save the Children's child safeguarding policy, how to work with children, and how to respond to instances of child or staff abuse.

The volunteers carried out the majority of the project's grass-roots operations in the field and were a major asset both to the project and to their local communities. At the beginning of the

project, the volunteers conducted consultation meetings for teachers and the children where they discussed what the project was and why it was starting in the village. Towards the end of the lockdowns (and the summer holiday) their work included community mobilization and teaching children remedial classes using materials from Save the Children and the project's Mobile Resource Van, which drove to the schools to deliver materials, show children educational videos from a screen in the back and check in on the volunteers. After schools reopened, the volunteers helped with teaching and other day-to-day operations in their local village government schools and visited the homes of children who were not attending school to try to convince their parents to send them back. They also took on several other tasks in the project including the support of local farmers, village-level Parents' Monitoring Committees and Child Protection Committees, and school Children's Groups.

In addition to the thirty volunteers, the local project team included a Project Coordinator, Project Assistant, and three Cluster Assistants, who worked more closely with a group of ten volunteers each, and a driver, who drove the Mobile Resource Van. The names of these key informants have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity. The Project Coordinator Ravi was in charge of running the field-level operations as a whole and reporting to higher-ups at the regional Save the Children office. Higher-up regional coordinators sent updates to the national headquarters in Delhi as well as the project's funder the Paulig group, and the Save the Children office in Sweden also helped to maintain donor relations. The Paulig group itself did not, to my knowledge, have much say in the field-level operations of the project. They were, however, a visible partner in the sense that their logo could be seen on various materials provided to the project schools, such as face masks, educational posters, and the side of the Mobile Resource Van.

The majority of my fieldwork took place at a time when it was still uncertain whether or not the project would be able to secure more funding and continue past September 2022. The end was confirmed to me in mid-August and the volunteers found out a week or so later. This time of uncertainty ended up being enlightening in terms of my research. While the volunteers were shy in bringing up their accomplishments, in speaking about their fears of the project's coming to an end they revealed what they believed had been their greatest achievements, including the ways their work in the schools had helped to decrease child labor and increase (re-)enrollment in school among the children of their local villages. Worries expressed by school staff and parents were equally enlightening in unfolding the impact of the volunteers' work.

This thesis argues that the volunteers ended up playing a vital role in the project as well as in their local schools and communities. As representatives of the organization, their school, and their village community, they were able to facilitate dialogue between the three groups, which in turn improved school retention and appreciation for education in their villages. In Chapters 2-3, I outline the theoretical background, research process, methods, and ethical challenges of this study, before describing the field in Chapter 4. I then analyze in more detail the significance of the volunteers, focusing on the work they did at the government schools (Chapter 5), and in their local communities (Chapter 6). All told, the thesis demonstrates that volunteers were able to fill gaps within the official school system, improve community members' access to social protection schemes and avenues of participation, and serve as mediators between schools, community members and the organization. Future projects would do well to pay attention to the role and impact of local project employees such as the volunteers of this study.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Child Labor and the Challenges of School Retention in India

In 2016, an amendment to India's *Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act* came into effect. This amendment states that all work is prohibited for children under the age of fourteen. One of the reasons for this amendment was to make the law more in line with the country's existing law on education, which states that all children of six to fourteen have the right and responsibility to participate in free education. Previously, the law on child labor (1986) had declared that children under the age of fourteen cannot participate in certain work considered to be dangerous or prone to risk. In doing so, it aimed to regulate the jobs and working conditions of younger children but did not ban them from working. (Indian Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2016.) Following this legislation, the Save the Children project researched in this thesis also chose to focus on children between the ages of six to fourteen and though the majority of children I met in the field were of this age group, in this thesis I follow India's Majority Act and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child in defining children as anyone under the age of eighteen (The Majority Act, 1875; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

Despite the amended law, child labor is a common and serious issue in India that continues to prevail despite constant efforts to control it. These efforts are not only undertaken by the Indian government, but also by international actors such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). (Kaur and Byard 2021, 212.) As noted in the introduction, there appear to have been significant changes in the amount and type of child labor since the start of the pandemic (see Venkateswarlu 2021) and according to Kaur and Byard (2021, 212) there were approximately 10 million children in India in 2021 who were working or actively seeking work. Finding current statistics or even estimates on child labor in India, however, is extremely difficult and the reliability of those that do exist are often up to debate. It is also worth noting that the more attention paid to child labor, the more likely it is to become invisible and hidden in response, particularly in instances of the worst forms of child labor, as these are against the law or regulations. (Venkateswarlu 2021, 7.)

According to Kaur and Byard (2021, 212) there are several factors behind the failure to reduce child labor in India stemming from socio-cultural realities facilitating and condoning

child labor in the country. For example, during my time in the field in August of 2022, I observed Sunil, one of the Cluster Assistants, reminding parents at a Parents' Monitoring Committee meeting that you could get up to two years in jail and a fine for bringing a child to work. He admitted to me later, however, that this was not really enforced in practice. Kaur and Byard (2021,12) also see the widespread poverty across India as "both a cause and a function of child labor", which is exacerbated by the significant shortage of cheap labor in fields such as agriculture and mining, as well as in specific industries including the garment and brick kiln industry. A need for cheap labor increases the demand for child workers, who can be paid less than adults. (Kaur and Byard 2021, 212.)

In addition to poverty, other factors that may affect child labor include social marginalization, discrimination, labor mobility, and insufficient or non-functioning social protection schemes. Despite the aforementioned law on mandatory education, a lack of available, high-quality education in practice can also be a part of children's trajectories into child labor, as children have more time for work if they are not attending school. (ILO 2020, 4; Cranston 2014, 355.) Other common factors listed by ILO include the prevalence and power of the underground economy and the limited or completely lacking general discourse on child labor in the country (ILO 2020, 4). It is also worth noting that child labor has a tendency to migrate and reappear in new or unexpected ways, even if it has been eliminated from certain regions or job sectors (Cranston 2014, 355).

The most common types of child labor have changed over time and vary based on variables such as gender and region. For example, in a study on census data from 2001 and 2011, Samantroy (2021; 2-3) found that child labor had notably decreased in rural India but had had a marginal increase in urban environments. Despite this decrease, in 2011 the agriculture sector had become a prominent area for child labor in rural India and children between the ages of 5-14 were most likely to work in agriculture (Samantroy 2021; 2-3). The Save the Children project studied here also worked with agricultural communities.

Samantroy (2021, 7) also made several findings related to gender discrepancies in child labor, including that in 2011, girls were more likely to do unpaid work both in rural and urban settings than their young male counterparts. Pressure on girls to work in the home often prevents them from pursuing their education and it is not uncommon for girls to stop their schooling after primary school (Samantroy 2021, 4; see also. Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 125). According to Roberts and Chittooran (2015, 125) housework and taking care of

younger siblings "is often believed to be the most important education for girls because it prepares them for their future role as a wife and mother." A lack of education means that girls are likely to be restricted to low-paying jobs once they move on to join the adult workforce (Samantroy 2021, 8). While their sisters work in the home, young boys are likely to either continue to attend school or take part in paid labor outside the home (see Samantroy 2021; 4, 6–7). Boys may also have more free time, as they are not expected to do chores around the house (Mattila 2011, 265).

It is important, however, not to underestimate the value of the paid work that girls do. For example, in her dissertation based on interviews and ethnographically oriented fieldwork among female domestic workers in Jaipur, Päivi Mattila (2011, 266) found not only that young girls frequently participate in child labor, but that they often had the highest income in the family. Mattila (2011) also stresses that girls and boys face different expectations from their families when it comes to contributing to household income. Because India is still by and large a patrilineal society, boys are expected to support their parents when they get old and stop working. Because girls are seen to join their husband's family upon marriage, they are often implicitly or explicitly expected to financially contribute to their parents' household while still unmarried (see also Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 121).

Poor girls in Jaipur also feel financial pressure to work in order to help build up their dowry for their future marriage and some girls have the additional financial pressure of having to help pay back loans taken for the dowry of their older sisters. This can put a significant financial strain on families with girls, as the expected amount of a dowry has long been on the rise despite the fact that the practice has been outlawed in India since 1961. Jobs are also often passed down from mother to daughter, or from an older sister to a younger sister, for example in instances where the older sister has gotten married and stopped working. (Mattila 2011; 266, 270-272, 292-293.) Easy entry into paid labor has means that girls who initially start working part-time often transition to working full-time. Thus, even though it is possible in principle for children to combine school and work, in practice they are likely to drop out. Girls may also feel inclined (or forced) to follow the examples of their older sisters or fellow classmates who leave school in order to work, or drop out due to bullying or harassment from boys at their schools. (Mattila 2011; 282, 284.)

Another important consideration when it comes to child labor is the question of children's autonomy and negotiation power. According to ethnographer Ganguly-Scarse (2007) much of

the research on poor children living in urban environments across South Asia heavily criticizes child labor as exploitative and dangerous to the children who take part in it, leading to a typical narrative in which working young people are seen as victims and their own experiences and narratives are left out of research. Different authors have aimed to combat these stereotypes and create a more nuanced view of child labor by distinguishing between different forms of children's work such as "child labor" and "child work" (see Mattila 2011, 60-61), or between "child labor" and "the worst forms of child labor" (see e.g. Venkateswarlu 2021), which appears to be the more commonly used distinction.

Indeed, young laborers may be more autonomous and empowered by their work than is often implied in the common terminology. In his study of young boys independently migrating for work in Southern India, Iversen (2002, 821) found that many of the boys had left home for work against the will of their parents. In these instances, boys displayed autonomy over their decision to leave their homes and seek employment. However, Mattila (2011, 208-209) notes that it is more common for parents to find work for their children and negotiate salary, working hours and work tasks with potential employers. Parents taking over their children's labor negotiations can leave them in an incredibly vulnerable position in the work force and unable to advocate for themselves. Because parents and employers are seldom in much contact after the negotiations have been finalized, employers may not feel responsible to anyone when it comes to the rights and well-being of the children working for them and at worst, children's working conditions may be comparable to slavery. (Mattila 2011, 208–209.)

Parents' employment can also affect whether or not their children participate in child labor; if parents are unemployed, it may be more enticing for the family to send its children to work in order to support the family's financial situation (ILO 2020, 4). Similar sentiments came up in the field, where children faced pressure to work in order to make up for the lost income of an alcoholic, sick, or deceased parent (see e.g. Chapter 4.2.). It is also important to keep in mind that in some instances children work directly for their parents. In addition to unpaid work in the home, children can work in family businesses or participate in the agricultural work of their families. For example, it is common in some regions in India that children take part in seasonal agricultural work during the time(s) of the year in which there is the greatest need for manual labor. In these instances, children may be able to work while also attending school, but often the children's education suffers as the agricultural season(s) is seldom in line with school holidays. It can be particularly difficult for children to decline this type of work, because the pressure to work comes directly from the home and the family may rely on

income from all family members for their basic needs such as food. (Personal Communication with staff from Save the Children India, March 24th, 2022)

Samantroy (2021, 1) highlights that in India "child labour and early school leaving are intertwined, and the reasons for both include poverty, access to education and gender-related social pressures". As discussed above, one of the most common reasons that children in India drop out of school is to be able to work either at home or in paid labor, but there are also many other possible and compounding reasons. It is also important to keep in mind that some children may never attend school or start going to school at a much later age than required.

An important factor which can result in children dropping out of schools in India is the combination of poor-quality education with the fact that many people do not respect education and are not interested in the possibilities that it can bring. Children may drop out of school if the school system is believed to be so poor that it will not benefit children either in terms of their learning or their future job opportunities (ILO 2020, 4), and according to Samantroy (2021, 6), in rural areas one reason teenage girls drop out of school is that, in the words of the census, "education [is] not considered necessary" (see also Roberts & Chittooran 2015). Mattila (2011, 283) similarly finds it understandable that girls may doubt the value of their education seeing as "[t]he nearest public school seemed to have major problems, such as one teacher for a large group of children of all ages and very limited facilities." Similar findings on insufficient teaching staff and poor infrastructure from the project schools in Guntur are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Some girls also leave school due to early marriages (see e.g. Samantroy 2021, 1; Mattila 2011, 287), and preventing child marriages in the project villages was one of the roles of Save the Children volunteers. In India, child marriage refers to any marriage where a woman is under 18 years of age or a man is below 21 (Srinivasan et. al. 2015, 11). In their quantitative analysis of various public government data, Srinivasan et. al. (2015, 21) found that in the state of Andhra Pradesh, where the research for this thesis took place, it is still typical to follow the custom of marrying off young girls. Census data shows that in rural Andhra Pradesh the number of girls married between the ages of 15-19 had decreased from 2001 to 2011, but remained at a little over 20%. (Srinivasan et. al. 2015, 18-20.) Child marriage is more common for young rural women, suggesting that traditional values are more likely to guide marriage practices in rural areas (Srinivasan et. al. 2015, 37-38).

In many cases cultural practices are prioritized over economic or educational considerations and parents typically marry off their young daughters to follow religious obligations, continue their family lineage, or to ensure the "modesty and chastity" of their daughters and protect the family from potential dishonor caused by a daughter's potential indecencies before marriage (Srinivasan et. al. 2015, 15-16). Parents also typically choose a spouse for their child from within the same caste, and in many castes it is customary to marry off daughters when they hit puberty (Srinivasan et. al. 2015, 16).

The relationship between child marriage and level of education is not as straightforward as one might think. On the one hand the percentage of child marriage systematically decreases as young women's levels of education increase. Though it cannot be claimed that education itself defers child marriage it appears that completing middle school in particular significantly lowers a girl's chance of child marriage. (Srinivasan et. al. 2015; 28, 38-39.) However, the authors also found that in "poor and socially backward areas" children may be less likely to marry, which they suggest is due to the fact that families are dependent on all children's financial contribution to household income. If this is the case, it is possible that child labor may in fact protect girls from being pushed into child marriages. (Srinivasan et. al. 2015, 25.)

There may also be structural challenges that inhibit children's opportunities to attend school. During my time in the field, I observed a conversation between Nikhil, one of the Cluster Assistants, and a young boy who did not attend school but had come over to watch some videos from the project's Mobile Resource Van which was parked outside the local school. Nikhil later told me that the child's parents were migrants from another part of the country and that the boy would not be able to join the local government school until he had been granted a residency certificate. The boy had already applied for it and would join the school when the application had been processed.

2.2. Non-Governmental Organizations in the Field of Education

Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also shown interest in the intertwined relationship between child labor and school retention and have advocated for education as a means of achieving various development goals. Local and international NGOs work in collaboration with government schools, start their own schools, or participate in other kinds

of educational initiatives. According to Gayathri and Heydlauff (2016, 74), NGOs have the power to make meaningful contributions in the education sector. They can promote inclusive education and support it in practice through teacher training programs, capacity building, increasing access to education for marginalized groups of children, and addressing grassroots level needs at schools and within communities. (Gayathri & Heydlauff 2016, 73-74.)

According to Gayathri & Heydlauff (2016, 73), in a country as large and diverse as India, it is necessary to have NGOs working in the field of education in order to help make up for disparities that children may face in access to, and quality of, education based on factors such as gender, class, and caste. The government of India also has a history of recognizing the positive impacts of non-formal education, NGOs and other voluntary agencies in the field of education. In fact, India's history of having education provided by indigenous NGOs predates the country's independence and goes all the way back to the social reform movement of the 19th century. Since India's independence in 1947, both the number and types of NGOs working in education have increased exponentially and NGOs are still seen to play a crucial role in raising awareness of the importance of education, promoting change and development in communities, assisting government education, and providing new avenues of learning outside of government schools. (Gayathri & Heydlauff 2016, 73.)

Many (I)NGOs in India have chosen to work either with or within the government school system. According to Kumar (2019, 76), "a growing system of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is intervening upon government school students, incorporating alternative visions for pedagogy, curriculum, and teacher behavior in an attempt to improve learning outcomes and future economic prospects for students". These interventions are primarily carried out by NGO teachers, who work in partnering government schools. This means that in practice students are influenced by the teaching styles of both government and NGO teachers simultaneously. (Kumar 2019, 76.)

Kumar (2019, 79) studied the differences in school-level behaviors and mechanisms between government schools and NGO schools by examining three different NGOs and four government schools in South Delhi, doing fieldwork in the region for 13 months in 2014-2016. One of these NGOs is Teach for India (TFI), which quickly trains young adults without formal teacher-training and then sends them (typically) to a government school for two years. The newly-trained TFI teachers teach full time using the same curriculum as government teachers. Being confined by the government curriculum meant that the TFI teachers are not

able to take the time they would need to make sure that all students comprehend the lessons. Despite the rush to keep up, however, they manage to teach the required topics more thoroughly than most government teachers and try to be as engaging and creative with their approaches as possible. (Kumar 2019; 79, 83-84.)

"Aspire", one of the other NGOs studied by Kumar (2019; 79, 83) also works in government schools, but unlike TFI, it follows its own remedial curriculum in the subjects of math and Hindi with the aim of helping the lowest achieving students in a given partner school. The remedial curriculum is based on the individual needs and progress of the students, which means that teachers are not forced to rush to keep up with the official curriculum. Aspire teachers are also encouraged by the organization to try to integrate into the school and support the school in other ways where needed in addition to teaching their remedial classes, and the founder of the organization believes that this type of "being there" for schools is the most important function of NGOs working with government schools. Unlike TFI, Aspire teachers have completed a teacher certification and plan to be teachers in the future. Despite the additional training provided by the organization, however, one headmaster of an Aspire partner school noted that the main value of Aspire teachers at the school was to provide extra staff and he did not see Aspire teachers themselves as unique or better equipped than the other teaching staff. (Kumar 2019; 79, 83-84.)

In addition to working in schools, NGOs can also focus on creating materials for government schools that they then may or may not help to implement in practice. These materials often include new creative pedagogies and might cater to children with special needs or fill perceived gaps in the official curriculum (Gayathri & Heydlauff 2016, 70). For example, Gayathri & Heydlauff (2016) researched the NGO "Going to School", based in New Dehli. The organization believed that the official school system was not able to impart important life skills to children, so it decided to create a series of stories on entrepreneurship to be used in schools. These stories give children positive examples of entrepreneurship and encourage them to look for role models in their own communities. The organization has also trained government secondary school teachers and headmasters to teach children different life skills through the stories, accompanying games, and a weekly "skills challenge program". (Gayathri & Heydlauff 2016; 75-76, 81.)

