

**CHILDREN CHANGING THE WORLD  
2011-2012  
BRINGS WATER TO ITS PEOPLE**

**ACTIVITY BOOK FOR SECONDARY**



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SOPAR is a non profit and non governmental organization who work to reduce poverty in developing countries.



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# Activity for 1<sup>st</sup> Cycle

## Activity 1: Ready, Set, Go!<sup>1</sup>

**Purpose:** Learn about the importance of water in the region and develop a positive attitude toward the conservation of bodies of water in the region.

**Time frame:** 1h30 in the class room. The time for the search and the presentation of the results will depend on pupils.

**Material:** SOPAR's video

### Activity plan

<p><b>Step 1:</b> Explain to your pupils that they are going to participate in an international development project to help build a well in India. Ask them if they know India, its culture, the lifestyle and their customs. You can use the Teacher guide in order to explain to them the living conditions in India and more specifically the problems related to water</p>	<p><b>Step 6:</b> Give each team the mission of gathering all possible information on one aspect of the body of water. Each team will choose to study one of the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biochemical aspects of the body of water (water samples, pH, turbidity, temperature, currents, banks, the living things, etc.);</li> <li>• Social aspects (industries, companies built on the shore, etc.);</li> <li>• Leisure and tourist activities around the water body;</li> <li>• How drinking water is supplied in your region;</li> <li>• The purification system for waste water;</li> <li>• Historical aspects (the role of the body of water in the history of the region, the meaning of native names, industrial development, former uses, etc.).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 2:</b> Present SOPAR's video</p>	<p><b>Step 7:</b> Invite the pupils to begin their research on Internet, in the library or at the municipality to get acquainted with the subject. To help them, you could draw up a list of resources which could allow them to bring to a successful conclusion their inquiry. Motivate the pupils to go in the field and to collect the relevant information.</p>
<p><b>Step 3:</b> You can now explain the details of the project (the amount to be collected, the fundraising activities, the dedication which is going to be engraved on the well and the reception of the plaque with the photo of the well).</p>	<p><b>Step 8:</b> Back in the classroom, ask each team to interpret their data and to present their observations by painting a picture of the body of water through the aspect they studied. Pool the observations and make a general summary.</p>
<p><b>Step 4:</b> Explain to your pupils you will use this project to also understand more about water related issues in your own region. Ask them some questions about your region: do they consider that the water is plentiful? Is it accessible? Is it of good quality?</p>	<p><b>Step 9:</b> Motivate the students to bring forth current problems related to the water body they studied (problems of supply, pollution, mismanagement, etc.) and find feasible solutions (decrease the consumption in drinking water, avoid the wasting, tree plantation, etc.).</p>
<p><b>Step 5:</b> Choose a body of water to study and divide the class into six study groups.</p>	<p><b>Step 10:</b> Invite the students to make a commitment through activities such as the cleaning the river banks or trees planting or through awareness campaigns in the school or simply to set up an exhibition presenting the results of their inquiry</p>

<sup>1</sup> Activité proposé par L'Éducation au service de la Terre (LST) : [http://www.lsf-lst.ca/fr/teachers/classroom\\_active.php?activity\\_id=48](http://www.lsf-lst.ca/fr/teachers/classroom_active.php?activity_id=48)



# Activity 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle

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## CASE STUDY: KEETA

This exercise is intended to lead the participants through the discovery of complex development problems and the challenges involved in identifying sustainable solutions. It has been designed for high-school students (10-12th grade) who already have an understanding of the mechanisms of the social environment in which they live.

### Note for the teacher

A case study is an exercise which aims at stimulating a reflexion on the part of the student about a real story or a fiction. After reading the story (Keeta's story), students are asked to identify the problems and develop the solutions which they feel is most appropriate in the circumstances. This case study has been designed to be conducted in small teams.

This case study uses the short story: « Keeta's story ». The students have to read the story and whenever possible, consult additional informational material ([www.sopar.ca](http://www.sopar.ca)). Then in team of 4 to 7, they are asked to evaluate the problems, identify their causes, develop solutions and devise ways of implementing their solution. Once their analysis is complete, they are asked to present their findings to the class in terms of their understanding of the problems and their proposed solution for Keeta's village.

When evaluating the result, the teachers are invited to put more emphasis on the process rather than the feasibility of the proposed solution. It's important to remember that the development of an effective solution may be beyond the reach of most high school students.

Finally, this exercise will contribute to develop skills such as: autonomy, communication and team work.

### Step 1: Discovering the case study

The teacher will explain the work to be done on the case study going through the objective, the process and what resources are available to the students.

### Step 2: Organizing the groups

The teacher or the students set up working groups of 4 to 7 students.

