

Indian Express
Oct. 29, 2006

**UTTAR
PRADESH**

IN 2000, Meena was an idea. A symbol of the girl child developed by the UNICEF, it was adopted by the state to launch an education and awareness campaign at the grassroots level in select districts through girl clubs called Meena Manch.

Today, Meena is each of those four lakh girls who have changed lives for themselves and others all across the state. Between 11-18 years, they belong to the state's 19,705 strong Meena Manch network.

In the outskirts of Lucknow, Kumari Meena shares her name with the movement. A class VIII student, she learnt cycling a year back at her school. Being the in-charge of the Meena Manch in her School, she has since trained over 80 girls studying with her.

"Earlier, my mother had to wait for my father to bring things from the market but now I do most of the job for her," says Priyanka, a class VII student.

In Kanpur district, a group of these girls in Rania village united against eve-teasers. In Muzaffarnagar, a group of girls was successful in stopping two child marriages. In Bahraich, another group brought 1000 students to school. In Sravasti, the girls convinced students of primary schools to wash their hands before eating. In various districts, the girls maintain libraries with books given to them under girls education programmes.

In 2005, the programme spread all over the state and all the Government Junior High Schools were roped in. In last four months, these clubs have been successful in bringing over 30,000 children back to school.

Even the education officers accept that their contribution has given new meaning to the SSA. "One has to see these clubs to believe how effective they are," says Mukesh Singh, basic Education officer, Lucknow, "It's a silent revolution."

MAULSHREE SETH



Senior Meena Manch students helping their juniors with bicycle on the outskirts of Lucknow, (right) the school band calling out for more students to join in