Another example comes from one of the two child-centered approaches used in the South-Indian state of Karnataka that Sriprakash (2012) studied in her ethnographic dissertation,

which was designed and implemented by an NGO. The NGO in question designed the approach in collaboration with local teachers, and at the time of the fieldwork, the approach was being tested and implemented in a number of government schools in Southern India. The role of the NGO was to continue developing the approach, offer initial and continuation training on the approach to local teachers, and provide materials to some of the schools involved. (Sriprakash 2012.) Sriprakash (2012, 1) notes that child-centered pedagogies have been seen as a form of "quality" education development not only in India, but in wider regions of the global south. Child-centered reforms take on many different forms, but often share an emphasis on "democratic learning environments, loosened authority relations over the child [and] more flexible boundaries.", which differ notably from those usually used to describe the Indian school system, namely its hierarchical teacher-student relations and emphasis on education based around textbooks and exams (Sriprakash 2012, 4).

According to Sriprakash (2012), the conflicting aims, methods and expectations of education have proved difficult for teachers in Indian government schools to work around in practice. For example, teachers re-interpret official policies based on their personal experiences, interests, biases, local knowledge, and the resources available to them in their rural schools. These re-interpretations mean that the aims and methods of the policies are seldom carried out as intended. As such it is also important to remember that child-centered education is not always directly linked to positive education development in practice. (Sriprakash 2012; 2-3, 5, 179.) Kumar (2019, 85-86) also concludes that despite the presence of NGOs and their new teaching methods in the Delhi government schools, the dominant culture of government schools had not changed in any of the researched schools, and NGO teachers had not affected the practices or beliefs of government teachers in the schools they worked at.

Another way for NGOs to work alongside the official school system is by providing non-formal education outside the school day. This type of work can take the form of after-school activities or remedial classes during holidays. The third NGO studied by Kumar (2019) was such an organization based in South Delhi. The NGO operates an "independent learning center" which catered to around 20 children during Kumar's fieldwork in 2015-2016. All of the children attended government schools in grades 6-8 during the day and came to the learning center after school. The learning center was staffed by one teacher, who led teams of children to explore topics like water scarcity and then present the theme to the rest of their classmates. (Kumar 2019, 80.) Similar after-school activities and remedial summer classes were also taken on by the Save the Children volunteers and are described in Chapter 5.2.

In his overview of educational development in Asia, Keith Lewin (2000, 63) notes that several NGOs have chosen to focus on children who, for one reason or another, are left (or forced) outside of the official school system. NGOs provide these children with education and training which can take many different forms, answering specific educational needs or catering to specific disadvantaged groups of children (or adults), such as those who do not fit the expectations of the official school system and have dropped out as a result. These organizations can take the form of large national or international NGOs with access to international funding, or smaller, local organizations that only work with a small number of children in a specific location. (Lewin 2000, 63.) This type of education provision is especially useful, and common, in a country as large and culturally diverse as India, where the official education system is not able to reach all children. For example, child laborers, children living on the street, disabled children, and refugees are still often excluded from government education. (Gayathri & Heydlauff 2016, 70.)

A common way for NGOs to reach these groups of vulnerable children is through opening their own schools or education centers. Nicola Ansell (2005, 153) notes that vocational education and non-formal education may also be more amenable for NGOs to take part in, as these types of education are not strictly bound by governmental regulations on education. This gives NGOs space to be more flexible and innovative in their approaches. The possible down-side to this freedom is the fact that NGOs will then also lack some of the accountability and quality control that comes with working within the official school system. (Ansell 2005, 153.)

According to Roberts and Chittooran (2015, 128) NGO schools are able to expand access to education by eliminating barriers and improving the quality of education, which can help with school retention. One example of this comes from the brickfields near Kolkata in eastern India, where a few NGOs have set up schools for undocumented child laborers working in the brickfields. Setting up these schools has been difficult, however, as brickfield owners are reluctant to admit that they employ children and have only permitted NGOs to build schools once the NGOs convinced the owners that providing a place for young children during the day would make older children and parents more productive at work. (Cranston 2014, 356.)

According to the staff of Mary Ward International, one of the NGOs setting up schools in the brickfields, the most important function of the schools is to make education accessible to children who may never have the opportunity to attend regular schools. These schools do not

aim to follow the official curriculum, but instead teach children basic literacy and numeracy skills with the help of "Barefoot Teachers" who teach the children in their native language. NGO staff uses locally accessible and often recycled materials and believes that teaching these basic skills should not have to be overcomplicated and left only to those teachers who have undertaken the official and highly theoretical two-year training. (Cranston 2014, 356.)

In their research of another NGO school catering to underprivileged children living in a slum in Varanasi, Roberts and Chittooran (2015; 124, 126) similarly noted that teachers were not required to have formal teacher-training and a few of the teachers had not studied past high school. The teachers at this school did, however, have the advantage of belonging to the community in which they taught. This personal connection to the community meant that the teachers worked hard and were invested in improving education and the future prospects of the children in their community. Many teachers saw teaching the children at the NGO school as one of their greatest accomplishments. (Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 126-7.) These feelings of personal investment and pride are very similar to those expressed by the Save the Children volunteers in this research, who similarly worked at their local schools teaching the children who lived in their villages.

Roberts and Chittooran (2015, 127) also highlight the value of teachers building relationships with the families of the children attending the NGO school. Through their relationships with parents, teachers try to change various misconceptions families have around education and encourage them to support the education of their children. Teachers also stress the importance of educating girls and try to convince parents and community members to send their daughters to school. Avenues for this type of advocacy work include inviting parents and community members to school events, and teachers visiting the homes of local families. Teachers believe that this contact with parents and other community members is an important part of their jobs because it raises awareness of the importance of education and makes parents, many of whom have never received a formal education, feel more comfortable engaging with the school. (Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 127.) Home visits and encouraging community participation were also key aspects of the Save the Children volunteers' work in the project studied in this thesis and are highlighted in Chapter 6.

2.3. Community Participation in Schools and Non-governmental Organizations

Through their reading of the vast literature on participation, Fitriah et al. (2013, 484) note that participation is often viewed as either a means or an end, a distinction which has been used to compare different motives and forms of participation and to further build on existing theories. Participation has also been theorized through a distinction between "genuine" and "pseudo", which aims to highlight differences in the degree of participation (see e.g. Khanal 2013, 237). Another common theme is power, which many authors see as a central element of the discourse on participation. Others, however, argue that participation should be defined simply as involving people or inviting them to contribute, and this may not inherently include a position of power for those participating. (Fitriah et al. 2013, 484.)

One of the most cited theories on participation is Sherry Arnstein's ladder of "citizen participation", originally published in 1969. Using examples from federal social programs in the United States, Arnstein (2019) developed an eight-tier ladder model which helps to distinguish between those with power and the powerless or "have-not" citizens. The eight rungs are located in the three broader categories of "non participation", "tokenism", and increasing power. The first category includes the rungs of "manipulation" and "therapy", the second includes "informing", "consultation" and "placation", and the final category is made up of "partnership", "delegated power", and "citizen control", at which point the "have-nots" have attained the majority of the power to make decisions. Citizen participation is thus seen as an avenue to redistribute power to the "have-nots", allowing them to take part in and meaningfully affect planning, decision-making and the sharing of information. (Arnstein 2019, 24-26.)

The ladder model is a simplification and in reality there may be more than eight rungs and the lines between them blurred. Additionally, the ladder model does not account for potential factors that may limit genuine participation such as racism or paternalism, the community's lacking infrastructure and knowledge, everyday challenges, and marginalization. (Arnstein 2019, 24-26.) This is particularly important to remember in the context of the rural project villages, in which local infrastructure is often lacking and many of the villagers live in poverty and struggle with class and caste-based discrimination. Another point made by Arnstein (2019, 26) which is of particular relevance for this research is that "employment of the have-nots in a program or on a planning staff could occur at any of the eight rungs and could represent either a legitimate or illegitimate characteristic of citizen participation". It is

possible for powerholders to hire community members in order to co-opt or placate them, or to benefit from their special skills or insights, and "participating" can often become an empty ritual and frustrating process where true power is not redistributed. (Arnstein 2019, 26).

For the purposes of this research, I define "community" simply as the members of a specific village. In practice, this refers to local families, village elders, and in some instances seasonal migrants who reside in the village for a long time and may be inclined to temporarily enroll their children in a local school. Recent research on community participation in schools tends to place participation in the context of official policy and decentralization reforms. This is understandable, as according to Khanal (2013, 235) "Community participation in the governance of school systems is a recurrent theme of educational reform in developed and developing countries alike." This is also the case when it comes to the Parent's Monitoring Committees and Child Protection Committees found in each of the project villages discussed in this research, which are both mandated by the state government of Andhra Pradesh.

Arnaldo Pellini (2007) researched community participation in rural schools in Cambodia using a multitude of methods including participant observation over the four years he worked in the country. Pellini (2007, 53) found that promoting community participation is not possible without taking into account traditional forms of social capital and identifying where and how this social capital can be linked with local institutions in order to improve public services. He also argues that "the development of a 'participatory culture' should be based on local norms, and given sufficient time to develop further in a partnership with local governments, line agencies, and service providers" (Pellini 2007, 53).

Despite available avenues for community participation in schools, often informed by official policy, community participation in school decision-making often remains surface-level and restricted to the hands of a small elite (see e.g. Khanal 2013; 245, 245; Pellini 2007, 53). Participation can also suffer from a lack of adequate support and preparation that community members receive for participating in the different kinds of school associations (Pellini 2007, 154-155), the struggles of associations to gain legitimacy among the villages or communities they operate in (Khanal 2013, 235; Pellini 2007, 153), and the limited effort from the school to make space for participation (Pellini 2007, 150). Associations or committees may also fail to enhance quality assurance in schools and can even have negative outcomes if they are not properly supported to positively influence schools (Ezenwaji et al. 2019; 26, 31, 36-37).

Parent’s financial investment in education can affect their participation at schools. For example, following the implementation of the Free School Program in Indonesia, parents were no longer allowed to financially support schools. As a result, their interest and participation in school-related decision-making ceased almost entirely and the once active school committees were reduced to little more than a rubber stamp on school budgets. (Fitriah et al. 2013; 483, 489.) Similar sentiments were echoed by project staff of Save the Children, who told me that parents who sent their children to expensive private schools were much more likely to attend parent-teacher meetings than the parents of children who attended free government schools and were not as financially invested in their children’s education.

Personal or cultural views on the appropriate roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers can also affect participation in practice (see e.g. Ezenwaji et al. 2019, 25). There can be a reluctance of community members, including parents and leaders of School Associations, to insert themselves in the various parts of education that they consider to be the responsibility of teachers, lessening their interaction with teachers (Pellini 2007; 150, 155). On the other hand, parents may minimize their own roles in supporting the learning of their children at home and choose to focus on collective forms of participation in schools instead. Community participation in schools and education can, however, can empower parents, unite community members around shared goals, and give them space to achieve these goals through collective action and collaboration (Carolan-Silva 2011; 253, 267).

Different authors have suggested various ways to improve community participation in schools in practice. One recurring suggestion is to build community capacity to better participate in the education of its children and work to empower parents to feel more comfortable taking responsibility for education and school decision-making through teaching them the practical skills needed to effectively advocate for their children and their schools (Khanal 2013; 235, 245; Pellini 2007, 159-160). This is in line with the Save the Children project’s aim of empowering local parents and community members to participate in their villages’ Parents’ Monitoring Committees and Child Protection Committees (see Chapter 5.2). The authors also believe that teachers should be taught how to work together with parents from varying socio-cultural backgrounds and encouraged to take part in the community committees and associations where possible. This way teachers can also make sure that their own knowledge and perspectives are heard and considered in the committees and associations, which can benefit their work. (Khanal 2013, 235; Pellini 2007, 157.) In the

project villages in Guntur, local teachers and headmasters also participated in the Parents' Monitoring Committees' and Child Protection Committees' meetings where possible.

Community participation in non-governmental organizations, on the other hand, is often conceptualized through consulting with locals about different projects and making use of their "local knowledge", which Clifford Geertz (1973, 5) has classically described as "webs of significance" at the very heart of culture. In the case of the Save the Children volunteers, these webs of knowledge can include basic information such as who is the current village Sarpanch (locally elected leader), and which local families have power in the village. It also includes up-to-date knowledge of local stakeholders, ongoing political debates, common beliefs and misconceptions (particularly in regard to child labor and education) and customs, as well as practical knowledge on local employers and farming seasons.

The benefits of utilizing local knowledge are clearly on the minds of many non-governmental organizations. In 2022, USAID published the report *Integrating Local Knowledge in Development Programming* in which it interviewed NGO employees on how local knowledge informs programming. The report concludes that "1) building trust and relationships, 2) ensuring participatory processes, and 3) integrating local and scientific knowledge" are three key elements of making use of local knowledge in ways that benefit development work and local communities (USAID 2022, 3). A participatory approach should be utilized throughout the projects and begin at the planning stages of new interventions, as local knowledge can help project employees to understand the root causes of the issues they are trying to combat, and help local communities to accept the outside organizations. Encouraging community participation in NGO projects can also increase the likelihood of sustainable results and continued work within communities. (USAID 2022, 3.)

Community participation has also been researched in the context of decentralization reforms and the work of small, local grassroots organizations. For example, in their research combining the findings from several case studies in Indonesia, Nugroho et al. (2018, 1-2) looked into the integration of local knowledge into public policy and policy processes and argue that local knowledge, often advocated for by local grassroots organizations, can improve public policy both locally and nationally as it can provide important context and help with correctly targeting the policies. They define local knowledge as "the knowledge that people in given communities or organizations have accumulated over time through direct experience and interaction with society and the environment" (Nugroho et al. 2018, 3).

3. The Research Process and Methods

3.1. Ethnographic Research

Ethnography is a research method used most often by anthropologists, and long-term ethnographic fieldwork is seen as a defining feature of the discipline (Howell 2018, 1). Ethnography aims to "study social life as it unfolds in the practices of day-to-day life" (van Donge 2006, 180). An ethnographer spends time in the community they are researching and participates in the daily routines and special events of the community, working within the paradox of trying to participate as fully as possible in the community, while simultaneously observing it from a distance (Howell 2018; 1, 3). As such, an ethnographer's research is based on social interaction with so-called informants in the field (Aull Davies 2001, 78). Through this interaction with community members, ethnographers identify key roles and relationships in their field in order to model the inner workings of social life within the community and compare it to others (Gay y Blasco & Wardle 2019, 68). Because of this, ethnographers do not test out previously formulated hypothesis, but instead "study that which is of significance to the community" (Howell 2018, 1).

An ethnographer's experiences, as well as their conversations and observations from the field are written into a diary, known as fieldnotes, and form the bulk of the research material. This fieldwork material is often expanded along the way with more formal interviews. The interviews aim to provide further insight into people's social life, and to help the researcher understand the meanings people give their actions and relationships in the field as well as to the field itself. The interviews can also help the researcher understand why people's words and actions do not always meet. (Huttunen & Homanen 2017; 131-132, 135; see also Howell 2018, 3) In addition to informal conversations, observations and interviews, ethnographers can also utilize photos, videos, and audio recordings from the field (Howell 2018, 3).

In recent decades the approach of carrying out multi-sited ethnography has become increasingly popular. In multi-sited ethnography, the researcher moves between different physical or social sites following "a group, a material object, a particular topic, or social issue". (Howell 2018, 8-9.) The multiple sites are seen as connected and these connections can be just as meaningful to the researcher as the relationships within the individual sites (Hannerz 2003, 206). Hannerz (2003, 207) notes that the researcher must nearly always

choose to focus on specific sites out of all the potential options that could be included. In the case of this research, thirty project villages had been selected by Save the Children based on a study it had previously conducted on the prevalence of child labor in the region. Hannerz (2003, 208-209) also notes that more limited time in each individual site can pose limitations on the research and the ability of the researcher to form personal relationships with informants. This may also lead multi-sited ethnographers to depend more on interviews than those who focus on a single field (Hannerz 2003, 211).

There are many examples of school ethnography from India. For example, Arathi Sriprakash (2012; 2, 19, 23), discussed above, explores the politics and practices of child-centered education in India based on ethnographic research from 16 rural primary schools and other contact with teachers during 11 months of fieldwork. Sriprakash (2012, 27) notes that "Sustained in situ research can help one 'get to know more' about classroom processes, and in the rural Karnataka school context, it also helped me to distance myself from inspectorial cultures." In the introduction to the edited volume *Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India*, Meenakshi Thapan (2014, 8) notes that school ethnography is based on the "ethnographer's ability to listen, to observe and to faithfully record, without prejudice". The authors dive into everyday life at school, researching topics such as student culture, peer relations, developing citizenship ideals or a particular type of national identity at school, and religion within different kinds of school cultures (Thapan 2014, 12-17). Authors like Amanda Gilbertson (2014) and Ashmeet Kaur (2023) have also done ethnographic research in so-called "international" schools in India, which are typically elite private schools only accessible to upper-middle class or very wealthy families due to high tuition fees.

3.2. The Data

Before embarking on this research, in 2015-18, I spent a total of 14 months working as a volunteer at an NGO school for underprivileged children in Bangalore, India. I also worked as a counsellor at the Freedom Summer Camp for underprivileged children, disabled children, and children with HIV/AIDS in 2016, which also took place in Bangalore. During my time in India, I learned a lot about the local culture(s), customs, and global NGO field as a whole, as well as the many compounding challenges that underprivileged children may face when it

comes to school retention. This prior experience of having lived in South India and the growing concern I felt during the pandemic about the possibilities of children in India to continue their education once schools reopened have both informed and inspired this thesis. I was also familiar with the structure and values of Save the Children as I had previously worked there, first as an intern, then as a translator and later as a preparedness councilor.

I conducted my fieldwork during a six-week period in July-August of 2022. I carried a small black notebook with me at all times, describing my surroundings as well as my conversations and interactions with the volunteers and other project staff, school staff, children, and community members. I also spoke to a few headmasters separately and got a written letter from one of them talking about the project. The project's Mobile Resource Van already had a schedule in which it tried to visit two schools per day, so for the most part I was able to visit schools in the van without disrupting the everyday functions of the project too much. After the school visits, the driver Karthik would take me back to the office, where I translated and wrote out my fieldnotes onto my laptop (I began writing my fieldnotes in Finnish because children and staff members were often coming over to glance at my notebook). These experiences led to around 120 pages of fieldnotes (Times New Roman 12, with 1.15 spacing).