### Step 3: Presenting the case study material

The teacher will present the case study material (including instructions). The teacher will explain to the students what is expected as the end result. The teacher can allocate time in the schedule to allow the students to get started and to orient their research. Establishing a deadline for presentations is also useful if the students will be asked to work on their own outside of the class room.

### Step 4: Presentation and discussion

Teams can be allowed 3 or 4 days, 3 weeks or even three months depending on the teacher's needs. At the end the students will have to make a short presentation of 10 to 15 minutes. The presentation should focus on presenting the solutions retained by each group. After each presentation, some teachers prefer to open the discussion to provide each group to compare their solutions and see the differences of viewpoint which may have developed.



## INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENTS

This exercise will give you the opportunity to play the role of an international development organization in the context of contemporary India. To play this role, you need to read « Keeta's Story » to identify and analyze the problems. Once this is done, you will be asked to identify some solutions to be implemented as part of the solutions to these problems. Even though the story of Keeta is fiction, it is based on actual cases of million of women living in India.

### Instructions:

1. Make a team of 4 to 7 students
2. Read thoroughly the story of Keeta
3. With the help of the other team members, you must:
  - Identify the problems in the village where Keeta lives.
  - Identify what are the solutions to those problems
  - How you could implement your solutions
4. Your team will have 10-15 minutes to present the findings to the class.

### Tips ...

Here is some advice on how to go about your work:

1. Don't get started until you clearly understand what the task is.
2. Do not hesitate to make a seek more information on international development and India ( a lot of information is available at [www.sopar.ca](http://www.sopar.ca))
3. You can use the same approaches as SOPAR to help the people in poor villages.
4. Use the strength of the group and rely on everyone's contribution. If one is more at ease with presentations and the other is more talented for making charts, then split the work. Do not compete for the same job.
5. Share you ideas, share you feelings. Say what you think, what you see to be the solution... If you have many ideas, then the best ones will come!!! Never stop to be creative, sometimes funny ideas turn out to be the most interesting.



## Let's Get Started...

To understand how the problems in the village affect you, it is essential to see yourself as part of this village and see where you stand.

*“For many years, you have been working in various places around the world. You like to help people and better their lot. After many experiences, you are now posted somewhere in India. You are working for a local organization called Vikasa.*

*One day people of a village come to see you to speak about the Keeta's story. With the approval of the director of Vikasa, you go to the village of Keeta to see how your organization could help them. But attention the problems are many and the solutions not so easy to find!*

One day, the director of Vikasa asks you to answer a certain number of questions in order to implement some solutions in the village of Keeta. He also asks you to make him an oral report of these answers for a meeting.”

1. **What do you feel are the problems in Keeta's village?** Explain why you feel it's a problem and why this situation is not acceptable to you and your team?
2. **What has caused each of these problems?** You should be able to establish the relationship between the problem and its cause. Are there problems which are interdependent or related? Each problem probably has a different cause. Be careful: Causes and problems are different.
3. **What are the different solutions which you can retain to get rid of the problem you have identified?** You must propose as many solutions as you want, but you will have to make a choice on the best one. Reconsider each solution and see which one works best for each problem.
4. **What will be your most effective solution to eliminate the problem (what's the team choice)?** Indicate why, in your opinion, it is the best possible solution in this case.
5. **If you have to implement the solutions, what are you suggesting to do to make it work?** Give as many details as you feel it is useful to understand how you would go about implementing your solutions.



## Available tools and resources

Vikasa will provide you with these resources and you will have all liberty to use them properly to implement your solution in Keeta's village. Be careful, you do not have to use everything, some may be better than others, depending on what you are trying to achieve. Remember that your solution should be realistic and reasonable. Also remember that you are working for Vikasa, and the financial resources are limited.

- Your budget for the next five years will be \$1 000 000 (don't forget, it is for five years).
- You have some staff and some tools to build wells and a water filtration system. It will cost you \$5 000 to build it and maintain it for five years.
- You have the resources to establish a small health center. It will cost you \$25 000 to operate it for 5 years.
- You can add a nurse to take care of the health center but it will cost you \$100 000 for five years.
- You can hire some facilitators or trainers to help women get organized and become more influential in the village. It will cost you \$200 000 for the five years.
- You can make an awareness campaign on women's right in the village. Hiring organizers will cost you \$100 000 for five years.
- You can make an awareness campaign on children's right in the village. Hiring organizers will cost you \$80 000 for five years.
- You can hire a Canadian media crew to write articles on the situation in India and raise the awareness on the problem. Each paper or broadcast will cost you \$5000
- You can send village people to get some education and training in Indian major cities. Each person trained will cost you \$25 000 for five years.
- You can make small loans to people in the village. Each loan should not exceed \$500 and be paid back within two years.
- You can build an orphanage. It will cost you \$520 000 to build and operate for five years.

## Additional Information

One of your co-workers has just obtained a copy of United Nations Report. This report can prove to be helpful since it contains some information on the area where you will be working. As in many UN reports, some of the information may be useful, some may not be relevant. We will let you decide!!!

- The average annual salary in the village of Mallampalli is \$2000;
- 10% of the population belongs to the *Brahman cast* (religious), 20% from the *vaicyas* (trades and commerce), 50% from the *çudras* (peasants), 10% from the *kshatrias* (police and civil servants) and 10% are from the untouchables.
- The average age in the villa is 28.
- The unemployment rate is 24%.
- 58% are men and 42% are women.



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- The most powerful person in the community is the mayor. He is subject to a series of regional and federal law. Sometimes the enforcement of these laws leaves to be desired.
- There are 12 000 people living in the village.
- Over 80% of the population is of Hindu religion. Over the years, a large number of people have converted to Buddhism and Islam to flee the cast system. The main local religious minorities are Muslims and Christians.
- Illiteracy affects over 44% of the population.
- Illiteracy of girls is 60% while it is 30% for boys.
- 90% of the girls do not go to school after the age of 11.
- 70% of boys quit school after the age of 16.
- Even though the Indian government has passed laws to ban them, some customs are still prevailing: the dowry, infanticide (affecting mostly girl babies), child marriage, prostitution of minors.
- 182 children are orphans, having lost both parents and 190 have lost their father.
- 2200 adults (Men and women) are homeless, and are living squats or temporary shelters.
- Mallampalli is located at 12 hour driving distance from Hyderabad. Hyderabad is a large metropolitan area of 4 million people. The main industries in the city are high-tech and film industry. Unemployment is relatively low and less severe than in Mallampalli.
- The road to Hyderabad is very bad and the flow of traffic is heavy and slow. Major improvements are needed to reduce the trip below 5 hours. In general, all the roads in the area are in very sad condition and have not been repaired for years.



## Sample presentation

To help you grasp the challenge, here is an idea of what your presentation could look like. We have made it in the simplest form. We will use only one problem to build this example. Your presentation can cover more problems and more solutions.

- 1) What are the problems that you have identified in Keeta's village?** Explain why it is a problem, why is it unacceptable to you?

*Answer: One of the problems is that there is no transportation in this village. This hampers the capacity of the village to grow and develop. It also leads to tragedies like the death of Keeta's daughter.*

- 2) What causes these problems that you have identified?** Here you have to be able to define a relationship between the problem and what may be the cause of this problem. Each problem will likely have a different cause and sometimes many causes. For each problem, systematically describe the cause you have identified.

*Answer: We believe that the main cause is that the village is poor and cannot afford the roads. With an average annual revenue of \$2000, very few people can own a car. Also, the fact that the economy of the village is weak means that there is not much in terms of economic development.*

- 3) What are the possible solutions to solve this problem?** Here you can suggest as many solutions as you want. But, in the end, you may have to make a choice about which one is the best solution. Just remember that the solution must address the cause of the problem

*Answer: There are many ways of dealing with the problem:*

- a. We can purchase a bus and establish a bus service between the city and the village*
- b. We can pay for a taxi service to handle the emergencies*
- c. We can buy the mayor a car and get him to use it for in case of emergencies*
- d. We can buy a few auto-rickshaws to help people in the village to help move people around*

- 4) What is the best way to get rid of the problem? What is the best solution?** Indicate why, in your opinion these solutions appear to be the most effective or the most appropriate.

- a. Answer: We strongly believe that the bus service is the most effective way of having a daily transportation and help the economic development of the city.*
- b. We believe that this is the best solution because :*
  - i. It will provide the opportunity to many people to have access to transportation.*



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- ii. *We can raise a small tax to ensure that the bus service can continue to be available.*
- iii. *It can mobilize people around a common project. This in turn can give the motivation to the community to do other projects.*
- iv. *With this approach, we avoid creating privileges for the mayor or his friends as it is the case when we would buy a car for the mayor.*
- v. *With a better access to the city, the economy will prosper and there would be better exchange between the village and the City.*

**5) How will you implement this solution?** Try to give enough details so people can have a good understanding of what you are suggesting to do.