The project worked in three mandals in the Guntur district in the state of Andhra Pradesh in Southern India between 2021 and 2022. A mandal, also known as a block in some regions of India, refers to a local administration unit. A mandal is typically named after one of its central villages though this village is not necessarily the largest. According to the most recent 2011 Census, there are 57 mandals in the Guntur district and each mandal has between 5 and 23 villages in it, with an average of 13 villages per mandal (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011). The project worked with 10 villages in each of the three mandals. The field office, along with my lodging next door, were also located in one of them. To ensure the anonymity of the schools and local staff that took part in this research, I will use the pseudonyms Treetops, Hillside, and Farmland for the mandals going forward. These names do not reflect an especially common characteristic of each mandal, but instead aim to describe the landscape of the region as a whole (see Chapter 4).

During my time in the field, I was able to visit to all 30 of the project schools at least once (5 of the schools were visited twice, and 2 of the schools were visited 3 times). At the schools I observed the lessons of both the Save the Children volunteers and local teachers, as well as five Children's Group meetings conducted by the volunteers. I also attended nine Parents'

Monitoring Committee (PMC) meetings and one separate Child Protection Committee (CPC) meeting. I also attended two monthly meetings with the full project staff at the local office and saw part of one Mandal-level volunteer-meeting. Lastly, I attended one Teacher's training and one Farmer's training organized by the project.

In addition to my fieldnotes, I conducted a group interview in English with the volunteers from each mandal towards the end of my time in the field. The first of these interviews was held outside a small shop in Hillside and the other two were held back-to-back at the project's local office during the last monthly staff meeting that I attended. Sunil (Cluster Assistant) and Karthik (driver) helped with translation during the first interview, and Vijay (Cluster Assistant) with the other two. The interviews followed the same basic structure (see appendix 1) and lasted from around thirty minutes to an hour. Twenty-two of a potential 30 volunteers participated in the group interviews. Additionally, one volunteer came late to the first interview, and answered a couple of short questions by herself at the end. The interview themes included common activities at school, home-visits, PMC and CPC meetings, success stories, challenges, and feelings about the project ending. I also asked the groups what aspects of their work they found particularly important and what themes they thought I should focus on in my research. I chose not to record any of these interviews and instead took notes, which resulted in around ten pages of text (Times New Roman 12, with 1.15 spacing).

I also utilized some of the project's internal documentation and statistics as background information for this research. These documents included Excel files on the number of girls and boys enrolled in each class of the project schools, and the number of male and female teachers at each school as well as how many vacant teacher positions there were at the schools at the time of my research. I have also looked at eight case studies collected by project staff which introduce an individual child from one of the project's schools and go over how the project has been able to impact their lives. These case studies have not been included in the analysis but do provide examples of the socioeconomic challenges faced by families in the project villages described in Chapter 4. I have also utilized the initial Concept Note of the project written for the Paulig Group to help introduce the project.

3.3. Key Informants

Given the distance between project schools, I ended up learning a lot from my conversations with Karthik, the project's driver, and he quickly became a key informant of my research. According to Hannerz (2003, 210) it is common for key informants of multi-sited ethnographies to be "the more mobile ones, those who contribute most to turning the combinations of sites into coherent fields". In this sense it is unsurprising that one of my most important informants was the driver of a "*Mobile* Resource Van". Karthik was a man in his early forties who had migrated to the region at the beginning of the project with his wife and two children who attended a local private school. Because he visited all of the schools regularly, he was able to tell me a lot not only about individual schools, but also about common problems the schools faced. He was friendly and well-liked by the volunteers and had a deep understanding of the field-level work of the project. Karthik also spoke good English and often translated for me during our school visits. He was happy to answer all of my questions and was interested in both my research and my life in Finland. I am deeply grateful for his insights, translation assistance and thought-provoking questions during my time in the field.

Ravi, the field-level Project Coordinator, was another key informant of this research, with whom I spent many an evening discussing my ideas and findings at the office. Ravi was a man in his early thirties who had worked in the NGO field before the project and had more than one master's degree. He was always smartly dressed in jeans and a long-sleeved button-up shirt, which he would sometimes change into a red Save the Children Polo when visiting the schools. Like Karthik, Ravi was not from the region, but had relocated for the duration of the project and was sometimes visited by his wife and toddler, with whom I played catch a couple of times at the office with a rolled up scarf. Ravi was genuinely optimistic, very well-liked by his staff and not afraid of asking difficult questions. He had a distinct laugh that made everyone in the room smile and he laughed often. He was also incredibly knowledgeable about the ins and outs of the project and made sure to answer any doubts or questions I had at the end of my days at the schools.

The three Cluster Assistants, Sunil, Vijay, and Nikhil, were also very helpful and happy to share their knowledge and translation assistance with me. Sunil, the Cluster Assistant of Hillside, was a man in his early forties who lived with his extended family in a very nice large house at the far edge of the mandal. Sunil had a master's in the social sciences and had done charity work for many years. He was well-liked and trusted by both his volunteers and local community members and incredibly knowledgeable about the various social protection

schemes offered by the Andhra Pradesh state government. Vijay, the Cluster Assistant of Farmland, was a man of a similar age, who enjoyed joking around with the volunteers from his mandal. Vijay spent more time at the project office than the other Cluster Assistants who often came with Karthik and I on school visits, so I did not get to know him as well as the other project staff. The third of the Cluster Assistants, Nikhil, worked with the Treetops volunteers. He was older than the rest, perhaps in his late forties, and had found temporary lodging in the central village of the mandal as his family lived over two hours away. Nikhil was very jovial, welcoming, and always made sure to ask if you had had your tea.

Of course the "volunteers" themselves were also key informants of this research, though I was not able to spend all that much time with any of them individually as I mostly spoke with them during the school days when they were busy teaching. The majority of the volunteers had a bachelor's degree and a few also had master's degrees. The level of education had been one of the determining factors for recruitment, although the subject had not been of importance and most of the volunteers lacked any kind of formal teacher training. Around two-thirds of the volunteers were women and one-third men and they ranged from their early twenties to mid- to late-forties, though the majority of the volunteers were between the ages of 25-35. As local community members the volunteers also came from poor agricultural families and many of them were already married with children.

3.4. Organizing and Analyzing the Data

The project team at the regional office had originally suggested that I focus my research on identifying some of the "best practices" of the project and upon entering the field I quickly realized that the use of local volunteers was perhaps the clearest example of a best practice. Despite having found my focus, I spent a lot of time during my first few weeks in the field questioning the point of going to all of the project schools and wondering what I was going to get out of the relatively short school visits. I would come back to the office after a long day in the field and the Ravi, the Project Coordinator, would ask me: "What you learned today?". My field notes kept growing and growing and yet I wasn't sure what to tell him. I sometimes wondered in terror whether or not I had in fact learned anything at all.

This type of questioning is not uncommon for ethnographic researchers. According to ethnographer Jan Kees van Donge (2006, 183) ethnographic fieldnotes often appear random in the beginning of the research and leave the researcher questioning whether or not they are leading anywhere. Then, one day, new insights into the social practices of the community being researched suddenly appear from the data. A moment of wider understanding, "when data turns into insights", often takes place when the researcher begins to perceive repetitive patterns in their notes. (van Donge 2006, 181-183.)

With time, my focus too became more specific and my research questions began to take form, though this process was not straightforward. I was constantly finding new angles, exploring new themes, and altering my direction. I had several breakthroughs during my time in the field which enriched my budding analysis and led me to pay attention to new aspects of my surroundings. Several of these breakthroughs were results of the long conversations I had both with Karthik on our way to and from the project schools, and with Ravi at the office in the evenings after my visits in the field. I am deeply grateful for their insights, thought-provoking questions, and genuine interest in and support of my work. In the end, I left Guntur feeling confident that I had learned something after all.

There are several ways to analyze and organize ethnographic data upon one's return from the field. In one common method, the researcher identifies recurring patterns and themes in the data. These patterns are then analyzed and organized into key findings. (see e.g. van Donge 2006, 184.) I began my analysis by reading through all of my data, searching for recurring themes and then identifying the key themes I wanted to focus on. I then went over my data again, reorganizing it based on the themes that had stood out to me and began to map out key points and examples to bring up in my analysis. This formed the basis of chapters five and six.

Finally, in order to assure the anonymity of my informants, I removed all the names of people and places from my analysis that could point to the identity of individual informants. I have chosen to use pseudonyms for my key informants and the three project mandals, and to refer to the schools in my fieldnote excerpts by number following the order in which I visited them. For example, "Hillside, school #1" refers to the first school I visited in the Hillside mandal and "Hillside, school #1.2." refers to the second time I visited this school. I also occasionally refer to insight I got from "project staff". In practice, this includes the Project Coordinator Ravi, the three Cluster Assistants and Karthik, the driver of the project. I have

made a specific note if I have included the volunteers when speaking of project staff overall, but typically refer to the volunteers either overall or in relation to a specific mandal or school.

3.5. Ethical Challenges

3.5.1. Relying on Translation

It is typically recommended that an ethnographer learn the local language of the people being studied in order to help better understand their social world (see e.g. Aull Davies 2001, 76; Bujra 2006; Howell 2018, 4). The main official language in the state of Andhra Pradesh is Telugu, which was the mother tongue of most of the participants of this research and also the language of instruction at government schools. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was not able to learn Telugu before I entered the field. I did not feel particularly worried about this, because my contacts at the project had told me before my trip that all Save the Children Staff members, including the volunteers, should speak English and could help to translate for me in the field. Upon my arrival I noticed, however, that this was not the case. Though the staff was happy and enthusiastic to help me, the majority of them spoke very little English.

I was lucky in that I already had experience of living in Southern India and had learned some basic Kannada and Tamil, the official languages of two of the states neighboring Andhra Pradesh. Though not particularly similar to Telugu, there were a few words here and there that helped me to understand bits and pieces of what was being said around me. People also mixed English into their speech in a way that was reminiscent to the mix of Kannada and English I had grown used to while living in Bangalore. This meant that I was able to get the basic idea of most conversations going on around me and ask the project staff later what exactly had been discussed.

I was also able to rely on body language in my communication with locals in the field. Body language is an important part of communication in India, and I was thrilled to find that it appeared rather universal at least in the context of the Southern states. My knowledge and use of local body language, such as shaking or wobbling your head, was immensely helpful in daily communication and I was able to communicate messages such as “yes”, “no”, “are you ready”, “should we visit other classrooms”, “I’m full”, and “where is the bathroom” with ease

(though the question of the bathroom was met with giggles a few times as I was told the hand gesture is mostly used by small children).

I considered using the help of online dictionaries, but most reputable dictionaries do not include Telugu as a language option and many of the villages we visited had poor or nonexistent internet reception. I also once tried to have a conversation with a volunteer with the help of Google Translate, but she found it rather amusing and responded to me in a mix of Telugu, English and body language instead of writing and translating her response. I had been somewhat reluctant to use Google Translate to begin with because of its high chance of mistranslation and misunderstanding, and did not try to use it again.

The language barrier meant that in most cases I had to rely on the few staff members who spoke good enough English to translate for me. In practice, this often meant the Cluster Assistants and the driver Karthik who came with me to the schools. I was very lucky in that Karthik had good English skills and also appeared to be well-liked by the volunteers, whose schools he visited regularly. It is safe to say that this research would not have been possible in its current form without his translation assistance. Of course relying on interpreters for translation does not come without its challenges (see e.g. Bujra 2006). In my case the main challenges came from the fact that those who translated for me also had limited English skills and I could not always be sure that my messages were being conveyed correctly to the other participants. My translators would also occasionally struggle to find the right words to explain something to me in English. Though I feel like the translation mostly worked reasonably well, it is obvious that some things were lost in translation in both directions and that not speaking Telugu limited the ways in which I was able to carry out my research.

According to Bujra (2006, 176), it also common for translators "to 'filter out' what they consider unimportant, even though this might be precisely what the researcher needs and wishes to know." During my first day at the regional office of Save the Children in Hyderabad, a higher-up advised me to always speak to informants through the volunteers or staff members, who could help translate for me. This way they could filter out any possible bad questions I asked and make sure I did not accidentally cause any harm to the reputation of the organization. At the same time having my conversations through staff members meant that they could filter out any inappropriate or uninteresting things that the informants told me. I found these comments disconcerting. I joined the project's field team the next day mentally preparing myself for some damage control, as I feared that getting honest responses would be

much more difficult if they had been told by a higher-up at the organization to withhold information. Luckily I do believe that for the most part my informants spoke honestly about their experiences and did not withhold information.

3.5.2. Obtaining Informed Consent

The question of obtaining informed consent was in many ways tied to the challenge of the language barrier between me and the majority of the participants of this research. I tried to be as transparent about my research as possible with the project staff, including the volunteers, constantly reminding and updating them on the purpose of my research and how they would be portrayed in it. I also occasionally stopped people in the middle of a conversation to ask if I could write about it and I had conversations with key informants about how I would use our conversations in the final text. I tried to make sure I was always getting verbal or otherwise explicit consent (in India there is clear body language to express approval) from school headmasters, teachers, and volunteers when I entered schools or classrooms. I also carried around my notebook at all times and would ask people if it was alright that I was writing about their school or their lessons. The notebook was a physical reminder for people of what I was doing, and though it may have been a little distracting at times, I felt it was very helpful in making sure that everyone remembered I was doing research and not simply visiting.

Despite my efforts, I sometimes struggled to make sure people in the field knew about my background and intentions. The driver and Cluster Assistants did their best to introduce me to the headmasters of all of the schools, but explaining my purpose for the school visits clearly was challenging, especially towards the beginning of my fieldwork when I had not yet fully defined my research questions. School staff sometimes thought I was connected to the Paulig group and a couple of headmasters tried to thank me for choosing their school to be a part of the project, appearing a little confused when I tried to explain that I had only just arrived and had had no prior role in the project or its decision-making.

I also noticed that Karthik and the Cluster Assistants often appeared to forget to mention that I was doing research for Tampere University and not only for Save the Children. The Project Coordinator Ravi had told me previously that all of the project schools have signed an agreement at the beginning of the project which allows Save the Children to conduct research

at their schools and the team felt that my research fell under this agreement. Nevertheless, I felt it important to stress my relationship with the university and I tried my best to make sure that it was clearly conveyed to the school staff. Eventually Karthik and the Cluster Assistants remembered to mention my ties to the university, though a few times I did catch the phrase "PhD research". I also made myself a large nametag with the logos of both organizations in hopes that this would further remind people of my affiliation to Tampere University.

My role within the organization also caused some confusion among my informants. At the time of my research, I was not employed at Save the Children and my research was conducted in collaboration with the organization and not commissioned for it. I did, however, sometimes speak with volunteers and other project staff of the work I had previously done for Save the Children Finland. Though I tried to be as transparent as possible about my role within the organization as an outside researcher (with outside funding), I believe that most of the volunteers probably believed that I worked for Save the Children. The project staff had also told the volunteers about my research ahead of time and I think it likely that the volunteers were requested by higher-ups at the organization to participate in the research and answer my questions. As such, it is possible that some of the volunteers remained unsure of the purpose and reach of my research and felt compelled by their employers to participate, despite my efforts to remind them that their participation was voluntary.

Towards the end of my research, I collected signed consent forms (see appendix 2) from all members of the project staff, including the driver and volunteers, who were present at the August full staff meeting. I used simplified language on the form, and I also had Ravi translate it to the group to make sure I could clear up any doubts. At this point everyone had given me verbal consent several times, but I still thought it necessary to ask for signatures. Going over the consent forms also gave me an opportunity to remind everyone of the fact that they would remain anonymous and give them one more chance to tell me that they would rather not participate in the research. I also used this time to thank the volunteers for all of their hard work in the project and for sharing their experiences with me so openly.

Going into the field, I was also very mindful of the ethical challenges to do with researching children, especially when they are from vulnerable backgrounds (see e.g. van Blerk 2006, 57; Mattila 2011, 83-85). According to Van Blerk (2006, 57) the aims and implications of participating in the research should be clearly explained to children in a language and form that is easy for them to understand. The researcher should also be careful not to pressure

children into participating and make sure they understand that participation is optional even if it is encouraged by parents or teachers. In addition to the eager and informed consent of children, it may sometimes be necessary to get consent from adults such as their parents, teachers, or community leaders. (van Blerk 2006, 57; see also. Mattila 2011, 83-85.) Save the Children also has its own protocols for working with children which have applied to this research. These include the constant consideration of children's rights, encouraging child-participation and a mandatory child-safeguarding training that must be attended once a year by all SC employees (see more. Save the Children International 2023). I had attended such a training twice before in Finland prior to my fieldwork and I also received a brief version of it at the Hyderabad office of Save the Children India upon my arrival. Anthropological Ethics have also been followed in this research, which highlight the ethical considerations of researching vulnerable groups, such as underprivileged children (see American Anthropological Association 2023).

I ruled out interviewing children pretty quickly as I confirmed my suspicion that reaching children's parents to get their consent would have been very difficult. The language barrier would also have made it challenging to explain my research to both children and their parents and I was worried that I would not have been able to guarantee that children were sufficiently informed about my research and participating in it willingly. Though I spent a lot of time observing lessons, I tried to focus on the volunteers or teachers teaching the classes and the ways in which they interacted with their students. I made the conscious decision to only ask children questions at Children's Group meetings, as it was easier to introduce the research to the children first and they had the most contact with the volunteers. I was not able to get consent from the parents of the children, but the teachers and headmasters welcomed me to ask the children questions and the children all appeared very eager to talk to me.

3.5.3. Being a White Woman in Indian Villages

The different perceptions local people had surrounding my whiteness affected my research in many concrete ways. As mentioned above, at some of the project schools the first instinct of school staff was to assume that I am in some way related to the donor. When I expressed my frustration about this to project staff, they laughed and replied that some of the school staff would automatically assume that a white woman walking around with a notebook was

connected to the donor, even if I tried to tell them otherwise. Indeed, even when I was able to convince locals that I was not working for the donor, most people still assumed that I had the power to convince donors of the importance of the project or that I had contacts to potential new donors that I could get to fund it. I kept telling people that I had no contacts to current or potential donors and that as a student, I did not have the power to affect any funding decisions. These comments were usually brushed aside and even some of the project staff that I worked quite closely with were reluctant to believe that I had relatively little power or money in my country. A couple of times I was also met with the suggestion that I should start my own NGO and carry out similar project work myself.

Having previously worked at an NGO school in Southern India, I immediately recognized in certain members of school staff a way of speaking that I myself had employed while touring (potential) donors around my school. I believe that my personal experience of speaking to donors helped me to differentiate genuine praise from exaggerations and attempts to secure more funding. I also recognize that although positive impacts of the project may have been highlighted by certain staff members, this does not mean that they were untrue. Thus, though it is likely that challenges related to the project may have been partially hidden from me, I do believe that the gratitude expressed towards the project was genuine, even when those speaking to me had an incorrect assumption of my role and power within the organization.

My skin tone together with my gender and age also meant that my movement was heavily restricted in the field. I was told that the region was not used to having foreigners and that it would not be safe for me to be out in public by myself. This naturally limited the contact I was able to have with people outside the project. Karthik, who half-jokingly referred to himself as my bodyguard, also felt reluctant to be seen alone in public with me, as it would have reflected badly on him and his family, so I usually had to wait in the Mobile Resource Van when we stopped for lunch or coffee on the drives between the office and the schools. Even so, he often told me that people asked him questions about who I was and what I was doing in the area. Despite these challenges, being a young woman in the field was also helpful to me in that it helped several of my young female informants feel more comfortable around me. Several of my informants visibly relaxed when they found out I was the same age or younger than them and appeared more open to talking to me and showing me around their schools the next times that we met.

4. The Project Field

4.1. Treetops, Hillside, and Farmland

In Southern India July and August are part of the rainy season. The worst of the summer heat has already past and heavy rains sweep over the land bringing with them the possibility of new crops and working opportunities in the fields. The rains are a welcome change to the summer heat, which can reach up to 50°C in some parts of the region. I was told many times that I chose a good time of year for my visit. Despite this reassurance, my fieldnotes are filled with descriptions of my slow descent from a fully functioning human to a meek puddle on the floor. I occasionally found it hard to concentrate on my surroundings, focusing instead on a small breeze coming from an open window or the fan on the roof of a classroom which gave me strength to hold myself together until I could go back to the air-conditioned van, or better yet, a cool shower and a change of clothes. I was thankful daily for the air-conditioning in the Mobile Resource Van, in which I rode with Karthik to the project schools. It didn't always work properly, but made a huge difference nonetheless.

I was a little surprised at how little it ended up raining during my time in the field. Karthik told me the lack of rain is a result of global warming, which has also driven up summer temperatures. From the point of view of my research, however, we can be thankful for the lack of rain. Many of the project villages are in very remote areas and as we drove to schools Karthik would point out to me all the spots that tend to flood over when it rains. The roads can be completely blocked for hours or even days if it rains enough, but the rains only ended up costing us a day or two of visits. On one such occasion Karthik came into the office after 8.30 am and told me that he had been on the phone with Nikhil, the Cluster Assistant of Treetops. Nikhil was stuck because of the rain that had begun the night before and was afraid that the roads would be too muddy and slippery for the van.

The landscape of the three mandals is mostly filled with fields of chili, rice, cotton, and dahl depending on the time of year. During our drives Karthik told me that cotton is a preferred crop because it grows in only four months, which means that the field can also be used for other crops the rest of the year. The price of cotton has also increased in recent years, which has increased its popularity. In July and August, the tallest of the cotton is around a meter high, and I could begin to make out some buds in between the leaves. The cotton would be ready to harvest after the rainy season. Rice is grown in areas with a lot of water to save on

watering costs, while crops like chili can grow in drier areas. Large, rocky mountains loom behind the fields, covered in dense forest and large boulders and the occasional rice mill, dahl mill or chili storage facility line the roads.

Larger fields have several employees who help with weeding, spraying pesticides and other agricultural tasks. Landowners will sometimes drive trucks of employees from nearby villages to the fields. Though I know that child labor is prevalent in the area, I did not see much of it during my time in the field. Children mostly work on the chili plantations, and the season would not start until the cotton had been harvested. Rice fields are considered too dangerous for children and cotton fields tend to have elderly people working in them. The fields are sprinkled with large trees, where workers can rest in the shade during their breaks. Some of the workers are seasonal migrants, who had recently traveled up to 200km for the beginning of the cotton season. The migrants would stay in the region until the end of the chili season in April, and their temporary housing lined streets and fields.

Picture 1: Ploughing a Cotton Field in Farmland

Picture 2: Goats Blocking the Road in Treetops

The closest schools to the project office were only a ten- or fifteen-minute drive away, but others took closer to two hours to reach from the office. As we neared the villages, the fields would get smaller and the piles of trash along the road got bigger. Here, you are more likely

to spot small plantations of papaya, lichi, banana, or ladyfingers. Some of the roads are lined with the occasional large tamarind tree to bring shade, and in July and August some of them are still filled with bright red and orange flowers. The roads that lead from the mandal center to the smaller villages are often narrow, windy, bumpy, and full of potholes. Most of the roads are made of cement that has clearly been patched up over the years, but a few are made of dirt. Occasionally the branches of bushes or low-hanging trees would hit the window and bang on the speakers on the roof of the van. Roads are only wide enough for one vehicle and passing others was often challenging. In addition to other cars, autorickshaws, and bikes, we often had to stop for large herds of goats or buffalos that blocked the road. Monkeys are also common in the area and frequently wreak havoc in the villages and at the schools.

Many of the schools are located at the edge of a village, which means that I often didn't see much of the villages themselves during our visits. Many of the villages are small, cramped, and the homes are visibly in need of repair. Other villages are clearly better off. The roads are still narrow and made of cement but the houses lining the streets are much larger, more colorful and overall in better condition. Project staff told that in some instances this is a caste-related division and in some villages the majority of inhabitants are seasonal laborers, which in part affects the quality of housing.

Picture 3: A Road in a Project Village in Hillside

Picture 4: Construction in a Project Village in Treetops

4.2. Local Families

Between September and November of 2021, the Save the Children project *Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19* conducted a study in which they identified 1488 vulnerable children in the project villages. Of these children, 1432 participated in seasonal labor and 56 participated in non-seasonal or irregular labor (by the end of the school year in May, 100% of these children were attending school). Project staff told me that in some of the villages the majority of families live below the poverty line: "You maybe already observed that the children have no proper dress, hygiene, like that". Families are especially vulnerable during the summer months, when there is no work because of the farming season and no mid-day meals for children because of the summer holiday: "today we work, tomorrow we eat".

The majority of parents in the project villages are agricultural laborers without their own land, and it is typical for parents to take on daily wage work in chili or cotton fields. The income from this work is often insufficient to meet the families' financial needs, and for example a full day of work in a cotton field may only pay around 500 rupees (under 6€). Some families have tried to lease land and cultivate their own crops, but this is also financially risky. Children are more likely to work during specific agricultural seasons, such as the chili season, when farmers hire employees on daily contracts. Children take time off school and often go to work with their parents in order to supplement household income. Some children also stay at home to take care of younger siblings and housework while their parent(s) are at work.

In addition to financial struggles, some children have family troubles which impact whether or not they work. In some instances, one of the children's parents has passed away and children have to work to help make ends meet as a single salary cannot take care of a family. Children may also have an alcoholic parent, typically a father, whose employment cannot be depended upon. Alcoholic fathers may also force their children to work, (threaten to) beat them, and argue with teachers who express their concerns over the children missing school. Sometimes the child(ren) of a family may be the only option for paid labor. The Covid-19 pandemic has also made local families increasingly vulnerable, as it has led to job loss, resulting in hunger, stress, and debts. It also pushed some families to relocate to other villages or regions in search of new employment possibilities, further disrupting their children's

education. Many children felt pressure or were forced not to go back to school after schools reopened in order to work and help their families pay back debts. Being out of school sporadically or for longer periods of time means that children who work fall behind in their studies and may forget basic skills such as reading and writing. This can in turn make it harder to follow lessons and decrease motivation to go to school.

Picture 5: The Volunteer and I Watching Films from the back of the Mobile Recourse Van with Children, Teachers and a Few Mothers Passing by Outside of a School in Treetops. Picture taken by the Project's driver Karthik.

4.3. The Project Schools

Andhra Pradesh government schools are divided into Primary Schools (1st to 5th grade) or Upper Primary Schools (1st to 7th or 8th grade depending on the school), High Schools (6th to 10th grade), Jr. College (11th to 12th grade) and Degree Programs. The project focused on children between the ages of six to fourteen and as such, worked with one Primary School or Upper Primary School from each of the 30 project villages. Most of the project villages only had one school, but a few had both a so-called Mandal Parishad Primary (MPP) School and a Mandal Parishad Upper Primary (MPUP) School. In this chapter and going forward I refer to MPP or MPUP schools and use the local terminology of "standard" for the different grades in school and "school strength" when referring to the number of children currently enrolled in a school. In the project schools school strength ranged from around 20 in the smallest MPP schools to a little over 200 in the larger MPUP schools.

In this section I describe the project schools dividing them into “Nadu Nedu” schools and other government schools, combining typical features of the schools and more specific examples from my fieldnotes in order to give the reader a more detailed image of the school environments, while protecting the anonymity of individual schools. At the time of my research in 2022, half of the project schools had recently been a part of the Andhra Pradesh state government’s Nadu Nedu scheme. Nadu Nedu roughly translates to “before and after” and the scheme focuses on improving infrastructure at government schools.

You can usually spot a Nadu Nedu school as soon as you reach the entrance. The schools are striking and often both the compound walls and the outside of the school building(s) are covered in very beautiful paintings including a solar system and maps of India and Andhra Pradesh with the states and districts painted in different colors. There are large and very beautiful paintings of peacocks or happy children on either side of the front gate facing the village with a colorful sign that says: “Welcome to Our School”. School strength has been one of the deciding factors in prioritizing which schools the scheme addressed first and as such, Nadu Nedu schools tended to be larger than some of the other government schools. The schools have big yards, where children play during their recess, and freshly remodeled toilet and handwashing facilities. A Nadu Nedu school usually has between one and three small school buildings with a few classrooms and large verandas, where children eat lunch and smaller children often have their lessons.

The classrooms are nice and relatively large. At some of the schools the inside walls of the classrooms are painted with large and colorful paintings. The paintings inside the classrooms are more educational and often include multiplication tables from two to ten, the western alphabet in both capital and lowercase letters, Telugu grammar rules or parts of the human body. At other schools the classroom walls are strikingly bare compared to the colorful outsides. The paint on the walls is chipping off near the bottom and there are some smudges and writing on the back wall. If you turn to look closely, you can spot a small butterfly drawn with the same pen. The walls may have educational posters, decoration made by the children or educational signs provided by Save the Children and the Paulig Group.

There are 2-4 large fans on the ceiling, but they often stand still due to power-cuts. The children give a joint sigh of relief and clap when the fans turn back on. Classroom walls are lined with large bookshelves. Most of them are filled with books, but some carry the children’s lunch plates or miscellaneous materials. The two long walls on the sides of the

classrooms are lined with wooden windows which are always open but covered with metal grates to keep out monkeys. There is a small teacher's desk at the front of the classroom. Some of the classrooms are filled with new colorful Nadu Nedu desks for the children in vibrant green, blue, pink, red and orange, while others still have older metal desks with connected benches. Some of the classrooms do not have any desks and the younger children sit on the floor made up of large black stone tiles with thick cement grout in between. One of the classrooms in each of the Nadu Nedu schools also has a large TV mounted on the back wall, but it always has the protective plastic over it and looks like it has never been used.

Picture 6: Nadu Nedu Desks in a School in Farmland

Picture 7: Washing Up at a Nadu Nedu School in Treetops

The government schools that had not yet been part of the Nadu Nedu scheme were often smaller and in notably worse condition. Most of the schools only had a few classrooms, sometimes only one, and verandas running along the length of the school. The verandas open up onto the schoolyard or small streets, as some of the schools do not have schoolyards or compound walls. Here too, children eat their lunch sitting on the black stone tiled floor of the veranda. Several of the verandas have vibrant and welcoming paintings on the walls, including a large map of India with each state in a different color, India's national bird,

flower, tree, and animal, and happy children. A couple of the schools also have large paintings outside with either Child Rights written in Telugu or containing information on a free phoneline to call government officials in case of complaints regarding the school. Many of these schools do not have a toilet or a kitchen, and the children run home to use the bathroom during their breaks. At some of the schools I spot a few buckets of water on the veranda for hand and plate washing, and water-purifying systems that have come from the government. A few of the schools, however, are larger. They have two buildings around a central courtyard in an L-shape similar to some of the Nadu Nedu schools, and a line of water taps and separate toilets outside.

At a few of the schools the Cluster Assistants told me that before Save the Children came the schools had been in much worse condition, and you could clearly tell looking at them that some work has been done. The inside walls of the classrooms are either blank and rather dirty with paint peeling off in several areas, or covered in paintings made by Save the Children, typically including fruits and vegetables, animals, as well as shapes and colors with their names written underneath. Some of the schools also have a chart of body parts with arrows pointing to a light-skinned boy in a school uniform. The paintings are clearly older and more worn than the ones at Nadu Nedu schools, but they are still rather beautiful and liven up the space. Many of the classrooms also have posters on the walls, including informational posters from the project on Covid-hygiene and the different steps of hand-washing, and educational posters in English which show different kinds of plants, foods and inventors with the things they invented.

There are old-looking blackboards at the front of the classrooms, a small teacher’s desk, and several cabinets and bookshelves filled with books and miscellaneous items. The back walls are also lined with junk, piles of old plastic chairs or empty rice sacks. There are a couple of fans on the ceiling, but they are often still due to power cuts leaving everyone inside at the mercy of the slight breeze flowing through the open windows. Many of the schools do not have any desks for the children, who sit on a similar black stone tiled floor to that used in the Nadu Nedu schools, though a couple of the larger schools have some of the old blue-grey metal desks and benches still seen at some of the Nadu Nedu schools. Smaller children take their classes outside on the veranda. Here, too, there are long shelves on top of the windows carrying old schoolbooks, plastic globes and skeletons (from Save the Children) and discarded trash. The windows also have bars across them to keep out the monkeys, who like to wreak havoc on the piles of eggs and lunch that is stored on the floor of a classroom due to

the lack of a kitchen. At one school there is an electrical box near the top of the backwall, which some small birds have converted into a nest. They occasionally fly in and out of the open window and sit on the monkey grates watching the lesson.

Girls and boys tend to sit on different sides of the classroom in all of the project schools, either at their desks or in neat lines on the floor. The children have school uniforms, but typically only between half and two thirds of children in a given classroom were wearing them. Vijay, Hillside's Cluster Assistant, told me that the government provides the materials for school uniforms along with some money to get the uniforms made at a tailor, but the allocated sum is not always sufficient to have the uniforms made. Many of the children wear old uniforms or other clothing. Their clothes look relatively clean but are clearly worn and mended with clasps sewn over broken zippers. Several of the girls have flowers in their braided hair.

Picture 8: Save the Children Paintings in a Treetops school

Picture 9: A "Junk Shelf" and Cabinet in a Treetops School

5. Working at Schools

Education has been seen by many as an effective strategy for lessening child labor in India and is generally viewed as one of the most important factors in improving the social and economic lives of children and their communities (Gayathri & Heydlauff 2016, 69; Cranston 2014, 356). The local employees, known within the project as "volunteers", spent the majority of their days teaching at their local schools. In Andhra Pradesh, school days typically last from 9.00am to 3.30pm and include four subjects: Telugu, English, Math, and Environmental Science. Some of the volunteers taught the same class or classes every day, while others taught different classes depending on the need and availability of teachers. Volunteers also took charge of other activities at schools such as improving children's hygiene, teaching Covid-awareness, and leading the schools' Children's Groups. They also helped teachers take attendance in the mornings and supervised the beginning of lunch before heading home for their own lunchbreak. The volunteers also gave children tuition after school, and during the lockdown and summer holidays.

Like the local teachers from the NGO school in Varanasi (see Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 127), the volunteers said that teaching the children made them happy and that they were proud to teach the children of their village. When I asked volunteers what they had enjoyed the most in the project, several responded that they had liked the children at their schools, and enjoyed teaching as well as other "happy moments with the children", such as playing games. In this chapter I explore the many challenges of teaching rural children in the aftermath of the pandemic and the way volunteers were able to fill in some of the gaps in the official school system. I also describe the teaching and other activities taken on by the volunteers at the project schools, demonstrating why their work has been so important to both the children and the schools at which they worked.

5.1. Challenges of Working in Schools

During the group interviews my question on what challenges the volunteers had faced at school was met with a lot of giggles, but not very many answers. Several of the volunteers chose to focus on challenges related to school facilities. Volunteers noted that their schools

did not have proper playgrounds and several schools had water problems, particularly in the availability of drinking water. One volunteer laughed and said that parts of the ceiling at her school kept falling down and a couple of others had had problems with their kitchen gardens. Volunteers also mentioned challenges that had to do with local infrastructure, such as bad phone or internet reception and power cuts. A few times I also observed children missing their first lesson at school because the rains of the night before had damaged local roads. Such challenges are important to note, as poor school facilities may discourage children from attending their local government schools (see Mattila 2011, 283).

Most of the volunteers told me that they had not had any problems with the headmasters or teachers at their schools, though of course it is possible that they were keeping things to themselves because the interviews were held with all the volunteers from one mandal at a time, often with the help of their Cluster Assistant as a translator. This positive sentiment was, however, also reflected by schoolteachers and headmasters. When I asked a headmaster in Hillside if there had been any challenges with the project so far, he told me that of course there are challenges with all projects, but that Save the Children had handled them well. He did not, however, elaborate on what these challenges had been.

There were two main sets of challenges, however, that were discussed with me more openly and that were also evident during my visits to the project schools. The first of these challenges had to do with the pandemic and resulting school closures, and the second had to do with a lack of teachers and having to teach several classes at once, which I return to later in this section. Volunteers complained that during the pandemic children had lost two years of education, but they had all been bumped up two classes despite not having had remote learning opportunities outside of the remedial classes held by the volunteers. They told me that lessons had been very difficult, because children lacked the knowledge that was expected of them by the syllabus. This had been a big problem in all of the schools.