- First we will target the village leaders because they have much influence on the community. To convince them that we have the best solution, we either will try to make them realize by themselves the extent of the problem (Like using Keeta daughter's death as an example) so they start thinking about a solution. We can also try to sell them our idea by talking about the benefits we have identified.
- When they are convinced, it may be useful to have a village meeting to explain the project and how it can be done. Then it may be possible to get the population to support the project and get involved.
- If the leaders refuse to be convinced, we will try to get as many people involved in a large village meeting. During this meeting we intend to raise the problem of transportation. Then we will try to convince directly the population that something must be done. We will try to set-up a committee to put some pressure on the elected officials.
- This should help us get approval for the purchase of a bus and the development of a bus service.
- After that, it is our intent to gradually withdraw from the project and let the village people take over the initiative. It is essential that they understand that the bus service will work if people give it support and manage it by themselves in a democratic manner.



## KEETA'S STORY

- "It's out of the question, you will not work! We have already discussed the matter, there is no way you will go and work outside. You are a woman and you will soon have another child. God willing, it will be a boy and my son will need a mother to take care of him!!!"
- "At least, let me do it until I get pregnant again. My cousin Menor in Birba needs somebody to sell his fruits, I could go there and be back every week-end,"
- Listen to me, Keeta, I understand that the loss of your daughter is making you sad; but it is not a sufficient reason to make a fool of yourself! Who will go and fetch the water for the house and who will take care of my mother and who will take care of the house? Tell me, who? It's out of question. It's the last time we talk about this, stop arguing about it. Go and get some water at the well, and get these stupid ideas out of your head!"

Keeta did not insist. She knew she was wasting her time. When her husband Rameesh had an idea in mind, there was nothing that could change it, not even his wife. Keeta took her containers and started to walk towards the water well.

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Keeta lives in Andhra Pradesh in Southern India in a small village called Mallampalli. Living conditions in this area were difficult. Most of the villagers earned less than a few dollars a month. The local employment was mainly agricultural and the local farmers were working in the rice fields. Sanitary installations were a disaster; no doctor or nurse lived nearby. The nearest hospital was 12 hours away by bus. Worse, nobody had a car in the village! It was the main reason why Keeta lost her daughter. She was sick with an infection, but the trip took too long and it spread and finally led to the death of her child

Most villagers in Mallampalli were superstitious and believed that it was a bad omen that had fallen on the village. It gave meaning to their misery. The villagers had lived this way for centuries, and it was the customs of their ancestors. The caste system was well established and encouraged. People who were born labourers would be labourers like their father before. Women would stay at home and take care of the family. They were regarded as mothers and housekeepers; their influence in community affairs was minimal. The whole village, men and women alike, had a simple and oppressive vision of women. They were there to care for the husband, the children, the in-laws and the household. That's all. Work, school, socializing that was not for them.

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But the life of Keeta had not been all that bad. She was brought up in a nice little house with her father, mother, two sisters and her brother. Her father, Ravi, was a member of the "vaicyas" caste. He could have a small business, and the revenues, though not a fortune, were sufficient to meet the simple needs of the family. Keeta attended school for a few years. Her father was a kind man who could get along with people around him. Her mother, Radhamma, was a proud and strong woman. Unfortunately for Keeta, she was also a very conservative woman who lived by the customs of the ancestors. Keeta could try to argue with her father, but she would never dare to do it with her mother. Her mother had to be right.



Keeta's life changed when her mother told her, one day, that a young man she had carefully chosen would come and propose a marriage. Keeta said nothing, she did not argue. She simply decided to obey her mother. She vividly remembered the day she met her future husband. In her mind, it was like yesterday. She was barely 15 years old. Her mother and aunts were all excited. As they were putting on her the nice dress, they would give her all their advice on how to stand proud, what to say, what not to say. When the young man showed up at the door, the whole family greeted the visitors. They were invited to sit on the best cushions of the house and the women served tea and food. The aunts made a point of honour to compliment the visitors about their dresses and suits.

Then Keeta was introduced in the main room where the visitors were sitting. She carefully followed her mother's instructions. She slowly went to the future husband, offered him some tea without looking him in the eyes. Then she returned to her sitting place, keeping her head down. She still remembered the conversation around the room. Her father kept on insisting on the "dowry", a word she barely could understand then, but that became a fact of life on that day. He appeared satisfied and would smile to Keeta, when she would look at him. Her mother continued to praise her daughter's beauty, her talent as a housekeeper and as a cook. There was also the look in her younger sister's eyes. She was 13 then and all this seemed such a strange adult behaviour. Her brother was in the room. He was talking with one of the cousins of the future groom, they seemed to enjoy themselves. But the striking memory is the look on Rani's face. She was her older sister. She was married and had been living with her husband for more than 4 years. She looked sad and absent. Keeta could not understand why she would be so sad. After a few hours of discussion and small talk, it appeared that all parties had come to an agreement, everybody, but Keeta. Keeta knew she could say no to this marriage, but she knew she would not be strong enough to say no to her mother. It would be even more difficult because her father was committed to the agreement and would never go back on what he considered to be a done deal. For her, it was over. Her future was sealed in a universe which she had no right to question. She accepted her father's blessing and decided to accept her future as a "fate".