I observed several lessons where the volunteers had to use different methods to try to help the children catch up with the state curriculum. A few times I noticed volunteers using the wrong workbook in class indicating that they were trying to help children catch up with the lessons they had missed the year before. For example, one volunteer taught a 4th standard science class using a 3rd standard workbook. I also believe that some of the volunteers changed their lesson plans when I visited so that the children would struggle less in keeping up with the

lesson and be able to participate more actively. The most typical example of this was 3rd or 4th standard children repeating and leading each other in reciting the alphabet in English.

I also observed several instances where children were clearly struggling in class with activities that I would have assumed that children their age would have been able to easily accomplish. The example below shows how a volunteer had to change her approach after noticing that children in her classroom were still struggling to read a familiar rhyme off the board:

> The [2nd standard] class goes back to repeating words on the board. They form a rhyme in Telugu, which the class repeats after the volunteer a few times. Then one of the girls is called up to the front. She looks a little nervous as she takes the pointing stick from the volunteer and begins to lead the class in reciting the rhyme again. She stumbles several times and the volunteer has to whisper the next line to her. The same thing happens with the next girl who comes up to lead the group. I get the sense that the children have tried to memorize the rhyme and don't yet know how to read it off the board. After the struggles of the second girl the volunteer goes back to leading the class herself, trying to break down each word as she goes.
> – 29.7.2022. Farmland, school #2

Volunteers and project staff also noted that the time at home during the lockdown had resulted in an increase in "slow learners", concentration issues, and restlessness in class. Volunteers said that one of their main activities at school was to try to pay special attention to helping "slow learners", of whom there were now many more than previously. The volunteers also complained that during the time away from school, children got used to consuming a lot of media, including movies and television series, and that as a result they were now having trouble concentrating on their studies. This had clearly become a big challenge in many of the schools. Some of the volunteers said that they had sometimes struggled to understand the children and their needs.

Volunteers and other members of the project staff similarly complained about children's decreased motivation. Both volunteers and other members of project staff told me that children were not interested in school anymore after the year and a half they had spent at home during the lockdown. Volunteers from Hillside also noted that this lack of interest was reinvigorated during school holidays and that it was sometimes challenging to get children to come back to school after a holiday. This lack of interest in school is particularly explicit in this example from a lesson in Farmland:

> Two more 2nd standard girls arrive late to class. One of them goes straight to sit with the others, but the other girl stops to talk to the volunteer. She says that a boy (perhaps her brother) had told her to tell the volunteer that he is not coming to school today because he wants to play at home all day and not come to school. The volunteer and Karthik laugh, and Karthik comes over to translate what the child had said. – 6.8.2022. Farmland, school #4

The second key challenge, a lack of sufficient teaching staff, also came up at several of the project schools and was brought up by many of the volunteers in all three of the group interviews. It is also in line with other research done in school settings in India (see e.g. Mattila 2011, 283). The excerpt from my fieldnotes below is from a conversation I had with the headmaster of one of the project schools in Treetops. The headmaster was very eager to talk to me and invited me into his office during my visit to tell me about the impact the volunteer had had at the school and express his frustrations at his limited teaching staff.

> The headmaster tells me that the school has 130 children but only 3 teachers, the volunteer, and the headmaster. The headmaster himself is tied up with administrative work most of the day, and only teaches 6th and 7th standard math in the afternoon. Apparently, the school has been approved to have up to nine teachers, but the government has not been able to fill the posts. The headmaster feels neglected by the Education Department and believes that the Department is encouraging private education.
> Before covid the school had 170 children, but due to the limited number of teachers, several of the children have switched over to private schools. Some of them have also relocated to a government "Model School" near [the mandal center]. --Throughout the conversation I get the feeling that the headmaster is genuinely worried and frustrated about the lack of teachers. He brings up his fears surrounding his limited staff several times unprompted. I'm thrilled that someone is finally really opening up to me about this. – 12.8.2022. Treetops, school #9

The lack of sufficient teaching staff is also evident from the statistics on enrollment and teachers that Save the Children had collected at the beginning of the previous school year in the summer of 2021. At the time, the project schools had a total of 3303 children enrolled with a total teaching staff of 135 and 8 vacant teaching positions. This averages to 24.5 students/teacher, but the student to teacher ratio varied from 13 at one of the smallest schools to 40 at one of the larger MPP schools. Based on my general observations and conversations with school staff in the field, it appears that several of the project schools had lost some of their teaching staff in the year since these statistics had been collected and it is also worth noting that some teachers did not come to school regularly.

There are many reasons why the government schools involved in the project have suffered from insufficient staffing. Perhaps the most obvious has to do with the limited state budget allocated to education and the salary of teachers. I was told by project staff that the state of Andhra Pradesh has raised the salaries of teachers and headmasters in an attempt to meet the demands of teachers and incentivize others to join the profession. This pay increase has not, however, been mirrored in the funds allocated to education, which means in practice that the government has not been able to employ as many teachers as before. A couple of the schools also had teachers who had been absent for a longer period of time due to health problems and resulting medical leave and some of the schools complained that it can be difficult to find teachers for specific subjects.

Another key limitation to the availability of teachers has to do with the long distances they have to travel for work. In Andhra Pradesh, the state controls the placement of teachers, who typically have no say in which school they will be placed. Staff shortages appear to disproportionately affect rural, hard-to reach schools such as those participating in the project, as teachers do not want to accept these positions due to their remote location or distance from their homes. Some teachers have to travel up to two hours to reach the schools and project staff noted that teachers are often very tired at school because of their long commutes, which in turn affects their teaching. It is also challenging to find female teachers for rural schools, due to a lack of public transportation and the fact that few women have their own scooters to commute with or feel safe taking on such long commutes alone:

> [The Cluster Assistant] Sunil brings in a red “Suggestion box” from the adjacent room… He pulls out a single suggestion from the box and reads it quickly to himself. He tells me that it is a “teacher problem”. There are officially seven teachers in the school, but at the moment only three of them are actively coming to school. I ask him why and he tells me that the teachers don’t want to travel to the school, because it is in such a remote location and traveling takes so long. – 4.8.2022. Hillside, school #1.2

Some schools have also lost staff due to teacher transfers and mergers with larger MPUP schools in the village. A couple of smaller schools had had their teachers transferred elsewhere, leaving them with only a headmaster, who was left in charge of teaching all the children on top of taking care of all the administrative work. Towards the end of my fieldwork, Sunil, the Cluster Assistant at Hillside, also brought up that teacher transfers were coming up again in September and many teachers were likely to change schools. Teacher transfers were likely to lead to vacancies, which meant that the work of the volunteers in

schools would be even more important in September and beyond (after the project had ended).

It is interesting that headmasters were left as the sole staff members at these schools given that they are not supposed to be in charge of teaching. At a school in Farmland, I spoke to a headmaster of an MPP school, who told me that there was only one teacher at the school in addition to himself and that in Andhra Pradesh the headmaster is only supposed to do administrative office work and not take on the main teaching responsibilities. He complained that the government would not allocate more teachers to the school because the school strength is so low and expressed his wish for the volunteer to stay longer stating that: “We need the volunteer because there are five classes”.

Due to the lack of teachers, volunteers were often pushed to teach two or even three standards at once. In some cases, this had to do with temporary absences, but in several of the schools this was the norm for the volunteers. Several of the volunteers said that they had found it challenging to teach many classes at once and it was clear that they had had to develop different teaching techniques to adapt to the changing demands of teaching at school. This was the same for the teachers, many of whom I observed teaching up to three different curriculums in the same classroom.

Volunteers typically approached teaching two or more standards at once either by choosing to teach the same curriculum to the whole group or by trying to conduct two parallel lessons where one group at a time would get more attention, while the other(s) focused on independent work. Opting for the first approach was common especially when teaching the youngest children in the school. As most of the children were still behind with their studies due to the lockdown and resulting school closures, teaching the same curriculum to older students at the same time as the “correct” age group was a way to help them catch up with their studies and often worked quite well. Sometimes, however, older children felt bored with the repetition and “easy” lessons, while younger children struggled to keep up as they had not learned the curriculum of the year(s) before. Teaching was particularly challenging in classes with three or more age groups taking part in the same lesson. An example from a very small school in Treetops shows a particularly chaotic lesson where a stressed-out volunteer struggled and finally gave up trying to control a class with children from 1st to 5th standard during my visit:

> The boys sitting at the back have started hitting each other again and a particularly disruptive boy gets up and runs to the other side of the room smacking everyone across the head as he goes. One girl holds her head and goes to tell the volunteer, but the volunteer doesn't pay her any attention and keeps writing on the board. One of the boys in the back has gotten up and is dancing.
>
> The volunteer tries to get the class to repeat after her in Telugu. Around half of them repeat after her, though this time in more of a mumble than a shout. A group of girls has started whispering together near the front of the class and the boys in the back are hitting each other again. A boy from the front of the class is called up to lead the others in repeating the words on the board. A few of his classmates follow his lead.
>
> The disruptive boy comes over to me and tries to talk to me about the rain, which started a few minutes ago. He also tries to tell on his classmates, even though it is perfectly clear to me that he has started all the fights. The volunteer is still not paying him any attention. I tell him to sit down. The boys at the back have started rolling around on the floor kicking each other. Finally, the volunteer tells them to sit down and be silent. - 27.7.2022. Treetops, school #8

This example shows how chaotic, overwhelming and exhausting it can be to try to keep a classroom engaged when it is full of children of different ages and levels of education. This is an extreme example and I believe that typically the school's headmaster taught half of the children. During our visit, however, he stepped out to take care of administrative work leaving the volunteer in charge of the whole school at once.

The other option, conducting two parallel lessons in the same classroom, also came with its own set of benefits and challenges. On the one hand, the volunteers were able to tailor separate lesson plans to fit in with the expected curriculums of each group, but on the other hand, one group was almost always getting more attention. It was also more challenging for the volunteer to monitor the whole class at once and sometimes the volunteers depended on older children or "class leaders" to help. The next example shows a condensed version of a lesson in which the volunteer was teaching 1st and 2nd standard Telugu in the same classroom. Here we can see how the volunteer focuses on each group in turn, making sure that the other group always has independent exercises to be working on. Though some of the children were concentrating on their assignments more than others, the classroom remained relatively calm and attentive, and older children stepped up to help the younger children when the volunteer was preoccupied checking the students' work:

A [1st standard] girl comes up to lead the class [in repeating a list of words from a poster on the classroom wall]. While she points and reads, a 2nd standard girl comes up to show the volunteer her slate [small blackboard]. The girl leading the class begins to struggle near the midway point of the list. The volunteer is concentrating on the 2nd standard girl and does not notice, but a 2nd standard boy looks up from his writing and helps the girl finish reading. The class claps for the girl and she sits down. The girl is followed by a small boy who also struggles with the reading. The volunteer gently takes a hold of the stick and together they point and read out the words for the others to repeat. --

The volunteer then swaps her attention to the 2nd standard children. The 1st standard children sit on the right side of the room a little farther from the front blackboard and the 2nd standard children come up to sit in front of the volunteer, who has taken her seat at the front again. The volunteer asks the children to recite a rhyme. -- The 1st standard children are supposed to be copying Telugu syllables on their slates, but only around half of them are working. Two 1st standard boys sitting in the back flip through one of their workbooks looking at colorful pictures. The volunteer glances up and says "slate" to the boys, but they keep looking at the pictures together. --

The 2nd standard children go back to their seats. It looks to me like there are a few different assignments going on now. Most of the children are concentrating on something, except for the two boys in the back. The volunteer stays at the front and there is constantly a handful of children waiting to show her something, ask a question, or get a new assignment. – 6.8.2022. Farmland, school #4

There was also one instance in which I observed a volunteer conducting two parallel classes in classrooms next door to each other. This school was relatively well staffed compared to many others, but there was a mandal-level teachers' meeting that day that many teachers were attending, so the school was temporarily severely understaffed. The volunteer did not appear to be used to teaching several classes at once and faced the additional struggle of the children sitting in their own separate classrooms, where she could not keep an eye on everyone at once. She was clearly a little flustered and on edge during our visit and I made a note that she was stricter and less smiley than many of the other volunteers. On a second visit, however, she appeared much more relaxed and joked around with the children more.

The majority of teachers and headmasters I spoke to were genuinely worried about the impact the volunteers leaving in September would have on lessons and group sizes. Their fears show that the volunteers were an integral part of the schools' daily operations as they made up for a lack of sufficient teaching staff and were able to notably lessen the workload of teachers,

particularly in smaller schools. The volunteers took on a huge amount of teaching responsibility at the schools and were quick to step up when additional help was needed. Though the work of the volunteers took place within the confines of the state curriculum, the needs and resources of the school, and the goals and guidelines of Save the Children, the volunteers were still free to make many day-to-day decisions in their classrooms and choose methods of teaching that worked best for them and their students. This level of freedom indicates some level of "partnership" or "delegated power" (see. Arnstein 2019) and in general it appeared that the volunteers' time and knowledge was met with openness and respect, even if they were not always involved in larger decisions made by the school.

In addition to these key challenges, the volunteers also complained about a new form of quality control used in the Nadu Nedu schools, a mobile application that requires all teachers (including volunteers) to take daily photos of the school's washrooms and lunch time as well as teachers' lesson plans. These pictures are then analyzed with artificial intelligence which will notify the school if the pictures do not pass certain "quality" parameters. In the case of toilets and lunch, this mostly has to do with cleanliness, but it was never explained to me how the application reads a photo of a written lesson plan. Though the idea of the application is good, it proved to be challenging to use in practice especially in areas with poor internet access. The application had only been in use for a few weeks when I first entered the field, so some teachers and volunteers were still struggling with getting the application to work properly and remembering to take the pictures every day. The application also added to the workload of teachers and volunteers, who had to write out their lesson plans specifically for the application and take daily pictures.

The volunteers also brought up a challenge that had to do with combining the values and expectations of the organization with those of the schools they worked at. Save the Children and the project's agenda stressed the importance of implementing child-friendly approaches to teaching, as they are in line with the organization's aim of encouraging child participation. Some of the volunteers said that they had enjoyed learning these new teaching techniques and were happy that the children had been exposed to a different way of teaching because of the project. The volunteers also noted, however, that child-friendly teaching can be difficult to implement in government schools, where it is often at odds with prevailing teaching methods and the typical hierarchy between students and teachers. Similar findings on the challenges to implement child-friendly pedagogies within the government school system were made by Sriprakash (2012) and Kumar (2019), as discussed in Chapter 2.

5.2. Bringing New Activities to School

In addition to teaching, Save the Children volunteers took charge of other activities in the schools that had previously been neglected or completely non-existent. Some of these activities came up at the request of school staff, but a large number of them had to do with the Save the Children project and its agenda. The volunteers represented the organization at the schools and took on a portion of the project's administrative work such as collecting data on teachers and the children's attendance. They also aimed to introduce new child-friendly methods of teaching and working with children, and conducted a Save the Children Back to School campaign at the beginning of the school year in July.

As a part of the project, the volunteers worked with the children in their villages both during lockdowns and summer holidays when schools were closed. Most of the volunteers said that they had typically held one to two hours of remedial classes a day during the summer holidays. This work was incredibly important as children were automatically moved forward to the next class as per their age when schools reopened after the pandemic, despite not having had any other remote learning opportunities during the lockdowns. At a school in Hillside, parents also expressed their wish for summer school to continue in the future to help bridge the gap between school years. Parents had been very happy with summer school that year, as it had made it easier for children to continue school again after the long summer holiday and they were worried that the summer school provided by the volunteers and the project's Mobile Resource Van would end if the project ended in September. Through highlighting the importance of summer school, parents exposed a gap in the official school system, which did not have the resources to provide remedial classes either after school or during the long summer holidays.

The volunteers also taught remedial classes during the school year to help children catch up to the curriculum. According to the volunteers, how this "tuition" was given depended on the school. One volunteer from Farmland said she gave tuition for one hour both before and after school every day. A few others told me that they gave tuition for two hours a day after school from 4-6pm. At these schools, the first hour was study time and the second hour consisted of fun activities such as drawing and games. Volunteers from Treetops and Hillside said that they typically gave tuition for one hour after school and that it was one of the activities in the project that they enjoyed the most. Project staff reminded me that teachers go home after the school day is finished and are not able to give remedial classes to the children after school,

unlike the volunteers, who live in the same village and have a significantly shorter commute. Unlike the independent NGO teacher who taught remedial lessons after school and the Aspire teachers, who taught remedial lessons during the school day (see Kumar 2019), the project volunteers stretched their workdays in order to teach the lessons.

Volunteers also took on new responsibilities during the school days themselves, such as improving the sanitation of schools and teaching children about proper hygiene practices. All of the volunteers told me they had helped to monitor handwashing at school and taught children the different steps of handwashing. These steps differed a little from school to school, but typically consisted of at least six steps with some schools adding one or two more. Volunteers had also helped with raising awareness around Covid and had helped distribute hand-sanitizer, face masks and other supplies from Save the Children to the schools.

School headmasters also recognized and were appreciative of this additional work done by the volunteers. At a school in Hillside, a happy headmaster told me that the school's volunteer had made sure that the school had enough soap and had worked on cleanliness awareness both with children and their parents. The headmaster also thanked the volunteer for trying to bring dropouts back to school and overall seemed very happy with the volunteer, telling me that the volunteer was always supporting him and the school. Similarly, a headmaster in Farmland told me that the school's volunteer had helped a lot with teaching as well as remedial classes, which she had also held during the summer holidays.

In addition to teaching, one of the most important roles of the volunteers was to support their school's Children's Group. Each school is supposed to have a Children's Group which meets regularly to discuss children's rights and school-related issues, but in several of the schools this was not the case before the project. Volunteers helped to organize the schools' Children's Groups and hold their meetings. The frequency of the meetings depended on the school and how active the children and volunteer were in organizing meetings. Some schools would have a short meeting at the end of every school day, while others held meetings once a week or every two weeks.

During the meetings, volunteers taught the children different child helpline numbers and discussed topics such as children's rights and preventing child marriage. They also taught the children leadership qualities with the hope that children would become empowered to share the things they had learned and discussed with the rest of the children at school. Volunteers also tried to help to change the behavior of the children for the better and taught them the

differences between “good touch” and “bad touch”. Many of the key themes discussed in the Children’s Groups were heavily influenced by Save the Children and were repeated in several of the schools. The volunteers did, however, have the power and freedom to decide how to cover these themes with the children. They also brought additional themes and activities to the groups and were able to lead the groups relatively independently. As such, the volunteers’ work with the Children’s Groups can be seen to fit into Arnstein’s (2019) higher rungs of citizen participation and can be seen either as a form of Delegated Power or Partnership.

The volunteers also appeared to have enjoyed their work with the Children’s Groups and were proud of what they had been able to teach the children. When I asked the Treetops volunteers what the most important part of their work in the project had been, one of the volunteers said with pride that the children know and understand their rights now. One of the headmasters in Treetops also brought up the work that Save the Children, and the volunteer in particular, had done to help raise children’s awareness of child rights. He believed that this work had been very important because learning about child rights allowed children to stand up for themselves, but also to teach these rights and help other children in the future.

I was able to attend five Children's Group meetings during my time in the project. These groups had between twelve and fifteen children each and were led by the school’s volunteer. I had hoped to be able to sit in on the meetings without being too much of a distraction, but it soon became evident that that would not be possible. The children were very excited by my visits and eager to show me what they had learned in the group, so a few of the meetings consisted mostly or partially of short presentations and performances. Though this was not what I had hoped for originally, it proved to be a good way of seeing what the children had learned, and I was happy to give each of the children their moment to shine.

Below is a slightly condensed example of one such Children’s Group meeting at a school in Treetops. At this meeting the volunteer was able to strike a balance between discussing the topics he had planned for the meeting and allowing the children in the group to perform songs and show me what they had learned in the group:

> The children all introduce themselves one at a time in English. They stand up and tell me their name, their class and the name of their school. The children are from 5th to 8th standard, but the majority are 6th to 8th. The volunteer also introduces himself when the children are done, and when he has finished I stand up and say: “My name is Lea, I am studying master’s degree in Tampere University and my village name is Tampere”. I also pull out my Tampere-

postcard from the pocket of my notebook and show it to everyone. They smile at me and clearly think it was fun that I participated.

The volunteer begins to speak. I catch the year 1947, which I assume is referring to India's independence. He also says something about free education, food and medicine. The children clap. Two of the girls stand up one at a time, introduce themselves again and recite Child Rights. They are followed by three girls who stand up to sing a song together. When they have finished, the volunteer speaks for a moment and then asks another one of the girls to recite the child helpline number. When she has finished, the volunteer takes a minute to go over all the different available helpline numbers with the children, explaining what each one is meant for. The volunteer and the children clap again, supposedly because it's nice that there are so many different helplines and services.

The meeting continues in a similar pattern. A couple of the children will give short performances or recite something and then the volunteer will speak for a moment. The children recite rhymes and the volunteer tells them about the importance of taking iron tablets monthly and reminds them that the project will be ending after next month. After a while all the girls stand and sing a song together. When they have finished, the volunteer asks two of the girls to sing another song and a couple of smaller groups get up to sing more songs. The volunteer says something about different talents and personalities which I think refers to the individuality of all the children. --

I ask the children if they are going to continue the children's group after the project ends at the end of next month and all the children shout out that they are eager to continue.
- 24.8.2022. Treetops, school #6.2

As in this example, presentations and performances in all of the Children's Groups usually started with a child standing up and introducing themselves to me in English, stating their name, their standard, and the name of their school. The presentations typically included reciting the four child rights in Telugu (usually one right per child) and reciting the child helpline number. Some of the children would also sing songs, recite rhymes, or tell stories either in English or in Telugu, which had to do with child rights, important daily habits, or other topics related to the group. The different stages of handwashing were also typically included in the presentations, and at one school in Farmland, the meeting was even moved from a classroom outside so that all the children could show me the stages in action:

One of the walls facing the courtyard has a line of water taps over a long sink. There is a Nadu Nedu painting on the top of the wall which shows different steps of handwashing, but the painting shows four steps instead of eight. The children all stand in a line in front of the

> water taps and the volunteer gives them soap. They lather it up for a while and some of them start demonstrating the steps on their own. The volunteer stops them and starts leading them in the demonstration from the beginning. They all count the eight steps together and show me the hand-motions of the different stages, washing their palms, fingers, and wrists in different ways. When they have finished all eight steps, the volunteer tells them they can go rinse off and they all turn around and go actually wash their hands at the water taps. – 23.8.2022. Farmland, school #5.2

The meetings were also a good opportunity for me to ask the children themselves what they had learned from the volunteers. Children's responses were similar to those of the volunteers and also reflected the common topics of conversation I observed during the meetings. For example at the school in Farmland above, children told me that they had learned about child rights and that they could now name the rights. They had also conducted meetings for the rest of the school where they had talked about child rights with the other children and taught them the eight steps of handwashing. The children told me that they had not known about child rights before the volunteer had come and helped them form the Children's Group. I also asked the children if they had faced any challenges in the group and they laughed and said there had been no challenges.

5.3. Emotional Support and Making Space for Fun

> The volunteer is very fun, quite laid back and gentle with the children. He is excited and smiles a lot. The children clearly like him a lot too. They look like they are having a lot of fun in class and ask him questions or shout out the occasional comment as they copy words from the blackboard into their notebooks. The volunteer jokes around with them as they write and everyone laughs. A couple of times the volunteer accidentally steps in front of the blackboard and a couple of girls in the back shout "Side sir!!". The class concentrates on copying the words for a while. – 17.8.2022. Hillside, school #10

The excerpt above is one of many examples from my fieldnotes of children having fun at school with the volunteers. The volunteers were kind, calm, gentle, fun, laidback and extremely present with the children. They were encouraging and proud of the children's accomplishments and would smile and nod when the children spoke in class or came over to show them their work. Several of the volunteers were able to create a relaxed, free, warm and

fun atmosphere both in their classrooms and the Children's Group meetings, which stood out against the more rigid, traditional forms of teaching employed by some of the permanent staff members, though this is not to say that the permanent staff members of the schools do not support the children or have fun with them. I observed several classes taught by teachers in which the children were clearly engaged and having fun.

Of course, each volunteer is different and some of the volunteers were also stricter or more "professional" than others. The volunteers were of different ages and had different educational backgrounds and amounts of previous experience of working with children and in schools specifically. The needs and resources of the schools also differed which meant that some volunteers had more time and space for fun activities, especially when they did not have to deal with the stress of teaching multiple standards at once. Despite these differences, the majority of volunteers appeared to be well liked by their students and I believe that the supportive and fun environment created by the volunteers at school is worth highlighting separately, as it has likely been a contributing factor of the project's success in improving school retention and fighting child labor in the project villages. Though children may not always have a say in whether or not they drop out of school for work, they may be more likely to stand up for their right to attend school if it is something that they enjoy.

Creating a warm and relatively free classroom environment appeared to be a key factor of fun and engaging lessons. This meant that even when volunteers used typical teaching methods, they were able to keep the children engaged and excited. The lesson described below was structurally similar to most math classes I observed in both the classrooms of teachers and other volunteers and consisted of group repetition followed by individual problems on the board. What stands out here, however, is not the methods of teaching, but the fun and supportive atmosphere created by the volunteer, which allowed children the freedom to express themselves and make mistakes without fear of being judged:

> The children are very energetic and look like they are having a load of fun in class. "One digit additions" is written in big letters on the top of the blackboard and the volunteer writes different additions on the board underneath it. The volunteer goes through a couple of additions together with the class: "What is this number?" "TWO!" "Very good! And what is this number?" "FIVE!" "Very good! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven! What is two plus five?" "SEVEN!!"
>
> Then it's the children's turn to come practice. A child comes up and correctly counts "1+5". The volunteer says "Very good!" and urges the class to clap for the student. A second student

> also correctly counts their addition to a round of applause from the room and a "Very good!" from the volunteer. The children come up to the board one at a time and each complete their own equation. They are very excited and raise their hands shouting to the volunteer when she goes to pick the next student to come up to the board. The children are beaming and some of them do a little celebratory happy dance as they come back to their seats from the blackboard.
>
> -- One of the boys is struggling at the blackboard. The class waits patiently, and the volunteer goes over to the boy and they do the equation together. When they are finished, she says "Very good" in her happy booming voice and the boy looks very pleased with himself.
> – 25.7.2022. Treetops, school #4

This example also shows how the volunteer stopped to help a student who was struggling at the front of the class. Similar instances were common in several schools both in class and during children's performances. The students would often look to the volunteers for support when they stumbled or got lost and the volunteers would gently help them continue. There was also a distinct warmth between many of the volunteers and the children at their schools and the volunteers looked proud when their students succeeded.

Some of the volunteers also got creative with their teaching techniques in order to make their lessons fun and engaging for the students. For example, during one lesson, a volunteer turned independent math practice into a speed game in order to motivate his students:

> The children proceed to do some exercises in their books. This appears to be a bit of a competition and each child rushes to complete their assignment as quickly as possible. When they get an exercise done, they run to the volunteer with their books. The volunteer checks their answers and says "Very good" or "Correct" occasionally adding "Next!" to indicate that the children should move on to the next question. The children are having a huge amount of fun. Their faces light up with pride when they've gotten a question correctly and they run to the volunteer and back to their desks as quickly as they can once they've completed a question. Some of the children jump over tables to get to him faster. – 26.7.2022. Treetops, school #5

In addition to creating an engaging atmosphere and trying new teaching techniques, the volunteers also built a sense of fun through the ways they expressed themselves and engaged with the teaching material:

> The volunteer picks up a workbook (Blossom 4) and begins to go through the butterfly-chapter with the children. She reads aloud one sentence at a time of the story and then stops to explain it to the children in Telugu or ask them a question about it in English. "How many

> butterflies?" "What color butterflies are there?" She is a fun, lively and engaged teacher and she acts out the story through hand motions and facial expressions as she goes. It's an absolute joy to watch her teach and the children are also clearly having a great time. There is a refreshingly free atmosphere in the class and the children laugh and shout their answers at the volunteer when she asks them something, sometimes speaking over each other. She gives each of them her full attention in turn, making sure they know she is fully present with them. They beam as they reply. -- Towards the end of the story the butterflies have survived a sudden rainstorm and dance together. The volunteer gives a little wiggle as she reads this part and asks the children who likes to dance. Everyone jumps up, raises their hand, and shouts that they do. – 4.8.2022. Hillside, school #1.2

This volunteer used her hands and facial expressions to help tell the children a story from their workbook. In acting out the story she made sure that the children understood the English-language story and kept them engaged by asking them the occasional question. The fun and relaxed atmosphere of the class also helped the children to stay engaged in the lesson and participate with confidence.

The volunteers were also able to spend some of their time at school teaching the children drawing and playing games. Volunteers in Farmland said that they had taught children skipping and volunteers in Hillside said that they had organized games for the children. Sometimes the volunteers were able to organize these fun activities during the school day, but often they took place during after-school tuition. Fun activities were also a part of the remedial classes during the lockdown and holidays, and in some schools they were used as an extra incentive for children to join the school's Children's Group. When I asked the children at a Children's Group meeting in Treetops what their favorite part of being in the group was, they told me that they enjoyed playing games and learning songs. A little later when I asked them what they had learned in the group they mentioned different songs and games, such as "kabaddi", "kho kho", cricket, skipping, musical chairs, "lemon spoon" and dancing. I had expected them to shout out "Child Rights" and "handwashing" as in many of the other schools, but these things did not come up, which shows just how important this "fun time" was for the children.

The visits of the Mobile Resource Van were another time for fun. Project staff told me that they tried to make sure there was always time at the end of school visits for watching a fun video on the screen at the back of the van, playing games, or acting out rhymes together. Volunteers also told me that the children enjoyed watching educational videos and cartoons

from the van and that the van attracted children in the village who did not attend school but wanted to come watch films too. Many of the school visits I accompanied ended with films from the back of the van, which the children clearly enjoyed and often sang along to.

My visits also appeared to be highly anticipated and exciting for the children at the schools and several times it was clear that some of the students had helped the volunteers prepare for the visits by planning a greeting for me at the front gate or picking me flowers ahead of time. I quickly realized that the hand-picked flower bouquets and children's performances were just as much for them as they were for me. Though I sometimes got the feeling I was missing out on "real" or "normal" lessons, I appreciated that the volunteers wanted to give the children a chance to come say hello or show off a little. For many of these children I was the first Western person they had seen outside of a tv-screen. An example from a classroom in Hillside shows how one of the volunteers encouraged some of his students to pick up the courage to come speak to me towards the end of their lesson:

> The girls in the front row have been turning around to look at me the most during the lesson. They start asking the volunteer about me and he tells them my name. The girls giggle and keep glancing over. The volunteer tries to encourage them to come over and ask "Your good name please?", but the girls are too shy. They speak in somewhat hushed voices, but it's perfectly obvious to me what is going on. The volunteer also offers up "Where are you from madam?", but this is too much for them too. They keep looking at a book on the desk, but the volunteer occasionally repeats the two lines to the girls in a hushed voice.
>
> I'm a little confused about what the class is meant to be doing and figure it might be about time to leave. Just as I start packing up, two of the girls pick up the courage to come over to me. The volunteer smiles at them encouragingly. One of the girls asks me my name and I tell her. I ask her what her name is and she looks a little taken aback, but answers smiling. The girls go back to the front giggling a little and right as I'm about to get up a third girl comes over to ask me where I am from. I tell her I'm from Finland and she too goes back to the front beaming. The volunteer looks incredibly proud of all three. – 11.8.2022. Hillside, school #8

In this chapter we have seen the many tasks volunteers took on at their local government schools. Through their work teaching children, organizing Children's Groups meetings, conducting remedial classes, and making space for fun, the volunteers were able to make up for gaps in the official school system and encourage children to advocate for their own education.

6. Working with the Community

> As we begin the drive to the next school, I notice that one of the walls of a building in the village says something in Telugu, with the words "Save the Children" behind it. I ask the Karthik and Sunil what it is, and they tell me that the painting is part of their aim to raise awareness of the importance of education and get parents to send their children back to school. The Telugu quote translates to: "Education is better than money". - 2.8.2022. Hillside

As seen in this quotation, Save the Children has been visible in the project villages outside as well as inside schools, and raising awareness on the importance and positive impacts of children's education within the local communities was a key part of the volunteers' work. The volunteers conducted home visits to meet with the parents of children who had dropped out of school or were at a risk of doing so and supported parents and community members to advocate for their children through village-level Parents' Monitoring Committees (PMC) and Child Protection Committees (CPC). Roberts and Chittooran (2015, 127) highlight that through building relationships with local parents, teachers can begin to change different misconceptions families have around education and encourage parents to support their children's education. In the case of the NGO school in Varanasi, avenues for this type of advocacy work had similarly included home visits and inviting parents and community members to school events (Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 127).

During the group interviews, several of the volunteers highlighted that the most important part of the project for them was to help stop child labor. As in the case of the locally-employed teachers in Varanasi, the volunteers' personal connection with the community motivated them to work hard and feel immense pride in their accomplishments (see Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 126-7). They were happy to make sure that children were coming to school and said that several parents had decided to send their children to school after the volunteers had spoken to parents as well as to farmers who had been employing children in (seasonal) agricultural work. Indeed, part of the volunteers' work was to maintain contact with farmers, teach them new farming techniques which would lessen the need for cheap child labor, and educate them on child rights. I attended one Farmer's Training organized by Save the Children, but since the majority of my fieldwork took place in schools I have decided to leave out the volunteers' work with farmers in this analysis. Instead, I will focus here on the volunteers' home visits and work with their local PMCs and CPCs. I will also discuss how the volunteers were able to use their local knowledge and contacts to aid this

work, and the sometimes uncomfortable mediating roles they took on as representatives of the organization they worked for, the schools they taught at, and the communities they belonged to.

6.1. Home Visits and Knowing the Children's Families

Home visits were a key aspect of the volunteers' work in the project. The volunteers continuously worked to find out if any children had dropped out or were at a risk of dropping out of school and kept track of absences. If a certain child was not coming to school, the volunteer would visit the child's home and ask their parents why the child was absent. The main purpose of these visits was to try to motivate parents to let their children continue their education instead of going to work in the fields with the parents. A similar approach was employed by some of the teachers at the NGO school in Varanasi, particularly in an attempt to encourage the education of girls, who were underrepresented at the school (Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 127).

The volunteers typically conducted home visits alone and had the freedom to determine the frequency of visits and how to approach the visits with each family. This freedom shows that volunteers were viewed as trusted partners of both the schools and Save the Children and indicates a level of delegated power (see Arnstein 2019). Home visits typically took place in the evenings after school and all the volunteers told me in the group interviews that they had done home visits during the project. The frequency of home visits depended on how many children were absent from school. The volunteers from Farmland told me that they would collect a list of absent children from school every day, so they would know which homes to visit. They said they typically did three to four visits a week if several children were absent. Similarly, the volunteers from Treetops and Hillside noted that the frequency of the visits depended on the situation. In Hillside some volunteers had visited children's homes daily especially towards the beginning of the project, while others had visited homes two to three times a week or less.

During home visits, the first priority for the volunteers was to find out why the absent children were not coming to school. Sometimes the children were absent because they had gotten sick or had another health problem. In other instances, children had stopped coming to

school because they had started working in the fields or there was a problem in the family. According to the volunteers from Hillside, some common reasons parents stated for their children missing school included family problems, such as an alcoholic father, and financial problems, which led parents to take their children out of school to work and contribute to the household income. These challenges named by the volunteers are in line with the family situations described in the project's case studies as well as the research on the typical factors leading to child labor as presented in Chapter 2.

Roberts and Chittooran (2015, 127) note that one of the main raisons for low school retention is the fact that parents do not understand the importance of education (see also Samantroy 2021, 6). Contact between teachers, or in this case volunteers, and local parents can thus be an important avenue to help raise awareness on the importance of education among parents, especially when parents lack a formal education and may feel uncomfortable engaging with the school (Roberts & Chittooran 2015, 127.) The Hillside volunteers similarly noted that many parents are not educated and are not aware of the importance of education. Parents' ignorance and ambivalence towards education can lead them to take their children out of schools for short or prolonged periods of time, as is evident from the following discussion between a worried parent and headmaster at a PMC meeting in Hillside:

> There is a little bit of murmuring in the audience and then a father at the back asks a question. It is later translated to me that he is worried about why his child in 4th standard is not doing well in school. The headmaster answers him by saying that the child had been out of school for a month and had fallen behind. - 11.8.2022. Hillside, school #1.3

This father placed all responsibility of his child's learning onto the school, failing to acknowledge his own accountability and the effect that his decision to keep the child out of school for a month had had on the child's learning.