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Keeta kept walking at a fast pace towards the well as her husband had ordered. She was obsessed by the discussion with her husband. Keeta had tried to tell him that her life was a nightmare and that she felt rejected and excluded. Ramesh insisted she stayed at home and take care of the children. But she wanted more; she wanted to be free to go out, to talk to anybody and even work if she could find some work to do. But this is not what her husband had in mind for her. His view that she was there to take care of...him!

She walked for two hours and finally arrived at the well. Suma, Sara and Bala were already there filling jugs with water. They had become her friends after her marriage. Each day, the four women would start early in the morning with their children and go to the well to fetch water for the household. It was their job as women to get the water for the kitchen and the laundry.

- Hi there Keeta, how are you doing? Said Sara.
- "Good, good" said Keeta with a timid smile.
- "What's wrong today? What's happening, Keeta?"



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- “It’s nothing. I am fed up of starting early each day, washing the kids, feeding the husband and walking for hours to fetch water. I am sick of cooking, cleaning the house and washing dirty clothes each day, as if there is nothing else in life for me!”

Keeta was looking to the ground so her friend could not see the tears running down her dark cheeks.

- “What’s the use of complaining? Said Bala, “You have a good husband who takes care of you and he is from a respectable caste.”
- “You do not understand...” started Keeta
- “My father cannot afford to pay the dowry. Each day my brother blames me for threatening his future because we cannot afford to send him to school, that he will not get a good job and will not be able to take care of the elders like our parents have done before. All this because I am a girl, and a poor one. An then...”
- “She is right, Keeta” added Suma “My father ruined himself to pay my dowry. He borrowed a large sum and was never able to pay it back. Now he cannot afford to feed everybody and my brothers have left school in order to work in the fields. They should be in school. You are lucky. You came from a wealthy family.”

Keeta was starting to feel guilty. She had no right to complain and to feel bad about her life. After all, it was not so bad. She was never hungry in her stomach she was not rejected as were the untouchables. Nevertheless, she still felt angry. She picked up her jugs and parted with her friends. She walked a few steps when Sara shouted:

- “Wait! Keeta wait...”
- “You must be right; my life is not so bad after all...”
- “No. It’s something else...” interrupted Sara, “I think I understand what you are trying to say. Like you, I believe we do not have a fair chance. But I think we can do something about it...”

Keeta could not believe what she was hearing.

- “I have joined a group of women organized by Bala Theresa. We try to make our lives better, and care for our children. Things can change, you know. Nothing is cast in concrete. Why don’t you come and meet us. We will meet at the Bala-Vikasa centre at noon. I will be there. I’ll wait for your.”
- “I don’t know... My husband will never accept in the first place...” replied Keeta with a look of despair.
- “Come on, at least come and see what we do. You do not have to tell your husband. We will go on our way back.”
- Keeta thought for a moment, and finally said: “Ok, but just a peek.”
- Keeta decided to part with her friend and return to the village. She kept on thinking about the women’s group and the response she would get from her husband and even worst, what people in the community would say if they heard about it. Mallampalli was relatively large with 12200 people. Most of them were of Hindu faith. For centuries, tradition had never changes. But modern things have changed some of the behaviour but the mindset had remained unchanged. As their fathers did, they abided by the rules of the holy book the “Rig Veda”. The book established the calendar of the year. It defined the holy days one for each of the caste of the Hindu society. There was one for the Brahmins, one for the Kshatriyas, one for the Vaishyas and one for the Sudras. Throughout the year each season of the calendar defined what people had to do and when to do it. Therefore, the holidays continued to happen and unfold as they did hundreds of years ago, the only new thing was that we had electricity to light up the village.



Even though India was praised as the largest democracy in the world by the local politicians, the power in the village rested with the Brahman families. It was always the same family for as long as anybody could remember. Villages had the right to choose the mayor and the councillors, but in the end it was always members of the Vitru family who were elected. Traditions were so deeply rooted that it seemed that nothing would ever change in this part of the world and things would continue for many more centuries.

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Keeta finally reached the village and went directly home. She had to prepare the meal for the husband and his old mother. She took time to clean up the eating area and decided to go to the meeting at the Bala Vikasa Center. At the Center, under a large tree, some twenty women were sitting on the ground. Keeta notices Sara and decided to go and sit next to her. One of the women was standing up and started addressing the group:

- "Hi, my name is Pira. My husband drinks too much on his way back from the fields. One the alcohol is in his body; he is hard on me and the children. The other day he hit me because he did not like the way I had cooked the rice. I begged him to stop, I told him that he was wrong to beat me but he became furious. After that..." and Pira's voice was now more nervous... "After that, he asked me to go into the room and force me to... Well to do what a wife does with her husband..."