At another PMC meeting the local chairman of the PMC gave a speech which he had clearly written ahead of time for the occasion, in which he reiterated several times the village's appreciation of Save the Children and its wish to continue collaboration even after the potential end of the project. He requested that Save the Children stay in the school and community forever, even if only in a small role and noted that most of the parents in the village are illiterate and that they wished for the organization to stay and help their children to learn. He said that their children's education was very important to the families and that the parents of the village all wanted to work to support Save the Children.

What is of particular interest here is that at this school's parents were so adamant in expressing their interest in taking responsibility for and participating in the education of their children alongside Save the Children and their local school. The wish of parents to ensure that their children received a better education than they had, though not uncommon, was clearly at odds with the complaints of some of the volunteers who said that parents often lacked a respect for education and did not see its value, particularly when in direct competition with the monetary benefits of sending their children to work. This disconnect does not mean that parents were disingenuous in their wish to contribute to their children's education, but instead points to discrepancies in how parents viewed and valued education as a whole and the lengths they were willing to go to in order to support it.

During the visits, the volunteers would tell parents to send their children to school daily and not take them to work in the fields. They also told parents what the children had missed in school and explained to the parents that it is important that their children do not fall (further) behind with their schoolwork. The volunteers would try to explain to the parents what the future of their child may look like if the child drops out of school and reminded them of the benefits of government schools such as free mid-day meals and schoolbooks. One of the volunteers from Hillside told me he would often tell the parents things like "Child life is important", "We have to care about our children's life, don't spoil their life", and "If you don't educate your child, your child will have to work hard like you".

Another key aim of the visits was for the volunteers to try to identify the socio-economic situation of families and introduce them to available social protection schemes of the Andhra Pradesh state government, in order to combat some of the root causes of child labor outlined in Chapter 2. During my first week in the project in late July, the Project Coordinator Ravi told me that the project had thus far helped to link approximately 850 families to available social protection schemes. Out of these families around 550 had gotten government insurance cards for the first time. Sunil, one of the Cluster Assistants, also mentioned a scheme which pays parents if their child attends school regularly. The aim of this scheme is to lessen the financial incentive of parents to bring their children to work with them in the fields.

This aspect of the volunteers' work was clearly important to them too, and was highlighted in each of the three group interviews. Volunteers from Farmland told me their local communities had previously been unaware of government facilities and schemes, and the volunteers had been happy to tell them and help them get connected. Volunteers from

Treetops were similarly proud of their accomplishments in connecting families to schemes which help to reduce poverty, a common cause behind children joining agricultural labor. Volunteers from also Hillside told me with pride that they had been able to find financial help for single-parent households by talking to local stakeholders about the families in question, and that they had helped some particularly vulnerable children in their villages move out of their homes and join residential hostel schools.

This aspect of the volunteers' work was clearly dependent on their local knowledge and personal relationships with fellow village-members, which allowed them to have open and deeply personal conversations with some of the most vulnerable families in their villages. As we can see in the example from Hillside above, volunteers were also able to help some families by speaking to local stakeholders about single-parent households and finding them help from within the community itself. Parents also expressed their gratitude for the volunteers' efforts to inform them about and connect them to available social protection schemes, which shows that there have been challenges in ensuring that information about available state government schemes reaches families in remote locations.

The volunteers from Treetops and Farmland claimed that they had not experienced any challenges working with the community or the parents of the children at their schools. The volunteers from Hillside, however, expressed some frustrations about working with parents and other community members. Some of the project villages suffered from village-level political issues and casteism which got in the way of the volunteers' work. The volunteers also noted that you cannot force parents to send their children to school, and motivating the parents to keep their children in school had been very difficult especially during chili season. A few of the volunteers had also had to deal with alcoholic parents and disruptive community members who had come onto school grounds during holidays to "drink and play cards" (gamble) and break school property. These examples show again that some parents and other community members lacked respect for education and school property.

Despite these challenges, the home visits appear to have been a great success. Cluster Assistants and volunteers from several villages told me with pride that child labor and child marriage had decreased notably during the project. At a small school in Treetops the Cluster Assistant Nikhil told me that the school had gotten a lot of help from Save the Children and doubled the number of children enrolled since 2017, commenting that "We became a child-labor free village." Ravi, the Project Coordinator, also stressed the importance of the home

visits, telling me that the volunteers educating parents on the importance of education was one of the main reasons that so many children are now enrolled in schools. In Treetops, this newfound appreciation of education had even led some parents to ask the volunteers if the project could organize night school for them. The parents were motivated to improve their own education and wished to learn basic reading and writing. I was told that many of them did not know how to sign their own names.

School headmasters, teachers, and members of the Parents' Monitoring Committees also recognized the impact of the volunteers' home visits and expressed their gratitude. The chairman of a PMC in Treetops made a point to tell me that before the project some of the children in the village were working in chili and cotton fields daily. She said that the volunteer had helped to raise awareness of child rights among the children and the community and that she had been a "super volunteer". Similarly, parents at a PMC meeting in Farmland told me that the volunteer is very important to their children and their children's education and that the volunteer had helped to pass information from the school to the community.

The fear that drop-out rates would increase when the volunteers stopped going on home visits after the project ended was also brought up by headmasters and other staff members at project schools. The school staff's concern that the volunteers' leaving would lead to increased drop-out rates shows the importance of their advocacy work within the community and points to a gap in the outreach of the official school system. It is also worth noting that this kind of role had not existed in the area prior to the project. As teachers tend to come from different villages, they often lack personal relationships and contact with parents outside of Parent's Monitoring Committee meetings and other official events. The teachers are also unable to meet with parents outside of school hours, as some have to travel for up to two hours to get home from school.

As evidenced in the above examples, volunteers were able to make use of their local knowledge and contacts in many ways which positively impacted their work during home visits. Perhaps the most obvious advantage is their prior knowledge of the families and children in the village. Especially in the smaller villages, it was likely that as local members of the community, the volunteers already knew all of the families well before the start of the project, and as such had an idea of which children were the most vulnerable and what sorts of reasons led to them to drop out of school. This background as a community member also

helped parents to feel comfortable opening up about their possible financial and familial struggles to the volunteers, who were then in turn better equipped to suggest social protection schemes and combat some of the root causes of child-labor and dropping out of school. Volunteers were also more likely than teachers or other project staff to be able to identify local children who had never attended school or had dropped out a long time ago and were missing from the attendance lists at school.

The volunteers' work with families during the home visits was also informed and aided by their existing understanding of local employers, work opportunities, and farming seasons. Some of their advocacy work and training was targeted directly at local farmers, but this knowledge also allowed volunteers to have more in-depth conversations with families about the risks of (local) agricultural work that their children took part in, and how it affected their education. Volunteers also knew when drop-out rates were likely to increase due to seasonal labor, which affected children particularly during peak chili season. This meant that they had been able to double down on their efforts ahead of time and be more attentive to absences during the season itself.

6.2. Supporting the Parents' Monitoring Committees and Child Protection Committees in the Villages

Each of the project villages has a Parents' Monitoring Committee (PMC) and a Child Protection Committee (CPC). Both of these committees are made up of local community members and discuss topics related to Child Rights and education, but from different perspectives and through the participation of different stakeholders in the village. These committees exist independently of Save the Children, but several of them did not function properly (or even exist) prior to the project, and supporting the PMCs and CPCs was a key aspect of the volunteers' work. This work has been vital, as the participation of community members suffers when they do not receive adequate support and preparation for how to participate in different kinds of school associations (Pellini 2007, 154-155). School headmasters also acknowledged the impact of the volunteers' work with the PMCs.

All of the volunteers said in group interviews that one PMC meeting and one CPC meeting were conducted monthly in their villages, though at the CPC meeting I observed in Treetops, a teacher who had temporarily taken over as headmaster told me that they organized two PMC meetings per month. The school headmasters set the dates and times for the PMC meetings, sometimes with the help of the chairman of the PMC. In Treetops, the headmaster and PMC chairman would also inform the parents about meeting times, but in Hillside and Farmland, volunteers would go to the children's homes and invite parents to the meetings once the headmaster had set the next meeting time.

Parents are eligible to join the PMC if their child is enrolled in the (local government) school. Every two years, the parents of each class in the school will elect three parents to join the committee. After the members are elected, they choose a chairman and a vice chairman. The meetings I attended had between 11 and 24 mothers present (av. 15), 0 to 8 fathers (av. 3.5), and at two of the meetings a few of the parents attended with their small children. The volunteers claimed to be present at all of the PMC meetings. Some of the volunteers in Hillside even said that their schools would only conduct the meetings in the volunteer's presence, though on the same day as their interview one of the volunteers was teaching in a classroom next door during a PMC meeting and only helped with setup. The volunteers were, however, present at the other six PMC meetings that I attended. In addition to the volunteers, the Cluster Assistants were present at nearly all of the meetings I attended, though this could be due to the fact that some of the meeting times had been changed on short notice by the Cluster Assistants so that I could come see the meetings and meet some of the parents. The school headmasters and one or two teachers attended the PMC meetings when possible.

The PMC is in charge of school-related issues and children's development, and common topics of discussion include the behavior and performance of children in the school, dropouts, the quality of mid-day meals, and school sanitation. According to a headmaster in Treetops the PMC had been able to affect school budgeting by raising important issues that parents had noticed in the school. According to Sunil, the Hillside Cluster Assistant, the state government has also set guidelines and provided materials for the work of the PMCs. According to these guidelines, one of the main roles of the PMC is to monitor not only the school but also the government's participation in the school such as the implementation of the Nadu Nedu program in chosen schools. At one PMC meeting Sunil also spoke about different scholarships available for disabled children and reminded the parents that it is the committee's job to monitor whether or not eligible children are receiving these scholarships.

Volunteers said that they often discussed different problems at the schools with the parents such as fans or lights not working, the function or sanitation of toilets, and a lack of water and drinking water or functioning water taps or tanks. At one PMC meeting, a group of irritated mothers similarly complained that the washrooms are not clean or hygienic and that there is often not enough water at school for the toilet, handwashing and plate washing. Parents also frequently brought up questions or complaints surrounding the government-provided mid-day meals at school. For example, at a PMC meeting in Hillside, parents complained that until recently there was no shed for food storage at the school and there were many disruptive monkeys in the area, which had made storing lunch out in the open very difficult. At this school, the Andhra Pradesh government had funded metal grates for the windows at the school and the monkey problem had gotten much better. At another Hillside school parents said that their children had found worms in their mid-day meals, that the rice was old and that the quality of food was bad overall. These issues had led several children to skip school lunches and go home for mid-day meals at both of the schools, which put additional (financial) pressure on parents.

Parents at PMC meetings often also stressed their wish for the project to continue and the volunteers also told me that several of the parents in their village had asked them not to leave the school. In general, the parents were very grateful for the work of the volunteers at the schools, and their main worries when it came to the end of the project were twofold. One main concern was for the future of their children's education and the progress made by the project, which parents feared would suffer when the volunteers stopped working at the schools. The second main concern had to do with the end of the home visits, which in turn meant the end of both the volunteers' mediating role between the village and the school as well as their help connecting families to available social protection schemes.

The PMC meetings I observed lasted around 15-35 minutes and typically included a few short speeches from school staff, the Cluster Assistant and the volunteer. Meetings also made space for parents to ask questions or express concerns or complaints, and one of the meetings included a short speech from the chairwoman of the PMC. During the meetings the volunteers typically stood towards the back of the classroom taking photos. They would also help make sure latecomers found a seat and walked around the room halfway through the meeting collecting everyone's signature for the "minutes of the meeting", which in practice, was just a list of attendees. At a few of the meetings the volunteers also helped to hand out fabric facemasks or biscuit packets provided by Save the Children.

The volunteers also used PMC meetings as avenues to pass parents important messages. Toward the beginning of the project, volunteers had used the PMC meetings to tell parents about Save the Children's Back to School campaign and they frequently informed the parents of how many children were studying and what kinds of needs the school had. Volunteers from Farmland and Hillside also noted in their group interviews that PMC meetings were a good place to introduce a larger number of parents at once to the available government schemes they often discussed during home visits, and ask families if they were receiving benefits. Volunteers from Treetops also said that they would occasionally bring up chili farming with the parents, as teaching different tips and tricks for achieving a better yield was one of the aims of the project.

Volunteers, teachers and headmasters also used the meetings to talk to the parents about the differences between public schools and private schools and try to make the parents more appreciative of their children's public-school education. In the following example, one of the volunteers jokingly shares his personal experiences of the differences between private and public schools at a PMC meeting in Hillside:

> … the volunteer begins to speak to the parents. He had come to stand at the front of the class next to Sunil earlier, after he had finished taking photos of the meeting. I make out that the volunteer is talking about the differences between government and private schools. He says something funny and the headmaster gives a little laugh and several of the parents smile. He makes a few other offhand jokes throughout his speech and the parents occasionally break into smiles as he speaks.
>
> Sunil tells me later that the volunteer had told the parents that government schools are better than private schools. In government schools teachers are more educated, whereas private schools often have interns teaching the children. The volunteer had also told the parents that his own children went to private school and he had made a joke about questioning the teachers there. Apparently if you question the teachers in private schools they will not welcome you anymore. - 17.8.2022. Hillside, school #3.2

The aim of the volunteer's speech was to encourage parents to appreciate government schools. This was important, as it would make parents more likely to keep allowing their children to attend school and help them to look past the many challenges faced by the school. By joking around about private schools, the volunteer also reduced the possibility that parents might force their children to work in order to cover future private school tuition fees.

Child Protection Committees, sometimes also known as Village Child Protection Committees, are similarly mandated by the state government. In practice, this means that the order to form the committees comes from the state, but each village forms its committee internally. According to Ravi, committees usually have around fifteen members, though the size will differ slightly based on the size of the village. The members typically include a few staff members from the local school(s) as well as other stakeholders such as the local anganwadi (preschool) teacher, a pediatric nurse, the village's "lady constable", potential government volunteers and influential community members that may or not be parents of children at the local school. CPCs also have a few child members, and they tend to focus their discussions on Child Rights and ways to ensure that they are respected in practice in the village.

Both Ravi and some of the volunteers noted that despite the state government's mandate, CPCs were not functioning properly at the start of the project and Save the Children had been working to strengthen the Committees. Some of the villages had not had a CPC at all and the Committees were formed with the help of the project. As in some of the case studies presented in Chapter 2, these comments show that state mandates or guidelines do not in and of themselves ensure the participation of community members in practice, and that communities lacked the motivation and resources to discuss and improve children's rights locally before the push from the project.

As with the PMC meetings, the volunteers assisted with CPC meetings by gathering community members, engaging all government stakeholders, and helping to conduct the meetings. The volunteers said they were present at all CPC meetings. Farmland volunteers said that the CPC meetings were a place to discuss health-related issues, such as vaccinations and that a local nurse came to school once a month to give the children iron tablets. They also noted that there is a lady constable in every village, who attends the CPC meetings, talks about ways to protect children from abuse, and explains the differences between good touch and bad touch. Volunteers from Treetops had used the meetings to teach the members of the CPC the child helpline number and talk to them about ways to prevent child marriages in their villages (though they noted that child marriages were currently not a problem).

I was only able to attend one CPC meeting during my time in the field. At this meeting, there were three female teachers and one male teacher present along with the school "ayya" (caretaker). One of the teachers had temporarily taken over as headmaster. The local

anganwadi (preschool) teacher and pediatric nurse were also present along with two government volunteers, who are in charge of 50 families each and help them with government administration such as applying for birth certificates. There were also three other adult members of the CPC present along with 15-20 children from the school. I was told by Farmland volunteers later that there are usually four children in the CPC, but the number can depend on the village. I assume that this meeting had allowed more children to attend because of my visit.

At this meeting, there were short speeches from the acting headmaster delivering updates on the PMC, from the Cluster Assistant on child labor and child abuse, and from one of the government volunteers on child marriage and the role of the lady constable in supporting families and children at risk of child marriage. The Save the Children volunteer spent the beginning of the meeting taking pictures at the back of the room and later came to the front to tell the committee that next month would be the last month of the project. The second half of the meeting was filled with some of the children coming up one at a time to demonstrate the different stages of handwashing, recite rhymes and Child Rights, and sing songs.

Both the PMCs and the CPCs shared the challenge of finding a meeting time that worked for all participants. I believe that meetings were most often conducted in the evenings after school, when the parents had left their work in the fields for the day. However, all the meetings I observed were held during the day, partially on the request of the Cluster Assistants, which clearly impacted the turnout at the meetings. At one meeting held around 9.40am in Hillside, Sunil told me upfront that “This is working time” which meant that many parents had already gone to the fields, and we were not likely to have a full house. Similarly, at a PMC meeting in Farmland I was told that there are usually between 30 and 40 parents present at the meeting, but there were less that day because it was cotton season and many of the parents were at work. This meeting was also held rather early in the day instead of during the parents’ lunchbreak, and ended up being quite short, as the parents were in a hurry to get back to work.

Though a few of these meetings were moved to coincide with my visits at the schools, some of them had been scheduled at strange times to begin with. At one school in Farmland the volunteer told us that there was supposed to be a meeting starting soon in the village, but that there were only going to be three members present because it was farming season and all the parents were at work. We skipped the meeting, as did the volunteer, who was busy at school.

In the evening I asked Ravi why the meeting had been scheduled for 2pm on a Friday and he looked surprised, responding that the volunteer clearly had not been doing her job properly if no-one was coming to the meetings. On the same day I visited another school in Farmland where no one had shown up to a meeting because there were free vaccines being distributed in the village that day.

Despite these scheduling mishaps, the impact of the volunteers to the functioning of the PMC and CPC meetings appears to have been overwhelmingly positive. In their group interview Hillside volunteers told me that one of the things that had made them the happiest and most proud in the project was the fact that more parents had started attending PMC meetings. Several of the volunteers also expressed their concern over the continuation of the schools' Parents' Monitoring Committees and the villages' Child Protection Committees. The volunteers said that after they leave, the schools' headmasters will take initiative of organizing PMC and CPC meetings. The frequency and quality of the meetings in the future would depend on the activity of the headmasters and the volunteers believed that the headmasters would not conduct the meetings monthly, but only every three to four months. One Hillside volunteer also said that "If we are not there in [the PMC] meetings, they will be casual. Parents will come and sign [the attendance list] and go".