The group was silent. One of the women stood up and thanked Pira for her testimony and for her courage to share this:

- "She is not the only one here in this situation. It is important that as many of these experiences be shared and known to all of us. Come, step up and tell your story. When we decided to form this group, we wanted to be stronger and be capable of having an influence on our husbands and on the village. If Pira agrees, we will all go and talk to her husband. We must convince him to change. If it does not work, we will go and see the mayor and the police if that does not work. Nothing changes overnight, but if we stick together, we can at least, change our lives."

It was clear for Keeta that she was a leader of the group. Keeta did not know her, but she was impressed by her courage and her assurance. The meeting went on. More women came with their story. They were talking about their problems and then the group would exchange on their experience and the possible solutions. They would sometimes disagree over the most appropriate one, but the atmosphere remained very friendly. The most frequent problems were family violence, physical abuse, daughter's dowry and sometimes the opportunity to work outside of the house. Then she realised, even though some the stories were horrible, that she was not alone and she could feel more confident. When the meeting was over, Keeta told her friend that she had to talk to her husband and convince him that her condition had to change.

Keeta walked back home at a fast pace, convinced that things would be different in the future. After all, she was not asking much, and her demands were easy to meet. Her



husband would come to reason. When she opened the door, Rameesh was already at home and seemed impatient.

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- “Where on earth were you?” he asked “I have been waiting for more than an hour, the supper is not ready and my mother is exhausted.” The voice of Rameesh was calm but she could feel that he was upset.
- “I must talk to you. Today I went to Bala Vikasa. I was in the women’s meeting...”
- “What do you say? You went to meet these dirty women who have no respect for the holy book. I do not want to see you there anymore! If ever you go back there, I swear you will regret it!”

Rameesh was getting furious. Keeta had already seen her husband upset, but never like that. He came closer and shouted: “Do you understand what I say?” Keeta stood like a statue, she could not reply. Then, with a timid voice, she added:

- “I just want you to understand...”
- “There is nothing to understand, I am your husband, and you do as I say. You will not...”
- “But I simply want...”

Rameesh was out of control. He grabbed Keeta by the arm and pushed her against the wall. Then, with his huge hands, he slapped her in the face a few times. She fell to the floor. He grabbed her, pulled her back on her feet and dragged her into the room. -“you will stay here and get out when I say so. Understand? And the next time you argue with me, be prepared to regret it.

Then he locked the door and went back to the main room. Keeta’s nose was bleeding and she her head ached. She had hurt her forehead when she had fallen to the ground. It took her a few minutes to get her senses back. She started to feel helpless and weak. She resented the women, the meeting, and the stupid way in which she had confronted her husband. She knew better, what was it with her?

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A little later in the day, Sara knocked on the door hoping to see Keeta. She wanted to see how the conversation with the husband had been successful. But it was Rameesh who opened the door.

- “What do you want?” he said.

That was not the usual greeting tone of Rameesh,

-“Is Keeta home” I want to talk to her.” Answered Sara.

-“No, she is at her mother’s place.” Rameesh replied.

Sara felt it was the right time to insist. She turned around and as she passed along the house, she noticed Keeta’s face through the window. She was standing there, with blood on her face, with an empty look. It was like a scene in a movie. She could read the despair on her face. She realized that the situation was serious and she ran to get the police officer.

Keeta continued to look outside. She recalled the children stories of women who were locked up by their husband. She had never believed it would be true. But now, she was locked up in her room. The nightmare was a reality...



Sara finally located a police officer on the main street and tried to explain, as best she could, what she had seen. The officer was more interested by the traffic and did not seem to care. She instead and he finally accepted to go the Keeta's house and ensure that she would get medical attention if need be. The officer told her to go home and let him handle the situation.

An hour later, the officer was knocking at Keeta's front door. Rameesh opened the door and with a smile, asked the officer what was the purpose of his visit. Keeta had stopped bleeding. Through the door, she was following the conversation and trying to understand what was happening on the other side of the door. She could not hear clearly, but it was clear that Rameesh was raising his voice and that the officer was doing the same. The police was there to liberate her. Was it true? And the conversation was turning into an argument. Then somebody was coming towards the room. Her nightmare was over! The women were right, there is always a way to get things changed. When the door opened, she saw the face of Rameesh. It was not the officer, it was her husband. He looked furious again. He reached for the shelf where they kept the clothes and withdrew the little box where she kept the family savings. It was their fortune. Rameesh took the money and threw the box on the bed. "Because of you, we are wasting my savings, and my hard earned money. Wait I will be back in a minute." It was clear for Keeta. He was bribing the officer to keep him quiet. She was caught in the trap. She new her husband would come back. He had said so. She knew he would hit her again, he had done so. She knew he would blame her for their poverty... Keeta was afraid. In fact she was in a panic. She had to runaway. She went to the window. It was locked but the lock was loose. She managed to break the lock and open the window. She had barely enough room, but she managed her way through the opening. She gathered all she had left of courage and jumped. Once on the ground, she ran as fast as she could. She was going nowhere.