This concern was shared by other staff members of the project and the Cluster Assistants in particular often focused their speeches during PMC meetings on empowering parents and school staff to continue to prioritize education and fight for children's rights. It was clear to me, especially from these PMC meetings, that volunteers and other members of project staff wanted to do their best to ensure that the positive impacts of the project would not be lost after it ended. This was important, as encouraging community participation can increase the sustainability of NGO projects and the continuation of their work (see USAID 2022, 3.)

According to Pellini (2007, 53) it is impossible to promote community participation without considering traditional forms of social capital and identifying where and how this social capital can be linked with local institutions, such as schools. The volunteers shared this social capital with local parents and as such were able integrate it into their work with the PMCs and CPC. The volunteers were also able to use their local knowledge and contacts to support the PMC and the CPC, and encourage parents and other village stakeholders to participate in the meetings. This was evident both in the topics discussed during meetings, such as the social protection schemes specific families were entitled to, as well as in more practical

issues, such as inviting individual parents to join the meetings. In the excerpt below, we can see a very practical example of this local knowledge being utilized, as a volunteer in Hillside asks children in his class to run and fetch their parents for a PMC meeting which is about to begin:

> After a while the volunteer says that any children whose parents live close by can go run to fetch them for the meeting. A few of the children get up and run outside. One girl tries to get up, but the volunteer tells her that she lives too far, and she should stay and keep writing. She sits back down again. -17.8.2022. Hillside, school #10

6.3. Mediating Between the Village, the School, and the Organization

As representatives of Save the Children, their local school, and villages, the volunteers often found themselves as messengers and mediators between the three groups. They enjoyed the trust and respect of each group and were able to facilitate sensitive conversations between the different parties, the likes of which had not been taking place before the project. Through these discussions they helped to strengthen meaningful cooperation both between the villages and the schools, and the villages and Save the Children. At a PMC meeting Hillside, parents expressed their gratitude to Save the Children for their role in helping to promote collaboration both within the community and between the community and the school.

One clear example of this role was the way in which volunteers were able to pass on information from the school to parents, especially during home visits. Most parents of children attending school were not a part of the PMC, and thus unlikely to get frequent updates from the school either on general school-related issues or on the education and learning of their child specifically. Though the main function of home visits was to advocate for child rights and decrease (the threat of) child labor, home visits were also an opportunity for volunteers to keep parents up to date on school matters and tell both parents and absent children what the child had missed in their classes while away from school. Parents were also appreciative of this aspect of the volunteers' work.

As stated earlier, teachers and headmasters were seldom village locals themselves and did not have time after school to stay in the village and meet with parents. Because they traveled from different villages for work, the school staff also lacked knowledge on local affairs.

Additionally, though PMC meetings ideally included the school headmaster and at least one teacher, this was not always the case. Because of this, the volunteers often had the important role of conveying messages, worries and suggestions that parents discussed in the PMC meetings to school staff after the meetings. Through their work at schools, volunteers were able to advocate not only for individual children and families, but also for the village itself.

This physical and cultural distance between school staff and the village in which they worked was particularly evident in one school that catered mostly to children from a particularly marginalized, lower-caste community, in which the mother tongue of most of the children was not Telugu. Though the collaboration between the school's headmaster and the chairman of the PMC appeared to work very well in this village, the role of the volunteer who, like the chairman, spoke both languages cannot be minimized.

Some of the volunteers also brought up the mediating role they had had between the families in their villages and the local school. They were worried that this type of mediating role would cease to exist if they no longer worked at the school, and that this lack of mediation could in turn lead to more children dropping out of school. Volunteers said that "government teachers will only come to school and teach and go" and that the teachers would not go to children's homes to talk to children and their parents if children were absent from school. Parents also expressed their concerns over losing the volunteer as a mediator between the school and the village, which shows that there are no practices in place which ensure proper communication between school staff and parents outside of the project.

The volunteers' role as messenger and mediator was equally visible when it came to enhancing collaboration and discussing the goals and values of Save the Children within the communities. As the organization was relatively new to the region in which it worked, the volunteers' prior understanding of local power structures, politics, and families was key to the success of the project. This included basic information such as who was the current village Sarpanch (locally elected leader) and which families were particularly influential in village decision-making. Volunteers also had up to date knowledge on various stakeholders invested in child protection issues, which was especially helpful when helping their villages to set up or strengthen their Child Protection Committees. Having employees from the start of the project who were familiar with these local stakeholders, power structures and political debates helped the project and Save the Children as an organization to gain legitimacy quickly among the communities (see also USAID 2022, 3).

The volunteers' position as local community members also helped the project to gain more access to at-risk children and their families, especially when the child had never entered the official school system or had dropped out long ago. The case studies that volunteers sometimes collected in conjunction with home visits not only gave Save the Children valuable insight into the challenges of communities and individual families, but also oftentimes provided them with a tangible story of the impact of the project, which could be referred to later when discussing the project with higher-ups in the organization or donors. The volunteers also used their double role as community members and Save the Children employees by passing on information and wishes from community members to higher-ups at the organization, typically the Cluster Assistants and Project Coordinator Ravi. During my time in the field towards the end of the project, the most pressing of these wishes was for the project to continue.

The double role of volunteers as community members and Save the Children employees was clearly beneficial to both groups, but it did not come without its challenges for the volunteers themselves. As employees of the project, the volunteers work had to reflect the values of the organization and the goals set both in the original project agenda and by higher-ups throughout the project. All of the volunteers appeared to happily stand behind the key values of the project such as reducing child labor and improving children's rights, which they clearly believed in and were proud to work towards. There were times, however, when the volunteers were forced as part of their jobs to follow the agenda and values of Save the Children, even when they faced opposition from members of their own community.

One such instance came up a couple of times during my fieldwork. Over the summer holiday one of the volunteers found out about plans for two child marriages in her village and managed to prevent them from taking place by speaking to the families about child rights and the illegality of child marriage. The Cluster Assistant responsible for the region told me that in some areas parents will beat you if you try to stop a child marriage. The volunteer said that she had been aware of this possibility and felt a little anxious when she chose to speak out against the marriages, but felt that she had to do so because of the Save the Children mandate on child protection. Luckily, no-one tried to physically harm her after the event, but many people in the village did not appreciate her meddling in this way and scolded her for several months for stopping the marriages.

7. Conclusions

> "The volunteer gets out her phone and starts showing me photos. She shows me pictures from local PMC and CPC meetings, Save the Children events, and the group photos we took on Wednesday when the volunteers from her mandal had come to the project office. She also shows me pictures of the children at school sitting in a circle or presenting to each other, and a photo from Save the Children's back to school campaign, in which a group of children stands in front of the school building holding a large Save the Children poster." – 23.7.2022. Farmland, school #1

As is evident from the excerpt above, the Save the Children volunteers were present and participated hands-on in both the activities and campaigns of the project, and the day-to-day life at the schools they worked at. As this research has shown, enhancing community participation in NGO work is beneficial to both organizations and local communities, and it should be encouraged and further implemented in the planning and practice of future projects both in the fields of education and other sectors of development work. Community participation in NGO projects also still appears to be under-researched and should be given more attention in the future.

The volunteers took on many different kinds of roles and activities while working in the project and it is important to highlight the autonomy that field-level NGO employees have despite the fact that they are often perceived to be at the lowest levels of organizational hierarchies. The volunteers carried out most of the project's grass-roots operations in the field. They spent the majority of their days working at their villages' local government schools where they taught children, organized their schools' Children's Groups meetings, and conducted remedial classes for children after school. The volunteers also visited the homes of children who were not regularly attending school and spoke to parents about the importance of education. They also used these visits to find out about any challenges the families were facing and helped to connect them with available social protection schemes offered by the local state government of Andhra Pradesh. The volunteers also helped to support village-level Parent's Monitoring Committee and Child Protection Committee meetings and carried out and took on project related tasks, such as organizing Save the Children's Back to School program when schools reopened after the pandemic. The volunteers were proud of their work at Save the Children and excited to let the children show off what they had learned at school.

The volunteers were able to make up for gaps in the official school system, such as the lack of sufficient teaching staff. The challenge of understaffing had clear implications for volunteers, teachers, and of course the children, who were seldom given much personal attention in the busy classrooms. The volunteers developed different strategies for teaching several groups of children at once, but despite their best efforts, sometimes they too felt overwhelmed and lacked the authority that would have been necessary in the classroom. Having their hands full with several groups of children at once also meant that some of the volunteers were not able to carry out as many additional activities in the schools. Indeed, in the couple of schools that had the same number of teachers as classes, volunteers were not depended on for daily teaching activities and their time was freed up for other activities. Their work in the classrooms cannot, however, be minimized and the volunteers received high praise from headmasters.

A second clear gap that the volunteers were able to fill was the lack of remedial classes or summer school for the many children who had fallen behind in their studies during the pandemic and resulting school closures. After the pandemic, children had all been bumped up two standards, despite not having had any remote learning opportunities during the lockdown. On top of missing out on these years of the syllabus, many of the children had become "slow learners" and there had been a clear decrease in student's motivation and interest in school. The work of the volunteers after school and during the holidays was thus vital in helping the children to catch up with the expectations of the official school curriculum. The volunteers were also able to create fun and relatively relaxed classroom environments both during school and the remedial lessons, which helped to increase children's motivation and improved school retention in the villages.

The work of the volunteers with local families also highlighted that there is a clear disconnect between government social protection schemes and qualifying families in the remote project villages. It is clear that these families had not previously been aware of the availability of such schemes, showing that the state government was not able to reach some of its most vulnerable inhabitants. The state-mandated Parent's Monitoring Committees and Child-Protection Committees had also been non-existent or poorly-functioning before the start of the project and the volunteers' efforts to support the committees. This shows that the availability of local avenues of community participation in and of itself does not ensure local people's participation in decision-making or advocacy work, which is in line with much of the previous research on different kinds of Parent's Boards. The work of the volunteer shows,

however, that with proper encouragement, such committees can allow local people to be heard and affect local decision-making.

As members of both the local community and the school, the volunteers were also able to build bridges and mediate between local families and school staff. Despite the existence of Parent's Monitoring Committees, school staff and local parents alike noted that before the project there had not been much communication between parents and schools. The trust volunteers were able to build both with the school staff and the local parents allowed them to facilitate conversations that had not been taking place prior to the project and make sure that the wishes and needs of both groups were heard by the other. This mediation was dependent on the volunteers' local knowledge and prior personal relationships with the other members of their village. The volunteers were also able to bring their local knowledge into their work at Save the Children and help to build understanding and trust between the organization and villages.

Arnstein (2019, 26) notes that employing community members does not guarantee them the possibility to participate in program planning or decision-making in of itself. It appears, however, that the more volunteers were able to utilize their local knowledge in the project, knowledge that both project staff and school staff lacked, the more power they had to influence their work. The extent of the volunteers' decision-making in the project was limited by organizational structures and the perimeters set by outside funding, as well as by the wishes of schools and the curriculum provided by the state government. True partnership also depended somewhat on the volunteer's own activity within the organization and the school they worked at. Despite these limitations, however, volunteers shared some planning and decision-making both with schools and the organization especially in terms of home visits, community advocacy work, and the Children's Groups, which they were able to conduct relatively independently, reaching some of the higher rungs of Arnstein's ladder.

Based on my observations and conversations with project staff, I can confidently say that most if not all of the initial goals set out for the project were met, and some of them were even exceeded during the project. Through the hard work of the volunteers and the rest of the project staff, many children have re-enrolled in school and several families have been able to reach available social protection schemes, which can hopefully help to eliminate some of the root causes of child labor in the villages. It is also clear that the volunteers have made a

notable impact on attitudes towards education, child labor, and child marriage in their villages.

The school headmasters I spoke to also agreed that the project had been “very nice”, and they gave “many thanks to Save the Children”. For them, the most significant impacts of the project had been the notable decrease of child labor and child marriage among the village children. A headmaster in Hillside told me that the parents in the village, who mostly worked as chili farmers, were now taking their children to work with them in the fields less frequently. A headmaster in Farmland was equally proud to tell me that there was no more child labor or child marriage in the village among children aged six to fourteen, and a headmaster in Treetops said that he believed the project had been especially useful in “backward areas”, such as the village that he worked in.

Despite these accomplishments, the end of the project was still clouded by uncertainty and concern. When I asked the volunteers about the project’s coming to an end during group interviews, the atmosphere would immediately change. “There will be more drop-outs!” The volunteers spoke to me about the end of the project with grave faces, expressing their concern that the project’s ending would lead to an increase in child labor as children would return to work in the fields. They also believed that teachers would stop taking attendance and that many of the children would stop coming to school regularly. The volunteers firmly believed that if the project were to continue for another two to three years, there would be no more child labor in any of the villages. At the time of research only a few of the project villages were in the process of declaring themselves a “child-labor free village” or had managed to do so during the time of the project.

The fears of the volunteers mirror the common concerns expressed by both school staff and local parents and shine a light on what the volunteers believe to have been their key accomplishments. Their concern shows that though they may have been shy to bring up their role in decreasing child labor in their villages, they were recognized the significance of their work, particularly in regards to home visits and the way they were able to help raise the awareness of parents on topics such as child rights and the long-term advantages of education.

The volunteers agreed that if the project would continue, they would be happy to continue working in the schools in their local villages. Vijay, one of the Cluster Assistants, also highlighted during a group interview that “children will not be happy when [the volunteers]

are not in school". The volunteers had enquired about the possibility to continue working at the school after the end of the project, but this was impossible because acquiring teacher qualifications is a long process with mandatory examinations and government teachers are unable to request specific posts. The volunteers told me that headmasters and teachers would have been happy to continue working with them in the future, but the schools did not have the money to provide them with livable wages. "Teachers said you can work, but we cannot pay". Some of the schools had offered to pay the volunteers a salary of 1000-1500 rupees per month (1/7th to 1/5th of their salary at Save the Children), but the volunteers did not think it possible to live on such wages, especially with such a heavy workload.

Project staff and volunteers hoped that their work might be continued by various government employees, who worked with children in the villages and often belonged to the villages' Child Protection Committees. These employees included government volunteers, anganwadi (preschool) teachers, pediatric nurses, and the villages' "lady constable" who worked to eliminate child marriages. It is also possible that the encouragement and positive example of the volunteers working in the project as well as their attempts to strengthen local avenues of participation such as the PMC, CPC, and Children's Groups, empowered and encouraged other members of the village communities to continue advocating for education and children's rights. For example, PMC members would have the potential to work as mediators between the school and other parents in the future, as they have regular contact with school staff and can affect decision-making. It is also possible that the volunteers themselves have continued to advocate for children and community members since the end of the project.

The true impact of the volunteers is perhaps best described by Nikhil, the Cluster Assistant of the Treetops volunteers. After attending a short Village Activity Program on how to end child marriages at one of the project schools, I headed outside onto the veranda to take part in a children's group meeting conducted by the volunteer. Nikhil stood on the road outside talking and laughing with a few local nurses and the anganwadi (government preschool) teacher, who had all come to the school for the program and had decided to linger around for a moment and watch the children's group. Later, on the way back from school, I asked Nikhil what he had been talking to the guests about. He said he had spoken to them about the project ending and encouraged them to follow in the footsteps of the project: "We have paved the way and now it is time for you to follow the way". Increased community participation could be one meaningful step on the way to a future without child labor.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions

1) Which activities do you do in your school?

2) Do you visit children's homes?
    a. How often do you visit children's homes?
    b. What will you say to parents when you visit children's homes?

3) How often does your village have a PMC meeting?
    a. How will you help the PMC meeting?

4) How often your village has CPC meeting?
    a. How will you help the CPC meeting?

5) How often do you attend the PMC and CPC meetings?

6) Do you enjoy working in the Save the Children project?
    a. What do you enjoy the most about working in the project?
    b. What is your most big success in the project? / What things are you happy or proud about in your work in the project?

7) Have you had challenges at school?

8) Have you had challenges working with the community/village (CPC / PMC / parents, Sarpanch…)

9) Have you had any other challenges in the project?

10) What did you learn in the Save the Children training at the beginning of the project?

11) How do you feel about the project ending?
    a. Will you stay at the school after the project ends?
    b. What do you think will happen to children / PMC / CPC after you leave and project ends?

12) What do you think is most important thing about your work in the project that I should focus on in my research?

Appendix 2: Permission to Take Part in Research

Research questions:

How are the "Academic Support Fellows" / volunteers of the Save the Children & Paulig Group project "Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19" helping to fight child labor, bring vulnerable children back to school and help all children stay in school in their local villages? Why is the work of the volunteers so important in the local schools and communities?

Participants:

"Academic Support Fellows" / volunteers and staff members of the Save the Children & Paulig Group project "Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19".

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Research introduction:

The aim of this research is to explore the different ways in which local "Academic Support Fellows" / volunteers help the school and community in their village as part of the Save the Children & Paulig group project "Strengthening Protection and Education Services for Children During COVID-19". The research will include what types of work volunteers do in the project and what impact this work has. It will also discuss how the volunteers are able to use their local knowledge and contacts to help their work in the project and argue why this local knowledge is so important. The research will compare the work of this project to previous research done around the theme of "community participation" and also place it in the wider context of school retention and child labor in India.

PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I am participating in the research voluntarily. I can stop participating at any time and ask that my answers are destroyed and not used in the research.

I have been told about the research and I can ask questions about it.

My personal information (name, village, etc.) will not be in the final research paper and only Lea will know which answers I said. Staff at Tampere University and Save the Children will also not see which answers I said, unless I ask Lea to share with Save the Children also.

Lea will delete all my personal information (name, village, etc.) after the research is finished (Europe law).

Lea can use my answers in future research also without my personal information (name, village, etc.)

____ I would like to participate in the research, and it is fine for me that my answers are saved and written in the final paper without my personal information.

____ Lea told me how she will use my personal information (EU law) for this research

____ Lea can take no-face-photos for the final research paper

Date: ______________________

______________________________ ______________________________

Signature of the Participant Signature of the Researcher (Lea Absetz)