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She was following her instinct. She ran to her parent's house. There she found her father and mother. She took a deep breath and tried desperately to find the words to explain what had happened. Her father was trying to calm her down in order to understand what she was trying to explain. After a few minutes, Keeta was cooling down and was able to better explain her mishap. Both parents were listening with attention to what their daughter was saying. When she was finished her mother replied:

- "Keeta dear, I understand your concerns, but aren't you blowing things out of proportion? Rameesh takes good care of you, much better than many other men would do. More important, a woman's place is next to her husband; you must stand by him, be respectful and obey when it is necessary. The only solution is to go back home. Ask for his forgiveness and do as you are told. Things will fall in order by themselves."

- "I agree with your mother. You cannot run away from the house like that. You should talk it over with Rameesh...."

- "It's out of question!! Added her mother, "Just imagine what people in the village will say. They will think that you are out of your mind. The whole family will have to pay the price.... Do you really want to be put excluded because of a family dispute? You must go back; you must behave and do as you have been brought up to do."

Keeta just could not stand it any more and she broke in tears. She turned her heels and walked to the door:



- “You cannot understand, nobody wants to listen... I cannot keep on living like that. I don’t know what to say, I don’t know what to do, and I don’t know where to go.” She ran away once again...
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She ran to the end of her breath. Exhausted she let herself fall to the ground, making an effort to get her mind straight on something. Who could help, who would listen? Perhaps, her older sister? The image of Rami’s sad face on the day where she had met Rammesh came to her mind. It was a vivid memory. Things were becoming clear... Rami was living the same life since she had been married. She wondered why Rami never talked about it even though they had been very close. Keeta rose slowly and decided to go to her sister’s house...

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Out of curiosity, Sara had followed the police officer. She had witnessed the exchange between the officer and Rammesh. She knew nothing would happen and the officer had no intention to pursue the matter any further. She had taken the road to the Bala-Vikasa center. When she arrived, there were women sitting under the old tree. She shared her story and told what she had seen. The women were upset. After a few exchanges, one of them suggested that we go and see the mayor. A small group decided to go and knock on his door. The mayor was home, and let them in. His wife offered a cup of tea. Then he listened to them. When they were through, he took his official stance and declared that, as a responsible mayor, he could not intervene in what was clearly a domestic matter of a personal nature. Each man was responsible for his family and the behaviour of his wife. Women were upset and started to argue. The mayor simply responded that the meeting was over and that they should leave the house. They left. Some of them were upset and had no intention of letting the matter stand. They continued the discussion outside and they started to shout and loudly express their discontent with the mayor’s attitude. A few more women joined the group and the crowd started to grow in front of the mayor’s house. The shouting became louder and some demonstrators started to threaten the mayor. The mayor could not ignore the protest anymore and decided to confront the crowd. He agreed to go and see Keeta’s husband and try to peacefully sort out the matter.

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Keeta was on the doorstep. It was her sister’s house. She knocked on the door. Her sister was there and let her in.

- “What happened? Are you hurt, what’s all this blood? Come let me take care of you” said Rami

- “It’s a long story” answered Keeta

Rami took some water out of the jug and started to wash the blood on Keeta’s face. Keeta kept on talking about her husband, her parents and all the things that had happened. Rami listened in silence.

- “I know what you mean... It happened to me a few times after I got married. I kept on asking myself, what’s the meaning of all this, Was there anything else in life why do husbands have all the rights and why do wives have to stand that. After a while, I stopped thinking about it. It is the way it is and nothing will change that. I had to learn to live with it and I did. I now realise that I have a good husband, he deserves respect. He may be demanding at times, but that’s the



- way things should be. I have come to realize that the best place for a woman is at home. I am proud to teach my daughter how to take care of the household and to keep my son in school. I hope I will find time to teach her how to read and write if I want her to be a good wife. Men are different; don't expect them to be like women. God has provided us with different gifts and each of them is important in the family. You seem to be forgetting what the scriptures have told you. This is why you ask the wrong questions."
- "Do you really think that men have all rights and women should not have any?"
  - "Be reasonable, who is stronger? Is it men or women that are in government? Do you really think that you could be the mayor of the village? Would you be smart enough to do it? You hardly know how to read and you cannot write a letter! You have to face the reality, little sister; we are there to give children to the family and to care for them. I will add..."
  - "Wait, wait, and let me answer. I know that women are different but I don't agree that we cannot take decision. We do in the family and we should be able to do so in the village, at work or even as mayor! I may not be able to write a letter, but it does not mean that I cannot do it..."
  - "You see you agree with me. You think you can take decisions but you know that you cannot do it. Just let your husband take them, it is better this way..."
  - "My husband can take decisions, he can take all the decision he wants" replied Keeta "He has attended school, he has a job, he can talk in public, when he talks my parents listen to him. But has anybody given me the chance to do the same thing? No. It is easy to say I cannot when I have never had the chance to prove I can do it. Give me the opportunity; I can as good a mayor as any other..."
  - "You are not serious. Show me a woman that is the mayor..."
  - " Euhh..."
  - "You see, that does not exist. You say it is because women do not go to school... but women cannot study, they are not made this way...Don't think that it is because you are more stupid, it is just that you are different. Men are made to work and take the decisions. Women are there to bear children and care for the family. The right thing to do is to take care of your husband. It is not smaller, it is just different. Why should we have the same rights and the same status when our role is different?"

Keeta had nothing to add. What her sister said had some sense. Why ask for anything different when it had been this way for centuries. It was the way of life; it was the way it was. Perhaps she had to find a way to make it work. Perhaps happiness was possible. Keeta kissed her sister and parted.

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The mayor took the narrow street leading to Keeta's house. Some of the women were following. The husband was there and explained that he had no idea where his wife was at the time. Two of the women insisted to search through the little house. Rameesh bluntly refused by, after a few minutes of arguing back and forth, he finally accepted to let them in. It was only to agree that she was not at home. The mayor asked the women to go back home and let the matter stand. To no avail, they decided to continue their search through the village. They had to find Keeta.

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Keeta was there, sitting in a bush under one of the large banana tree. The place was cool and she could think aloud. She did not want to go back home and face



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Rameesh. She knew her place was there, but she did not want to go back right now. There was no way she would come back begging and asking forgiveness. But what could she do? There was no solution at sight. All she could think was to sit there and wait. Friends, family, village where could she go? It was desperate. It was like a big black hole. Going back home was returning to hell! She was left by herself with only herself. She thought of suicide. She had not had these thoughts before. For here it was gross and morbid. But now it was something else. If life was unbearable, then there may be another life.

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The whole village was up in arms. The women were going from house to house and the search party was rapidly growing in numbers. Sara had gone to Keeta's parent's house and to Rami's house. She realized that the matter was becoming serious. She was worried. One of the women started to share the story of Dodda and Latha who had run away. The groups started to walk towards the Ramba cliffs. Two years ago the twin sisters had jumped off the cliff to free their parents from the burden of the dowry. The younger women started to walk at a fast pace, Sara was running towards the cliff.

When Sara and a few women finally got to the cliff, Keeta was there. She was standing looking out at the horizon below. She turned around and waited for more people to show up. There was her father, the mayor, Sara and some of her neighbours. She would not listen, she only wanted to look at them in the eyes so they would see what she felt. She raised her voice:

- "You can have my time, my desires, my passion, my money, you can take away my happiness but you cannot decide what I will do with my life. My life belongs to me... only to me..."
- -Keeta...No Keeta... don't do that!" begged her father.

She stepped back and her thin body fell slowly out of sight....



## REFERENCES FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES

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Description	Links
<b>CIDA (Canada)</b> Links towards activities for the young people of school age on the international development	<a href="http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/">http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/</a>
<b>UN (International)</b> Cyber Schoolbus : Information intended for the children of school age with activities.	<a href="http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/french/index.asp">http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/french/index.asp</a>
<b>OXFAM (UK);</b> Case studies for student and the other educational activities	<a href="http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/change_the_world_in_eight_steps/">http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/change_the_world_in_eight_steps/</a>
<b>TERRE ACTIVE (Canada)</b> Interactive activities for youth on child labour in developing countries.	<a href="http://www.in-terre-actif.com/trousse1/accueil.html">http://www.in-terre-actif.com/trousse1/accueil.html</a>
<b>LSF</b> Site including several games and activity for the pupils. Excellent!	<a href="http://www.lsf-1st.ca/">http://www.lsf-1st.ca/</a>
<b>Education for a Sustainable Future</b> Book containing numerous activities for international development.	<a href="http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/future/sustaineducation.pdf">http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/future/sustaineducation.pdf</a>
<b>Programme solidarité eau</b> Site containing information and resources about water in developing countries.	<a href="http://www.pseau.org/">http://www.pseau.org/</a>